

Jeremiah Chapters 14-15 John Karmelich

1. Ever wanted to question God about why He's allowing something horrible to occur? If He's God, why does He allow all those things to occur in the first place? As I do often, I paint myself into a tough corner in the opening paragraph! In these chapters, Jeremiah sort of gets a "Q&A" session with God. These chapters focus on some horrible things that'll occur in the land of Israel along with one that already began. Jeremiah effectively asks God, "If the locals are willing to change for the good, will You stop this? What about false prophets who teach people to turn from You, can't you just make them suffer versus everyone else? Why must the whole nation of Israel have to suffer including say innocent children?" Finally Jeremiah contemplates his own role in this mess!
 - a) Those kind of questions, most of us would love to pose to God when we're going through a horrible time in our lives or the lives of those we love? If God's so good, why does God let such a horrible thing occur? It could be a natural disaster, a horrible accident, or even the suffering of a loved one. We all wonder at times like that, why does God allow it?
 - b) As I said in the last lesson, there is a classic expression that goes, "Religious leaders need to explain why God allows horrible things to occur! Nonreligious people have to explain everything else that's way beyond coincidence!"
 - c) Let me take a stab at it, while I'm in the neighborhood, and then I'll explain how it relates to this lesson on Jeremiah:
 - i) First there's the issue that we live in a cursed world. This world's history is full of horrid natural disasters that insurance companies call "Acts of God" when paying out damages. Many die of cancer or just go through horrible accidents and we ask, "God why are you allowing this?" Obviously, I can't explain all of that. God does it for no other reason than as a reminder that we live in a fallen world. The only way to escape "in full health" it is to accept His full sin payment as a consolation for the sorrows of this world. The essential purpose of living this life is to use it to glorify God in all we do. That includes learning of Him, make a difference for Him when we help others and simply using our time for His glory. As I also wrote in the last lesson, Christians are to "comfort the afflicted and afflict the comfortable".
 - ii) Sometimes we have to deal with sickness, or injuries, ways people hurt us or even helping a loved one who's suffering. It gets back to the question of why isn't God doing more in our hour of need? That's the question Jeremiah ponders here. All I know is that I trust in Romans 8:28 where Paul essentially says all things work out for good for those of us who trust in Him.
 - iii) There is also the issue of free will. If God stopped all horrible things before they're occurring we'd be complaining that He never gives us chances to prove our worth to God as He's always "interfering" in risky situations!
 - iv) That leads to the third and final category. Punishment. To put it simply God uses what I call the "carrot and stick" motivation to draw us and keep us close to Him. I mean "carrot" as we entice horses and mules with a carrot for good behavior. The stick is a reference to hitting an animal to make them go. The idea is God will do whatever is necessary to draw those He's called close to Him and that includes the idea of making people suffer and even allowing death for the "bigger picture" of making those of us He's called draw close to Him.
 - v) With all that said, let me explain these two Chapters and what's going on here:
2. Chapter 14 opens with describing a drought in Israel. It's so bad that even animals can't find any water for survival. The text describes servants of the leaders being sad as there's no water for any of the top people. God states clearly in Deuteronomy 28:22, that drought is a "stick" punishment for when we fail to live as God desires we live. The question is when the suffering comes, what is it we should we do about it in terms of seeking God when the suffering is wide spread?

- a) Jeremiah describes the corporate effort to seek God at that point. God's response in effect is "it's a waste of time", it's too late for that. There's a "too late" with God when it comes to being a witness for Him. The reason is that God wants others to see that "the stick" will be used when we fail to live as He desires. Again, separate salvation from witness. The issue at hand is individual and corporate witness for God with our lives. Does that mean we've got to be perfect? Of course not. However, that's not an excuse to not try in the first place to live as He desires. There is a small bit of humor as we read of Jeremiah breaking out in prayer and God saying, "you're wasting your time Jeremiah" in effect.
 - b) Next Jeremiah tries to blame the "lying prophets" as if to say, how can you blame all of the people if they believe those who tell them lies? In this lesson I'll talk about the motivation of lying prophets, but let's just say it's the usual things of fame, fortune and power. We'll know the lies because they preach against Jeremiah and God's judgment He gave through Moses when people turn from Him. Bottom line is that "Q&A" with God is a time waster.
 - c) At that point we get a plea by God through Jeremiah. The point is there's no pleasure for God to do all of this. He's doing it because nothing else is making a difference. Anyway, the last part of Chapter 14 has that type of plea of "please turn, destruction is coming!"
 - d) Chapter 15 gives more "bad news". It describes the way the Israelites will die. It describes how and why God's going to judge them some more. It's like the old joke that this song is "starting off depressing, and goes downhill from there". I'll spare you the details for now!
 - e) Jeremiah's next issue is in effect, why do I have to do this? God tells Jeremiah and informs us that He's making Jeremiah in effect, "tough as nails" and He'll be able to withstand the onslaught for preaching what God calls Him to preach. It's a combination of sorrow he's got for His job along with gratitude for God calling him to do this.
3. Bottom line, these two chapters read like a "Question and Answer" session with God. We never get the classic question answered of why does God allow the innocent to suffer. Instead we get a lecture on why the guilty must suffer and what's the price for turning from God with our lives? It is a hard lesson to read and yes, depressing at times. Still, it's what we need to hear. If there's an underlying message here is that "Sin isn't to be messed with". The price to be paid is harsh. What is a related message is the personal side of being called to be a witness for God. God never makes a promise to us that living the Christians life is easy. Jeremiah will suffer a lot in his life for what he was called to do as we'll see in later chapters. What Jeremiah gets reassured of is that it's well worth it and God will give Him the strength and ability to be that type of witness we're called to be in this world.
- a) All of that leads to my lesson title: "Why be a witness for God?" Why bother to preach of all the world's ills and the price one has to pay to live as God desires? God reassures him in this lesson that "It's ok Jeremiah. Horrible things will occur, but it's going to work out for My glory. Jeremiah like us are called to be a witness to a lost and dying world. No it does not mean we wear a big sandwich board saying "The end is coming". It means that we're to live out our lives as a witness for Jesus. The "Q&A" that Jeremiah gets is also the same message that God gives to us when we use our lives as a witness for Him. If you're aware of that, you're ahead of the game.
 - b) Still we've got a lot of details to cover in this lesson and as always, I welcome you to join me as I go verse by verse through these two chapters. Let's begin, shall we?
4. Chapter 14, Verse 1: This is the word of the LORD to Jeremiah concerning the drought: ² "Judah mourns, her cities languish; they wail for the land, and a cry goes up from Jerusalem. ³ The nobles send their servants for water; they go to the cisterns but find no water. They return with their jars unfilled; dismayed and despairing, they cover their heads.
- a) If you recall, Chapter 13 was Jeremiah speaking in "signs" to explain the damage that'll be occurring in Israel soon. In Chapter 14, the damage is occurring. No not the invasion by the Babylonians, but another of God's promises: You turn from Me, and the weather will start going bad (drought). (See Deuteronomy 28:20-22 for specifics.)

- b) What we have in the opening verses of this chapter is Jeremiah describing a drought that's so bad everyone "high and low" is suffering. He gets colorful as he describes the different ways people are suffering because of this drought. It even describes the people who serve the top people telling how they're ashamed at their failure to do the simple task of getting water for them. It shows how bad the drought was when one can't even buy their way out of this situation. There are three more verses on this and I'll comment more after that.
5. Verse 4: The ground is cracked because there is no rain in the land; the farmers are dismayed and cover their heads. ⁵ Even the doe in the field deserts her newborn fawn because there is no grass. ⁶ Wild donkeys stand on the barren heights and pant like jackals; their eyesight fails for lack of pasture."
- a) You would think that when times for survival get desperate, people would turn to God if for no other reason, than just to survive. I recall hearing about a severe drought in a part of the United States many years ago, where even the nonreligious farmers of that area also went to prayer meetings out of desperation for rain. I don't know the result of that story, but I do know that when things get tough, people will try anything to change it!
- b) What made this significant is Baal, the local false god was supposed to be a weather god! I can see people there praying hard to Baal to end this and then trying to cover their bases by praying to God as well! The question is, if God loves us so much as the bible will claim all through it, why does He allow such horrid things to occur? It's about the fact that God will do whatever it takes to draw people back to Him. I suspect they were praying to God and to Baal. God's saying in effect, "That won't do the trick. You (The Israelites) are held accountable for knowing your bible and you all should realize that's not the way I work!"
- c) This is also a reminder that the prayers of "His people" is what concerns Him. If we see a lot of suffering around us, besides trying to help, God calls on believers to pray to Him to make a difference. To paraphrase the classic serenity prayer, God does for us what we can not do for ourselves and He expects us to do what we can do ourselves. Prayer's often just a way to get Him involved in the picture and for His guidance as to the wisdom as to how to best handle a tough situation.
- d) Speaking of tough situations. We read of animals abandoning their young here due to the lack of water. Drought not only affects humans but the environment as well. I've heard a great comment this week that if you really care about the environment, study our bible as it's a great guide to what God requires of us to protect that environment!
- e) Here's a question to ponder: If God's going to bring a huge foreign army on the scene as to wipe Israel out why add "insult to injury" with a bad drought? Yes Deuteronomy warns it would occur for turning from God, but why not just do one, and see if they react? Even if we accept the "it's too late" argument? Why do both? The answer is God will do whatever is necessary to get our attention. Even if it's too late corporately, there may be individuals willing to repent so all this horrid stuff is all about getting the Israelites attention.
- i) So if God wants to get our attention, why doesn't He just skywrite, "Repent or else you'll all die" or something like that? The reason God doesn't work that way is all it will do is scare us and after the message is gone, we go back to our old ways.
- f) Bottom line, things are horrid, its all justified and a reminder that we should never mess with God. That's an underlying message for us. Meanwhile let's see what Jeremiah does:
6. Verse 7: Although our sins testify against us, O LORD, do something for the sake of your name. For our backsliding is great; we have sinned against you. ⁸ O Hope of Israel, its Savior in times of distress, why are you like a stranger in the land, like a traveler who stays only a night?
- a) Jeremiah does what all Christians should do first when things get bad. We should turn to prayer. My view is to pray for His wisdom and then make the best decisions we can with the situation at hand. With that said, recall that God told Jeremiah in the last chapter not to pray about this. God will mention that again in this section. Still I think it's Jeremiah's nature to pray, so he's at here.

- b) Notice how Jeremiah appeals to God. Not based on the Israelites "goodness". He appeals to God based on His goodness. The appeal is essentially, "Hey God, it's Your name on the line here. If we're wiped out, other nations will say, "Why should we trust in their god, He wiped out His own people!" Although this appeal didn't work, pleading to God just based on His reputation is a great way to appeal to God to help. Not because we "deserve it", but only because what He can do would be a good witness for how He works in the world.
- i) This would be a good spot to take a quick break to discuss miracles. First, "God is God" which simply means He has every right to say yes or no and we can never be forcing Him to act because we want something done! In my life I have seen people who have had great miracle cures of cancer and other strong believers who have to suffer horribly to death. Miracles do occur, but we can't count on them. The other issue is people forget! Sometimes people get a great miracle then go back to living as they were as if it never occurred.
- ii) I never have a problem asking and praying for His intervention. I don't know His will, so it never hurts to ask! If we do appeal to God, we should be like Jeremiah and appeal based on His goodness and not because we deserve it!
- iii) Notice Jeremiah doesn't claim Israelites are "good people". He says God is a savior, so that's the basis of his appeal. Meanwhile Jeremiah gives it "one more verse"!
7. Verse 9: Why are you like a man taken by surprise, like a warrior powerless to save? You are among us, O LORD, and we bear your name; do not forsake us!
- a) The appeal is "Hey God, why aren't you acting for the sake of your reputation.?" Yes I am well aware how bad things are around here, but still, "You're God, why don't You work in a way that would make people respect you?" In other words, Jeremiah's asking, why don't offer a "carrot versus a stick" (so to speak). A reason Jeremiah lays all this out for us so we realize all the other options were considered before the necessity of this judgment hits!
- b) Anyway, after three versus God's "had enough of this talk" and essentially answers him to "cut him off" from continuing:
8. Verse 10: This is what the LORD says about this people: "They greatly love to wander; they do not restrain their feet. So the LORD does not accept them; he will now remember their wickedness and punish them for their sins."
- a) God's answer, "It's too late". Yes the drought is horrible. Yes it's going to be worse when the Babylonians hit town, but I (God) have run out of options and I need to show that I'm keeping My word. Deuteronomy basically teaches that if we corporately ignore Him long enough, things will go from bad to worse, to eventually get to a point where I (God) must kick them out of the land as I'm out of options to get their attention".
- b) As I've been preaching on and off through Jeremiah so far, one thing we have to accept is that there is a "too late" with God. Not just for unbelievers, but for believers as well, as a witness for Him. His reputation is always at stake. He won't tolerate those of us called to be His witness, failing to do so. As I also love to preach He created us so that we give Him glory through our lives. When we consistently fail to do that (those called to be a witness) we can't blame Him if He gets tough on us because we're failing to do what we are called to do. Okay, enough guilt on us, let's get back to God and Jeremiah's "Q&A" session.
9. Verse 11: Then the LORD said to me, "Do not pray for the well-being of this people. ¹² Although they fast, I will not listen to their cry; though they offer burnt offerings and grain offerings, I will not accept them. Instead, I will destroy them with the sword, famine and plague."
- a) John's loose translation, "I don't care what they do, I'm not going to react." It's kind of like when a child shows remorse, not because they feel guilty over what they did, but because they got caught! That's God's point here. Yes I'm well aware of how My people are going to suffer. I'm well aware that many of them will die painfully. Still, the important thing is I need to cure them of their desire to worship other gods and this is what it'll take. As I've said, the one good thing that came out of all this is it stopped idolatry amongst them!

- b) So why does Jeremiah give us all these details? In other words, why doesn't it just occur? Why does Jeremiah tell us all the details of how and why? Part of it is for them to realize that God's not to be messed with. By giving Jeremiah specific details about what'll occur to them, it validates Jeremiah as a prophet and more importantly teaches us what'll occur if we "mess with God". The answer is "He messes with us and it's going to hurt badly!"
 - c) In these verses Jeremiah describes the methods the Israelites will use to appeal to God for the avoidance of punishment. He lists two specific types of offerings listed in Leviticus. I would say there's nothing wrong with these types of offerings. They're both significant to show one's commitment to God. The issue comes back to "Are the doing this to try to buy "God off" so they could live however they desire or were they really want to change their lifestyle? Obviously their answer is, "Buy God off" and that's why this was rejected.
 - d) To validate Jeremiah as a prophet, we even get the specifics of how the Israelites are going to suffer when all this begins! Besides recognizing Jeremiah as a true prophet after all this starts, it also again, reminds us that God's "not to be messed with".
 - i) The specific methods are "sword, famine and plague". It refers to people dying by the sword of the enemy. Even those who survive that may die by famine or some type of plague. No matter what it's not good. Speaking of "not good" let's read in the next verse how Jeremiah reacts to this:
10. Verse 13: But I said, "Ah, Sovereign LORD, the prophets keep telling them, 'You will not see the sword or suffer famine. Indeed, I will give you lasting peace in this place.' "
- a) Even before I get to the specifics of Jeremiah's response to God, consider the fact that he's having a dialogue with the God who created everything! Yes all believers can also get to have that privilege, but not where He's audibly answering or at least making it an obvious situation where we know exactly what He's thinking. That fact alone is an amazing thing to contemplate. So why doesn't He answer us the same way? The most obvious answer is the fact that often God wants to say to us, "I gave you a brain, go use it". As to those tough theological questions, God gave us the bible so we'd study it and not repeat the same type of questions. Thus, here we are!
 - b) That leads me back to Jeremiah. Here he's saying in effect, "lying prophets are around and the people believe them. So why punish innocent children and the such if families believe such prophets?"
 - i) That leads to the question of why do false prophets always exist through history. I will say that they don't wear badges saying, "I'm a false prophet, ignore me". That is why we must pay attention to what people say and compare it to God's word in order to tell the real from the genuine. To use another analogy I'm fond of, people training to be bank tellers are taught to spend a lot of time counting money. What that does is help them to recognize the real thing versus counterfeit. The same idea works for Christianity. The better we know our bible, the easier it is to spot what's fake when it comes to false teachers.
 - ii) So what is the motivation of such false teachers? The usual things of power, fame and money come to mind. We should also consider the idea that demonic beings would influence them to teach what they say.
 - iii) OK John, how do we know if you're one of the "good guys"? Easy compare what I say to God's word and judge for yourself. One of the bible verses that scares me a lot is James 3:1 that effectively says, "Be wary to be a bible teacher as God will give them (me) a much tougher judgment standard because they should know better!"
 - c) That little lecture leads me back to this verse. Just like the fact there are many bad teachers around today, there were in Jeremiah's day. They preached what people want to hear. I'm sure they were standing around saying, "Trust God, the drought will end any time now. If you keep up your God rituals (then do what you want), the Babylonians won't invade. Or, I could hear them preach keep trusting in Baal, he's testing you right now!"

- d) The bottom line is the excuse of the false prophets won't work. God says in effect, if His word is available for us to learn, we're accountable for that knowledge! One reason that I would argue that most people today don't have any excuses before God is simple because His word is to readily available to us for free on the internet or in print. Even back then, I would assume most of the Israelites had "church service" as part of their ritual that was an available option to them. Therefore, what the false prophets taught could be compared to what God's word taught. Meanwhile, I'm interrupting God as He wants to respond!
11. Verse 14: Then the LORD said to me, "The prophets are prophesying lies in my name. I have not sent them or appointed them or spoken to them. They are prophesying to you false visions, divinations, idolatries and the delusions of their own minds.¹⁵ Therefore, this is what the LORD says about the prophets who are prophesying in my name: I did not send them, yet they are saying, 'No sword or famine will touch this land.' Those same prophets will perish by sword and famine.¹⁶ And the people they are prophesying to will be thrown out into the streets of Jerusalem because of the famine and sword. There will be no one to bury them or their wives, their sons or their daughters. I will pour out on them the calamity they deserve.
- a) God's saying in effect, "You know those people claiming to be my prophets? Not only did I not send them, but they'll suffer the same way they claim Israel won't suffer. You want a little proof that they're false prophets? Watch their lives! They claim Jerusalem will not be destroyed. Guess what? It'll happen and no one will be there to bury their bodies when it occurs as a testimony against them!"
- b) This leads me back to my test of true versus false prophets. The simple answer is to watch and see who's right. If someone tells me that God has a message for me, my first response is, "What has God lost my phone number?" Then I'll be polite and listen assuming they're not violent and I'll watch and see what comes to pass! That in effect is what God is telling the Israelites to do. It's the "Want to see who's telling the truth? Hang around and watch!"
- c) Again, keep in mind why all of this is taking place. Part of it is to validate Jeremiah as the legitimate prophet versus the false ones. Part of it is to teach us that "We should never be messing with what God says, or we too may suffer the same way." So if that's true why is we don't see all the multitudes of people who don't care about God enjoying their life as if nothing else matters! The answer is this is all the joy they'll get for eternity. If there will be an eternity, it's a lot longer than this life and I'm willing to bet on eternity versus "now"!
- d) I should also add that there is a cultural significance to "not being buried". For most of us, we take the view that "I'm dead, what do I care what you do with my body"? Back then, it is considered a disgrace to not bury the dead and that idea comes across in these verses.
- e) Let me end this section with a few words about those "bad guys" and their "false visions, divinations, idolatries and the delusions of their own minds". I'm sure the false prophets put on a good show. They wanted to attract attention to themselves. I'm sure they had a few "magic arts" up their sleeves to draw attention. I'm also willing to bet they believed it with all their hearts. For all they knew, "God was speaking to them". As John taught us, if a spirit says something to us, we must test that spirit to see if it's from God. (1st John 4:1.) That just means to test what we believe such spirits are telling us versus God's word!
- f) Meanwhile, I'm still interrupting God as He's talking so I'm in trouble again!
12. Verse 17: "Speak this word to them: " `Let my eyes overflow with tears night and day without ceasing; for my virgin daughter--my people-- has suffered a grievous wound, a crushing blow.
- a) One of the things to grasp about Jeremiah is he was called "the weeping prophet" in part because that's how God also felt about this whole ordeal. It doesn't bring God any joy to have to punish His people for their sins. The reason the punishment was so severe is the simple fact that He's tried lesser punishments and nothing was working.
- i) Keep in mind why God created us in the first place, to glorify Him with our lives. To have an intimate relationship with Him. When we turn from that, first we have to realize it "breaks God's heart" when we act that way. That's the idea here!

- b) So how does a perfect God grieve anyway? Doesn't He know all things? Isn't He perfect by definition anyway? Didn't He know they were going to mess up and doesn't He know when we mess up? I'd argue yes to all of that. I'd also argue it grieves God for the simple reason that He created us to have an intimate relationship with Him. When we turn from what He desires, somehow it literally grieves Him.
 - c) So how do balance God grieving with other aspects of His nature? I believe God's always perfectly angry at sin, perfectly loving to us and grieved at our sins all the same time. The idea of His judgment is God doing what He has to do to try to draw us back to Him. That is why all that suffering by the Israelites was necessary and yes, it can and does mean He will do what He has to do to draw us back to Him if we wander from Him.
 - d) Meanwhile we still have a good ways to go in this lesson. Let's continue:
13. Verse 18: If I go into the country, I see those slain by the sword; if I go into the city, I see the ravages of famine. Both prophet and priest have gone to a land they know not.' "
- a) Keep in mind Jeremiah's not crazy about what God called him to do. He wasn't excited to go see dead Israelites all over the place. He's well aware of the Babylonians attacking and he's well aware of the damage of the plague as we can tell from the opening verses of this chapter. The question he's asking God is in effect, "Why me? Why did you specifically call me to do this? It's a question any of us who do ministry work can wonder at times. What we must accept is we live to do His will and not vice versa. He never makes us do a thing that He knows we can't handle, as tough as it may be! In Jeremiah's case God's telling him that he must see the results of the Israelites turning from God? Must of us know of at least one story of a life ruined because people have turned their backs on God. Therefore what Jeremiah is asked to do is not so different from what any of us can experience when we do fail to live as God requires or see others suffer for failing to be a witness for Him.
 - b) Ok, that's enough self-torture for one verse. Let's move on to the next one!
14. Verse 19: Have you rejected Judah completely? Do you despise Zion? Why have you afflicted us so that we cannot be healed? We hoped for peace but no good has come, for a time of healing but there is only terror. ²⁰ O LORD, we acknowledge our wickedness and the guilt of our fathers; we have indeed sinned against you. ²¹ For the sake of your name do not despise us; do not dishonor your glorious throne. Remember your covenant with us and do not break it.
- a) Jeremiah is back to pleading to God to act "based on His goodness". Notice Jeremiah now is ignoring God's statement that He won't answer so "stop praying about that". His point's the idea that "Hey God, maybe if you won't act due to false prophets, maybe you'll act for the sake of Your name. Hey God, you made a deal that you'd preserve our nation so that the Messiah would rule here one day." God's going to respond to that issue. The reason I would argue that Israel still exists today is strictly for that reason! In the meantime, God's showing that He's not afraid to punish a nation of believers (or a church or say a houseful) if we fail to be a witness for Him. The question is essentially "Hey God, why are you being so tough on us? How are we worse than other Israelites who disobeyed you?"
 - i) Before I answer that, consider the that in the book of Acts, God struck a husband & wife couple dead for lying to the church. (Acts Chapter 5.) My point's to realize it isn't just an "Old Testament thing". God wants us to be a good witness for Him as He is willing to "take lives in order to make a point about obedience!"
 - ii) As to these Israelites, the reason God was tougher on this generation is they got to a point where corporately He'd been completely rejected. In effect God didn't have a choice to do what He did at this point. The "proof is in the pudding" as I've been stating the Babylonian captivity cured the Israelites of idols after that time!
 - b) I also want to comment on the idea of "we want peace". If you ask people what they want assuming there is no special illness or issue in their lives, I'd argue that most people crave a sense of peace. One thing that Jesus promises believers is a sense of peace no matter the problems of the moment. (See John 14:27.)

- c) Finally notice in Verse 20 that Jeremiah acknowledges their sins. So why didn't God act on that request? Can't we pray on behalf of others? Yes. However, I'd argue that other than Jeremiah himself, Israel wasn't really interested in that sort of change. Seventy years later, Daniel prays a similar prayer on behalf of his nation from Babylon and God responds. So why did God respond to Daniel and not Jeremiah? The answer is after seventy years of it, God figured "OK, they figured it out, I'll accept Daniel's prayer for their sins. I'm basing it on the prayer of Daniel Chapter 9.
- i) So yes or no, can we pray on behalf of a nation? Of course we can. God has every right to say no to our prayer request. So is it a good thing to pray for? Yes, God loves a prayer of repentance. Acknowledging our own sins before Him is always a good place to start and wanting other believers around us to change is a prayer He loves because it's a desire on our part to see people draw close to Him, I'd say He's willing to help us work toward that goal.
15. Verse 22: Do any of the worthless idols of the nations bring rain? Do the skies themselves send down showers? No, it is you, O LORD our God. Therefore our hope is in you, for you are the one who does all this.
- a) In Verse 22, Jeremiah "states the obvious". He's not doing it to tell God something he does not already know. It's a colorful way of saying, I know it's You we put our trust in even if my fellow Israelites don't get that! Jeremiah's ending this part of the "Q&A" session to say in effect, "Yes my job's hard, yes I hate having to see all the destruction, but I acknowledge that "You're God and I'm not" and the other so called things people desire in life aren't the things that I seek as I realize I'm going to live forever, so I might as well use my time to be the type of witness you want me to be.
- b) On that positive note, we can crank through Chapter 15 as it's part of the same theme!
16. Chapter 15, Verse 1: Then the LORD said to me: "Even if Moses and Samuel were to stand before me, my heart would not go out to this people. Send them away from my presence! Let them go!
- a) My first question, why did God incite Moses and Samuel's name? Why not Elijah or say Noah? The answer is these two men among many other things prayed on behalf of their fellow Israelites in their days. (Exodus 32:9-14 and 1st Samuel 7:5). OK, enough looking up bible verses. You get the point.
- b) Related issue: Isn't Moses and Samuel in heaven? Of course, however I'd argue that they had to "wait for Jesus" to be there. There's a view based on Luke 16:19-31: Jesus tells us a story about a "good and bad part of hell". Many of us argue that Old Testament saints did stay in the "good part of hell" until after Jesus resurrection. It's a popular scholar theory!
- c) Anyway, the key point of this verse is God's effectively saying, even if Moses and Samuel were right in front of me praying like there was no tomorrow, I'm not changing My mind!
- d) It's God's way of reminding us that sometimes the answer is "No" to our prayer requests!
17. Verse 2: And if they ask you, `Where shall we go?' tell them, `This is what the LORD says: " `Those destined for death, to death; those for the sword, to the sword; those for starvation, to starvation; those for captivity, to captivity.' ³ "I will send four kinds of destroyers against them," declares the LORD, "the sword to kill and the dogs to drag away and the birds of the air and the beasts of the earth to devour and destroy.
- a) Here God's response to Jeremiah's request of "why can't You be kind for Your name's sake here?" God's response is "For "My name's sake" Game on! Punishment's coming down as hard as I've told you. In fact, let me give you more details. Some will die by sword, others by starvation, others will be injured by a sword and others will go into captivity. All in all it won't be pretty, but it's all necessary to get my people to turn back to Me".
- b) Then if all that isn't scary enough, God explains different ways people will die as well as a description of dead bodies in the street. When the bible mentions dogs, don't think house pets, think "wild dogs scrounging for food". Anyway between wild animals and birds the bodies of the killed won't be buried but be destroyed by wild animals or by swords!

- c) OK John, so a bunch of people died in horrible ways millenniums ago. I've got problems of my own. Why should I care? Because just as God held them accountable as a witness for God, so He holds us Christians accountable too. It's another reminder that we're not to mess with our responsibility to use our lives as a witness for God? Even if we are using our lives that way, it's never meant to be an exclusive club. We need to be sharing His word with others or praying for those who do. As a former pastor of mine would be saying, "If we're not on the front line firing the bullets, we need to be on the back line as we prepare the "ammunition" (prayer).
 - d) Speaking of guilt, back to Jeremiah!
18. Verse 4: I will make them abhorrent to all the kingdoms of the earth because of what Manasseh son of Hezekiah king of Judah did in Jerusalem.
- a) OK, I'd say this verse requires an explanation! If you study the history of the kings of the Southern Kingdom, you'd know that Manasseh was really a bad one. He lived about 50 years prior to Jeremiah. So why didn't God punish Israel in "his day" versus now? That's because the influence of what Manasseh did lasted until Jeremiah's day. Let me explain.
 - i) If you study his life in 2 Kings 21:1-18 and Chronicles 32:33-33:20. He did a lot of bad things including Baal worship and offering babies to idols. He made worship of God essentially illegal. He did repent near the end of his life, but apparently all that he did influenced that nation all the way to Jeremiah's day.
 - ii) That's why God's saying in effect, "what Manasseh did back then has become an incurable issue other than to totally wipe them out!
 - b) Here's something else to consider. When the Israelites first entered that land, God used them to judge the local inhabitants for acting horribly (as in killing babies to indicate their loyalty to their gods). God used the Israelites to judge them as if to say, "here's how God who created all of us expects us to live". Now that the Israelites of Jeremiah's day acted in a way that was similar to the original inhabitants., God's doing the same judgment!
 - c) Meanwhile, God's on a role and I interrupted Him again!
19. Verse 5: "Who will have pity on you, O Jerusalem? Who will mourn for you? Who will stop to ask how you are? ⁶ You have rejected me," declares the LORD. "You keep on backsliding. So I will lay hands on you and destroy you; I can no longer show compassion. ⁷ I will winnow them with a winnowing fork at the city gates of the land. I will bring bereavement and destruction on my people, for they have not changed their ways.
- a) If you ever want evidence for the accuracy of the bible read some archeology studies done in that land! A good starting book is "Halley's Bible Handbook". My point here is simply that there is archeological evidence that Jerusalem and all the cities of "South" Israel were truly wiped out after this invasion. Just as these verses say that God will wipe out what's left of the Israelites in that land for rejecting Him.
 - b) Verse 5 asks the question, "Who'll mourn for you?" Obviously a reference to the idea that the destruction of Israel will be so complete "mourners" will be in short supply!
 - c) Most of us churchgoers have regularly heard the term "backsliding" referring to someone who believes in God but has turned away. In a sense it's an Old Testament term as shown here in Verse 6.
 - d) Again we're getting the idea that God's responding to Jeremiah's question about whether or not God still has any compassion for the Israelites. God's saying in effect, He has to do what He has to do as He's out of options at this point!"
 - e) OK John we get the fact it's going to be gruesome. Why is God giving us all these details? It's for no other reason, then to keep us on our toes as believers and realize God's never to be messed with. That we as Christians can suffer in horrible ways in this lifetime if we do fail to be a witness for Him. That's the underlying point here.
 - i) In the meantime, Jeremiah wants to finish his gruesome details. I've never been a fan of gore, but those of you who like this stuff, "these are your verses!"

20. Verse 8: I will make their widows more numerous than the sand of the sea. At midday I will bring a destroyer against the mothers of their young men; suddenly I will bring down on them anguish and terror. ⁹ The mother of seven will grow faint and breathe her last. Her sun will set while it is still day; she will be disgraced and humiliated. I will put the survivors to the sword before their enemies," declares the LORD.
- a) Well when God gets on a roll, He really gets on a roll! Next time I ask God to strike down someone who cuts me off in traffic, I'll think twice about it! I can give specifics but we can tell the main point is the destruction of God's people is going to be really bad!
 - b) The text gives the impression the Israelites had soldiers to confront the Babylonians but it was a "wipeout" as the text describes many women being widows at that point.
 - i) The next example is the fact the Babylonians attacked at midday as opposed to say dusk or dawn for light advantages.
 - ii) Women will lose all their children to this battle. Even those who survive did later die by the sword. All in all, it's pretty gruesome.
 - c) Remember that we're talking about God's chosen. As Jesus said, "many are called, few are chosen" (Matthew 22:1). Wow, I'm giving a lot of bible quotes in this lesson! Bottom line's a strong message that being His chosen comes with responsibilities and a failure to live by those responsibilities is well, pretty gruesome to put it mildly.
 - i) So why don't we see people being struck dead today for turning from God? That's because we have God's word to explain the price for turning away. Of course there are many who suffer in this lifetime, but how and when God chooses to "bring the hammer down" is His business. Ours is to be a good servant of His!
21. Verse 10: Alas, my mother, that you gave me birth, a man with whom the whole land strives and contends! I have neither lent nor borrowed, yet everyone curses me.
- a) At this point, Jeremiah gets personal. Can't blame him. If I had to preach all this I would also be saying to God, "Yes, that's horrible, but what about me?" Why do I have to suffer as a witness to all of this? I doubt the Israelites were telling Jeremiah, "preach it brother", I'm sure Jeremiah got picked on. As this verse says, "everyone curses me". It's similar to some of the psalms where David complained how badly people have treated him when he took a stand for God.
 - b) Here's the point, being a witness for God will not win us popularity contests. Most of the world rejects the Gospel either because they want to prove their worth to God or will not accept the idea of God Himself paying for their sins or just want to live however they like without thinking about the consequences. Either way, if we take a stand for God, we have to accept "blowback". It doesn't mean we should encourage it or look for it, we just have to accept that rejection comes with the territory. The good news is some people will get it and it's worth the trouble as some people will accept God's free gift of salvation. It's worth all the trouble and that's why we should stick at it!
22. Verse 11: The LORD said, "Surely I will deliver you for a good purpose; surely I will make your enemies plead with you in times of disaster and times of distress.
- a) I'm not sure if Jeremiah's talking about himself here or the remnant of Israel that survive all of this and go on to rebuild that nation. I suspect the latter. This is the good news in the middle of all the bad news. It's God answering Jeremiah's question about what His unconditional promises to bring in the Messiah through Israel. Verse 11 implies that in spite of the fact the Israelites will be out of that land, "I'll make your enemies plead with you". In other words a day will come when Israel's enemies will plead for their help!
 - i) It's another reminder that there are good things await those who "stick it out".
23. Verse 12: "Can a man break iron-- iron from the north--or bronze?
- a) We're back to praising the conquerors of Israel. The idea is just as iron can't easily break, so the influence of those God calls to destroy His people, "will do their job". We get a little reference to the "north" which is where the conquerors came from, direction wise!

24. Verse 13: Your wealth and your treasures I will give as plunder, without charge, because of all your sins throughout your country. ¹⁴ I will enslave you to your enemies in a land you do not know, for my anger will kindle a fire that will burn against you."
- a) Here's the last two verses of condemnation against Israel. I'm the first to admit, all this is getting very repetitive by now. Why spend so many verses with all these details to tell us just how the Israelites will suffer? Why beat it over our heads so bad? I suspect so it's hit us hard over the head that "God's not to be messed with" even as believers. Suffering can and will occur to those He's called to be His witnesses and suffer badly as an example that other people can see when it comes to "Don't mess with God or else".
 - b) In these verses the emphasis is on the fact that not only will there be a lot of death, there'll be a loss of possessions to their enemies. Even those that survive the slaughter will end up being slaves. Yes it occurred exactly as Jeremiah stated, but I've beaten that point to death by now.
 - c) The good news is the rest of the chapter focuses on Jeremiah himself and why he must do all of this:
25. Verse 15: You understand, O LORD; remember me and care for me. Avenge me on my persecutors. You are long-suffering--do not take me away; think of how I suffer reproach for your sake.
- a) Remember how I stated earlier about how tough it had to be for Jeremiah to deal with all of this? Verses 15 to 21 (the end of the chapter is Jeremiah's prayer about his own life and a final answer to the "Q&A" from God about all of this. With that said, it is not all positive for Jeremiah. God will rebuke him for "thinking this way" coming up in a few verses. Let's look at Verse 15 carefully:
 - i) Verse 15 is a plea on Jeremiah's part to "help me". He's complaining how much he has had to suffer for being faithful to God. He's also saying, "They want to kill me, so please God protect me so I can do Your job."
 - ii) One of the things to grasp about God calling us to do something is the fact that not only does He provide the desire to do something, but also the ability, assuming it's His will. Let me think of a simple example. Let's suppose you desire to sing in the church choir. The director says, "You're voice isn't that great, sorry no openings or your voice isn't that good". It could be God saying "no" to your desire or it can be a reason to look elsewhere. My point is just because God puts a desire in our heart does it mean He easily lets that desire be fulfilled. Often fulfilling that desire will require a lot of hard work on our part! My point is being a witness for God won't always be "peaches and cream". Sometimes we have to work hard at what we are convinced God is calling us to do. That's the case with Jeremiah here.
 - iii) Yet we find Jeremiah complaining, "Woe is me, this is hard! God will respond in a few verses after Jeremiah continues.
26. Verse 16: When your words came, I ate them; they were my joy and my heart's delight, for I bear your name, O LORD God Almighty.
- a) Obviously Jeremiah didn't literally eat copies of the bible. It refers to the idea of digesting what we read in the bible and thinking about it. That's what God calls all of us to do as we read our bible. The reason we study our bible over and over again, is to remind ourselves of "timeless truths" and think about why the bible mentions or omits this or that fact. This is designed to make us think about God and what He desires for our lives. That's what we read of Jeremiah doing here.
 - b) So if that's so "bad", why are you saying Jeremiah is complaining? This verse by itself isn't a problem. It's the context: It's thinking, "Yes, Lord, I realize Your word is a good things to learn and think about it. The trick is the application. The trick's preaching it when no one wants to hear it. The challenge is living it out (which is why we need God' spirit to give us the power to live it out) and then be an example to others of how to live that way!

27. Verse 17: I never sat in the company of revelers, never made merry with them; I sat alone because your hand was on me and you had filled me with indignation. ¹⁸ Why is my pain unending and my wound grievous and incurable? Will you be to me like a deceptive brook, like a spring that fails?
- a) Here's the last of Jeremiah talking himself in this section of his book. The last three verses will be God's response to Jeremiah's "woe is me" moment. He starts by saying, "I've never been like one of those "party animals". I've just worked hard for You because that's what I believe You've called me to do! You (God) have filled me with contempt for how all of my fellow Israelites are living. My pain is more than I can take dealing with this! God I can't help but feel like You've let me down, because living this way is too hard to take". That is the flavor of these verses.
 - b) I admit that as I read this, I kept thinking about what Jesus said about a Pharisee who was bragging how He "tithed of every little thing He got and fasted twice a week (Luke 18:11 to 13.) This man was standing next to a known sinner who repented sincerely for how he lived. I picture Jeremiah having his own "woe is me, I'm so good and everyone is so bad moment, just like Jesus had to deal with as told in Luke's account.
 - c) So are you saying we can't complain to God when what He's called us to do gets tough to comply with? No. I'm saying that living to do His will should always be thought of as a joy as opposed to a burden. It's the idea that we can't change our circumstances but we can always change our attitude! What Jeremiah forgot is what God calls us to do whatever that is, also means He provides us with the power to do and will be there with us to do as He desires. If you grasp that, you've grasped how God expects us to live the Christian life.
 - d) Meanwhile God Himself wants to weigh in, and I'm interrupting Him of course!
28. Verse 19: Therefore this is what the LORD says: "If you repent, I will restore you that you may serve me; if you utter worthy, not worthless, words, you will be my spokesman. Let this people turn to you, but you must not turn to them.
- a) If you thought that Jeremiah is "Mr. Perfect" or "Mister goody two shoes" who didn't mess up in being God's witness, Verses 19-21 is the rebuke of that argument. Notice God here is telling Jeremiah to "repent". OK, what's the sin that Jeremiah must repent of? Thinking he can't do what God asks Him to do! God's saying Jeremiah must still be His witness to the Israelites no matter how he feels about it because that's what God calls us to do!
 - b) The point of course is during our own "woe is me" moments, God will in His own way, be saying to us, "I called you to do this, why are you sitting around doing nothing!"
 - i) For those who believe they now what God calls them to do (something to pray for if you don't know), then yes, God allows down time, but He also expects us to get at it, and do what He calls us to do. Usually learning His will is "trial and error" as it is mixed with our desire to please Him using our God given talents. My point is it's worth the effort as we're pleasing the God who created us and I can't think of a better reason to live than that! On that happy note, the final two verses.
29. Verse 20: I will make you a wall to this people, a fortified wall of bronze; they will fight against you but will not overcome you, for I am with you to rescue and save you," declares the LORD. ²¹ "I will save you from the hands of the wicked and redeem you from the grasp of the cruel."
- a) This is God saying, "Hey Jeremiah, you worried about what people will say about you? I'll make you a "wall of bronze". (That's a metaphor like "hard as nails" meaning that I'll give you the power you need to withstand everything people throw at you! As we go through the rest of the book, we'll discover that Jeremiah will still suffer a lot for what he preached to the Israelites, but God is saying to him as He says to us, He'll be with us through all this as we go through our lives being a witness for Him.
 - b) If you recall, my lesson title was, "why be a witness for God". Hopefully this Q&A with God and Jeremiah explains why and how we're called to be a witness for Him. Hope all of it has been helpful as we use our lives for His glory. With that said, I'll close in prayer.

30. Heavenly Father, I'm the first to admit, this is "tough sledding". Called to use our lives to make a difference for You is a rough journey. Still, I can't think of a greater purpose in life than to be used by the God of the Universe for His glory. Be with us and make it obvious to us how You do desires we use our lives for Your glory. May we rely upon Your power to do all that You desire of us as we glorify You with our lives. We ask this in Jesus name, Amen!