

## Jeremiah Chapter 13 John Karmelich

1. My one word title for this chapter is "symbols". This chapter uses a bunch of symbols to illustrate how the Israelites are messing up. I simply want everyone to realize the bible often uses symbols to illustrate ideas. With that said, realize Chapter 13 appears to be part of a speech that continues in the next two chapters. However, the next two chapters are a "Q&A" session between Jeremiah and God. I'd argue God wants us to know Jeremiah's answers as we may ponder the same issues. My point is it's best to take Chapter 13 as a separate lesson and discuss the symbols of this lesson. The symbolic acts of these chapters become a necessary step to leads to the question and answer session of the next two chapters. That leads to the important question of what's Jeremiah talking about here and why should we care? I promise to get to all of that soon!
2. Before I do all of that, let me back up and ask, why does the bible use symbols? If God just wants us to know something, why not tell us blatantly. We're "big boys and girls and can handle it". I'd say the reason for symbols is it's a good way for God and the preacher's He's called to give us His messages to explain what's going on. I always think of Ezekiel as in effect he's the "champion" of using symbols as his Old Testament book is full of symbols. Yet, in all the lessons I taught on that book, it never occurred to me to explain why the bible uses them so much. Since we're taking on a smaller chunk of verses in this lesson, I thought not only is it a good idea to discuss the symbols themselves in these chapters, but to briefly discuss why the bible is so "full of them". The answer is they're a great way to make a point that people can relate to. The bible tends to use symbols of that time era that most people can relate to. Yes I'll explain them as we go along we may not get the significance as much as the locals did back then, but it's important for us to realize as we go through this chapter, that we're watching a number of symbolic acts in order to make a point.
  - a) One reason I get into all of this is to separate the idea of taking our bible "literally" versus "seriously". For example, in this chapter Jeremiah will use an apron (it's a classical debate what the "apron" literally was) and ruined it to make a point. My point is simply that God doesn't expect us to ruin a good piece of cloth (or whatever else) just to make a point. This was symbolic act to make a point. It's also a good reminder that we should treat the bible seriously but not literally.
3. OK enough of that. Let's go through the chapter and discuss the symbolic acts Jeremiah did and I will also discuss what the symbolism means as we go.
  - a) The first story involves what's was probably a man's undergarment. What it actually was is a classic debate. It was a linen garment that God told Jeremiah to buy to make a public illustration out of it. God told him to buy this and then go bury it by the Euphrates River. Some argue that's a mistranslation and it was buried somewhere near him. If Jeremiah did travel to that river, we're talking about a 700 mile round trip. Personally, I lean toward the classic view that he did have to travel that far. That's because the act represents who's the one doing the destroying, the Babylonians, who are based at that river. The point is God's instructions were to take a good garment, and go bury it in the dirt by that river. Later he was told by God to go dig it up and naturally it became useless after being buried awhile.
    - i) The point of the illustration is to show the Israelites that just as that garment was now ruined by the elements, so the Israelites still living in that land will be ruined by the coming invasion. What this boils down to is Jeremiah is making a dramatic point using an object that most Israelites would recognize.
    - ii) It's one thing to say trouble is coming run for it. It adds to the seriousness of all of this by using an object to dramatize the point.
  - b) OK John, "so what"? So Jeremiah uses a ruined garment to make a point. Obviously, this didn't make a difference as Israel still gets wiped out in Jeremiah's lifetime. Why did God make Jeremiah do all this if it's a "waste of time"? If nothing else, to illustrate to us what is the consequences of turning from God. Let me focus on symbol #2 for a moment.

- c) Jeremiah next discusses vessels used for drinking wine. The idea is the destruction will be so bad, it'll be like a drunken stupor where the Israelites lives will be so out of control, it'll be like they were drunk going through it all. Again, Jeremiah uses illustrations to make a dramatic point about how bad all of this is going to be.
  - d) The chapter ends with Jeremiah making a plea to repent before it's too late. I suspect he's hoping the illustrations convict somebody in the crowd to repent. It's the idea that maybe it's too late for the nation, but maybe there are individuals willing to get right with God in spite of the destruction. As most of know, Christians don't preach the Gospel to make the world a better place. We preach it to lead people to heaven and closer to God. Yes, many will reject that message, but some people do accept it, which is why for example you go to church or are willing to read this bible study. It's the reminder that we're not wasting our breath teaching the bible, it is true and we're willing to bet our eternity on it!
4. I wanted a separate chapter to discuss all the symbols in it. Not to remind us that symbolism is a common tool in the bible. But as a reminder that God wants us to use tools whatever we have at our disposal to illustrate points. For example, children's ministries often use flannel boards as to illustrate biblical points. I'm not saying that unless we have a special flare for the dramatic, we'll never be able to successfully preach the bible. I'm just saying using whatever tools we have at our disposal can help illustrate key points. As I love to state, what's a greater use of our lives then for teaching others about God's love for us as well as the consequences of turning from Him! Using a bunch of symbols to illustrate our point help people to remember better what we're preaching! It is an established fact that our brains remember illustrations and tools better than words. I'm just saying that what Jeremiah does in this chapter is a good principal for us to learn when it comes to sharing biblical points with people.
- a) OK John, assume most of us know that. Most of us have lived long enough to seen lots of illustrations used to dramatically make a point. So what? Pause for a moment to consider why the Babylonian invasion was so significant? After all the destruction done by Rome is probably equal or not greater. Why does the bible spend so much space on this issue? It's to remind us of the consequences of turning from God. It's like saying, "You want a life in this world without God ruling over it?" Great, in effect you'll get Babylon. A rough world full of death, theft, and worship of things that won't matter for all of eternity! That's why Jeremiah and many of the prophets have such a high emphasis on this invasion. It's a lot bigger than the event itself. It represents life without God and all it's consequences.
  - b) Even if we grasp all that, why should we "the choir" care? Because the worst attitude that we can have as believers is to think, "I'm saved, who cares about you?" God saves us as to use our lives to make a difference for Him. It comes down to leading others to Him for an eternal relationship with Him or working to draw others closer to Him. It's a mater of us using the gifts God gave us to make that difference.
  - c) There was a famous preacher who died awhile back. One of his motto's was, "Ask them to accept Jesus. If they won't accept Jesus, give them Moses!" What he meant by that is if the person you're talking to doesn't like the free gift of salvation, then they must learn what's God's standard for judgment, which is "The law". It ties back to Jeremiah. In effect that is what he's preaching, the danger of turning from God the consequences of living a life that does not involve trusting Him. If you grasp that, you get the point of all this.
5. OK, I've beaten the point of these illustrations over your heads enough for one introduction. The main point has nothing to do with the specifics of the ruined undergarment or things used when people drink wine. There just symbols to illustrate what really matters: The only way live should be lived, by trusting God to guide our lives and making the best decisions we can understanding how it is He expects us to live. Even if we live that way, He expects us to be a witness for Him as we pass those ideas on to the world around us.
- a) With that said, it's time to deal with the illustrations themselves and the stories that are a part of what God's trying to communicate to us. OK then, it's "Verse by Verse" time.

6. Chapter 13, Verse 1: This is what the LORD said to me: "Go and buy a linen belt and put it around your waist, but do not let it touch water." <sup>2</sup> So I bought a belt, as the LORD directed, and put it around my waist.
- a) Let's start with the classic debate and get it over with. Some translations argue that what Jeremiah was describing was just a belt. Others say it was a male "girdle" underwear. I'd argue it doesn't matter. We know it some sort of linen garment and that's what matters.
  - b) Also keep in mind that part of the uniform of the priests was all linen garments. I'd argue it's because it is "sweat resistance" and wouldn't get easily ruined by priestly duties.
  - c) Speaking of not getting ruined, that's what's behind the phrase "do not let it touch water". If you Google articles about cleaning linen (yes I did), you'd find they recommend only to use a dry cleaning method as water can ruin such garments.
  - d) OK enough on linen. The point is simply that this is a symbol that God wanted Jeremiah to use as an illustration as we're about to see.
  - e) Before I move on to Verse 2, as I like to say there were no breaks in the original text. With that said, the last verse of Chapter 12 ended a speech, so this is a new topic and good spot to start a new chapter. OK enough background, onto Verse 2.
7. Verse 2: Then the word of the LORD came to me a second time: <sup>4</sup> "Take the belt you bought and are wearing around your waist, and go now to Perath and hide it there in a crevice in the rocks." <sup>5</sup> So I went and hid it at Perath, as the LORD told me.
- a) Stop and ask yourself a question, if you believe God told you to wear an underpant made of linen, (this is for the guys), would you do so? I suppose we'd do it and cover it up! I'm getting to the question of how should we react if we're convinced God's telling us to do an act that society would consider strange. Let's assume the act or symbol doesn't violate any biblical principals. The question's essentially would you "take a stand for God" if it means doing something weird? I suppose part of it depends on our personality. I'd also want to be really sure it's what God's calling me to do. I suppose it would come down to whether I believe such a strange act would win people for Jesus or draw them closer to Him.
  - b) Whatever the story, that's what Jeremiah was called to do here. Not only was he parading around in that garment to make the point very public that he had it, but now God's telling him to travel to "Perath" and bury it in a rock.
    - i) This leads us to controversy #2 about this chapter. Some translations say Jeremiah traveled to the Euphrates River to bury it. In the original Hebrew language realize the spelling is very similar, so it can be argued either way. The King James prefers the "as is" of traveling all the way to the Euphrates, while the NIV translation here prefers "Perath", that is not far from where Jeremiah lived and preached.
    - ii) Here's the debate in a nutshell: If you think it refers to the Euphrates, that's a 700-mile round trip journey. Many commentators still think that's what God did call Jeremiah to do, because Babylon is located on the bank of that river, and that act is symbolic of the message God wanted him to convey.
    - iii) The local argument is the garment would be ruined no matter which river it was buried next to, so why travel all that distance?
    - iv) Now that you know all of that, you can forget it. The main point as we're about to see is that God wanted Jeremiah to ruin that garment to make a point.
8. Verse 6: Many days later the LORD said to me, "Go now to Perath and get the belt I told you to hide there." <sup>7</sup> So I went to Perath and dug up the belt and took it from the place where I had hidden it, but now it was ruined and completely useless.
- a) A logical question might be if God wanted Jeremiah to ruin a garment, why didn't he just have him tear it to shreds or get a lot of water on it? Why this specific method? I'd argue it's the "time factor". Just as Babylon is going to come soon and ruin Israel so Jeremiah is making the point that retrieving something buried by Babylon will be the ruin of Israel.

- b) If you can't tell, I like the Euphrates version. It'd give Jeremiah a nice break from having to listen to the Israelites complain about his preaching all the time! I'm sure it's a question he will be asked in heaven by a lot of scholars. Anyway, the point's being made that the linen garment is ruined by burying in some rocks or dirt on a river bank! That would do it for a linen garment and Jeremiah is using it as a dramatic illustration here.
  - c) Before we get to the point of the illustration, realize this is one of those cases where God's not saying "do likewise". An underlying point is that God desires we use ways to make it obvious to others about what He demands of us and what's the penalty for when we don't live as He desires. Speaking of horrid punishment, Verse 8:
9. Verse 8: Then the word of the LORD came to me: <sup>9</sup> "This is what the LORD says: `In the same way I will ruin the pride of Judah and the great pride of Jerusalem. <sup>10</sup> These wicked people, who refuse to listen to my words, who follow the stubbornness of their hearts and go after other gods to serve and worship them, will be like this belt--completely useless!
- a) Back in the opening discussion I asked, "Why doesn't God just tell us thing blatantly". We are adults, so why use these illustrations? Because sometimes the dramatic way will make a point we remember better than just being lectured. This is God through Jeremiah doing whatever He can to get the Israelites to turn to Him before it's too late!
  - b) With that said, Jeremiah is "laying it on thick" here. He's saying God's going to ruin what's the pride of Judah (the name of the Southern Kingdom". The pride is that they are chosen by God to be His people. God's response to being chosen is in effect, "So what?" Why are you so special by being chosen if you (that's us) don't do anything about it?
  - c) That's why Jeremiah got on their cases about going after other gods. If they claim to be a chosen people of the god, why are they (yes us) wasting away our lives doing things that will not matter for all of eternity? That's one of the main questions in this book to ponder.
  - d) Jeremiah's illustration is that just as the linen "thing" is now useless, so being "the chosen" is a useless title. The point is Jeremiah is lecturing them how they've become "completely useless" as far as God's concerned.
    - i) That leads to a natural question, if they're that bad, why didn't God wipe them out and start anew like with Noah and his family? Why send them in captivity? What is the reason for this specific punishment if they're "useless" to God? The issue has to do with His unconditional promise to the nation of Israel. The issue is He needs a nation of Israelites to exist when the Messiah rules from there. That's the reason why God has preserved them through the millenniums.
    - ii) In the meantime, God's got the dilemma of what to do with "His people" until the time of Jesus first and second coming. The answer is He has to allow lots of horrid death and suffering to get the point to us that He's not messing around.
    - iii) The obvious point to us Christians is that He wants us to find ways use our lives to make a difference for Him. We should look back at our lives no matter what is our age and say, "we used our lives to make a difference for Him". I can't imagine any purpose of living greater than that!
  - e) In the meantime, we got one more verse using this "linen thing" illustration before we see Jeremiah moves on to another illustration.
10. Verse 11: For as a belt is bound around a man's waist, so I bound the whole house of Israel and the whole house of Judah to me,' declares the LORD, `to be my people for my renown and praise and honor. But they have not listened.'
- a) I have to admit as a long term bible student, when I read this I think of the story from the book of Acts when Paul is warned not to go to Jerusalem as he'll be bound by a belt for an effort to preach the gospel. (Acts 21:11). My point is in both the book of Acts and here we get a reference to a belt as an illustration for prophesy. My simple point is we see symbols used for predictions all through the bible.

- b) Notice Jeremiah isn't definitely describing the linen garment here, He's describing a belt to make the point about being "bound".
  - c) That leads to a key point of this verse. Why did God bother to create us in the first place? To quote the translation, it says, "To be my people for my renown and praise and honor". Keep in mind that God doesn't have a big ego and needs our praise Him to inflate his ego. God created us because it's His nature to love, and He choose to love people. What is His desire in return is to freely love Him the same way! Obviously we're not God and we can not love God the same way He loves us. What we can do, is make our best effort to live as He desires as a witness for Him. That includes the idea of putting other's needs before our own and leading people to Jesus or helping others to live as He desires. That's how we are to praise and honor Him." Christianity was never meant to be an exclusive club. God has love for all people. Obviously only some choose to love Him back which is why not every person will be in heaven. Anyway a failure to live as God desires yes can mean hell for an eternity, but more importantly for the believer, it can mean losing our opportunities to be a witness for Jesus if we waste the greatest gift God has given us, our time!
  - d) OK, that's enough tough love for one illustration. Lets' try the next one!
11. Verse 12: "Say to them: `This is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: Every wineskin should be filled with wine.' And if they say to you, `Don't we know that every wineskin should be filled with wine?'
- a) First some technical notes. Some translations say "wineskins" others say drinking vessels (as in mugs). The important thing here is that the illustration being used here has to do with people being drunk. For what it's worth, Ezekiel preached effectively this as well. If you don't know Ezekiel was a Jewish prophet in Babylon as part of a group taken there in a time before the final destruction. He preached roughly at the same time as Jeremiah, but to the Israelites already in captivity. My point is in Ezekiel 23:32, he was also preaching of drunkenness being symbolic of ruin and desolation in Israel.
  - b) Again, we're seeing wine and drunkenness being used as a symbol. Jeremiah isn't saying to go get drunk to handle the invasion. The point is it'll be so bad, it's like staggering in a drunken state trying to comprehend what's going on.
  - c) That'll become clearer in the next verse. Speaking of which:
12. Verse 13: then tell them, `This is what the LORD says: I am going to fill with drunkenness all who live in this land, including the kings who sit on David's throne, the priests, the prophets and all those living in Jerusalem. <sup>14</sup> I will smash them one against the other, fathers and sons alike, declares the LORD. I will allow no pity or mercy or compassion to keep me from destroying them.' "
- a) Again, Jeremiah's painting a visual picture of how bad the coming destruction of the land of Israel will be. The picture is the destruction will be so bad, it's like watching a bunch of drunk people trying to function in that state.
  - b) Let me deviate and talk a little about drinking and drunkenness in the bible. Jesus turned water into wine, not "fresh grape juice". The Passover holiday is in the spring. Fresh grape juice is late summer. My simple point is Jesus did drink wine at the Passover meal and I'd also speculate he drank it on other occasions. Wine is generally associated with joy in the Old Testament. That's the good news. The bad news is drunkenness is definitely thought of a sin even though it's not listed as such. One can find a number of passages that forbid a Christian from being drunk. (See Ephesians 5:18 as an example.) I want to be witness for Jesus, so I am cautious about this. Let's just say my drinking is very limited, and I'll leave it at that!
  - c) Back to the text. Notice Jeremiah makes it clear that everyone will suffer. It won't just be a specific class of people or a certain group. It'll be nationwide. So why will say innocent children suffer? Because the action of the parents affect everyone! It'll be a complete and horrid destruction to make the point God's not to be messed with.

- i) Here's a possible example: The story of Esther is about a young girl taken into that captivity by the Babylonians. (They didn't kill everyone. Many survived and those who did were taken into captivity.) My point is that Esther was raised by her uncle as it stated in that book. It makes me wonder if Esther's parents were killed as part of that attack. Speculation on my part. History records that many Israelites did die in those attacks and those who survive were taken into captivity.
  - ii) All that leads back to Jeremiah's point here. He's using drunkenness as an idea for people to relate to how horrible all of this will be.
  - d) OK John we get all of this. We're overdue for one of your "why should we care speeches" at this point. Hit us: It's not that some foreign army may take over our country. Yes that is a real threat even to this day in other parts of the world. Even if we never have to face a tragedy of that scale, I have seen God take away people's opportunities to be a witness for Him. It usually occurs when sin has reached a point in their own lives to where they can no longer be an effective witness for Him. Most of us veteran Christians have seen the fall of many Christians and their ministries due to unconfessed or sins or one's we've failed to deal with. I'm just saying that even as veteran Christians God can always "apply the stick" to our lives and we must stay on our toes no matter what's our level of involvement as we make a difference for Him.
  - e) Meanwhile, I believe I was teaching Jeremiah!
13. Verse 15: Hear and pay attention, do not be arrogant, for the LORD has spoken. <sup>16</sup> Give glory to the LORD your God before he brings the darkness, before your feet stumble on the darkening hills. You hope for light, but he will turn it to thick darkness and change it to deep gloom.
- a) From this point to the end of the chapter, Jeremiah switches from writing narrative style back to poetry. If we're only focusing on what he has to say, I guess it doesn't matter that much, but just wanted to state that fact for the record.
  - b) Anyway, Jeremiah is done with his two key illustrations of a linen garment and whatever is used as an alcoholic drinking vessel. We're not done with illustrations yet, but the two key ones are done.
  - c) So let me ask another key question here: If the Babylonian captivity was inevitable, why's the effort still being made to ask them to repent? Yes, we get the idea that Jeremiah is also writing for future generations to turn to God, but why them? Obviously God is aware of all things and knew they wouldn't. So why the pleas here? It's because it is more than an issue of changing their lifestyle to be a better witness for God. It's also their eternal soul at stake here. There is a famous line that goes, "What makes you think you can serve God for all of eternity when you can't serve Him now?" The Israelites of that day were giving God "lip service" and going through the motions. Their hearts were not in it. They think they are saved because they're the chosen people so they don't have to worry about salvation.
  - d) Another classic saying is the purpose of the minister is to "comfort the afflicted and afflict the comfortable". The Israelites were comfortable in their sins and Jeremiah was working hard to get them to realize how much trouble their in both eternally and at the moment!
  - e) Meanwhile back to the literal: Jeremiah is using "light and darkness" as metaphors to state how they are messing up. The idea is bad destruction of their lives their way of living as well as the false gods they worship are all coming to an end soon. They must stop living as if they're walking around in the dark stumbling around. That's what's behind the doom that Jeremiah is preaching here.
  - f) Finally, let me ask, what does Jeremiah mean by "hope for light"? Let's face it when all the great destruction starts by the Babylonians they'll be hoping and praying for a solution to the issue. They'll hope that God rescues them "despite all their sins".
  - g) So why doesn't God always help when we cry out to Him sincerely? First, He's in charge and we're not. Often He allows things for some greater purpose, that's why!

14. Verse 17: But if you do not listen, I will weep in secret because of your pride; my eyes will weep bitterly, overflowing with tears, because the LORD's flock will be taken captive.
- a) Many people who don't know a lot about the bible have heard of "The weeping prophet" as it refers to Jeremiah. Here we get one of the references to Jeremiah weeping. Realize that Jeremiah isn't preaching "proudly". These are his people, his fellow priests, his own countrymen. He's not proud of what's happening. He's doing it because God told him to preach it (like we have a choice when God wants us to do something) and I'm convinced that Jeremiah wants to see his fellow Israelites turn to God "destruction or not!"
  - b) Jeremiah is well aware doom is coming. Like I said on the previous page, its about getting people to turn to God for their salvation sake.
  - c) A minor note before we move on. In the bible, people are often compared to sheep. That's done for a number of reasons. One is because sheep are not smart animals and it's done as a deliberate shot at people wandering from where we should go. Notice Jeremiah refers to the Israelites as "God's flock". Yes they are still His chosen people despite the fact they are messing up big time? Does it mean they're automatically saved? Of course not. Jesus said that "many are called, but few are chosen". (Matthew 22:14). That applies here as well! I'd argue that just like Jeremiah God "grieves" that His chosen turn away from Him. So can a perfect God grieve? Not that He stomps His feet and get mad. It's more like the idea that it is His desire for people He's called to turn from their sin and live as He desires. Failure to do that grieves God in the sense it is His desire we turn to Him. Yes I argue He knows all things, but I still believe we can grieve God when we turn from His desire.
  - d) Meanwhile, it's time for the next verse.
15. Verse 18: Say to the king and to the queen mother, "Come down from your thrones, for your glorious crowns will fall from your heads."
- a) Most commentators believe the reference to the king and his queen mother refers to one of the last of the Jewish kings named Jehoiachin, called also Coniah. He was one of the final kings before Israel was taken into captivity. He was among those taken into captivity. He was only 18 when he was king, which is why there's a reference to his mother. We get this reference as Jeremiah's saying despite the fact they are in power, Jeremiah's predicting the fall and the end of the reign of David's descendants (at least until Jesus rules one day!) For the Israelites of that day, this was shocking. Remember God told David a descendant will rule over a kingdom from Jerusalem. In one sense it refers to Solomon. It also hints that a descendant in the future will rule forever. My point here's for the Israelites to hear that no descendant of David will still be ruling from Israel is a big deal.
  - b) Speaking of future predictions, it continues in Verse 19.
16. Verse 19: The cities in the Negev will be shut up, and there will be no one to open them. All Judah will be carried into exile, carried completely away.
- a) The "Negev" refers to a desert area in the southern part of Israel between that country and Egypt. The idea is when the Babylonians attack from the north, they won't stop with their conquering of Jerusalem. They will wipe out the towns and cities in the desert area in that southern part of Israel again. The point is the destruction of Israel will be complete.
  - b) Stop and think about this from the Israelites perception. Even if they thought Jeremiah is making a point, how could they stop it? Later in the book we'll discuss the fact that God wanted them to surrender to the Babylonians to save their own necks. In the meantime, I would say the key point is to understand how complete this destruction is going to be!
  - c) Realize why God wants us to learn all of this. It's not to learn ancient history. It is to remember there is a price to be paid to fail to use our lives as a witness for God! I'd say the reason Jeremiah is "so thick" is so that we get it in our head how bad it is for any of us who claim to be Christians to fail to use our lives as a witness for Him.
  - d) OK then, with that understood, back to Jeremiah!

17. Verse 20: Lift up your eyes and see those who are coming from the north. Where is the flock that was entrusted to you, the sheep of which you boasted?
- Keep in mind Jeremiah is preaching in the capital of "South" Israel, Jerusalem. He's talking to the leaders of that country. Again, we have a reference to the "flock". God holds any of us who teach the bible to a higher standard. In the New Testament, James warns that if we are called to be teachers, we're held to a higher standard. (See James 3:1). The point is not that God measures our success in "numbers". He holds teachers to a higher standard as to expect such teachers to "teach accurately His word. The point as it relates to the text is the priests of Jeremiah's day are in "more trouble" because they're failing to teach their fellow Israelites about what God expects of them.
  - So how can the priests be in more trouble if all Israel is conquered? Let's assume that all of them end up in hell. How can their punishment be worse? What I suspect is just as there's different rewards in heaven based on whether or not we were loyal to what God called us to do, there may be different levels of punishment in hell for again, failure to do what He's called us to do. Same standard "different directions".
18. Verse 21: What will you say when the LORD sets over you those you cultivated as your special allies? Will not pain grip you like that of a woman in labor?
- If you recall my first lesson on Jeremiah, I stated that the "big boys" in that region fought over control of the Middle East. The Assyrian Empire that lasted for about 700 years was for all intents and purposes dead. That left the battle for control between the Babylonians and the Egyptians. Yes the Babylonians defeated the Egyptians and Egypt which were the "big boys" in that region for millenniums, never regained prestige again after that. What I am getting at is the Israelites sought help from Egypt over Babylon and Jeremiah's saying effectively, "That's a waste of time, as they won't help you either!"
  - Then we get another colorful illustration as Jeremiah compares the suffering the Israelites will receive to "a woman in labor". Not that the pain won't be temporary. It's the idea of the pain coming on strong and suddenly. Again what's important here isn't all the details of suffering from millenniums ago, but the idea that we too can suffer horribly if we fail as they did to live as God desires as one of His witnesses.
  - With that said, six verses to go. Let's keep moving.
19. Verse 22: And if you ask yourself, "Why has this happened to me?"-- it is because of your many sins that your skirts have been torn off and your body mistreated.
- One of the natural things people wonder when they're suffering is why is this occurring? What did I do to deserve this? One of the things I've had to learn in such times, is first do an inventory of possible sins. Confess and turn from them. Often God allows horrid stuff for some greater purpose. God never promises life will go well always for believers. He'll allow our suffering often for a greater purpose or for us the opportunity to be His witness to those around us during such times.
  - That little speech leads back to these verses. God's predicting what the Israelites are going to be saying once things get back. At least His people will have that answer, it's due to the sins they have committed. Let's be honest, if we've committed our lives to serving Jesus, I am certain we'd be well aware of whether or not we've turned from that lifestyle and then had to suffer because of it.
  - Since this lesson is going to be a little shorter, let me pause for a moment and address the "not sure" people out there. First, if we trust that Jesus is God, died for our sins and He is the Lord of our lives, we don't have to worry about our salvation. Being a good witness is another matter. Often suffering is just a part of life. When you're using your life to make a difference for Jesus, one can expect resistance and yes, suffering. Sometimes stuff happens and we must deal with it. My simple point is not all suffering is due to some great sin we have committed. Sometimes, it's simply due to "luck" or "age" or some test that God wants us to go through to be a witness for Him. OK then, back to Jeremiah.



20. Verse 23: Can the Ethiopian change his skin or the leopard its spots? Neither can you do good who are accustomed to doing evil.
- a) First let me say here that the Ethiopian reference is not a racist comment. Jeremiah only wants to use the "obvious as an illustration". Don't read any more into it than that. I've figured out that heaven is not going to have separate neighborhoods based on skin color or any other factor. Therefore, one better get used to being around people that don't look like you and me. Once one grasps that, life is a whole lot easier to manage.
  - b) Anyway, Jeremiah's point is just as certain things can't change the way they look, so those Israelites were so accustomed to evil, they were beyond fixing. We've had many chapters that deal with the specific sins they Israelites have committed and we'll get much more of that in the next lesson. Let's just say it was bad news. Not just turning from God, but they got to a point of "downright evil". Let's just remind ourselves that when we no longer do have a healthy fear of God, the worst happens and that was the case here!
21. Verse 24: "I will scatter you like chaff driven by the desert wind. <sup>25</sup> This is your lot, the portion I have decreed for you," declares the LORD, "because you have forgotten me and trusted in false gods.
- a) Let's be honest, things don't look good for the "home team" right now! God is saying that even those who survive this war, will be scattered. Time for a quick reminder of how that empire (Babylon) worked. First it covered a large territory. When they defeated someone, they would split up families so people wouldn't reunite to attack that empire. That means that when say a city was conquered, the survivors were scattered all over that empire. So when Jeremiah predicts they'll be scattered like chaff (a useless part of wheat blown away when separated by the wind), so the Israelites will be scattered the same way. Once again we see Jeremiah using illustrations to make his point.
  - b) After giving an illustration an agricultural society like Israel would recognize Jeremiah, it is now his responsibility to explain "why this is so". The issue comes down to the fact that the Israelites were worshiping false gods and ignoring the true God.
    - i) Let me explain why false gods are no appealing. With Baal, he was a weather god. The Israelites depended upon rain for their survival. I'm sure they went through a list of the required rituals to serve God, but they also "covered their bases" as they also did rituals to Baal, which included baby sacrifices!
    - ii) The appeal of a false god has to do with "rituals" we think if we try hard enough, it will please that deity and we'll get what we want. The true God desires we trust in Him for our salvation then do good works not to earn points but only as a witness for how He desires we live. However, I know I'm preaching to the choir on that, so 'll return to Jeremiah at this point. Bottom line the Israelites were trusting in "Baal" to "bail them out" of bad weather as we'll read in the beginning of Chapter 14.
    - iii) Until that lesson, we still have two few verses left to cover in this lesson.
22. Verse 26: I will pull up your skirts over your face that your shame may be seen--<sup>27</sup> your adulteries and lustful neighings, your shameless prostitution! I have seen your detestable acts on the hills and in the fields. Woe to you, O Jerusalem! How long will you be unclean?"
- a) Time for one of my very loose translations: Do you think you could just go through your life and get away with this forever? You were called to make a difference for Me, do you think there isn't a price to be paid for turning from Me? Many generations of Israelites did suffer for turning from Me, what makes you think you're getting off the hook?
    - i) Let me ask one last time, so why did this generation have to suffer worse than all of the previous ones? After all He never kicked "Southern" Israel out of the homeland prior to this? Yes you could argue, "God's had it". Yes you could argue that He did want to make an example of them for future generations. I suspect it simply makes the point that God has a limit of what He'll tolerate, and this was it! Deal with it!

- b) A few comments on the literal aspects of these verses and I'll wrap this up. Another of the many classical scholar debates of this chapter is what did Jeremiah mean by the symbol of having their skirts pulled over their face? Some believe it ties to a traditional punishment given to women caught as prostitution. They'd be naked in public for that act. Others say it refers to how the Babylonians will "ravage" the women as they attack! No matter what, I would say it's bad news all around. It's Jeremiah's final illustration of this chapter to try to get the Israelites to grasp how bad all of this going to be!
  - c) Just to pound the point home. The final sentence makes the point that Jerusalem itself as the capital of that kingdom was just as guilty as any other place in that region. Imagine if you were called to preach to your family, your friends, and acquaintances, that how they are living is not pleasing to God. I'm sure the message didn't go over well. I'm sure that Jeremiah was ridiculed at the least and threatened as we'll read later in the book.
    - i) I guess where I'm going with this is if God called you or me to preach something that's not popular, but was biblical, would we be willing to stand up for God?
    - ii) I'm convinced the hardest thing to do as a Christian is to have the boldness needed to make a difference for Jesus. That's why the early church prayed for boldness. I would then argue that boldness is what empowered Paul and his missionary pals to make the type of difference for Jesus that He desires.
    - iii) On that positive note, I hope all these illustrations and symbols "hit home" that it's God's desire not only that we commit our lives to serving Him, but also boldly go and use our lives to make a difference for Him.
    - iv) OK how? Ask what are you good at? Ask, what talent do I have and what would I enjoy doing to make a difference for Jesus? Pray and ask God for guidance. I am positive there is nothing God enjoys more than a total prayer of surrender of your life to His will. That's a prayer I'm positive God will answer.
    - v) Speaking of prayer, time to wrap this up for the week.
23. Heavenly Father, As people who've committed our lives to serving You, as those who not only believe Jesus died for our sins, but also is in charge of our lives, we pray for boldness. We pray that You make it obvious to each of us the specific ministry You've called us to do today as well as tomorrow. Guide us so that we can use the most valuable thing You've given us, our time to make a difference for You in the world around us. Then make it obvious to us as we surrender our will to Yours, the exact thing You desire we do with our lives right now. We ask this in Jesus name, Amen!