

1. As I read this chapter a few times, God hit me with the title, "The Price You Pay". Yes I know it's a song by Bruce Springsteen, but it's got nothing to do with that. It just hit me as an appropriate lesson title. Let me summarize the story and you'll see why it works and why we should care:
  - a) Chapter 16 opens with God telling Jeremiah what He can and can't do as His witness to the Israelites. It's not a "This applies to everyone set of commands", but specifically given for Jeremiah here. This includes not marrying or having children. It includes not helping a person who's suffering from the loss of a loved one. It includes avoiding celebrations of any kind including weddings and parties in general. No it's not about being a "goody two shoes who's holier than though". It's about God calling Jeremiah to do certain things to be a witness for Him during really tough times. When I get to my verse-by-verse comments I'll discuss the reasons, but the short version, is "God said to go do this and in effect what choice do we have when God tells us to do something?" The main reason for all of that is to indicate bad judgment is coming and I'm (Jeremiah) trying to avoid the suffering that's about to occur here in this land!
  - b) By Verse 10, Jeremiah gets "preachy": He explains to whoever's willing to listen to him of the horrid judgment that's coming down. He explains why the Israelites of his day were a lot more wicked than previous generations because they "worship everything but the true God" in their hearts. Therefore God's kicking them out of the land (taking away the right to enjoy God's blessings in their lives) for a failure to be a witness for Him. Yes, that is the other key example of the "price you pay" that we're studying in Jeremiah!
  - c) Then we get a hint of good news: The last part of Verse 16 talks either about the fact that no one will escape His judgment and the fact that God will one day restore that nation for His name sake, not for theirs. The point is, if we're not willing to be a witness for God, He will find someone else to "do the job". That's why He promises restoration of the nation of Israel in spite of their sins.
  - d) By the last few verses of Chapter 16 and the opening verses of Chapter 17, God's saying in effect, "it's gotten so bad around here, I (God) have no choice but to wipe out this place!" It is "the price you pay" for being useless to God. Punishment in effect is worse than death. I would say it's a loss of everything we consider of value as well as death itself! It's another reminder that we are created to glorify God with our lives and when we fail, yes I'll say it again, there's a price to be paid.
  - e) Chapter 17 goes on to focus on "evidence". Jeremiah sites examples of how Israelites of his time were living and why all of this is necessary. It's intermingled with promises of types of punishment to come as well as great promises to those who turn to God!
  - f) By the end of Chapter 17, Jeremiah gets specific and starts discussing the fact the Israelites were breaking one of the 10 Commandments to "Honor the Sabbath" and not work on that day. I'll get into the specifics of what that means in that lesson. In short, there's a price the Israelites (and us) must pay for ignoring God and yes, a price we must pay to be a witness for Him in our lives.
2. OK, if all that doesn't scare you, you obviously we're reading carefully enough. Now comes what I consider the harder part: Why? Why do we have to "pay a price to be a witness for Him"? Why do we have to willfully give up our privileges in life to be a witness for God? Why do we have to suffer in order to live as God commands us? Let's be honest, living out the Christian life's a tough "gig" to put it mildly. Even if we don't have to remain celibate like Jeremiah (I promise to discuss the reasons for that in this lesson!) why does God tell us to do and avoid specific things? Does He never want us to have fun in this life? What about even giving comfort to the hurting at a time of the death of a loved one? My point is Jeremiah was given specific instructions that are NOT to be applied to us. At the same time, God may make it obvious to do or avoid certain things.

- a) What to do or avoid is a key point of this introduction. I'll start with Jeremiah and why it was that God called him to do certain things. The reason he remained celibate has nothing to do with why Roman Catholic priests take that vow. It is due to the "coming very soon" Israel destruction and the fact it'll be so bad, God didn't want Jeremiah to have the burden of dealing with worrying about his family's safety. Realize that the destruction of Israel as a nation will be so horrid, nobody could even bury the bodies. God also didn't allow him to be a part of any celebrations, as He wanted to get the message across that "the times are coming that are so bad, it's not a time for celebration".
  - b) The underlying point here is when God calls us to not do something, it's for our benefit to do what He commands. That leads to the big question, how do I know when God calls us to do something over and above what the bible teaches? Sometimes it's obvious: If you've battled alcoholism, staying away from bars may be a necessity at this point in one's life. If you believe God's called you to witness to a certain group of people, obviously you've got to be where they are! To paraphrase Paul, "I have the right to do this and that, but I gladly give up that right if it means winning someone for Jesus". (Based on 1st Corinthians 9:19.)
  - c) Let me put it this way, God doesn't whack us on the head and say, "Go do this in order to be My witness to the world." Often it's just common sense or a desire God puts in us so we can be a better witness for Him. There was a famous pastor in American colonial times who used to preach many sermons daily riding on horseback to wherever there was those willing to listen to Him. My point is sometimes God may put it in our hearts to do a thing for Him. The "scale" doesn't matter. What matters is our willingness to be a witness so we can serve God as we believe He's calling us to do so.
3. That leads to the second part of this discussion, "A willingness to deliver the bad news". Let's face it nobody enjoys being the bearer of bad news. As I state every now and then, one famous pastor used to say, "If they're not willing to hear the good news of Jesus, give them Moses!" That means if people aren't interested in hearing the good news of God's free plan of salvation, then they got to hear the bad news of what that'll cost them! So are saying I got to stand on a street corner as to preach judgment's coming, or scare my family and friends half to death with that message? No, I am saying we must be a good witness for Jesus, and sometimes that means explaining how one is living is killing them. Obviously if people aren't willing to listen, they'll have to learn a hard way in life. The other good news is when they hit "rock bottom" it might sink in at that point.
- a) Anyway, when one is confronting a situation where "intervention" is necessary, pray for a lot of guidance and wisdom and let God lead us down the path that He wants. That way, we'd be like Jeremiah preaching what has to be said no matter how painful it is!
4. Finally a word to those of you who are thinking, "Wait a minute, I go to church and I already do a lot of good things for Jesus!" This isn't a "You're not doing enough" lecture, so work harder! All I am doing is reminding us that God calls believers to give up our rights in order to be the type of witness He desires we be for Him. This lesson's a reminder that God tells us that sometimes it is necessary to be the bearer of bad news in order for people will learn the consequences of living a life that's not pleasing to Him. This is a hard section to get through, but it's a necessary one, not to make us feel guilty about not doing enough, but a reminder that we're told to be a living witness for Jesus and yes, it means giving up our rights in order to win souls! It'll be hard at times to live that way, but in a sense, what choice do we have? Should we care more about how we live in this life or in eternity? If you grasp all that you get Jeremiah here!
5. OK, now that I've scared everyone half to death, I can exhale and start on my verse-by-verse talk on these two Chapters of Jeremiah. As we get into the details, I ask that you don't think, "Oh poor Jeremiah or those poor Israelites, they don't get it". It's not in the bible to learn history. It's here as to teach us how to apply it to our lives.
- a) Grant it, not every verse my strike home on every given day. But there should be enough here for us to think, "Good point, I haven't thought about that". Or "That's a good way of looking at my life. Thanks for bringing that up!" With that said, let's get started.

6. Jeremiah 16, Verse 1: Then the word of the LORD came to me: <sup>2</sup> "You must not marry and have sons or daughters in this place." <sup>3</sup> For this is what the LORD says about the sons and daughters born in this land and about the women who are their mothers and the men who are their fathers: <sup>4</sup> "They will die of deadly diseases. They will not be mourned or buried but will be like refuse lying on the ground. They will perish by sword and famine, and their dead bodies will become food for the birds of the air and the beasts of the earth."
- a) Imagine telling a young man, not only can you never have sex, but you can never marry a woman and you can't have children. Not because of physical problems, but simply to be a witness to your fellow Israelites based on the way you live. I'm guessing he was thinking, "Lord, I don't mean to question you, but you sure you got that right?" God, I want to serve You, but let's be clear here on this one! No it's not a command to all Christians. This is just a specific command given to Jeremiah to be a witness based on the way he lived.
    - i) While I'm in the neighborhood, let me explain as best I understand, why priests in the Roman Catholic world are not allowed to marry. Part of the issue is to show a dedication to serving the church and not letting a marriage interfere with it. It got started a few centuries after Christ after the church was legitimate and there was a concern of priest families inheriting the church's wealth, so it wasn't allowed. Yes, there was a lot of corruption due to that requirement, but that's the basic story.
  - b) The next thing Jeremiah is told is what's going to happen in Israel. There will be so much death when the Babylonians strike that dead bodies will line the streets with no one to go bury the dead. The Babylonians wanted to encourage that nonburial to show how futile it was to resist them! So God gave Jeremiah that order so like Roman Catholic priests they'd not be concerned about their own spouses or offspring in service to God.
  - c) With that said, God's getting warmed up on how Jeremiah is supposed to live for Him.
7. Verse 5: For this is what the LORD says: "Do not enter a house where there is a funeral meal; do not go to mourn or show sympathy, because I have withdrawn my blessing, my love and my pity from this people," declares the LORD. <sup>6</sup> "Both high and low will die in this land. They will not be buried or mourned, and no one will cut himself or shave his head for them. <sup>7</sup> No one will offer food to comfort those who mourn for the dead--not even for a father or a mother--nor will anyone give them a drink to console them.
- a) Part of the job of any minister is to "afflict the comfortable and comfort the afflicted". That includes being of comfort to those who've lost family members. It's about reassuring them about eternal life and more importantly, just a willingness to listen to people tell about the love they have for the departed. Like the first few verses, the issue has nothing to do with a desire to comfort the hurting. The point is the destruction will be so bad, Jeremiah won't have the time to go house to house helping the hurting. It'll be so bad no one will even be able to fix meals for the suffering. The text has a detail about "cutting themselves or shave of their head which was a custom that the pagans of that area did when their dead died!
  - b) Bottom line is this won't be a happy time, and God's preparing Jeremiah as to how to live through that time. In that sense, God's telling Jeremiah he'll live to see all of this!
8. Verse 8: "And do not enter a house where there is feasting and sit down to eat and drink. <sup>9</sup> For this is what the LORD Almighty, the God of Israel, says: Before your eyes and in your days I will bring an end to the sounds of joy and gladness and to the voices of bride and bridegroom in this place.
- a) It's one thing to tell a pastor, priest or rabbi, he won't have to work funeral prep anymore, it is another to say, "no more parties for you!" Again, I picture Jeremiah asking God, so I can't have sex, but now you're telling me I can't even go to weddings or any other form of celebration? I see God at this point writing on the wall saying, "Sorry kid, just know you'll have eternal rewards that are far greater than all the suffering you'll have to face before a judgment day will come!" Being loyal to what God calls us to do is never easy, but if we're to accept eternal life and rewards for loyalty, Jeremiah's got nothing to worry about.

- b) I sort of picture Jeremiah at this point thinking, ok, no sex, no wife, no children, no help to those who are hurting and no partying, OK God what's next? Do I have to spend the rest of life say, naked wearing a sandwich board saying the end is coming"? No he doesn't.
  - c) This leads to a quick discussion about God speaking to us. I take the view that God's God and He can speak to us whenever and however He wants. We can't force Him to speak to us as He's in charge and we're not. The main way He speaks to us through us is simply by us reading our bible and using it to guide our lives. Then I believe God says to us, we are free to do what we want within the limits of what this book teaches. I'd also argue that the New Testament is our guide for interpreting the Old, but most of you get that by now! As I love to preach, then it is a matter of finding ways to do what we enjoy doing to make a difference for Him. With that said, would God tell us to say, "avoid parties or no spouse"? As I said, God can do what He wants when He wants. My view's that we should all live to be a witness for God. As long as we can handle what we believe He's calling us to do over and above the bible and we're not "getting all weird", we're free to do what we want!
  - d) OK that was a strange tangent to take here. Bottom line, "No fun for Jeremiah!"
9. Verse 10: "When you tell these people all this and they ask you, `Why has the LORD decreed such a great disaster against us? What wrong have we done? What sin have we committed against the LORD our God?' <sup>11</sup> then say to them, `It is because your fathers forsook me,' declares the LORD, `and followed other gods and served and worshiped them. They forsook me and did not keep my law. <sup>12</sup> But you have behaved more wickedly than your fathers. See how each of you is following the stubbornness of his evil heart instead of obeying me. <sup>13</sup> So I will throw you out of this land into a land neither you nor your fathers have known, and there you will serve other gods day and night, for I will show you no favor.'
- a) As I read Verse 10, my first thought was, "Hasn't Jeremiah's audience read the first fifteen chapters of this book? Then I recalled the fact that the book was organized late in his life. I visualize the book being organized by Jeremiah recalling certain facts about his life. What I suspect is God told Jeremiah early in his ministry about no sex, no marriage, no children, no comforting the suffering or enjoying a party. Maybe I'm wrong and maybe Jeremiah is talking to people who "haven't read his book to date", or more likely he's simply recalling a lot of facts about his life and when someone would question Jeremiah about the reasons why he's excluding himself from those things, these verses are a "summary answer".
  - b) Yes, we're reading things that he already talked about earlier in the book. This time all of that information is being packaged in a way where Jeremiah's now doing things to get the attention of people around him. As I've been joking, Jeremiah's not walking around with a big sandwich board saying, "The end is coming, panic!" Instead he's doing other things a bunch of other things that would naturally get people to ask why? In that culture, the men got married at an early age. Men trained to be priests would comfort the hurting. All the townsfolk would go to parties at some time in their lives. Jeremiah's "sandwich board" in effect is the way he lived his life. So what you say? Do I have to skip marriage or funerals or parties to be a witness for God? In the vast majority of cases, no. However we should be living differently enough where people think, "That guy or girl's joyful yet they don't do what the rest of society is doing. That's how he was to be a witness for God. Live like he intends us to live, by joyful and that combination attracts attention.
  - c) Now that I got all of that out of system, let's talk about what Jeremiah specifically said as a witness for God when confronted with the question of "Why you doing this? or what did we do that was so bad?" Jeremiah states in Verses 10-11 that previous generations turned from God but "you guys are worse" because in effect, "You (plural) could care less about if you're pleasing God or not. You're doing what you feel like doing as if it doesn't make the fact that You've been separated by God to be a witness for Him. It isn't whether or not the rituals are being performed at the temple. It's about how you live daily given the fact you have been called to be a witness for Him. That's the issue here!

- d) I'd say that's enough guilt for those verses. Verse 13 gives the consequences once again in this book: Destruction is coming and it's going to be bad! It's the condemnation of getting to a "point of no return" and know they must suffer for it.
    - i) That leads to the question, why tell them? If they've gotten that bad, and all of that bad stuff is now certain, why the warnings? So they understand that we can't mess with God and get away with it. So they grasp that there is a price to be paid when we decide to not live as God calls us.
    - ii) So how does that affect us if we're devout Christians? First, it's a reminder that we too, were called for a purpose. It's not, "I'm saved, you're not, that's your problem!" Yes we're saved, but the question is, "Saved to do what?" The answer is to use our lives as a witness for Jesus in some capacity. It gets back to my point of using gifts and talents God has given us for His glory. It's also a matter of helping out even if something isn't our "thing".
    - iii) What if we're already doing all of that. What are we to get out of this? A warning to stick at it, because here the consequences. It's not a matter of our good deeds vs. our bad deeds. It's about using the gifts God has given us for His glory. It's also a big reminder that sin is always knocking on our door, with opportunities to do the things we know are not pleasing to God.
  - e) OK off my soapbox. The final key point of these verses is God's saying in effect, "You will get what you want". One reason God had the Babylonians conquer Israel is because their land was full of idols. It's God saying, "You like idols, they got lots of them there!" There are lots of idols around today. Doubt it? Look how people spend their spare time or their spare income, and you'll find people's "idols". Ok, enough on that, let's move on.
10. Verse 14: "However, the days are coming," declares the LORD, "when men will no longer say, 'As surely as the LORD lives, who brought the Israelites up out of Egypt,'<sup>15</sup> but they will say, 'As surely as the LORD lives, who brought the Israelites up out of the land of the north and out of all the countries where he had banished them.' For I will restore them to the land I gave their forefathers.
- a) The good news about the book of Jeremiah is the fact it's not all bad news. Every now and then, he sneaks in some glimmer of hope as if to say the damage will not be permanent. It is saying in these verses, just as God was famous for getting the Israelites out of Egypt, He will also be famous for bringing them back to that land again.
  - b) One of my favorite bits of history to teach people is in the history of the world, no nation's ever been conquered, scattered and came back together to be a nation again! Except Israel who did it twice! The first time was seventy years after the Babylonian invasion, and also in 1948 after they became a nation again for the first time since the Roman conquering!
  - c) Keep in mind when the Babylonians conquered Israel, they didn't send all of them to say, the capital city to work as slaves. They were scattered all over that large empire. That is why we get the comment about the Israelites being gathered from all the places they got scattered after that conquering.
  - d) So how do we know Jeremiah didn't write this after it happened? The answer is his book was in "circulation" before the regathering occurred. Daniel said he read Jeremiah when Daniel was one of the people taken into captivity. Daniel saw that Jeremiah said that 70 years was to be the total time period (coming later in the book) and Daniel prayed as he knew that time period was almost up. My point is Jeremiah was long dead when all that occurred so we know he accurately predicted the return long before it occurred.
    - i) The reference to Jeremiah in Daniel is from Daniel 9:2.
  - e) OK, so Jeremiah had a "lucky guess" or he figured that God had to restore Israel one day so the Messiah would rule there. Since Jeremiah only preached what God told him to do, I would argue that this is God making that point here through Jeremiah!

11. Verse 16: "But now I will send for many fishermen," declares the LORD, "and they will catch them. After that I will send for many hunters, and they will hunt them down on every mountain and hill and from the crevices of the rocks."<sup>17</sup> My eyes are on all their ways; they are not hidden from me, nor is their sin concealed from my eyes.<sup>18</sup> I will repay them double for their wickedness and their sin, because they have defiled my land with the lifeless forms of their vile images and have filled my inheritance with their detestable idols."
  - a) OK, "hold the happiness", back to the tough part! If I was an Israelite living at the time of Jeremiah I'd be thinking, "That's good that God will restore our nation again, but tell us a little more about the part where we get killed, as that affects us!" The Israelites must have wondered, "Isn't there any place we can run to and be safe? Can't we run to some isolated place, or even take refuge in a foreign country that's not under the Babylonian control?"
  - b) These verses are the answer to those questions. Verse 16 is effectively saying, no matter if you hide in the greatest hiding spot in Israel, God's going to "dig you out". Why? Because you (plural) have not lived as I required, and yes, now it's too late!
  - c) If nothing else, it's a reminder that none of us can avoid God's judgment. Yes if we believe Jesus is God we don't have to fear condemnation. At the same time, I'm equally convinced that how we spend eternity matters a lot based on how we've lived as a witness for Jesus! It's another reminder of "not to mess with God" which is a big theme of this book!
  - d) With that said, Jeremiah breaks out into poetry in the next few verses to pound the point even stronger of how we're "not to mess with God":
12. Verse 19: O LORD, my strength and my fortress, my refuge in time of distress, to you the nations will come from the ends of the earth and say, "Our fathers possessed nothing but false gods, worthless idols that did them no good."
  - a) So is Jeremiah describing some sort of literal event on judgment day? Will people tell the God of the Universe, "Boy did we blow it, can you have some mercy on us? A theory that scholars debate is whether or not God is "tempted" to rescue souls condemned to hell due to His love for people? The classic answer is while that may be perfect in love, it does not have any "perfect justice" to it. Therefore, God has to condemn souls to hell, given the fact those souls have already rejected God Himself. Yes, there's a whole separate discussion of the naïve and child who die young, but you get the general idea.
  - b) So why state this verse? Yes it could be a judgment day prediction, but more importantly, I see this as a warning to us to say, "Don't blow it too! Don't waste the life God's given to you. Don't end up like those who'll regret the decisions they made!" Even to those of us, who have committed their lives to serving Jesus, this is another reminder to "stick at it!"
  - c) With that comment made, Jeremiah returns to condemning those who turn from God!
13. Verse 20: Do men make their own gods? Yes, but they are not gods!"
  - a) Yes in Jeremiah's day, people literally made their own gods. There are statues all over the world dedicated to "man made gods". Still prominent in many parts of the world.
  - b) Since we're on the topic of idols, let me state a few things. While statutes of gods are not as common as it was "then", idols are just as common today as it was then. As I said a bit ago, find where people spend their spare time and money, and you'll find their god! This is not a condemnation about enjoying "secular" things. It's a reminder that we're always a witness for Jesus no matter where we are in life! For example if all we live for say is sports or fame, or power, those things become an idol. A good test is simply, if God asked you to give up a certain thing, are you willing? Do we love God more than "x" is the question!
  - c) We're all aware that nonbelievers seek things other than god. Where I'm "hitting now" is for believers to check ourselves. The simple test of what we could consider an idol is the simple test of whether we're willing to give it up if God tells us too!
  - d) Even if you say "I use my love of "this" to honor God. A key to remember is He wants a love relationship because He does, not based on what we do for Him! OK, then Verse 21.

14. Verse 21: "Therefore I will teach them--this time I will teach them my power and might. Then they will know that my name is the LORD.
  - a) I've stated a bunch of times in my teaching of this book, that the one good thing that came out of the Babylonian captivity is it "cured" Israel of making idols. Yes they were guilty of other sins say, in Jesus time, but the captivity did cure that! That's one thing Verse 21 tells us, that "it worked". Obviously this verse can be interpreted other ways about how we can draw close to Him, but I'll leave that to your imagination as we move on to Chapter 17.
15. Chapter 17, Verse 1: "Judah's sin is engraved with an iron tool, inscribed with a flint point, on the tablets of their hearts and on the horns of their altars.
  - a) As my regulars know, there were no chapter breaks in the original text, so Jeremiah is just continuing his condemnation of the Israelites. As you can tell, it fits well my lesson title of "The price you pay". I'll explain how it applies to this verse now:
  - b) God's point here is Israel's sins are so bad, it's like engraving that idea into a thing that can not be removed. Jeremiah's point is the collective sins are so bad, they can't be undone by just saying, "I repent" or "I promise to go to church this weekend!" The idea here's that the Israelites are so "addicted" to seeking anything and everything other than God, their life's gotten to a point where they can't be an effective witness for God anymore. As you know by now, I've beaten that point to death, so we can move on.
  - c) Oh, the "horns of the altars" is where the animals that were sacrificed on an altar were tied up. Let's face it the animals weren't crazy about that idea, so they had to be tied down! It is here to say in effect, that the Israel's collective sins are so bad it's like their tied down on a sacrificial altar to what they worship. Now that I've made that point, Verse 2.
16. Verse 2: Even their children remember their altars and Asherah poles beside the spreading trees and on the high hills.
  - a) Jeremiah is "piling it on" here by saying in effect, even your children are aware of all these sins and they'll end up just like you. If you recall from the last lesson, Jeremiah mentioned a wicked king that lived about 50 years earlier. His point is even though that king isn't an issue, the wicked way he acted influenced generation after generation and now Jeremiah's saying how even this generation is passing on their bad habits to their children!
  - b) To put it simply, Asherah poles (wood sticks) are associated with Baal worship. The point is Jeremiah is listing ways associated with Baal worship. The point here is that Israel's sins have continued from generation to generation and it's not getting any better. Just keep in mind that Jeremiah's doing all of that because those around him asking why he's doing all the things God told him to do (no marriage, no funerals, no parties etc.). He wants to get across in a poetic way just how bad things are and it's a "point of no return". If the first 2 verses didn't pound that point home hard enough, the next two do even more so!
17. Verse 3: My mountain in the land and your wealth and all your treasures I will give away as plunder, together with your high places, because of sin throughout your country. <sup>4</sup> Through your own fault you will lose the inheritance I gave you. I will enslave you to your enemies in a land you do not know, for you have kindled my anger, and it will burn forever."
  - a) The "point of no return" is that whatever possessions they have will be lost to those who will conquer them. The underlying point is there is a price to be paid for those of us who call ourselves God's people when we fail to be a witness for Him.
  - b) Verse 4 basically says, "It's your own fault, so don't blame Me (God) or your parents or the false prophets or even your family. You need to take responsibility for your own actions." The "price you pay" is you'll be given over to your enemies if not killed.
  - c) OK, John, this is horrid stuff. These people died thousands of years ago. We're saved by His grace. We use our lives to make a difference for Jesus? Why should we read all these horrid things? How does any of it affect us? While we may not be dragged away to some other country, God may take away our opportunities to make a difference for Him.

- d) You might recall that I said, "Why doesn't God just forgive us if He loves us like the bible claims he does?" The answer is God is equally as perfect in justice as He is in love. I state that here because the end of Verse 4 says that, "His anger will burn forever".
  - i) So let me ask the question, why doesn't God forgive us after say, 1,000,000 years in hell? Why is hell so "permanent"? The same question can be asked as why will we get eternity in heaven? After all, "we're not that perfect". The idea is to understand the perfection of God. He's perfect in His forgiveness and perfect in His justice. It is why God Himself is the only solution. Having "us" pay for our sins isn't enough for a perfect God. God Himself is the only way a perfect payment can be made. It is why hell is so permanent and heaven is so permanent. Yes that's tough to grasp, as we desire so much to prove our worth to Him. We desire the "curve", when the curve in grading doesn't exist! That's a key point to Christian faith.
  - ii) Meanwhile, I left Jeremiah chewing out the Israelites:
- 18. Verse 5: This is what the LORD says: "Cursed is the one who trusts in man, who depends on flesh for his strength and whose heart turns away from the LORD.
  - a) Speaking of a desire to "grade on a curve", I present Verse 5. Jeremiah's effectively saying whether we know it or not, when we're trying to appease God based on our efforts or just trying to survive in this world based on own strength, we're doomed whether we realize it or not! To not trust in the God who created the Universe not only for salvation, but also for guidance, is let's be honest, a wasted life! It means we're trying to prove our worth for our lives to both ourselves and those around us based on our efforts. That's what Jeremiah is saying here. He's telling his audience "why they're in big trouble" and spelling out what they're doing wrong, which again, is about trying to prove their worth to God by efforts!
  - b) So if we're doing stuff around say, our church, isn't that proving our worth to God? What we always need to ask is are we motivated to try to "earn points" with God (wrong) or are we simply doing it out of gratitude for what He's done for us (right)! That's the issue!
- 19. Verse 6: He will be like a bush in the wastelands; he will not see prosperity when it comes. He will dwell in the parched places of the desert, in a salt land where no one lives.
  - a) We get one more poetic verse emphasizing the negative, before we get two that will focus on the positive. This is not saying that those who ignore God automatically enjoy a life of no prosperity in this life. It's "poetry". It's the idea that a life without God is effectively an empty life like a "tumbleweed" in the desert. That's the idea here.
  - b) OK, enough beating bad stuff over our head. Time for the good news!
- 20. Verse 7: "But blessed is the man who trusts in the LORD, whose confidence is in him. <sup>8</sup> He will be like a tree planted by the water that sends out its roots by the stream. It does not fear when heat comes; its leaves are always green. It has no worries in a year of drought and never fails to bear fruit."
  - a) Again, keep in mind we're reading poetry here. So why did Jeremiah get all positive here in these verses? Did he just need a "happy moment" in the midst of all that criticism?
  - b) I suspect Jeremiah wanted to think about something positive in the midst of all the facts of how the Israelites were "blowing it". Yes, it was too late to change the big picture. Still if an individual wants to turn to God, I suspect Jeremiah wanted to give some motivation if that was someone's desire. Jeremiah is saying, "Hey I can't change the big picture but I'm still promising as God's "spokesman" that the best way to live life is about trusting God to guide our lives. I think that's the underlying point of Jeremiah's poetry here.
  - c) Let me comment on the "literal" before moving on. Obviously, we won't literally be trees in heaven, so please take it as poetry. Notice the tree is "four season". It draws upon water all year long and doesn't even have to fear droughts. Again, it's meant to be poetry telling the Israelites God always provides for those who trust in Him. (Also see Psalm 37:25.)

21. Verse 9: The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it? <sup>10</sup> "I the LORD search the heart and examine the mind, to reward a man according to his conduct, according to what his deeds deserve.
- a) OK, we got a whole two verses of happiness. Apparently that's all Jeremiah can handle. I see he's back to describing "problems" again. He opens with a biblical "fact" that requires an explanation. In the bible, the heart is "never cured", it's "replaced". Obviously this is a poetic reference as well. It's the idea that the heart is incurable wicked. This ties to the idea of the fact we're all born "sinners". The idea isn't about babies being innocent. It's the idea that we're all prone to sin. Need proof? Do you have to teach children to lie? No we learn it ourselves. Jeremiah is emphasizing the fact we're all born "sin positive". Yes Jeremiah's talking to a bunch of Jewish people who grew up hearing that, why emphasize it here? To remind them what a waste of time it is to go after other "so called" gods, when the God is the only one who we can turn to for our wicked hearts. I know I'm preaching to the choir here, but it's important to establish that base as we go through the rest of the chapter.
22. Verse 11: Like a partridge that hatches eggs it did not lay is the man who gains riches by unjust means. When his life is half gone, they will desert him, and in the end he will prove to be a fool.
- a) Just when you think Jeremiah isn't getting weird enough he "jumps off the deep end"! We get a reference to a partridge who will lay on eggs it didn't give birth too. The reference is designed to be compared to a man who gets rich by stealing from others! In both cases, it's about protecting what's not "ours" no matter how we acquire it. The point is such gain by means of illegal gain will turn out at the end of someone's life to be a waste. God does not judge people based on how much wealth they've acquired in their lives. Judgment's based on what knowledge we have about Jesus and what we did with that knowledge!
- b) Stating those facts which are obvious to us Christian veterans, leads well to Verse 12.
23. Verse 12: A glorious throne, exalted from the beginning, is the place of our sanctuary. <sup>13</sup> O LORD, the hope of Israel, all who forsake you will be put to shame. Those who turn away from you will be written in the dust because they have forsaken the LORD, the spring of living water.
- a) Here we have both a positive and a negative thought. Jeremiah's saying the Israelites got the privilege of God's throne being there. As the saying goes, "Great power comes with a requirement for great responsibility!" If we forsake the God we serve, God will forsake us as well. That's what the Israelites are about to experience of course. I've beaten that point to death, so I won't go any further. It's just another illustration of "the price we pay".
- b) The one phrase that might be unique here is called God "the spring of living water". Israel is a dry climate. Water is often collected in the ground from the rain. However, the better source of water is one that "moves", i.e. from a spring or river. Such spots exist in Israel as they are known as "spring of living water" as the source is better. It's a word picture to call God "The Spring of Water". It's the idea of Him being our provider, as in water needed to survive.
24. Verse 14: Heal me, O LORD, and I will be healed; save me and I will be saved, for you are the one I praise.
- a) So who is Jeremiah talking about here? Is this a plea for Israel or for himself? This section is still poetry and in context it appears to be talking about Israel. It's a reminder that if the people are willing to turn back to Him, their eternal salvation will still be set. If Jeremiah is talking about himself, it's the idea that he needs saving and he's not exempt from doing what God calls him to do. Coming back to "great responsibility", Jeremiah had the burden of having to do just that.
- b) So what's our burden? Thought you'd never ask! First, it's to live under the rules taught in the bible. As I always say, we're then free to do what we want living under His laws as a witness for Him. No we're not saved by keeping laws, however, we are a good witness for Him by living that way. As to over and above that, pray to God as to what He desires!

25. Verse 15: They keep saying to me, "Where is the word of the LORD? Let it now be fulfilled!"
- a) Can't you just picture telling Jeremiah, "how do we know you're not predicting about an event that'll occur a 100 years or a 1,000 years from now? To state the modern equivalent, "People have been saying Jesus is returning for 2,000 years. How do we know this event is on the horizon?" Let's start with Jeremiah's history first:
    - i) God told Jeremiah in effect, he's about to see it and he did. If you recall from a few chapters back, a bad drought was upon them. This is God's way of saying you are really blowing it and "bad stuff" has already begun!
    - ii) Plus I'm sure word reached Jerusalem that the Babylonian Empire is on the rise as they were interested in expanding their empire. I know this is true because Israel's leaders were appealing to Egypt for help at that time against Babylon. One of the great historic moments in Middle East history is about the same time that Babylon conquered Israel, they went on to defeat Egypt a great power for millenniums. The victory by Babylon ended in effect Egypt's dominance there in effect for good.
    - iii) Bottom line, evidence was there that the Babylonians were a threat and the people did need to take Jeremiah seriously now.
  - b) Since I brought up Jesus return, a key point is God "designed it this way to keep us on our toes". Jesus definitely stated He would return. The bible is also clear no one knows when it will happen. For a host of reasons I'm convinced the bible is the word of God and a day will come one day when it will occur. The fact that Israel is back in the land after roughly a 2,000-year absence tells me we are close, but the exact date is God's business, not mine!
26. Verse 16: I have not run away from being your shepherd; you know I have not desired the day of despair. What passes my lips is open before you. <sup>17</sup> Do not be a terror to me; you are my refuge in the day of disaster.
- a) More than any other bible prophet, we read a lot of Jeremiah getting self-reflective. He is constantly discussing and pondering what God called him to do and whether or not he is doing what is God's will. Here is an example of that thinking. He's probably thinking of the fact that he's being rejected a lot by those around him and it naturally causes him to be reflective of what God called him to do. That's why Verse 16 says that he hasn't run away from doing what God called him to do.
  - b) Imagine being rejected by everyone you know. A few chapters back we read of those who were from Jeremiah's hometown (a few miles from Jerusalem) were organizing a plan for killing him for what he preached. Let's be honest, walking around proclaiming doom for the way one is living would not make one very popular in society. That's why we read of Jeremiah stating his desire for God's protection from the disaster to come. If all that didn't make him state his dependence on God, we know he's preaching destruction is coming. I think Jeremiah feared for his own life as he thought about all of this!
  - c) OK he died thousands of years ago, why should I care? Because we all experience times in life when things are falling apart and we wonder, "Is He still there and can I depend upon Him to protect me?" At such times is when we pray "Give us this day our daily bread" as if we really mean it! My point is even when God backs off, He's still there guiding us!
  - d) Meanwhile, we're getting close to finishing the chapter. Let's continue:
27. Verse 18: Let my persecutors be put to shame, but keep me from shame; let them be terrified, but keep me from terror. Bring on them the day of disaster; destroy them with double destruction.
- a) Jeremiah finishes this section that ties well to my "price we pay" theme by saying in effect, all the stuff the Israelites want to happen to me, may it happen to them, in fact I want it to be twice as bad as what they want to do to me. In the Psalms David himself expressed his fears in a similar matter. As I've blatantly stated, Israel's destruction of was a horrid thing with lots of dead bodies scattered everywhere. How can it possibly be made twice as bad? Obviously it's poetry to express Jeremiah's frustration on results!

- b) So why include this verse? Because I suspect most Christians like me, when frustrated, do pour out our frustrations to God. I see Jeremiah teaching us by example, it's ok to express our frustrations that way vent them out.
  - c) Anyway, that's why I think the next paragraph is here. God gives Jeremiah a healthy way to vent his frustration. Sometimes when we're burnt out or complaining about what we're sure God calls us to do is just to get back at it. It's the idea of where He leads He provides us with the power to carry it out. With that said, let's continue, we're almost there.
28. Verse 19: This is what the LORD said to me: "Go and stand at the gate of the people, through which the kings of Judah go in and out; stand also at all the other gates of Jerusalem.<sup>20</sup> Say to them, 'Hear the word of the LORD, O kings of Judah and all people of Judah and everyone living in Jerusalem who come through these gates.
- a) From Verses 19 to the end of the chapter (Jeremiah changes topics in Chapter 18) we'll see Jeremiah focus on one specific commandment: Obeying the Sabbath. It's not that Israelites were more guilty of disobeying this commandment than other ones. It was just a practical way of Jeremiah to focus on the fact they were not living as God required.
  - b) Let me first focus on what this should mean for the Israelites and then I'll discuss how it is that Christians should obey the Sabbath. The basic idea is to take one day and not make it like every other day. Rest does not mean not do all work. It means to take one day of the week to focus on God. It means doing "church" and gathering with believers to share in a time of "communion" (for the lack of a better word) with them. All the normal things we'd do to "make a living" should cease. What about emergencies? What about soldiers or say policemen or even doctors in a hospital? Obviously they have to do what's necessary. It's the idea of honoring God by not working all seven days of the week, and just resting from what normally considers work. Yes I'd argue it applies to Christians as well. We'll debate forever whether that should be Saturday or Sunday, but I think the main idea is He wants us to rest our bodies one day a week from the stress of work. Yes we can get carried away with requirements as was an issue in Jesus day, but you get the point!
  - c) So why did Jeremiah pick this issue to focus on? Obviously Jerusalem was treating it like any other day of the week, as this paragraph will imply. What honoring the Sabbath tells us in effect if we care about honoring God, that idea will "flow" into every other aspect of our lives. Why would we want to honor false gods or steal if we care about pleasing God and realizing we'll be judged by Him one day! Thus, Jeremiah made this commandment an issue to focus upon for "the price we pay" lecture.
  - d) The rest of the verses focus on the practical aspects. The City of Jerusalem at that time, is all behind the city walls. Today it's much larger and only a small part of the city is within those walls. Anyway Jeremiah goes from gate to gate in that city, proclaiming to them the importance of keeping the Sabbath, which apparently was being avoided!
29. Verse 21: This is what the LORD says: Be careful not to carry a load on the Sabbath day or bring it through the gates of Jerusalem.<sup>22</sup> Do not bring a load out of your houses or do any work on the Sabbath, but keep the Sabbath day holy, as I commanded your forefathers.
- a) Might be best to explain "load": It's the idea of having a bunch of goods to sell. Even today part of the old city is lined with shops used to selling goods. It's Jeremiah's way of saying to not work on "Sabbath". So why did people work "seven days a week"? Money! Just like today many people work seven days a week to get more "stuff" for themselves. We think by working that hard, that's how to live life! Obviously God wants us to slow down if for no other reason, for the sake of our own health. For example, once in awhile, I've also got to work on a Sunday if I'm behind at work. Then I find I'm more wiped out the rest of the week because I didn't rest. My point's God knows "what He's doing" when He established the seven day week and wants us to rest one day out of seven.
  - b) Yes of course, it models creation. When God rested on the 7th day, it didn't mean that He tuned out of the world. It means He "rested" from what He created and set in motion!

30. Verse 23: Yet they did not listen or pay attention; they were stiff-necked and would not listen or respond to discipline. <sup>24</sup> But if you are careful to obey me, declares the LORD, and bring no load through the gates of this city on the Sabbath, but keep the Sabbath day holy by not doing any work on it, <sup>25</sup> then kings who sit on David's throne will come through the gates of this city with their officials. They and their officials will come riding in chariots and on horses, accompanied by the men of Judah and those living in Jerusalem, and this city will be inhabited forever. <sup>26</sup> People will come from the towns of Judah and the villages around Jerusalem, from the territory of Benjamin and the western foothills, from the hill country and the Negev, bringing burnt offerings and sacrifices, grain offerings, incense and thank offerings to the house of the LORD.
- a) Jeremiah gets into the heart of one last round of condemnation in these verses. Here's the actual arguments of ignoring God's Sabbath requirements are stated. Apparently those in Israel at that time got to a point to not only where they worshipping other deities all those laws God required of them was being ignored with keeping the Sabbath being an example that Jeremiah wanted to highlight.
  - b) Jeremiah focuses on the positive here. He says in effect, if you'd keep that commandment, blessing would be upon that land and the descendants of David would rule there forever! This is one of those "what if's" situations. Obviously he's asking something that never did occur. The reason for the "what if" question may be for future generations to contemplate as they read this. So does that mean if Jewish people keep the Sabbath today, it means an automatic ticket to heaven? Of course not! It will of course, draw them closer to God by a serious effort to live as He commands, but that's a separate issue.
  - c) So as to those Israelites, I think Jeremiah's simply trying to motivate them. He's saying in effect, "It's not hard, to be pleasing to God. He's got a set of rules. If you believe He's God He will guide your life and make it far more pleasant than any other choice!" That's why I think he focused on the "Sabbath" issue as an example of how to live as God desires.
  - d) I won't repeat again "Christians and the Sabbath, that's a lesson all to itself.
  - e) Anyway, he's wrapping up this section by stating in effect that people will come from all over Israel to honor God and the king if they'd just live as God desires!
31. Verse 27: But if you do not obey me to keep the Sabbath day holy by not carrying any load as you come through the gates of Jerusalem on the Sabbath day, then I will kindle an unquenchable fire in the gates of Jerusalem that will consume her fortresses.' "
- a) The "price you pay" ends with one more warning. Keep in mind that "Sabbath" isn't just a "make or break" issue. It's an example of how to live as God desires. The issue isn't to say obey these laws, then we're saved or we'll have a good life. He also wants us to live as He commands not only as a witness for Him, but because it's also the best way to live life. If you've ever wondered why we were made, it's to glorify God with our lives. When we're turning from that we suffer! That's the "price we pay". That's how we suffer in this life as again, the purpose of life is to be a witness for God. Obviously that comes in many forms, so what I'm called to do is different from what you're called to do. Still, together all of us can and will make a difference for Him. To turn from that is "the price we pay". If you've messed up to date, notice how much Jeremiah has been begging people to turn back. That is a clue of what God desires of us. If we are doing what's right, all of this is a reminder of what we're to keep on doing until God says, "that's a wrap for you". Speaking of wrap:
32. Heavenly Father, first we thank You that like the Israelites we were chosen to be a witness for You in the world around us. Make it obvious to us how You'd like us to live as a witness for You. Guide us to make the decisions that You desire we make today. Help us to live as You desire as to be a living witness for You. Be with us and guide us as we make that difference. We ask this in Jesus name, Amen!