

## Jeremiah Chapters 11-12 John Karmelich

1. As I read these chapters a few times, I kept thinking of the word "Blowback". It's a term used in a few action movies to represent the repercussions of actions taken. There was even a movie made back in the year 2000 with that title. Anyway, it fit these two chapters well. If you haven't figured it out by now Jeremiah's a series of speeches at different points in his life to the Israelites as major set of warnings that all say in effect, "You're messing up big time. God's well aware of it and that means judgment time is coming both collectively and individually." The point for us Christians is that once we accept Jesus as God, the bad news is we're accountable to Him as a witness for Him and He holds us accountable for how we live for Him. In short, God's describing the "blowback" repercussions for not living as He desires.
2. John, we're not even one-fifth through the book yet, and already this is getting repetitive. You can figure we all get that by now. So what's so special about the speech in these two chapters, and yes that means I need to explain why we should care what Jeremiah is saying here in these chapters. I would argue I need to summarize these chapters first, as that'll explain what God desires we get from reading this section. With that said, let me summarize the chapter and the "blowback" from what the Israelites did wrong:
  - a) The first five verses restate the promises the ancestors of these Israelites made to God. It's a reminder that to be a Jewish person, means that you agree to live as God called them to live as a witness for Him. Guess what Christians? That applies to us. Yes we're saved by grace, but the classic question is "Saved to do what?" That's where these Israelites blew it badly. Anyway, in order to explain the "blowback" it is necessary to first explain what was the "terms of the contract", which is why Verses 1-5 briefly describe that agreement.
  - b) Verses 6-8 describe the fact that God ordered Jeremiah to go "town to town" as to tell all of the Israelites how they're blowing it big time and "blowback" is coming. Jeremiah did not use that term. It's just my way of describing the consequences of not living as God desires we should be living as a witness for Him.
  - c) Verses 9-13 in effect list the charges and the reason for the upcoming "blowback". If any of us wonder why certain ministries fall apart when they're going strong, I can guarantee it's some sort of "blowback". God cares about what we say about Him and how it's preached. In Judaism, they argue that the worse sin is doing evil in God's name. It's hard to argue to that statement as the issue is spreading the word about God. Therefore, when evil is done in His name, the guilty usually suffer. However, most ministries I've watched come to the end suddenly is due to some sin associated with the leaders. Even if what they preached is correct, God cares about us being a witness for Him.
  - d) OK John, you're making us feel guilty and we're not even half way through the first page. I'm sorry, but the underlying issue is behavior matters. I'm speaking to those of us who do believe we're saved by grace alone! I'm not saying we have to work hard to be saved. I'm saying how we act as believers matters to God and it'll affect how we live hear and now.
  - e) With that said, back to the "meat" of the chapter. Verse 14 gives us a "don't pray for them" statement. This is God announcing it's too late. I don't know about you, but if someone is saying I can't pray for "that", the temptation to pray would be strong! His response would be we can pray over it, but it'd be a waste of time. It's a reminder that there's always some "too late" period with God, although we don't know what it is or when it comes!
  - f) Verse 15 is another reminder that the Israelites were "going through the motions" with the temple worship thinking they were good with God for going through those motions. That would be like us thinking, "I went to church this Sunday, I'm now good for the week and I can go live however I want." Being a witness for Jesus means we're always on the clock. It doesn't matter if we're winning converts or not. What matters is our behavior. The Spirit is the one who does the convicting. Our job is to be a witness for Jesus, period!

- g) By Verse 16, Jeremiah gets personal. From Verses 16 to 20, Jeremiah gets reminded of the fact He was called to preach judgment and that judgment is coming down hard and fast. I would say that's as good as example of "blowback" preaching as one can find! The verses explain why this judgment is necessary and why God needed a messenger like Jeremiah to preach this. Think of it this way, if all that judgment just happened with no explanation of why, people would wonder why it occurred. Before the Romans destroyed Israel many centuries later, remember that Jesus predicted its destruction. In that sense, Jeremiah was a "pre-runner" to what Jesus did centuries later. My point is when judgment is coming to God's chosen; I'd argue a witness was there to proclaim it. Today we have His Word as it's still the standard of how God expects us to live as a witness for Him.
  - h) The last three verses of the chapter reveal a plot in Jeremiah's hometown to kill him for what he preached. That plot was never carried out as Jeremiah preached over a 40-year period of time. God's reassuring Jeremiah that this plot won't come to pass, but it'll mean the death of the plotters from his hometown including a lot of innocent people!
    - i) That leads to the question, was God fair to inflict all this brutality on the innocent such as children? If there's no next life, it's very unfair. God allows all of that as to make the point that being a bad witness for Him, not only hurts us, but also hurts a lot of people around us. For example think of being an alcoholic. Our family will suffer the consequences of dealing with us through it all.
  - i) By the time Chapter 12 starts, Jeremiah appears to have enough of preaching all this bad news. In effect he complains to God how unfair all this is. Jeremiah mentions people who seem to be prospering as if none of this judgment matters. He even questions how long is all of this going to last (we'll get that answer later in the book and why that specific length of time is given). The point is Jeremiah wonders just as we would, why is all this going to occur and what about the innocent who will suffer because of it.
  - j) God's answer beginning in Chapter 12, Verse 5 essentially says, Jeremiah there's nothing you can do to stop the inevitable. The Israelites are not willing to give up their sinful life no matter what he said. Blowback is coming and you, Jeremiah are just the warning so no excuse can be given that they weren't given fair warning. Jeremiah's extended family will be among those who'll suffer badly because they refuse to change their ways.
  - k) Anyway, from there to Verse 13, we get God describing all the horror that's coming down in that land. Yes it's the "blowback" being described in detail to Israel.
  - l) The last few verses talk about other nations. In effect it's a preview of the final chapters in this book, when Jeremiah describes how "they get theirs". It's God's way to remind him he was sent to preach to Israel and let God worry about the judgment coming down on other nations in the area by the Babylonians as well.
3. OK then, let's exhale! This is tough stuff and very guilt written. For those of us who work hard to try to make a difference for Jesus, I want to reassure you that not everything here applies to all us believers. Remember what God calls to do as believers, be a living witness for Jesus to a lost and dying world. The "Revelation show" may not happen in our lifetime, but God doesn't tell us how long we get to live. All He tells us in effect is to use our lives as a witness for Him and that He's in charge of our time frame. Can we mess up our time frame by say jumping off a cliff? Of course. The point is the most valuable thing God gives us is our time. We can just use it to say, earn a living, or we can also use it to make the type of difference God wants us to make. So what's the specifics? Pray about it. Tell God that you give your time back to Him. Then let Him guide you as to what to do with it. Then we do the next obvious thing given the situation in front of us! That's what living the Christian life is about!
4. With that said, it's time to read the details of the "blowback". It's not to learn history. It's to learn how God expects us to live and what's the consequences for a failure to do so! As we all know, to sin is just a "moment" away, so God applying the "stick" is a necessary motivator to keep us in the right path to do His will. OK, enough guilt for one introduction. Let's start the text itself!

5. Chapter 11 Verse 1: This is the word that came to Jeremiah from the LORD: <sup>2</sup> "Listen to the terms of this covenant and tell them to the people of Judah and to those who live in Jerusalem. <sup>3</sup> Tell them that this is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: `Cursed is the man who does not obey the terms of this covenant-- <sup>4</sup> the terms I commanded your forefathers when I brought them out of Egypt, out of the iron-smelting furnace.' I said, `Obey me and do everything I command you, and you will be my people, and I will be your God. <sup>5</sup> Then I will fulfill the oath I swore to your forefathers, to give them a land flowing with milk and honey'--the land you possess today." I answered, "Amen, LORD."
- a) This two-chapter speech by Jeremiah starts off with the reminder of what the Israelites are supposed to be doing with their lives. It doesn't list the 10 Commandments or any specific law, but it's a general statement of responsibility.
  - b) The first thing the Israelites could argue is "Our ancestors made that deal, (covenant). So if they said, "Our children must do this and that, is that binding on the children?" Most of us know that in the ancient world, children were sold as slaves to pay off parent's debts. This is different. It's saying in effect, 100 or 1,000-years after a deal with struck with God, every descendant is bound to it! Obviously, God judges all of us as individuals. The point for the Israelites is in effect, "You want to live in that land as a witness for God, "put your money where your mouth is."" For us Christians it's always an individual commitment, but one that God holds us accountable to! What if it's made on our deathbed? We may be saved, but heavenly rewards may be limited for wasting all the valuable time God's given us to live!
  - c) Bottom line, is for the Israelites if they were Israelites, "they're stuck". If we've committed our lives to Jesus, we too, "our stuck". Deal with it!
  - d) OK I focused on the negative here. What's the positive? Notice Jeremiah refers to the time the Israelites living in Egypt as the "iron-smelting furnace". That's a very hot fire used to burn the "waste" from pure iron and other metals. The point is life in Egypt for them was a horrid time and was like living in a hot furnace. Yes God used that time to discipline the Israelites and get them to trust in the promise of delivery. At the same time, life was hard for the Israelites as slaves. God wants us to remember what He's rescued us from. It's not just eternity in hell, as horrid as that is. It's also that we're now saved with a purpose. It is to use our lives as a witness for Jesus. That's why we're saved in the first place.
  - e) I to admit, it sounds strange to our ears to say that if they obeyed God, they'll inherit a land flowing with "milk and honey". To quote an old Veggie Tales cartoon, "It sounds sticky!" Milk comes from dairy animals. The Israelites bred such animals. It's God's way of saying this will be a good place for them. The honey reference is to bees. It's the idea of being a sweet place. The point is to be living as God desires means a life of peace and a life where we get to enjoy the "fruits of our labors". It doesn't mean all those who believe in Jesus will live long lives. It's that our collective effort to live as He desires "pays off".
  - f) Anyway, living as God desires is a good thing. Failure means "blowback". Jeremiah got it and added his "amen" to what in effect is a prayer in the first five verses of this chapter!
6. Verse 6: The LORD said to me, "Proclaim all these words in the towns of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem: `Listen to the terms of this covenant and follow them. <sup>7</sup> From the time I brought your forefathers up from Egypt until today, I warned them again and again, saying, "Obey me." <sup>8</sup> But they did not listen or pay attention; instead, they followed the stubbornness of their evil hearts. So I brought on them all the curses of the covenant I had commanded them to follow but that they did not keep.' "
- a) Enough of the good news of how God expects us to live. Time for the blowback of how a failure to live as He desires. Jeremiah recalls that in effect since the Israelites first lived in that land, it's been one big failure. That leads to the natural question, "why now?" How is our generation any worse than any previous one? With God, when we get to a point when it's "not fixable", that's when the "hammer comes down hard" as it was necessary then!

- b) The answer of course, is that God has His limits to His patience. A famous American saying is, "You're getting on my last nerve". If God told me that our generation is "it" and we're on His last nerve, yes I'd be praying and preaching in how God wants me to preach in effect, the same message.
  - c) By the way, it's not like this is the first time Israel's being punished. A read through all of Judges and 1st and 2nd Kings shows that punished that nation a lot for disobedience. The point of the "wipe out" is that they've gotten to the point where "it's a waste of time to tell them over and over again". Warnings by Jeremiah and others is proof that we have to take God seriously or we too, will lose our opportunity to be a witness for Him. That's why all this harsh judgment was necessary at that time. It's also a warning to us that if we too fail to use our lives as a witness for Jesus, God can take away our opportunities to make some sort of difference for Him as well.
  - d) This leads us back to Jeremiah himself. God called him specifically to warn his fellow Israelites that they're in "big trouble". So if the destruction is coming no matter what, why is Jeremiah's message necessary? Proof of what God says isn't to be taken lightly. Proof of Jeremiah as a prophet. Proof that there are consequences when we fail to live as God calls us to live as a witness for Him. That's why he was called to preach in as Verse 7 states.
  - e) Meanwhile, it's time to list the big picture of the sins committed at that point.
7. Verse 9: Then the LORD said to me, "There is a conspiracy among the people of Judah and those who live in Jerusalem. <sup>10</sup> They have returned to the sins of their forefathers, who refused to listen to my words. They have followed other gods to serve them. Both the house of Israel and the house of Judah have broken the covenant I made with their forefathers.
- a) Short version is whether the Israelites like it or not, they were separated by God as to be a witness for Him. The witness isn't just to each other and foreigners living amongst them, but also to other nations as the Israelites had dealings with them. That leads to one of my favorite little topics: Ever thought by why God lead the Israelites to that specific piece of real estate? I mean God could have led them to Turkey, Greece or Italy for example. Why there? Because that section of real estate is a natural "land bridge" to travel from Africa to Europe/Asia and vice versa. My point is one key reason why God separated them was as to be a witness to those traveling through that region.
  - b) One of the tough things to accept about life is we can't just say, "It's not my problem if my great, great grandfather made that promise. I'm not them." Taking aside the issue of our salvation, God calls each of us to be His witnesses. For the Israelites back then, to live and be a part of that community, means, "one is stuck". For us Christians when we also make a commitment to be His witnesses, we too are "stuck" as the consequences for disobedience means we too can lose eternal rewards or simply the lost opportunity to be a witness for the God who created us in the first place.
  - c) Anyway, "That's the deal, God made with them and Israelites broke the deal". It's more than breaking the 10 Commandments or all the Old Testament rules. To be His witnesses to the world around us begins with the belief that He's God and we're trusting Him to guide our lives. To fail to trust Him with our lives is when trouble begins. The Israelites back at that day did just that. That's the accusations we're reading about here.
  - d) OK what about modern Israel. Isn't that mostly secular? Yes it is. My view is if Jesus will return to "set up shop" He needs Israel to exist as nation in order to rule from there. As to their lack of faith in Him, that's God's business how to handle that. Our job is simply to be a witness for Him in our lives. But if God punished Israel "back then", can't he also do the same today? Sure. I'm not God. I just work with what I see and what the bible teaches us about the future. I just know they're back in the land after almost 2,000 years. Does all of this mean Jesus can literally return today to rule the world from there? Sure. I'll let Him deal with their collective lack of belief. I just know it's my job to be a witness for Him. In the meantime, I believe it's time for more "blowback" warnings. Here we go:

8. Verse 11: Therefore this is what the LORD says: `I will bring on them a disaster they cannot escape. Although they cry out to me, I will not listen to them. <sup>12</sup> The towns of Judah and the people of Jerusalem will go and cry out to the gods to whom they burn incense, but they will not help them at all when disaster strikes. <sup>13</sup> You have as many gods as you have towns, O Judah; and the altars you have set up to burn incense to that shameful god Baal are as many as the streets of Jerusalem.'
- a) If there is one thing we have to grasp about living the Christian life it is the fact that there is a "too late". We may not have our nation conquered, but I've seen many a Christian lose their opportunities to be a witness for Him. That's what we're reading about here. People who have turned to other gods. When the disaster strikes and they cry out to God out of a senses of desperation, that's when He effectively says, "Wait a minute, you've spend your life doing whatever you think will make you happy and ignore Me at the same time!" For this specific case, it was about the Israelites worshipping at statues to a local deity popular in that region called Baal. It's more complicated than that, but that's the basics.
  - b) Let me deviate a little: Suppose you realize you've wasted your life to this point. If you've done ministry work and walked away in frustration, realize none of us know what is that point of "too late". Nothing God loves more than when we're willing to turn back to Him. Jesus told the parable of going after the one lost lamb and leave the others alone to rescue one of the lost. If those Israelites were experiencing a "too late" moment, how do I know it is not too late for me? Are you breathing? It's not late. Even if we're suffering physically, spiritually or mentally, we can always turn back to Him as we use the time we have left to make a difference for Him.
  - c) What if we feel like one of the "99 sheep" that Jesus left to go focus on the one who's lost? One of the things one learns living the Christian life is God often "backs off" in our lives. It's as if He's constantly asking, "Do you trust Me now, even through this?" Yes God still cares for us and He's there despite the mistakes we make and despite the one's others did make around us. We can't fix the world around us. All we can do is be a good witness for Him as some people will "get it" and also learn to use their lives for His glory.
  - d) OK, I feel better now! Time to get back to Jeremiah.
9. Verse 14: "Do not pray for this people nor offer any plea or petition for them, because I will not listen when they call to me in the time of their distress.
- a) We're back to God telling Jeremiah it is too late. As I said in the introduction, if I told you that you can't pray for "this", what would you be tempted to do? The message of course is the fact that Jeremiah can pray until he's "blue in the face" and it won't make a difference. I've heard many people say that, "They're tired of praying over an issue, they don't get the answer they want". My response is God did answer and it was "no, or not know". What God desires of us is total surrender of our life to Him. Then we're called to make what is the best decisions we can given what's in front us living by biblical principals. If we will do that He does promise to guide our lives for His glory.
  - b) With that said, I'm guessing that Jeremiah at this point had a reputation as being a man of prayer and God's "spokesman". For Jeremiah to publicly announce this statement is more proof of the "it's too late" issue the "blowback" is unavoidable at this point!
10. Verse 15: "What is my beloved doing in my temple as she works out her evil schemes with many? Can consecrated meat avert your punishment? When you engage in your wickedness, then you rejoice. "
- a) I've talked a bunch in previous Jeremiah lessons on the fact the Israelites were still going through the "Jewish motions" of worshiping God. In this case, they were still burning the sacrifices at the temple and I'd bet they went to synagogue services. The point is they're refusing to live for God the rest of the week and in effect worshipping what they really do care about. The verse is saying in effect is, "The only time you're really happy is when you are doing what you feel like doing which has nothing to do with how I want you to live!"

11. Verse 16: The LORD called you a thriving olive tree with fruit beautiful in form. But with the roar of a mighty storm he will set it on fire, and its branches will be broken.
- a) First question, who is the "thriving olive tree" in this verse? In the previous verse the talk was about the Israelites in general. Therefore the "you" must be the same group. What it is saying in effect is God "planted" the Israelites in this land to be a witness "fruit" for the world around them. The "blowback" is Israel has gotten to a point where no one will take their relationship with God seriously enough to be a witness for Him. God's going to end the Israel nation "for a while" to make the point that He's not to be messed with. That's the reason for the idiom about the mighty storm is coming to destroy that "tree".
12. Verse 17: The LORD Almighty, who planted you, has decreed disaster for you, because the house of Israel and the house of Judah have done evil and provoked me to anger by burning incense to Baal.
- a) In case the Israelites didn't grasp why this horrid punishment is so necessary Jeremiah has to state blatantly it's about corporate Baal worship. So what's the appeal of Baal? To start, it was a common entity in the area so the Israelites wanted to be "just like everyone else in the area". It's the "Everybody else is doing it, why not me" argument. That deity promised good weather for the crops, so the appeal was financial success. To entice Baal, cheap sex was encouraged and they offered up the babies that came from those acts. If nothing else the practice needed to end for the sake of killing the babies. For what it's worth, the good thing that came out of the Israelites being exiled here, was the end of that deity worship!
  - b) The worship of Baal is the ancient argument of, "If it feels good, let's do it because nobody is suffering risk but ourselves". The baby killing alone is enough for God to end this. We need to remember that the bible is a guide as the best way to live our lives. When we fail to live as God desires or simply go through the "Christian motions" and do what we want, in effect we're doing "Baal worship" ourselves.
13. Verse 18: Because the LORD revealed their plot to me, I knew it, for at that time he showed me what they were doing. <sup>19</sup> I had been like a gentle lamb led to the slaughter; I did not realize that they had plotted against me, saying, Let us destroy the tree and its fruit; let us cut him off from the land of the living, that his name be remembered no more."
- a) Verse 18 mentions a plot against Jeremiah. If I didn't read ahead, my first question would be "what plot"? As we'll see in Verse 21, those in Jeremiah's hometown were cooking up a plot to kill him. Now how that's for a reward for being a servant of God? Let's be honest, to be a devout Christian usually means opposition. Paul himself promised persecution for those who trust in Jesus (2nd Timothy 3:12).
  - b) Speaking of New Testament phrases, you have to admit, "gentle lamb led to the slaughter" sounds a lot Jesus. Isaiah used it in 53:7 to describe Jesus. An early church disciple Phillip quoted it saying it's about Jesus. Jeremiah is talking of himself, but the reference can't be a coincidence. That phrase also shows that Jeremiah's life was in real danger.
  - c) So what does the text mean by calling Jeremiah "tree and it's fruit"? It's colorful way to say what he's preaching needs to end (in the mind of his enemies)? A sad reality about life is many people who claim to believe in free speech will often work to silence others when it condemns other's lifestyle! Remember that Jeremiah wasn't physically tearing down those altars to other deities, he was just preaching it's not how God expects us to live! It reminds us that to live the Christian life often comes with resistance in one form or another.
  - d) OK, the "plot thickens". Let's read on:
14. Verse 20: But, O LORD Almighty, you who judge righteously and test the heart and mind, let me see your vengeance upon them, for to you I have committed my cause.
- a) We can see Jeremiah is angry here and wants God to take revenge. Keep in mind God has no obligation to "take revenge for us" even if we are living as a witness for Him. I'd say in effect this is a request to let Jeremiah keep preaching and get the enemies out of the way!

- b) One thing to remember about prayer is God will never do for us what we can do our self! If it is His will, He makes it possible for us to continue His ministry work for Him. Often God's guidance comes from trial and error. As I like to say, "God can't guide us, if we are not moving for Him!" In Jeremiah's case, he had a very serious threat against his life. It is natural to ask for God's protection. It's not a guarantee we'll get it in this lifetime! What I would say in Jeremiah's case is God called him to preach about the coming judgment and in order for him to do that, he'd require God to protect Him.
  - c) So if God told Jeremiah in Chapter 1 to "preach all this", was it a lack of faith in his part to doubt God and ask for His protection here? What Jeremiah didn't know was how long he was called to preach so in that sense, it's not a lack of faith, it is not knowing specifics of a time frame. I believe we can ask God anything we want in prayer. What we don't know is His answer, which can always be "no" or "not now".
  - d) Ok then, onto the specific's of those plotting to kill Jeremiah! By the way, later in book we will read of other plots against Jeremiah so this is just a "warm up exercise" in that sense!
15. Verse 21: "Therefore this is what the LORD says about the men of Anathoth who are seeking your life and saying, `Do not prophesy in the name of the LORD or you will die by our hands'--<sup>22</sup> therefore this is what the LORD Almighty says: `I will punish them. Their young men will die by the sword, their sons and daughters by famine.<sup>23</sup> Not even a remnant will be left to them, because I will bring disaster on the men of Anathoth in the year of their punishment.' "
- a) If you don't remember from Chapter 1, Anathoth was Jeremiahs hometown. So why is it that they wanted him killed? If I had to guess, they were so "steeped up in their sins" to hear Jeremiah preach cut to their heart and they don't want to feel guilty about it. It's one thing when someone disagrees with your lifestyle. It's another when they claim that God's angry with them for how they live and do so publicly. Does this mean Jeremiah never did sin himself? Of course not. The issue is about trusting God to guide our lives and making the best effort we can to live as He desires. When those around us who claim to be one of His disciples and don't live like it, sometimes we need to take the "bull by the horn" as we do a confrontation with them. (See Matthew 18 on that!) That's what Jeremiah is doing in these verses and "blowback" is coming as stated in Verses 22-23.
  - b) Speaking of those verses, we get specifics here. That town will be punished severely to a point where even their children will die. There's no specific record of this, so I'm willing to be it's simply a fact that was part of the Babylonian invasion.
  - c) In the last lesson I shared an old joke that if God announced the end of the world is about to begin, the New York Times would write, "The world to end, women and children to be hurt the worst!" I mention that because Jeremiah says that God will punish the children in that town to suffer in horrible ways. Let's be honest, war is a horrid thing as many suffer as casualties of such warfare. Doesn't God care about all the innocent who suffer? I always argue yes and if this life is all there is, life is very unfair.
    - i) To quote one of my mentors, religious Christians and Jews have to explain why is it God allows suffering! Atheists have to explain everything else!
  - d) Anyway, God's trying to reassure Jeremiah here that he will complete the mission that he was called to do and he doesn't have to worry about this particular plot against his life as it won't come to anything. The underlying point is those who work to stop those who do use their lives to make a difference for God will suffer in ways we can't imagine!
  - e) That's how this chapter ends, with the promise of "Big blowback" coming. As we get into Chapter 12 which is part of the same speech, Jeremiah thinks about the bigger picture of why God's allowing those to "get away with this"? Remember that Jeremiah has no idea when all this destruction is going to begin. In effect, he wondered what Job wondered, as in why does God allow the "wicked to prosper" in this lifetime? The short answer is this life is all the joy they'll get. If eternity exists and I'm convinced it does, being rewarded in that time frame is far greater than all we get here. Meanwhile, back to Jeremiah!

16. Chapter 12, Verse 1: You are always righteous, O LORD, when I bring a case before you. Yet I would speak with you about your justice: Why does the way of the wicked prosper? Why do all the faithless live at ease? <sup>2</sup> You have planted them, and they have taken root; they grow and bear fruit. You are always on their lips but far from their hearts.
- Jeremiah is reflecting on the big picture here. He grasps that the Israelites were separated so to bear fruit for God. What Jeremiah doesn't get is why God allows them as a nation to get away with it? Again realize Jeremiah doesn't realize how severe the "blowback" will be, so he's complaining for the moment, "Hey God, why are you allowing Israelites to live as they're living right now?" Yes it's similar to what other Old Testament prophets stated. The book of Amos comes to mind as he in effect asked the same question.
  - When Jeremiah says "You are always on their lips" I think of all the nonbelievers I've meet in my life who easily say, "Thank God" for things or "Praise Jesus" a lot yet, never live as He desires. It's easy to just go to church on Sunday or claim belief in Jesus. It's another to put our time and our money where our mouth is!
  - So what does Jeremiah mean we he says the nonbelievers have "planted and taken root? It is simply a way of describing the fact the Israelites are living there with lives, families and then carrying on as if God doesn't matter. We'll get into more specifics in a few verses.
  - What all of us have to be convicted of as we read this, is not that "we're not doing enough for God" issue. What's at stake is simply, do we believe God exists and are we acting as if we truly care about Him and willing to live as He desires? That's what's at stake here!
17. Verse 3: Yet you know me, O LORD; you see me and test my thoughts about you. Drag them off like sheep to be butchered! Set them apart for the day of slaughter! <sup>4</sup> How long will the land lie parched and the grass in every field be withered? Because those who live in it are wicked, the animals and birds have perished. Moreover, the people are saying, "He will not see what happens to us."
- Jeremiah's saying, "Hey God, I'm on your side here. Even if nobody else wants to live in a way that You desire, "I get it". Then Jeremiah gets tough to say in effect, "Make it happen! Make those who ignore You suffer badly for how their living? In Verse 4 he's now talking as if it's a "done deal". It's describing the land of Israel without people and without any animals. The idea is no one's there to work the ground so it can be used to grow crops.
  - The final sentence was Jeremiah responding to what I'm positive he was hearing, the fact the hearers of Jeremiah's message think won't happen in their lifetime.
  - OK, let's take a deep breath. Obviously this is horrid stuff. Since we know the bible is the word of God, we know historically (and as recorded later in the book) Jeremiah himself is a witness to the actual destruction. My point is it occurred as he said in his lifetime.
  - So how do we know if God's giving us a message like this? The answer is to watch what's happening around us. Do we see a world ignoring God with everybody doing whatever's a "feel good" thing? Does that mean God's going to judge the United State soon? To quote the late Billy Graham, "If God doesn't judge the United State, then He owes Sodom and Gomorrah an apology". Do I know when judgment will come? That's His business. Ours is to be a good witness for Him no matter what. God's timing is God's timing, not ours. I would argue the job of Christians is simply to preach the fact that judgment is coming and the only remedy is to accept Jesus' payment for our sins. That's "Day 1". Once we do that, it is a matter of living as a witness for Him. OK, then, I'm getting repetitive. Next verse:
18. Verse 5: "If you have raced with men on foot and they have worn you out, how can you compete with horses? If you stumble in safe country, how will you manage in the thickets by the Jordan?"
- Beginning in this verse, we're seeing God's response to Jeremiah's rant over the last bunch of verses. God's saying in effect, "Jeremiah stick to what I've called you to preach. You're not able to stop the invasion that's coming. Even if you talk to the locals about what is the near-term future, what makes you think you can handle the invasion when it comes?"



- b) That's what Verse 5 means about "racing with men" versus "racing with horses". The idea is Jeremiah may be able to talk to the local Israelites about what's about to happen, but the invasion is coming "no matter what". "Thickets by the Jordan" refers to thick brush that is a common sight next to any river. The idea again is "The invasion's coming, so stick with the script and preach it."
  - c) OK, if destruction is inevitable, why preach it? Why do pastors preach of the judgment to come? Obviously because some people will repent at that message. It's also so that people have no excuse about what's the reality of the future. Christians are called to either be on the "front line firing the bullets" or the "Back line providing the ammunition (prayer)". As I was correctly taught, in God's world, people are both the pawns and the prizes! All this means is we're called to get busy making a difference for Jesus, or else we could end up a part of the judgment that will come.
  - d) Now that I've scared everyone half to death, let's move on.
19. Verse 6: Your brothers, your own family--even they have betrayed you; they have raised a loud cry against you. Do not trust them, though they speak well of you.
- a) Remember the conspiracy against Jeremiah's by his hometown? God's telling Jeremiah his own family would be a part of it. Gods saying don't trust them even if they speak well of Him. Jesus Himself taught of divisions in families over Him. (Matthew 10:35, Luke 12:53). Think of it this way: How many of you have siblings or parents that don't accept Jesus as Lord and Savior even though you do? Jesus isn't preaching to hate family members. It is just the fact families will be divided over Him. That leads us back to Jeremiah here. He's also going to experience his own family wanting to betray him.
  - b) So why would his family do that? Isn't "blood thicker than water?" Yes, but sometimes a person's desire to sin is so strong, one wants to kill the messenger even if it's a member of their own family! It comes back to the desire to get our will done, versus God's will. Did you ever consider what was Judas's motivation to conspire against Jesus? He wanted the ruling kingdom now, be part of its glory, and not the "suffering Messiah". I believe that's what motivated Judas to betray him. While we aren't told the conspiracy motivation was for this conspiracy by Jeremiah's family and friends, I suspect it comes down to the simple desire to do what is their will versus God's will.
  - c) So why is Jeremiah warned of all this? So he could continue to do what God called him to do, which is to preach of the destruction to come.
20. Verse 7: "I will forsake my house, abandon my inheritance; I will give the one I love into the hands of her enemies. <sup>8</sup> My inheritance has become to me like a lion in the forest. She roars at me; therefore I hate her. <sup>9</sup> Has not my inheritance become to me like a speckled bird of prey that other birds of prey surround and attack? Go and gather all the wild beasts; bring them to devour.
- a) Let's back up and remember why God put the Israelites there in the first place? For there to be a witness for God as to how people should live! When we fail to live as He desires, I have been preaching it the whole lesson, "Blowback". These verses give us colorful ways to describe the destruction that's coming. If you think modern Israel's hated by all nations realize nothing's changed through history. Remember there are big empires fighting for a complete control of the Middle East and Israel was "always in the way". Anyway, God is the one who let's Israel survive all that conquering, unless of course, they refuse to live as He desires. That's why Verse 7 describes Israel as being abandoned to its enemies.
  - b) In Verse 8 Israel is compared to a roaring lion. The problem is that lion is roaring at God Himself as if to say that lion wants nothing to do with it's creator. The remaining animal references are all to "attacking" animals that devour. It's like Israelites became like those devouring animals. How have they done that? By ignoring how God calls them to live, and "devouring each other". Everything from theft to adultery to "use your imagination".
  - c) So what does all this mean for you and me? It's another way to warn us that either we are a part of the problem or part of the solution. God's blowback is coming, deal with it!

21. Verse 10: Many shepherds will ruin my vineyard and trample down my field; they will turn my pleasant field into a desolate wasteland. <sup>11</sup> It will be made a wasteland, parched and desolate before me; the whole land will be laid waste because there is no one who cares. <sup>12</sup> Over all the barren heights in the desert destroyers will swarm, for the sword of the LORD will devour from one end of the land to the other; no one will be safe. <sup>13</sup> They will sow wheat but reap thorns; they will wear themselves out but gain nothing. So bear the shame of your harvest because of the LORD's fierce anger."
- a) By this time, we're focusing on the foreign invasion itself. The idea of "many shepherds" refers to the large army that will overwhelm Israel to destroy it. Realize that when the Babylonians conquered Israel, it was in three phases. By the third time, the Babylonians had enough of the Israelites rebellion and destroyed the land completely! Before this we have read in Judges and "Kings" of other conquerings of Israel. However, the nation still went on to exist. At this time and again with the Romans, the destruction was complete to the point where the land was essentially made empty of people for awhile! By now I would say we got a pretty good picture of the destruction, so there isn't a big need to go on further describing it. Besides we'll get into those details later in Jeremiah.
  - b) The simple but sad reality we're reading of people called by God to be His witnesses to the world around them. They failed to a point where they were now "beyond hope". As I stated earlier, the one good thing that came out of the Babylonian invasion was it rid them of idols once and for all the Roman destruction centuries later was (in Christian opinion) a punishment for failing to recognize their Messiah to come besides other reasons!
  - c) The good news of all this is the chapter ends with some good news. Let's read on:
22. Verse 14: This is what the LORD says: "As for all my wicked neighbors who seize the inheritance I gave my people Israel, I will uproot them from their lands and I will uproot the house of Judah from among them. <sup>15</sup> But after I uproot them, I will again have compassion and will bring each of them back to his own inheritance and his own country. <sup>16</sup> And if they learn well the ways of my people and swear by my name, saying, 'As surely as the LORD lives'--even as they once taught my people to swear by Baal--then they will be established among my people. <sup>17</sup> But if any nation does not listen, I will completely uproot and destroy it," declares the LORD.
- a) The Israelites would naturally wonder, "Yes we messed up badly, but all of those nations who conquered us, what about them? And what about His promise to give us this land so the Messiah would rule from there?" In other words, "Yes this is horrible, but what is going to happen to God's promise to judge all people and for the Messiah to rule here?!"
  - b) These verses answer that. Jeremiah is saying that despite the judgment to come, it will be a complete end to the nation of Israel. Here we have the first hint in Jeremiah that all this is not "the end" for Israel. This is what I call "God's dilemma". How does He punish all of them for failing to be a witness for Him, and still have the Messiah rule there one day? I'd argue that's why the Israelites returned to that land. As I point out way to often, if you do study world history, Israel is the only nation to be conquered, scattered and then return to be a nation again. If that's not proof of God's existence, I don't know what is.
  - c) Verse 16 then goes on to predict that even though Baal worship is the dominate religion in Israel at the time the Babylonians conquered it, that won't be the case when they return. I have pounded the point home that the one good thing to come out of that invasion was it brought an end to worship of literal idols in Israel. Yes that nation is mostly secular today but the point is God is working through that nation to accomplish His goals as stated all through the bible.
  - d) OK good for Israel. What does that mean for you and me? That leads to the final verse of this lesson. God promises to uproot the nations that refuse to accept Him as God. When I was in Israel, one of my favorite T-shirts showed all the nations and empires that did rule in the Middle East. The point is they're all gone and Israel still stands! Verse 17 literally is a true prediction as history has shown us.

- e) All right John, we accept and believe all that. You are preaching to a bunch of Christians who already believe the bible is the word of God. What does all this "blowback" mean to us? We already live as a witness for Jesus. We already use our lives to make a difference for Him. Why should we care about all this ancient stuff? Thought you'd never ask!
  - i) If nothing else, it should be a reminder to us as we go through our lives, that He'll judge the world both individually and corporately. It reminds us that if whatever ministry we're involved in, fails to be a witness for Him, we can suffer just as sure as these Israelites did. God uses the "carrot and the stick" all through the bible! I'm the first to admit Jeremiah mostly uses the "stick" approach. It's a tough book that we must digest. However, we all need both the carrot (positive motivation) and a lot of "stick" (negative motivation) to keep us on the "straight and narrow".
  - ii) Hopefully we read Jeremiah and think, "I never want any of this to happen to me, I will stick to what God calls me to do, thank you very much!"
  - iii) What if you don't know what God calls you to do? Ask yourself, what do you just enjoy doing? What gift do you have and how can you glorify God with it? As I've loved to argue in many lessons, we all have to do our share of the "dirty work" and not just what we love to do. Still, God gives each of us gifts. We can use them as a way to only enrich our lives or we can use them to make a difference for God. That is how we avoid the "stick" and the "blowback" of this lesson.
- 23. OK, that's enough suffering for one lesson. For my newcomers, not all bible lessons are like this. I would say this is one of the tougher but necessary one's to digest. Thanks for putting up with me as I go through this. With that said, let's close in prayer.
- 24. Heavenly Father, First we thank You for choosing us. We know You've chosen us because of our belief that Jesus is God, died for our sins and is in charge of our lives. Since we believe that, what is now important is that we use our lives as a witness for You. May we never waste the time you have given us. May You guide us to use our time and our lives to make a difference for You. May we be motivated by the "carrot" so the stick won't be necessary! We ask this in Jesus name, Amen!