

Jeremiah Chapter 2 John Karmelich

1. The key question of the first lesson on Jeremiah is about understanding how God's called us to be a witness for Him. Chapter 2 begins the next logical question: "Call us to do what?" In Jeremiah's case, he's called to preach what the God who created the world had to say to His people. Realize Chapters 2 through 6 are in effect one big speech by God through Jeremiah. God's laying out His case of how His people are acting, versus how they should be acting. I'm just tackling Chapter 2 in this lesson then I'll see how fast is needed to get through the rest of it. What's important to grasp here, is we got God's first words to Israel through Jeremiah here! As God is starting to explain to His people (I'd like you to think of "you and me" when I write His people) and what they're doing wrong as one of His people!
 - a) Let me put it this way, one of the messages Jesus Himself gave to believers in the book of Revelation is the fact that some Christians were so busy "doing stuff for Jesus" they'd lost their first love! (Revelation 2:4). Jesus point is essentially the same one Jeremiah is saying in Chapter 2 of this book. Yes many of those Israelites did turn to other gods. We'll read of priests and Israelites who were going through the motions of their faith, but they did lose their first love.
 - b) My point is as we read this lesson, please don't think, "oh those poor Israelites who lived all those years ago". What I'm interested in conveying is where does all of this "hit home"? As we read of God "laying it on thick" on the Israelites in this chapter as well as this whole speech that runs until Chapter 6, our primary focus should be on "Hey, does the shoe fit", as we study this section.
 - c) Remember that the purpose of studying the bible isn't to learn history. It's to learn what is "His story" and how He expects us to live as a witness for Him.
 - d) The early chapters of Jeremiah beginning here in Chapter 2, is Jeremiah laying it on thick, as he wants God's people to realize how their blowing it and "lost their first love". Yes that is my title for this lesson. Nothing like quoting the bible to "quote the bible". ☺
2. With that said, let me back up a step, discuss where we left off and then I can summarize this chapter fairly easily.
 - a) Chapter 1 was God telling Jeremiah that he's been called to be a prophet and he must deal with it. God gave Jeremiah a few visions to get the hang of their communication style. It's a lot more to it, but that's Chapter 1 in two sentences.
 - b) In Chapter 2, Jeremiah gets down to business! We don't know how God communicated all of this to Jeremiah but it's best to accept it as face value. My view's God put these ideas in Jeremiah's head and then he "translated" God's message by visions and a history lesson on why the Israelites were called in the first place! For you and me, that means, "We too were called, so pay attention as this is how we may be messing up!"
 - c) If you told the Israelites they had turned from God, they'd laugh. What Jeremiah had get across is that they were giving God "lip service", but their hearts were not in it. We'll get a lot of proof of that in this lesson! It'd be like telling your spouse, "I love you, but I also am in love with this person and that person, so you all must share me". Obviously we can't live that way, and that's an underlying message of Jeremiah in this chapter.
 - d) He starts by saying, "I remember when I first brought all of you into this land. I recall how all of you trusted Me."
3. With that said, I can summarize Chapter 2 in a few thoughts: Jeremiah starts by recalling when the Israelites first came in the land and served Him! Realize that was 800 years prior to the time of Jeremiah preaching. Our mistake isn't about ancient history, it's about when we fail to live the type of commitment we made eight days or eight years ago". Jeremiah's rant in effect is "Other nations don't turn from their gods, why do you fail to live as I have called you to live? What did I do wrong that caused you to turn from me?"

- a) Yes Jeremiah was being sarcastic in the sense that God can't learn and He knew all of this before it occurred. His point is God separated the Israelites to be the first nation called to be separated to serve Him and be a witness for Him. We Christians obviously are also a "nation" separated to serve God. That's the point. We were saved for a purpose! That's to honor God by being a witness for Him to the world around us. The answer's to daily read our bible and then make the best decisions we can given the situation in front of us! Now that I got that obvious statement out of my system, back to Jeremiah.
- b) Jeremiah goes on a rant to his present time. He singles out the different types of leaders in Israel in his day and none of them seek God for guidance. He discusses a foreign false god that's been popular in the land of Israel since even before they got into that land. In order to explain further, I need to give a quick understanding of this false deity:
 - i) Start with the fact the Israelites came out of Egypt as slaves. They had nothing. As they saw the land of Israel with better technology and a better standard of living it had to get them to ask, "What do you worship and how do we get that?" The false god that was worshipped there promised prosperity in exchange for obedience. It required building wood and stone statues to this god and having intercourse with young women in yes, sexual orgies. It's the idea of "lots of pleasure and sacrifice" in exchange for great blessings. To show loyalty to that false god required people to sacrifice their babies to them. (After birth abortion!) My point is even though no one worships this deity anymore, the idea of unrestricted pleasure and offering up the consequences of those acts is nothing new. It was part of history then and it is part of our society today! That's why Jeremiah is relevant to our world today!
- c) Anyway, Jeremiah pointed out the flaws in the way's the Israelites were thinking. Yes I'm sure they went through the motions of serving God. They had God's temple in Jerusalem. They had the daily sacrifices that were required. When Jeremiah wrote this section, there was a king on the throne who was "pro-God". However, people weren't interested in real change in their lives as they're also used to their rituals of honoring the false god (called Baal, if interested). Historical evidence all over Israel found "slots" for wood poles and the stone statues to this false deity! Jeremiah is effectively preaching, "Do you really want to honor God? Then put your "money where your mouth is""
 - i) Yes there are a lot of specifics to discuss in this lesson. Right now I just wanted to give you the big picture that the story involves Israel "turning from God" in order to do "what they felt like doing" while still going through their Jewish rituals. The point for you and me of course is to be wary of "avoiding our first love". Again it's my lesson title for a reason.
- d) OK John, you're preaching to the choir again. We're not building statutes to false deities. I would argue most of us are not guilty of sexual orgies or abortion. We're all forgiven since we first accepted Jesus of whatever sin, small or great that we've committed. Why preach this message "to the choir"? It's the reminder of what He desires of us, a relationship with each of us. That means a good balance between remembering God's in charge of all things with the reminder that He wants us to consider him "daddy" in a personal sense! It's more than a good hug. It's about obedience to what He desires of us! To be a good witness for Him in every aspect of our lives! The rest as they say is the details. Speaking of which:
 - 4. Jeremiah Chapter 2 Verse 1: The word of the LORD came to me: ² "Go and proclaim in the hearing of Jerusalem:
 - a) Time for a little more background and a few facts from Chapter 1 to begin the story. When Jeremiah lived, Israel split into two countries a few hundred years earlier. The North one no longer existed as it's now part of the Assyrian Empire. The Southern one that includes the city of Jerusalem still exists. Jeremiah himself lived a few miles east of that city. God's instructions to Jeremiah was to travel that big "three miles" and go preach to the leaders of that city all the words that God told him to preach.

- b) As I said earlier, I'm endlessly fascinated of how God spoke to Jeremiah. My logical guess is he gave concepts to Jeremiah to preach in his head and then he just said them out loud to the best of his ability. In Chapter 1 God warned Jeremiah people would not accept his message so Jeremiah knew that going in! I'm also guessing he wrote all this down many years later under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. My point is this message isn't just for the Israelites who lived thousands of years ago, it's for you and me who trust that Jesus is the Son of God and consider Him to be in charge of our lives as well as God and being our savior!
 - c) With all that said, Jeremiah is about to give a speech to the "head dudes" in Jerusalem who were in charge. He was a priest so he'd know what "doors to knock on" to preach it! Keep all of this mind (especially the part about the fact he was speaking to leaders as well as the fact Jeremiah knew he'd be rejected for preaching it) as we start this section.
 - d) OK, without further ado, let's begin the speech!
5. Verse 1b: 'I remember the devotion of your youth, how as a bride you loved me and followed me through the desert, through a land not sown.
- a) Jeremiah is instructed to give an Israel "history lesson" to Israel's leaders! It implies God's perfect in the sense He always exists, doesn't change and knows all things! It also implies that the Israelite leaders need to hear the whole thing even though they probably know of their history, as they need to be reminded of how they're "blowing it badly".
 - b) He's beginning with what happened close to a 1,000 years earlier. Through a big bunch of miracles, God separated the Israelites from those who held them in slavery for 400 years. To get the Israelites from Egypt to Israel they had to travel through "true wasteland" that survival would not be easy. Best estimate is that about 2,000,000 Israelites made this trip. The point is the Israelites were trusting in God to get them through that journey! Before you say, "I know all of that", consider how God's gotten us "this far" as we've trusted Him to lead us to where He wants us to be in life! That's the underlying message here!
 - c) If you've ever traveled in the middle of a horrid dry and very hot desert you'd get a flavor of what the Israelites went through and how it was a miracle for God to get them to where they were. OK, they got their miracle, where's mine? If you're breathing, you've got your miracle! If you've accepted Jesus as lord and savior, you've got your miracle. Everything else is a bonus! My classic response is we've accepted Jesus, now what? That's Jeremiah's point right now too. He's going to build a speech essentially saying, "You've known all of this to be true because you're here in that land, so why are you blowing it so badly?"
6. Verse 3: Israel was holy to the LORD, the firstfruits of his harvest; all who devoured her were held guilty, and disaster overtook them,' " declares the LORD.
- a) It might be best if I start with the term "firstfruits". The literal idea is the first fruit picked when harvesting crops. Remember Jeremiah was speaking to a group with agricultural as the center to its economy. Were the Israelites to first people to be in heaven? I'd argue no, with Noah as an obvious example. The idea here is Israel is the first nation to be picked as to be God's witness to the world. I remember Dennis Prager taking phone calls with some Catholic priest as his guest. A call came in that said, "Is it fair that the Israelites are chosen more than other nations?" The priest said, "They were picked, deal with it". Of course I'm trusting in Jesus for my salvation, but the Israelites were the "firstfruits" for the lack of any better way to describe it!
 - b) So what's the benefits of corporately being called? The nations that attacked Israel do not exist any more! One of my favorite T-shirts that I bought in Israel listed all the nations and the empires that have risen and fallen over the millenniums, and states the fact that Israel is still there throughout that history! Jeremiah's point is it was God's intent to get them to that land and nothing was going to stop Him! People tried to kill the Israelites before they got there and after they arrived. Being a witness that a single God exists and demands an obedience to Him, comes with a cost as Jeremiah himself will discover later in life!

7. Verse 4: Hear the word of the LORD, O house of Jacob, all you clans of the house of Israel.
- a) OK, it's time to get the heart of the message, which begins in Verse 5.
 - b) Notice that Jeremiah isn't just addressing this to those in Jerusalem. It is meant for all the Israelites there. Even though the Northern Kingdom no longer existed at that time, many of them moved south in effect to "save their hides". God wanted Jeremiah to preach this to all the Israelites and not just the leaders. Yes the message is for us as well, which is why it is a part of the bible, as I've been bluntly stating so far in this lesson.
8. Verse 5: This is what the LORD says: "What fault did your fathers find in me, that they strayed so far from me? They followed worthless idols and became worthless themselves.
- a) This is Jeremiah saying on God's behalf, "What did I do to tick you off and abandon me?" God's the one who got the Israelites to that land in the first place. God made the victory possible over the nations "squatting" on His land (just as God will give us victories over what seems overwhelming to us)! Yet the response of the Israelites at that time as well as many people today is "Hey, why should I follow God when "x" appears to be delivering to me what I want and what I desire?"
 - b) Remember that Jeremiah was preaching to the Jewish leadership. I doubt his message is well received. I could hear them just saying, "Don't you see the sacrifices being offered at the altar? Don't you see the fire at the temple burning? Don't you see us wearing what is required for the priests to wear? How dare you accuse us of ignoring God? OK, so we're tolerating Baal worship in order to please the crowd! We're still Jewish and we're aware of our history? How dare you accuse us of this? Now imagine standing in front of a local church and accusing people of ignoring God! That's in effect what Jeremiah was doing!
 - i) Again, we're back to my lesson title of "You forgot your first love". Imagine people leaving church to go do things that have nothing to do with God! Imagine people who claim they're loyal to God and God alone ignoring Him the rest of their week! Obviously I'm not asking us to focus on God "24/7". I'm saying Christians need to be "always on the clock" for Him. To quote one of my mentors, "Going shopping? Great, take Jesus with you!"
 - c) If you think I'm straying from the text I'm not. I'm showing how what Jeremiah preached is as necessary today as it was back then. Back then, most of the Israelites were loyal to a false deity called Baal while claiming to be loyal to God. I'd argue that most of the people I know would cheer far louder for their favorite sports team than they would for Jesus. I watch people only concerned about their own lives or those they love and not using any of their time to make a difference for the God who created them in the first place. What it is that God demands of us is that we honor Him as God by using our lives as a witness for Him. That's what the Israelites were failing to do and truthfully, human nature isn't much better today from what I have observed. I'm not claiming I'm perfect. I'm just saying that I get what God demands of us and we all must work toward that goal!
 - d) While I got on a roll, Jeremiah is just getting warmed up. Let's continue:
9. Verse 6: They did not ask, `Where is the LORD, who brought us up out of Egypt and led us through the barren wilderness, through a land of deserts and rifts, a land of drought and darkness, a land where no one travels and no one lives?'
- a) Jeremiah's key point, "You leaders are not thinking about your history. Yes, you're aware of the fact that God brought you here, but you've failed to think about your responsibility in that deal! You think that if you just do the required rituals and don't kill anyone, that's all that God requires of you! You think it's ok to worship other deities (pay homage to the things of life that we really care about while giving God lip service) that we're going to be ok in God's eyes!" My point is Jeremiah is laying it on thick and yes we're only in Chapter two of a book broken into over 50 chapters!
 - b) Yes Jeremiah is giving a history lesson, but not to teach history! It's here to remind us that we have a responsibility that goes with that history. Let me explain:

- i) Let me explain for the naïve among you of the basics quickly: For the Israelites to get from Egypt to Israel, they had to get through some of the most horrid land one can imagine. When I taught Exodus, I thought about a desert area about 200 miles from me called "Death Valley". It's the name of that place that reminds me of what the Israelites went through. My point is imagine having to travel through an area that one couldn't easily survive. God got about 2,000,000 through that area for a 40 year time period to where their children could enter Israel.
 - ii) Jeremiah's simple point is that God made it possible for all that occur and Israelites living in his time, haven't focused on the implications of that miracle! What all this means is simply that God puts requirements on believers in exchange for us being His witness to the world! In simple terms, it's about living as He desires. Yes they were failing to do that back then just as we are today.
 - iii) OK, that's enough guilt for this verse. Let's try the next one! ☺
10. Verse 7: I brought you into a fertile land to eat its fruit and rich produce. But you came and defiled my land and made my inheritance detestable.
- a) Loose translation, "You're blowing it badly!" I kept wondering as I read this if the words were echoing in Jeremiah's ears the fact that God told him that no one would accept what he had to say. Even if he's writing this years after he preached it, I'm sure that Jeremiah is aware of the fact that God's purposes for preaching this is far greater than the fact he got a lot of rejection in his day! The reason I'm getting into all this is because few things bother me more than ingratitude. I watch people in horrid moods because they don't appreciate all the good things they have around them! As I love to preach, "We can't always fix our situation, but we can always change our attitude about it!" In other words, Jeremiah says we're failing to appreciate all the good things God's done for us. All God asks of us is for us to appreciate what He's done for us! He wants us be a witness for Him not because He needs us, but because He wants to work through us to teach others about Him as well as help others grow closer to Him!
 - b) In Jeremiah's time as of this writing, the Israelite kingdom was being threatened by the 2 major empires battling for Middle East dominance at that time (Egypt and Assyria). Yes there is the Babylonians, but they won't come on the scene until a little later in Jeremiah's writing. Jeremiah is saying, "Yes things are bad around here. I am God and I'm aware of all of Israel's problems. I (God) am allowing all of this because (let me spit it out) you are ignoring Me and now you're suffering the consequences!" As I said earlier, archeological evidence from this time period showed that idols to Baal (and it's associated deities) were common in Israel at that time. However, Israel it's not the external threats that are the real problem. It's the fact you (collectively) are not living as I desire and are suffering for it! It is a message to believers, not unbelievers. It's being delivered to Israel's leaders as if to say "I'm throwing the blame right in your lap and God's convicting you big time!"
 - c) Remember why God created Israel in the first place, to be a witness for Him to the world around them! Why did God create the Christian church? To be a witness for Jesus to the world that is dying around us as well! When we fail to be that witness God convicts us as He did them as well! What if you say, "I go to church most Sundays and I do this and that project for my church". My response is great. However "have we lost our first love?" That is always the question. God wants us to draw upon His power and His love and have the close relationship with Him that He desires so we can have the power to be His witness to the world around us. That message hasn't changed from Jeremiah's day today!
 - d) Yes I'm laying it on thick today. Yes I'm preaching to myself as well. I'm not preaching all of this to put us on a guilt trip. I'm preaching all of this to remind us how it is God expects us to live as a witness for Him. Yes it's hard at times. Yes it takes away from other things we'd like to be doing at this time. However, He's God and we're not so we must listen to what God is trying to teach us here. On that note of guilt, let's continue:

11. Verse 8: The priests did not ask, 'Where is the LORD?' Those who deal with the law did not know me; the leaders rebelled against me. The prophets prophesied by Baal, following worthless idols.
- a) Keep in mind Jeremiah is in effect making a comparison to how the Israelites should act in comparison to how they're acting now. He's giving the Israel leaders a reputation they can live up to. Obviously, when the Israelites first got established in that land, they were more loyal to God than they were during all the era of the Judges and most of the kings. What's implied is "Here's what God expects and well, here's how you're actually acting!"
 - b) Then Jeremiah gets into specifics. The priests of Jeremiah's time effectively were asking if God still cared about them? After all, Israel at that time was a pawn "stuck in the middle" between two big empires! There's been no grand scale miracles, so the Israel leaders were effectively asking, "why are we bothering in the first place?"
 - c) Then Jeremiah turned to the civil leaders as to say, "Hey why are you allowing worship of Baal and not leading people to me? At that time they had a good king named Josiah there but I suspect it was a ritual reform, in the sense that people were used to honoring Baal as god and not the true God. Then there were prophets claiming they were speaking for this false god. Keep in the mind the appeal of "Baal". He offered financial success and power if people would honor him. Men got "lots of free sex" to honor him, so the appeal to cheat is a big temptation as well. Realize that all the way until the Israelites got taken in captivity, this false god was an problem due to it's appeal.
 - d) In that sense, Jeremiah was the last great "Last ditch effort" to get the Israelites to get back to worshipping God. Jeremiah gave specific examples of how they're messing up!
 - e) I can just see all of you wagging your heads saying, "Too bad for them!" Remember for us the issue is "not losing our first love". That means daily devotional time and intimate time for prayer with God. Yes it also means, "works" to make a difference. I'm willing to bet the Israelites back then were full of works, but again, their hearts weren't in it as they've had a desire to "do whatever they feel like doing" when "church is not in session", so to speak!
 - f) OK, all of this is horrid, now what? Verse 9:
12. Verse 9: "Therefore I bring charges against you again," declares the LORD. "And I will bring charges against your children's children.
- a) Pause and think how scary these words would be if that was us! Here's the God who did make all things saying He's bringing charges against us and against our children (I'll deal with the kid issue in a second.) One of the things to grasp in life is that we're accountable to God with our lives! I'm not talking about heaven and hell, but our lives as believers. It is a scary thing for God to judge believers, but He does and yes, still is.
 - i) Yes most of us veteran Christians know that the Israelites were driving out of their land twice in history (first by the Babylonians and then by the Romans) so there's a corporate punishment being threatened here.
 - ii) By the way that's what Jeremiah meant by "children's children". They will suffer as well for the sins of this generation as they'll be in captivity as well.
 - b) OK, this ancient history is all interesting. What does it have to do with us? What if you're thinking, "I go to church and pray there, why should I worry about whether or not if I'm a good witness for Jesus or not to those around me?"
 - i) First eternal rewards are at stake. I have no idea how that works, I just figure that I am going to be doing God's will forever so "I might as well get used to it now!"
 - ii) Since heaven is "God's domain", I'll let Him worry about the specific's of "then".
 - iii) Now is the bigger question: I've seen some lose their ministry opportunities when they fail to live as God desires. Does that mean if a Christian dies young, did they fail to live as He desires? That's "above my pay grade". All I know is the best way to live life is for Him. It beats money, power or whatever. It's pure joy!
 - c) Time to jump back into Jeremiah before I got carried away with my "guilt trip"!

13. Verse 10: Cross over to the coasts of Kittim and look, send to Kedar and observe closely; see if there has ever been anything like this: ¹¹ Has a nation ever changed its gods? (Yet they are not gods at all.) But my people have exchanged their Glory for worthless idols.
- a) Jeremiah's next point effectively is "Hey you guys, look around, see if the nations that are around you have ever changed their gods the way you Israelites were doing. Yes nations are conquered and forced to change who they serve. That's different from volunteering to change what one worships
 - i) But John people on a regular basis go from nonreligious to religious or vice versa. I'm willing to bet we know or can find someone who grew up with one religion as they are now "that" religion. So what does Jeremiah mean by the fact nobody ever changed religions? He's not talking about individuals but corporately volunteering an entire society to "change overnight".
 - ii) For those who care "Kittim" refers to the coastland of Cyprus, a large island not so far from Israel. Kedar a city roughly the same distance east as Cyprus was west. It is to say, "Look at your neighbors, have they changed their gods?"
 - b) More importantly the Israelites were called to serve God and yes they were blowing it big time! If you're saying "I'm a loyal Christian I would never change", you're failing to get to the point: It's not about our rituals or even obeying God's laws. It's about whether or not our heart is given to Jesus and we're "putting our money where our mouth is". Yes, this is a issue to make us feel guilty, but if that's what it takes to draw us close to Him, so be it!
14. Verse 12: Be appalled at this, O heavens, and shudder with great horror," declares the LORD. ¹³ "My people have committed two sins: They have forsaken me, the spring of living water, and have dug their own cisterns, broken cisterns that cannot hold water. ¹⁴ Is Israel a servant, a slave by birth? Why then has he become plunder? ¹⁵ Lions have roared; they have growled at him. They have laid waste his land; his towns are burned and deserted.
- a) Now that we're getting the hang of where Jeremiah's going with this, we can speed it up a little and take a bunch of verses at once! Let's start by remembering what God desires, to have a close personal relationship with His people! That's what heaven is about as well, a collection of people (us) drawing close to Him for eternity.
 - b) Jeremiah starts by "calling out to the heavens". I suspect what he meant was "Hey angels, watch what's going on in Israel". Remember that angels are not all knowing creatures. It is a declaration that disaster is about to occur and the Israelites brought it on themselves!
 - c) Jeremiah summarizes Israel's sins by implying they're ignoring God to worship things in the world other than Him. (Think of the danger of worshipping the concept of love or to only care about making money or being with one's family and one understands that there are just as many false gods out there today as there was back then!)
 - i) Jeremiah uses illustrations that people of his day could relate to. The reference to "spring of living water" is associated with God and even Jesus implied that idea in some of His preaching (See John 4:14-16 as an example.)
 - ii) To make it easier, it's the idea of choosing something better over something worse. To drink water from a running source like a river would be preferable to the water that's stored underground in a well. Then to "pour it on" Jeremiah makes the point that the "wells they dug" have become broken. Picture drawing out of a well that is mixed with sand as the base of the well is broken.
 - iii) Of course it's not meant to be literal. It's a word picture of how the Israelites have turned from something great (the guidance of the God who made everything) and they're now "serving" a man made god.
 - iv) So did those false god's work? As most adults know "sin has pleasure for a season" and I'm sure it appears like this false god "worked well" for awhile! As all of know there's always a price to pay for sin, whether it's now, later or judgment day!

- d) We need to think about this from God's perspective. God by definition doesn't need us in order to "be happy". The way I describe God's relationship with people is "He desires that type of close relationship with people just because He does". It's kind of like a person who loves to paint or play a musical instrument. It's not because they have to, but it gives them great pleasure to do so! My point here is God called the Israelites to be His people. That's why God will do "all He can" to draw us back to Him. God stops short of forcing us, as in that case it'd be a robotic response on our part to His calling!
- i) That little speech leads back to these verses. God is in effect complaining that those Israelites are wasting away the greatest gift He can give anyone, an ability to draw close to God. He is comparing His people to "prey that lions are roaring over". If that wasn't tough enough, Jeremiah was stating about the towns that got "wasted" because of turning away from God.
 - ii) Let me explain that last one briefly. It could refer to the fall of the Northern Israel kingdom. More likely it refers to the fact that parts of the Southern Kingdom also got ruined by attacks from the "big boys" in the area.
 - iii) This leads to the classic question, "Why does God allow disasters to happen to the people who trust in Him?" Yes in this case it was obvious God allowed it because they turned from Him. What about the rest of us? I don't claim to have answers to such tough questions. I just know that God often has "greater purposes" than the suffering we must deal with in this life. Not all things happen for our good. I would argue that all things that happen to Christians do occur for God's glory in a way we could never explain from our perspective.
 - iv) In the meantime, we still have lots of verses to get through:
15. Verse 16: Also, the men of Memphis and Tahpanhes have shaved the crown of your head. ¹⁷ Have you not brought this on yourselves by forsaking the LORD your God when he led you in the way? ¹⁸ Now why go to Egypt to drink water from the Shihor? And why go to Assyria to drink water from the River?
- a) In these verses, Jeremiah gets all "geographical" on them. As I mentioned when he wrote the early chapters of this book, "Babylon wasn't a major issue yet". The big players were the Assyrian Empire (based out of what is Iraq today) and Egypt. With that said, let me give a little background to these verses.
 - b) "Memphis and Tahpanhes" were two major cities in Egypt at the time Jeremiah wrote this section. They've attacked Israel and had wars with the Assyrians in Israel territory. That is what's meant by "shaved the crown of your head" in Verse 16. The idea is God let them suffer at the hands of the Egyptian army for collectively turning from God! History tells of the advisors to the current king of Israel when Jeremiah wrote this were "Pro-Egypt". It is why we get the reference to getting water from an Egyptian source in Verse 18.
 - c) The second part of Verse 18 refers to the other great power, the Assyrian Empire. The last word in Verse 18 says "River". It refers to the Euphrates river on the border of that empire.
 - d) In summary, Jeremiah is saying, "Why are you (Israel collectively) trusting in "everyone" around you except me? Can those empires protect you as well as I can? How is it you've survived as a tiny nation all these centuries if it wasn't for my protection? What right do you have to turn from me in the first place?
 - e) OK, you get the point by now, now let's see "if the shoe fits". How do you think God feels when we turn from Him for a period of time? What do you think God's thinking about us as we claim to have a relationship with Him when we turn from Him? My point is all this is just as relevant to believers today as it was to the Israelites back then!
 - f) The interesting thing is the book of Jeremiah wasn't even studied until after the Israelites went into captivity, which will occur near the end of this book. The Israelites were not to read this and think we blew it, as much is to ponder how they should live as His witness!

16. Verse 19: Your wickedness will punish you; your backsliding will rebuke you. Consider then and realize how evil and bitter it is for you when you forsake the LORD your God and have no awe of me," declares the Lord, the LORD Almighty. ²⁰ "Long ago you broke off your yoke and tore off your bonds; you said, 'I will not serve you!' Indeed, on every high hill and under every spreading tree you lay down as a prostitute. ²¹ I had planted you like a choice vine of sound and reliable stock. How then did you turn against me into a corrupt, wild vine?
- a) John's loose translation, "You brought this on yourself, so don't look to Me to get you out of this mess!" If you've read through the entire Old Testament, or just 1st and 2nd Kings, you would notice a lot of references to the "high places". The short version is the Israelites would build shrines to their false gods in the highest spots in Israel. That's so others could see it better and they felt "closer to god" by going up to high spots. Verse 20 says that they lied "like a prostitute", it's the idea "whoring themselves" to false gods.
 - b) It's best to read this not so much as a complaint, but as God asking "why"? Why would it be necessary for all of you to turn from me when it was Me who gave you all the blessings you (plural) enjoy in that land. Obviously Jeremiah's using metaphors that they can relate to. That's obvious. The question is "why would they do it?" It's the age old story: A desire for money, power, fame and yes, cheap sex. It's about fulfilling human desires by turning from how God wants us to live! Let me pause to state that He wants us to have a joy filled life. God doesn't want to deny us fulfillment in life! What the bible as a whole teaches is a concept that to live "God's way" does bring greater satisfaction than the world's way!
 - c) Let me address one more issue before I move on. What if you say, "God's never done any thing great for me? Why should I live "His way" when I don't see the benefit? My answer is "what choice do we really have? If He created the world and He's in charge we must be willing to accept that fact and living by His rules is far and way the best way to live.
 - d) Meanwhile, I've still got a good ways to go. Let's continue:
17. Verse 22: Although you wash yourself with soda and use an abundance of soap, the stain of your guilt is still before me," declares the Sovereign LORD.
- a) When the text says "soda", don't think Coke or Pepsi. It's just something used to make the soap of that day. Jeremiah is stating an obvious fact that one can't get "clean" to God with a good bath!
 - b) Let me give an Old and New Testament illustration. God was represented through a "box" for the lack of a better term called the "Ark of the Covenant". The lid was separate. Much of the rituals around it involved throwing blood against it. God's law was inside of it. It's saying in effect God's "sitting on the law" and it's only by shed blood, one can be guiltless before God. The New Testament obviously has Jesus' blood as the central point.
 - i) The point is one can't wash off sin with soap and water. It has to be removed by a sacrifice of blood.
 - ii) That's obvious to us Christians and even Jewish people who knew the law. Here's a nation turning from God to idols. Jeremiah's reminding them here that nothing's changed as to how to be clean from sin. That's the point here.
18. Verse 23: "How can you say, 'I am not defiled; I have not run after the Baals'? See how you behaved in the valley; consider what you have done. You are a swift she-camel running here and there, ²⁴ a wild donkey accustomed to the desert, sniffing the wind in her craving-- in her heat who can restrain her? Any males that pursue her need not tire themselves; at mating time they will find her.
- a) Here Jeremiah is playing "Q&A" with himself to make a point. I'm sure the Israelites did claim, "We don't worship the false deity Baal". Jeremiah's response in effect was "All one has to do is look around at the evidence to prove you are wrong". Archeological digs did turn up lots of evidence that "Baal worship" was common all over Israel prior to the great captivity by Babylon. The evidence of Jeremiah's day showed that Baal worship occurred!

- b) Then of all things, Jeremiah used two animal examples that the Israelites would get. Let me explain. A female camel in heat is essentially useless. It won't follow or let someone ride it. The same with a wild female donkey in heat. The funny thing about the donkey is it literally sniffs for male donkey scent in order to satisfy its lust!
 - i) The point is not to give a zoo lecture. It's that just as those animals become useless when they're in heat, so the Israelites have become "useless" to God as they've got to a point where they refuse to give their hearts to God due to their desire to want other things. Most of us grasp the fact that people can get to a "point of no return" in life. None of us know when one reaches it, but we can see people act that way! Jeremiah is saying in effect judgment is coming because you're out of control!
19. Verse 25: Do not run until your feet are bare and your throat is dry. But you said, 'It's no use! I love foreign gods, and I must go after them.'
- a) My loose translation, "You've gotten so bad, now you just can't help yourself from doing evil!" This verse paints a picture of running with bare feet (Israel has rocks everywhere!) while being very thirsty. The point is God's people have a need for Him, but instead just "can't help themselves" to go after foreign (non) gods!
 - b) The way it "hit's home" is it's also describing our desire to sin, despite the fact God wants to fulfill our spiritual needs without having to turn to other things for satisfaction!
20. Verse 26: "As a thief is disgraced when he is caught, so the house of Israel is disgraced-- they, their kings and their officials, their priests and their prophets. ²⁷ They say to wood, 'You are my father,' and to stone, 'You gave me birth.' They have turned their backs to me and not their faces; yet when they are in trouble, they say, 'Come and save us!'
- a) Let's be honest, most of us are not ashamed of our sins, until we're caught doing it! That's what Jeremiah is preaching: "Hey guys, you're not getting away with anything. You may think nobody sees what you're doing, but God knows, and He called me to say it publicly so the world may know it.
 - b) Jeremiah names those in charge. Israel was ruled by kings in those days. Obviously there had to be officials to carry out the king's edicts. Then there were the religious preachers as well as people who claim they were speaking on God's behalf. Jeremiah's point is all these entities were guilty of turning from God in order to serve false gods. Again, these groups could easily be going through the rituals of what God requires and even be doing the best they can to avoid theft and murder as examples. The point then, as well as now, is God is always wanting "our hearts" not just our public behavior. God wants us to develop a close personal relationship with Him just as He desires to draw close to us!
 - c) As I've been stating all through this lesson, archeological evidence shows that all over that land at that time, were "slots" for wood statues to be made and stone statues as well. Why would people think wood and stone statues would protect them? What they think is what the statues represented (powerful entity) would protect them, make them prosperous and take care of all their needs. Let's be honest making symbols to a false god can be enticing as opposed to just trusting in a god one can't see! Just as the Israelites did things to prove that they turned from God then, so we do things in secret and in public that prove that we too, do stuff to prove that we too have turned from the God we claim to serve!
 - d) That thought leads perfectly to the next verse:
21. Verse 28: Where then are the gods you made for yourselves? Let them come if they can save you when you are in trouble! For you have as many gods as you have towns, O Judah.
- a) I'm in one of my "loose translation" modes today. My one for this verse is, "Why don't you cry out to the gods you made when the "chips are down", as obviously you are spending a lot of time focused on those gods. Why are seeking Me? Jeremiah's point is the evidence is all over Israel (at that time) based on statues to false gods being set up "all over the place" in Israel at that time." Yes it's convicting, and again, we're only in Chapter 2!

22. Verse 29: "Why do you bring charges against me? You have all rebelled against me," declares the LORD. ³⁰ "In vain I punished your people; they did not respond to correction. Your sword has devoured your prophets like a ravaging lion.
- For these verses I'd describe them as God saying, "Why you blaming Me (for the fact your nation is in danger of being destroyed by a big empire, when collectively you have turned from Me with your lives!" The people who claim to be prophets of God have died as if the lions have killed them. Bottom line is they're messing up big time and paying the price for it (or at least being exposed for their sins) as Jeremiah's calling them out here!
 - Let's stand back to look at the big picture. Remember Jeremiah's lecturing to the leaders of Israel. I can just hear them responding, "What do you mean we're turning from God? It's a response that got Jeremiah to lay out the evidence against them. Yes they were probably going through all the "Jewish motions". Yet the evidence of Baal worship was everywhere at that time. When God says, "In vain I punished your people", that's God saying I had to do that to "get your attention". (The destruction of the Northern Kingdom as well as loss of parts of the Southern Kingdom). Then Jeremiah says, "Your sword has devoured your prophets like a lion". I suspect it refers to false prophets and them dying. I'm convinced one of the worst sins is to claim to be speaking for God when one isn't and it caused them to be devoured.
 - Time for a "so what"? I can just hear some of you all saying, "What does any of this have to do with my life?" It's the convicting danger of "forgetting our first love". In effect, that is the main accusation of this whole section. OK then, ☺ Let's continue:
23. Verse 31: "You of this generation, consider the word of the LORD: "Have I been a desert to Israel or a land of great darkness? Why do my people say, `We are free to roam; we will come to you no more'? ³² Does a maiden forget her jewelry, a bride her wedding ornaments? Yet my people have forgotten me, days without number. ³³ How skilled you are at pursuing love! Even the worst of women can learn from your ways.
- "Translation": "Where do you think I've (God) has gone? Do you think I haven't seen how my people have walked away from Me? Why would you all think you're free to go live in any way you feel like as if I don't exist? For Me to forget all of you would be like a maiden (unmarried girl) to forget her parents or for a bride to forget how she dressed the day she got married?" Then Verse 33 states how the Israelites are really good at perusing the gods that they worship. The bible loves to interchange "adultery" with worship of false gods as in both cases one is turning away from what one committed to!
 - OK John, you can stop beating this over our head now. We get that the Israelites did turn from God and most of us know that is the prime reason God allowed them to go into their captivity due to their collective rejection of God back then. We Christians are scattered all over the world so God can't collectively throw us in the "penalty box". True, but that does not mean He can take away our witness for Him. Be it suffering or an untimely death or a ministry that isn't effective. My point is simply that God does what's necessary to keep us on the "straight and narrow". So does mean if something is going wrong, I'm messing up? Of course not. However, it's always a good idea to take "spiritual inventory" to see if that is a reason for the situation we're in. As the saying goes, "We can't always change what is happening in our life, but we can always control our attitude about it!"
 - Anyway, you get the idea that God's "ticked off" for rejection. Yes it means we can make God "grieve" as He desires that relationship with us. Personally, the idea of making God mad at me, scares me as I know the consequences can be horrid. Therefore, let us read on as we what Jeremiah's going to say next.
24. Verse 34: On your clothes men find the lifeblood of the innocent poor, though you did not catch them breaking in. Yet in spite of all this ³⁵ you say, `I am innocent; he is not angry with me.' But I will pass judgment on you because you say, `I have not sinned.'
- If false worship didn't convict you, let's look at other ways we can offend God! ☺

- b) Even if Israel's leaders can say, "We don't worship Baal, how is it our fault if people living in other areas are doing it? First, God holds leaders to a higher standard, so that fact won't work in "God's court". Therefore, God hits Israel's leaders another way: Justice.
 - i) There's an old joke that says, "Christians say God is a God of love". Religious Jews say, "God is a God of justice". Of course both are right. The way I describe it is we have a God that's "Perfectly just" all the time and "perfectly loving" all the time.
 - ii) Jeremiah is accusing the leaders of not doing proper justice. Realize that the main job of leaders were to judge "court cases". It's an accusation of not being fair when judging such cases.
 - c) Even if this doesn't apply to us, the key to remember is none of us is perfect. That's why it is necessary to put our faith in a Perfect God to guide our lives. Yes that's the basics, but in this case the Israelites were trusting in their own ability to do what's right. What Jeremiah is preaching in effect is "God knows what you're guilty of and you're not fooling anyone.
25. Verse 36: Why do you go about so much, changing your ways? You will be disappointed by Egypt as you were by Assyria. ³⁷ You will also leave that place with your hands on your head, for the LORD has rejected those you trust; you will not be helped by them.
- a) Mercifully, we've come to the end of this chapter. In these verses Jeremiah mentions both the Egyptians and the Assyrians as again, those were the two major empires fighting over control of the Middle East at that time.
 - b) The bottom line here is many of the Israel leaders say we should pick one side and join in them to fight the other! It's a matter of trusting in people over God! Jeremiah's point is a simple one: It's not about making alliances. It's about ignoring God and only trusting in a foreign army for protection as opposed to trusting God!
26. OK, enough beating us over the head with guilt for one lesson. I'd like to wrap this up by having all of us consider the lesson this way. Jeremiah started by saying in effect, "I remember when you were young and trusted me. Then over the centuries you started trusting in other gods as you've ignored the true God who got you to this land in the first place! To be honest, most of this lesson is a big "guilt trip" about turning from God. Yes they deserved it as collectively Israel at that time focused more on idol worship than on God Himself. Yes idols are just as common today. We are afraid to stand up for what's right and be a witness for God to the world around us.
- a) What I'd like each of us to consider is when we first gave our lives to Jesus. I'd argue that most of us were "on fire" for Jesus when we first made that commitment. As we've grown through the years, we still do our works, but let's face it, we've all wandered from our first love and not trusted God like we did when we first got saved. The point is this section of the scripture is just as indicting to the Christian today as it was to the Jewish reader stuck in Babylon when the book of Jeremiah was first "making the rounds".
 - b) With that final convicting note for one lesson, let's close in prayer and draw close to God as that is what He desires of us:
27. Heavenly Father, help us never to forget our first love. As we use our lives to make a difference for You in the world, may our "works" never get us away from our time with You. May we draw upon Your power to make the kind of difference You desire we make in the world around us. Help us to be the type of witness You want us to be. Make it obvious what it is You desire of us today as we surrender our will to Yours. We ask this in Jesus name, Amen!