

## Jeremiah Chapters 18-19 John Karmelich

1. I'm tempted to call this chapter, "God, Jeremiah and clay" because much of it involves telling two stories where clays used in illustrations. However, I believe God wanted me to title this lesson, as follows, "Who's in charge anyway?" The underlying question here is, "Who's really in charge our lives? Do we desire to live as God desires or are we only living we desire?" Let me explain:
2. Before you accuse me of preaching to the choir, let's each examine our own lives and ask, "Are we really living as He desires or just giving Him lip service?" Living the Christian life's about using it to make a difference for Jesus after we're saved by grace! If we're saved, the question of course is saved to do what? The answer is saved to use our lives to make a difference for Him. No, none of us are perfect. I'm not even claiming I'm a better believer than anyone reading this. My simple point is we should regularly review our lives as to ponder, "Have we turned this or that aspect of our lives over to Jesus?"
  - a) Let me try this one more way and I promise I'll discuss these two chapters. I'd ask you to consider the "Sermon on the Mount". (Matthew Chapters 5-7). It's a three-chapter speech Jesus gave. The underlying issue isn't to list all the things we must do to be saved. It's how we're to live as Christians after we've trusted Jesus paid the complete price for all our sins. It's as Jesus is asking, "Do you trust God with this or that area of your life? That 3-chapter speech lists different aspects of life with an underlying question, "Is God in charge of each of these areas of our lives or not?" I'm not saying He expects perfection. I'm saying it's His desire we trust Him with all of these areas. What about sins we've committed in the past? If we've turned from them, let go of worrying about it. We're much tougher on ourselves than God is, because we think we should have done better. OK, then, back to Jeremiah.
3. These two chapters both focus on two illustrations that both involve clay pots. By the time we've finished this lesson, we'll know more about clay pots than we ever care to know. Jeremiah makes the construction and destruction of clay vessels in these chapters to teach them as well as us, how God expects us to live after we're saved: To be a witness for Him. The Israelites here had reached a point in their lives where they refused to repent. My hope is none of us do that. I assume people who read this lesson already believe Jesus is God. That's my starting point. If we believe Jesus is God, paid the price for our sins and consider Him in charge of our lives, then our salvation's then set and can't sin enough to blow it! However, we're each given one life. The best way to use it is to make a difference for Jesus. Wasting that life is the worst thing we can do with what God gave us (the gift of eternal life). That's why the Israelites back then were going to suffer and yes that is why we too can suffer a horrid fate if we fail to be the witness God calls us to be.
  - a) OK, that's enough guilt for one page! Let me summarize these two chapters. Hopefully it will lead us back to the question of "Who's in charge anyway". Let's begin.
4. Chapter 18 opens with Jeremiah paying a visit to someone "in town" who makes clay pots. In that story the potter messes up and starts all over again. God's point to Jeremiah is "similar". Just as a potter is free to start all over again (before it's dry), so He's able to start again with others who He has called to be His witness. The point has to do with the destruction of what was left of Israel at a time not long before the Babylonian empire destroyed that place completely. The point is God can start all over again with new believers if He wanted to. To paraphrase a key line from Esther (an Old Testament book if you didn't know that), she was given a key opportunity to use her life to make a difference for God. If she failed, then that redemption for Israel will come another way. If she didn't take that opportunity, she'd waste the chance to be used by God. (My paraphrase of Esther 4:14, if you're not familiar with that key verse).
  - a) The point of course is God's not through with "His chosen people", however He can at any time bring them "to and end" if they fail to use their lives as a witness for Him.
  - b) Realize that God made an unconditional promise to redeem Israel (so Jesus can rule from Israel among other reasons). In the meantime, an unrepentant Israel is the issue here!

- c) To state the obvious the audience hearing that wasn't to crazy about the message. They'll accuse Jeremiah of being a false prophet himself later in this chapter. Before that happens, he gets "preachy" one more time. He explains to those willing to listen while he's in front of the potter's work, "Hey you Israelites, just like the potter messed up, so are all of you. I am warning you that because you turned from God, you're going down like that clay pile!
  - d) By Verse 13, Jeremiah switches from "straight writing" back to poetry style. He's going to make a few illustrations to show had bad Israel is messing up. For example he states how it's unheard of for other countries to abandon their god. Then he gets all "earthy" with two examples of how the rain cycle naturally works to provide water. The idea's a water cycle knows naturally what to do, but His people fail to do what He commands. Anyway again Jeremiah uses nature examples comparing things that instinctively realize how to act (like bird migration and wind). The idea is to compare it to His chosen who should know what to do, but ignore Him! We get a handful of these "back and forth" verses on that theme.
  - e) By Verse 18, Jeremiah's audience has had enough of the putdowns. Let's be honest, no one's interested in hearing how horrid their life is and the fact God doesn't approve! As I stated in the last lesson, Jeremiah spends a lot of time in this book getting self-reflective. Instead of focusing on his audiences' accusations, it draws Jeremiah in his own rant. He says God will make you suffer for saying that! It's almost as if he's becoming a "choir" with God for the destruction of Israel and Jeremiah's saying in effect, "Bring it on God" I hate them!
    - i) So how do we feel when people are putting us down? How many people have we cursed out for say, cutting us off in traffic?
    - ii) That's usually when God reminds us that vengeance is His job, not ours! That will lead us perfectly into Chapter 19. Speaking of which.
5. Chapter 19 opens with another "clay pot" story. This time it's completed pots. Jeremiah takes the leaders of the city out to one a valley just outside the city walls. That valley was associated with a lot of false god worship (probably Baal) and the killing of babies to prove their loyalty to Baal. It is done in response to the accusations they're making against Jeremiah. It's like he is saying, "You want proof of God's judgment, look at what goes on around here!" People are so loyal to the false gods, their willing to kill their children to show their loyalty to him. Therefore, God's response is, "Hey you want slaughter, I'll show you slaughter!"
- a) By Verse 7, Jeremiah's getting all "hot and heavy" again. He essentially says just as you've allowed all this slaughter of babies under your watch (he's talking to the religious leaders as they didn't speak to stop it), so God's going to bring death to this place. It's kind of like saying, "You guys like death to honor Baal, I'll show you what death will look like". It is a tough but necessary reminder of how that God in a sense, "gives us what we want". If we want a life without Him, He turns us over to it. If we're called to be His servants, then He expects us to act like it.
  - b) Then Jeremiah breaks a clay jar in their presence. The illustration is just as he smashed the jar, God's going to "smash" Israel as a punishment for disobedience. It's another reminder that He expects us to use our lives as a witness for Him once we're saved and He will use our lives as examples to others if we fail to live as He desires.
6. OK, I'm the first to admit, this is tough stuff. Who wants to hear a message of condemnation? I'd much rather here about God's love or His eternal wonderful plans for our eternal life! Why does Jeremiah go "on and on" about this? The first answer is it's what God called him to do, so we are seeing him being loyal to what God called him to do, just as He expects us to be loyal to what He expects us to do. Next the reason Jeremiah pounds this so hard, is because let's face it, no matter how long we've been a Christian, the temptation to turn to things that we know aren't pleasing to God let alone our harmful to our lives, is always there! The unfortunate truth, is we all need that "stick" reminder that God's "on our tail" to use our lives to make a difference for Him. In short it's a reminder that God's in charge of our lives and we must accept it if we've committed our lives to serving Him. With that said, it's time to discuss the details. Let's begin:

7. Chapter 18, Verse 1: This is the word that came to Jeremiah from the LORD: <sup>2</sup> "Go down to the potter's house, and there I will give you my message." <sup>3</sup> So I went down to the potter's house, and I saw him working at the wheel. <sup>4</sup> But the pot he was shaping from the clay was marred in his hands; so the potter formed it into another pot, shaping it as seemed best to him.
- a) As I stated in the introduction, these two chapters tell two separate stories that involve the use of clay. In this first one, Jeremiah's told to go to the house of someone who makes clay pots. This is not a "do likewise" moment. It's God using a common practice used to make clay pots to use as an illustration for Jeremiah to share with whoever will listen to Him.
  - b) I picture Jeremiah standing and watching some guy shape clay pots the same way men do get fascinated watching construction projects. As the potter was working with the clay, (if you don't know it's essentially dirt and water), he didn't like how the pot was coming out, so he decided to start all over again.
  - c) The point of all this is God will use this simple illustration to teach Jeremiah how to use it as an illustration of God's in charge of this world and if He doesn't like the results, he can reshape things to go the way He wants, as we'll see in the next set of verses.
8. Verse 5: Then the word of the LORD came to me: <sup>6</sup> "O house of Israel, can I not do with you as this potter does?" declares the LORD. "Like clay in the hand of the potter, so are you in my hand, O house of Israel. <sup>7</sup> If at any time I announce that a nation or kingdom is to be uprooted, torn down and destroyed, <sup>8</sup> and if that nation I warned repents of its evil, then I will relent and not inflict on it the disaster I had planned. <sup>9</sup> And if at another time I announce that a nation or kingdom is to be built up and planted, <sup>10</sup> and if it does evil in my sight and does not obey me, then I will reconsider the good I had intended to do for it.
- a) Let me begin with the question I suspect most of us are thinking: Can God work life out to end our lives early to make a bigger point about obedience? The Babylonian Invasion that caused destruction of Israel is the obvious example. What does that mean for you and me? Should we walk around in fear? As most of us know, the bible says, "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom". (Proverbs 9:10.)
    - i) Still with that said, besides fearing eternal judgment, what about our life living as a witness to God? To state the obvious, none of us know how long we'll live. We don't get control over when it will end. All we can do is do what we're called to do which is to glorify God by how we live. What about when we mess up? Confess it turn from it and move on. Again, most of us know that, so I'm well aware that I'm preaching to the choir here. Therefore, let me focus on Jeremiah again!
  - b) With all that said, God's made it clear that He separated the Israelites "for a reason". That is to be His witnesses to the world. A failure to do that means they and yes us, can be in a "heap of trouble". So how far can we go before we're in a heap of trouble? I have no idea, and hopefully I'll never find out. The underlying point is if you believe Jesus is God and He died for every sin you ever will commit and you believe He's lord of your life, then it's a fact that you are just as "separated" for God as those Israelites were.
  - c) If you think I've wandered from the text, obviously, you didn't read the text. God's saying to Jeremiah and the Israelites in effect, "people to me are like clay. Since I'm in charge, yes I have every right to mold people as I see fit." As one my mentors used to say, "People are both the pawns and the prizes to God". If we accept the fact God's in charge of the world, it's equally important to accept He can do with people as He sees fit!
  - d) Notice the text isn't just about Israel. The term "any nation" is listed. So did other nations come to an end due to lack of fear of God? Of course. A simple example is the people who lived in Israel prior to them. Archeological evidence shows how they lived way back then is what we'd most of we would consider so disgusting, we would wonder why God took so long to judge them. Sodom and Gomorrah is another classic example. My simple point is that God does judge nations and we must accept that fact. That also means He can also judge say our church or ministry effort? Scary, yes, but that's the point!

- e) The final point to make from this paragraph is that God's always willing to repent if we'll change our ways. The idea's to accept that God's in charge and we're not. If we're willing to change our way of thinking God's always willing to repent. So why was He so hard on the Israelites then, versus how society acts today? A key point is they refused to change a bit as we'll read later in this chapter. Let's be honest, people get to a point in life where it's not a desire to turn to God and the "too late" is being judged here. Obviously most people who reject God won't get judged until after death. The focus here's on those already called to serve God, so keep that in mind as we go through this chapter. Speaking of moving on:
9. Verse 11: "Now therefore say to the people of Judah and those living in Jerusalem, `This is what the LORD says: Look! I am preparing a disaster for you and devising a plan against you. So turn from your evil ways, each one of you, and reform your ways and your actions.'<sup>12</sup> But they will reply, `It's no use. We will continue with our own plans; each of us will follow the stubbornness of his evil heart.' "
- a) Here God is warning Jeremiah "realize all this effort to explain what's about to happen is a big waste of time." This leads to the natural question of, "If it's too late and those Israelites are so set in their ways, they're not going to repent, why bother?" One answer is so when future generations of Israelites read this book, they can learn from this. It's also for us too. We can read Jeremiah and realize there is a "too late" with God. It's the motivation to keep us on our toes so to speak. We're a third way through the book. Why is it so long? Why's the point being pounded over and over again? First, the book will get into more than just this one issue. Second it's to remind us that God expects us to use our lives as a witness to make a difference for Him and when we waste that life, God in effect "wastes us!"
- b) So why keep warning this same group over and over again, with different speeches, if it's a waste of time? The big picture to see is how much God loves people! He's willing to go to all this trouble and "pound our head with it" so we get it! God wants people He's called to return to Him. Yes there's a "too late" with God and none of us know when "too late" is going to occur. Until then, all we can do is use our lives as a witness for Jesus, explain that concept to others so they too can be a witness for Him. That's what Jeremiah was called to do and yes, that's what we're called to do as well!
- c) Let me explain it one more way and move on: Ever meet someone who says in effect, I'm happy with my life the way I am. God knows how I'm living and He knows I'm not going to change." How do we reach someone who's not willing to change? As I've stated now a few times, "If they won't listen to Jesus, give them Moses". That just means is if they don't want to hear the good news of God's free gift of salvation, they need to hear the bad news of what awaits them if they don't. For example, I once remember hearing someone brag at a gym how he's going to hell and nothing anyone can say will change that. In response, I said, "You realize the gates of hell will be locked from the inside". (C.S. Lewis.) I wanted to let him think about that. My point is God will give us ways we can also be a "Jeremiah" to the world around us! Anyway, that's the flavor of these verses!
10. Verse 13: Therefore this is what the LORD says: "Inquire among the nations: Who has ever heard anything like this? A most horrible thing has been done by Virgin Israel.
- a) From Verses 13 to the end of the chapter, Jeremiah breaks in to poetry again. I think what he's getting at is examples of how bad the Israelites have gotten. He'll give illustrations of how the world works with the underlying point of how the Israelites should be acting! He begins by stating in effect, "Has anything this horrible ever been done by other nations?"
- b) What Jeremiah is implying and will state fairly blatantly in a few verses is it was unheard of for a nation to abandon their gods. Think of it this way, often there are individuals in a country who change religions. It's unheard of for a whole nation to change from Buddhist to Muslim or Christian or vice versa! Yes one can look at China where a large percentage is turning Christian but that's from "nonreligious" to believing in Jesus. The point here is simply the fact that significant religious change on a national basis is a very rare thing!

11. Verse 14: Does the snow of Lebanon ever vanish from its rocky slopes? Do its cool waters from distant sources ever cease to flow?
  - a) Jeremiah likes to use simple examples from nature to make the point that some things are meant to occur a certain way. The implication is "This is how things are supposed to work in the world but My people don't see that pattern."
  - b) His example is the snow melting. Just north of Israel is the land of Lebanon. It has a lot of (low) mountains that collect snow and that water becomes the source of the Jordan River.
  - c) All Jeremiah is saying is just as the water flow is a consistent thing from year to year, so it should be a consistent thing that the Israelites honor the God who got them there to begin with! OK, one example down, more to go!
12. Verse 15: Yet my people have forgotten me; they burn incense to worthless idols, which made them stumble in their ways and in the ancient paths. They made them walk in bypaths and on roads not built up.
  - a) Here Jeremiah gets blunt. The Israelites would be wondering here, tell us exactly how it is we're blowing it? Therefore Jeremiah gets specific: He explains how the Israelites burned incense (dedicating themselves) to other gods. The implication's they've been doing this in secret. Thus the reference to the "bypaths" versus main roads. It's the idea that God's well aware of all we do. Just because others cant see what we're doing doesn't mean God is not aware of it. That's the implication here.
  - b) I can just hear you thinking, "I don't burn incense to other gods". Great, but are we doing things that if others from church saw us doing, would we be embarrassed? I'm not saying we can't have downtime or enjoy non-church things. To quote one of my mentors, if we're going shopping, take Jesus with us. OK, enough guilt here, back to Jeremiah.
13. Verse 16: Their land will be laid waste, an object of lasting scorn; all who pass by will be appalled and will shake their heads. <sup>17</sup> Like a wind from the east, I will scatter them before their enemies; I will show them my back and not my face in the day of their disaster."
  - a) So after giving an example of how the Israelites were messing up, Jeremiah's now returns to explaining the consequences. He's describing how the land of Israel will be laid waste!
  - b) His specific example has to do with "east wind". Where I live in Southern California, we'd say on a hot day that "hot winds are blowing from the south" as that's the direction winds comes from when they blow hot. Southeast of Israel is desert. Therefore hot winds come from that direction. We're talking about the kind of winds so strong it damages all that is in it's path! So the Israelites who survive the Babylonian attack will be scattered.
  - c) Archeological evidence from that time does show that the land was truly abandoned. The cities and towns of Israel literally were emptied of people. We'll discuss that more in later lessons on Jeremiah. Just know God says what He means and means what He says!
14. Verse 18: They said, "Come, let's make plans against Jeremiah; for the teaching of the law by the priest will not be lost, nor will counsel from the wise, nor the word from the prophets. So come, let's attack him with our tongues and pay no attention to anything he says."
  - a) I've stated a bunch of times of all the Old Testament writers, Jeremiah by far gets the most reflective on his life. Here he mentions again the plots against him. One can just see those people saying, "Jeremiah claims to be speaking on God's behalf to predict our destruction. We Israelites know that God set us up to be His witness. We know The Messiah will come one day to rule the world from here". What Jeremiah's preaching is blasphemous to think we'll be kicked out of this land". Bottom line, they're ready to kill him for saying all that.
  - b) That leads to a quick discussion of how we should react when we're threatened for telling of God's truth. Keep in mind there are occasions in the bible where Jesus or Paul escaped in order to avoid death. In the book of Acts, sometimes Paul stated his Roman citizenship to avoid being beaten. My point is God doesn't want us to "stand there and just take it" if we're being threatened for explaining God's truth in some way.

- i) The logical answer is to pray and do what's logical. The hardest aspect of living a Christian life is "boldness". Everyone wants to be liked or loved. I'm not saying we have to be obnoxious about our faith. I'm saying there are times when either by an action or our words we are condemning how others are living if we know it's not a way that's pleasing to God (e.g., having an affair or stealing). Sometimes we're the bearer of bad news, but it can be good news if it gets people to realize, "You've got a good point. How can I get out of this situation and live like I'm supposed to?"
    - ii) I also know there are situations where we have to keep quiet. A former member of my church is from a Muslim country. She could get killed there if her family found out she became a strong Christian. My point's is doing what's logical is important.
    - iii) All I'm saying is if we live as God intends us to live and sometimes that means we have to face opposition when we stand up for God.
  - c) With that said, back to Jeremiah himself. In these verses, he is told they're going to ignore what he says and "lash back" at him. So you know in Chapter 20, Jeremiah will go to what we call the "stockade" for what he preached. My key point here is sometimes we'll have to suffer for preaching God's truth. The good news is Jesus said to rejoice that our rewards are great in heaven when we're persecuted for preaching His truth. (Matthew 5:12.)
    - i) Meanwhile, we need to get back to Jeremiah's preaching. Yes people don't want to hear what he has to say, but sometimes we must obey God versus men. So back to his speech we go.
15. Verse 19: Listen to me, O LORD; hear what my accusers are saying! <sup>20</sup> Should good be repaid with evil? Yet they have dug a pit for me. Remember that I stood before you and spoke in their behalf to turn your wrath away from them.
- a) Do you think Jeremiah was legitimately scared? I'm sure of it. I'm sure his audience had people who had the power to put him in prison or worse. Therefore, Jeremiah does what all of us should do when things get scary, turn to God for prayer and support. As I stated we're coming up to a point where Jeremiah will be put in the stockade for what he taught. My point is that preaching the gospel never means we get off easily in this life. Still, we're to do what God called to do. Anyway, Jeremiah's scared here and gives us an example for us to use when we're doing what He calls us to do and are being persecuted for it!
  - b) In Verse 20 we're past accusations and Jeremiah states they "dug a pit for me". What that a legitimate pit? Coming up later in the book, he'll be lowered into one, so yes it was one of the ways people were punished in those days. Notice Jeremiah doesn't say, "OK, then I will stop, just don't hurt me!" Instead he pleads to God to do what Jeremiah can't. He says hey God, "I did what You asked, can You help here?" That's the flavor of Verse 20.
  - c) In the next few verses I picture a scared Jeremiah laying it on thick:
16. Verse 21: So give their children over to famine; hand them over to the power of the sword. Let their wives be made childless and widows; let their men be put to death, their young men slain by the sword in battle. <sup>22</sup> Let a cry be heard from their houses when you suddenly bring invaders against them, for they have dug a pit to capture me and have hidden snares for my feet. <sup>23</sup> But you know, O LORD, all their plots to kill me. Do not forgive their crimes or blot out their sins from your sight. Let them be overthrown before you; deal with them in the time of your anger.
- a) Notice Jeremiah doesn't just want his accusers to suffer but also their families. Is that how we should pray? First notice that their wives and children will be innocent victims if what Jeremiah prayed will be answered. In effect, it did happen that way as I suspect most men of fighting age did die when the Babylonian invasion occurred. Therefore, God in his own way did rescue Jeremiah from his accusers and their families did have to suffer.
  - b) Yes John, but this is all ancient history. Should we pray for our accusers to suffer just like Jeremiah did? In a sense "yes". Because if people refuse to repent, however long they'll get to live, it's still eternity away from God's presence.

- c) I hold the view that we can pray whatever we want. God's three answers are yes, no, and "not now". So is it ok to pray for someone to suffer who doesn't know God? Let me reply:
    - i) I think it's ok to "let out steam" in a healthy way. When we're legitimately angry at someone who's threatening us, it's ok, to share that with God. We never read Jesus or say the disciples literally hurting nonbelievers. They left that for judgment. Still what people threaten us with or say to us, can hurt and praying it through can be a healthy way to vent that frustration.
    - ii) What about King David. Didn't he kill a lot of nonbelievers? In that society it was a necessary thing as life was "kill or be killed". He was the instrument of what was God's judgment just as Jeremiah was the messenger to God's judgment. My point is it's best to leave judgment to God as He called us to preach the good news
  - d) With that said, time for Chapter 19 which begins a different story along the same theme.
17. Chapter 19, Verse 1: This is what the LORD says: "Go and buy a clay jar from a potter. Take along some of the elders of the people and of the priests <sup>2</sup> and go out to the Valley of Ben Hinnom, near the entrance of the Potsherd Gate. There proclaim the words I tell you,
- a) First why jump from "condemning his enemies to telling a new story involving talking to a bunch of Israel's elders? My guess is they both make the same point about the lack of an effort to change their way of living. That's why this story is placed here.
  - b) Anyway, "another chapter, more clay". I don't know if the story in this chapter took place right after the last one. Maybe when Jeremiah was putting this book together, he thought of the two clay stories, and put them one after the other. Anyway, since Jeremiah knew of someone who made clay pots (Verse 1 of Chapter 18), we see God telling him to purchase one here in this story. He talks some of the leaders and priests in Jerusalem to join him as he goes out one of the city gates. Why did the others join him? Curiosity? I just figured if God told Jeremiah to take them, God put it in the other's hearts to join him.
  - c) In case you care, this place is just outside the west and south side of Jerusalem. It includes Mount Zion, where David's palace was located. It merges with the Kindron Valley which is another biblically famous place. All you need to know for now, is Jeremiah leads a few people to just outside the city walls at the entrance to this valley. Now let's find out why:
18. Verse 3: and say, `Hear the word of the LORD, O kings of Judah and people of Jerusalem. This is what the LORD Almighty, the God of Israel, says: Listen! I am going to bring a disaster on this place that will make the ears of everyone who hears of it tingle. <sup>4</sup> For they have forsaken me and made this a place of foreign gods; they have burned sacrifices in it to gods that neither they nor their fathers nor the kings of Judah ever knew, and they have filled this place with the blood of the innocent.
- a) First let me say "kings" in Verse 3 refers to civic leaders. Jeremiah is saying in effect, listen all of you people in Jerusalem, including those in charge and "everyday" people! If you've read Jeremiah to date, he's obviously already announced this horrid disaster many times. That's why scholars suspect this section is from an early period in his ministry. Either that or God's just telling Jeremiah to "keep at it until it sinks in".
  - b) The real person for this demonstration that we'll see involves clay pots, is to give evidence of why they're in "big trouble". I suspect that when the "bottom falls out" on those who've turned from God, it won't be a secret as to why. In this case, the valley in question was the place where lots of sacrifices were made to foreign gods. Even if the people Jeremiah took there were not personally guilty, this is a case where God holds leaders accountable. They were the cities civil and religious leaders and the fact that "this" went on was a key reason for the upcoming judgment.
  - c) Keep in mind it's far more than say burning incense to other gods. It also involved sexual deviancy (sexual activities to entice those gods) and sacrifice of babies to show loyalty for the gods they claimed to worship. That's the reference to "blood of the innocent". Let just say that God "hears the cries in the wombs of aborted babies" and will repay one day!

- d) Let me pause for a moment and address those people who've had abortions. The only sin that's unforgivable is a lifetime denial of Jesus as God. If you believe in Jesus as both your God and Savior, you are forgiven of that sin. You'll be reunited with that child one day in heaven. Nobody should condemn someone who has repented of that sin and is trusting in Jesus for their salvation.
  - e) Anyway, what we have here is people who are so "set" on worshipping other deities. The idea of quitting isn't going to happen no matter how much Jeremiah preaches. Why? The same reason we see today: People want an open sexual society without any consequences. People want to abort their babies and not feel guilty about it. When it comes down to it, it is a matter that most people want to live "any old way they feel like" and avoid the guilt of living as God desires even if it's the best way to live.
  - f) Bottom line, the Israelites were in "big trouble" for turning from the God they existed with no desire turn back. So if they got judged, why hasn't God "brought the hammer down on say the United States for all the aborted babies? Best I can tell, it's because there are many people here who are still a good witness for Jesus. As long as the church is having a major impact on the world, He's sparing judgment. Could I be wrong? Of course. As best I can tell, this country is in big trouble and I hope I'm not around when the "hammer falls"!
  - g) Meanwhile, I'll let Jeremiah make us feel guilty and try to stay out of his way!
19. Verse 5: They have built the high places of Baal to burn their sons in the fire as offerings to Baal-- something I did not command or mention, nor did it enter my mind. <sup>6</sup> So beware, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when people will no longer call this place Topheth or the Valley of Ben Hinnom, but the Valley of Slaughter.
- a) Here in Verse 5 "Baal" is mentioned by name. Realize that cult was far more than an entity called "Baal". The short version is he was considered a weather god. He had to be enticed to help people. That included sexual activities with prostitutes and sacrifice of babies as to show one's loyalty to Baal. God's saying that the Israelites did turn that valley into a place of slaughter of innocent children. So He's renaming that valley southwest of Jerusalem as the "Valley of Slaughter".
  - b) If nothing else, it's a reminder that accountability to God is more than just Judgment Day. It's also our lives as a witness for Him. I've pounded that point to death, so I'll move on!
20. Verse 7: "In this place I will ruin the plans of Judah and Jerusalem. I will make them fall by the sword before their enemies, at the hands of those who seek their lives, and I will give their carcasses as food to the birds of the air and the beasts of the earth. <sup>8</sup> I will devastate this city and make it an object of scorn; all who pass by will be appalled and will scoff because of all its wounds. <sup>9</sup> I will make them eat the flesh of their sons and daughters, and they will eat one another's flesh during the stress of the siege imposed on them by the enemies who seek their lives.'
- a) Speaking of judgment, God's not letting up here. The idea is the slaughter of the Israelites will be so bad, there will be no one to bury the bodies or no place to bury them. Therefore, we get references here to scavenger birds and animals that will eat carcasses of the dead. I would think that's bad enough but Jeremiah doesn't stop there. He says conditions will be so bad, that the Israelites will eat dead human carcasses to survive! (Deuteronomy 28:53 effectively preaches the same thing.) It's God's reminder that if we fail to turn from a way that is displeasing to Him, we'll suffer horrid consequences? Why? Because God needs to do what He can to get us to turn back or at the least be a witness to others based on how it is we've turned from Him.
  - b) I admit all of this does make me wonder if all this gross stuff really necessary? Why won't God just wipe them out with one big swoop or something? Why make them suffer in such a horrible way? We get the "witness" idea, but why so bad? It's a case where God will try anything to get people to turn back to Him. Even have a Jeremiah preach for well over 50 chapters and even have horrid punishments to fail to be a witness for Him!



21. Verse 10: "Then break the jar while those who go with you are watching,<sup>11</sup> and say to them, 'This is what the LORD Almighty says: I will smash this nation and this city just as this potter's jar is smashed and cannot be repaired. They will bury the dead in Topheth until there is no more room.<sup>12</sup> This is what I will do to this place and to those who live here, declares the LORD. I will make this city like Topheth.<sup>13</sup> The houses in Jerusalem and those of the kings of Judah will be defiled like this place, Topheth--all the houses where they burned incense on the roofs to all the starry hosts and poured out drink offerings to other gods.' "
- a) Hey, remember the clay jar that Jeremiah was holding? It's time for him to break it as to make a big public statement. So you know, it was not that unusual for false prophets then to break such jars to symbolize something horrid. My point's I'd bet those Israelite leaders of Jeremiah had seen "such things" before. Jeremiah then had to distinguish himself from false teachers by being specific of the damage to be done!
  - b) OK, what is Topheth and why should I care? It's a specific place in Jerusalem where Baal worship was high and yes children were sacrificed there. Jeremiah's specific prediction is that all of Jerusalem will be like "Topheth". That is, since that place was associated with the practice of worshipping Baal, and the Jewish leaders never put a stop to it, now everyone will be accountable in the sense that "it's too late to change". There will be so much death due to the Babylonian invasion, there won't be room enough to bury everyone. The final verse of this paragraph even mentioned the houses used to make offerings to these deities and specifically burned incense and made drink offerings. (That's where wine is poured out to announce loyalty to this deity.
  - c) OK John, we get the horrid news. You don't have to keep pounding our heads with it. I'd like us not to be so concerned about ancient details but what all this means to us. Do those of us who believe Jesus is God really have to worry about all this stuff? Can we be thrown in the streets with no one to bury us if we're bad witnesses for Jesus? First I'd never put it past God to do what He desires to do. The Book of Acts does speak of a couple who were believers that instantly died for lying to the church (Acts 5), so again, the underlying issue is that God's not be messed with period!
    - i) Remember that the main issue here is concerning believers. This is about being the type of witness God desires us to be. Yes we're scattered all over the world, so the idea of a single nation destruction isn't likely like it was in Jeremiah's day. Still the issue at hand is us being a good witness for Him.
    - ii) We're back to my opening lesson question, "Who's really in charge of our life? To believe Jesus is in charge is more than Sunday "lip service". It's about how we live all week long. I'm not saying we have to go stand on street corner yelling "Repent the end is coming". I'm saying we have to live our lives differently enough that it's obvious we're living as a witness for Jesus. How that works for me will be a little different than how it works for you. But the basic idea is if we truly believe Jesus is in charge of our lives, we need to act like it all the time.
    - iii) Does that mean perfection? Of course not. Sin is always a temptation no matter if we've been a Christian 5 minutes or 80 years. Still if it's our desire to live as God desires we live, it does mean we give up our rights not to earn our salvation, only out of gratitude for what God's done for us, we should always desire to live in a way that makes a difference for Jesus in all that we do.
  - d) Sometimes I hate the fact I get on a roll, and realize there's a few more verses to cover:
22. Verse 14: Jeremiah then returned from Topheth, where the LORD had sent him to prophesy, and stood in the court of the LORD's temple and said to all the people,<sup>15</sup> "This is what the LORD Almighty, the God of Israel, says: 'Listen! I am going to bring on this city and the villages around it every disaster I pronounced against them, because they were stiff-necked and would not listen to my words.' "
- a) Standing outside the city breaking a pot wasn't enough, Jeremiah had to keep going!

- b) The verses are saying if we don't know what to do next, we keep going doing what God's called us to do. After Jeremiah finished his "clay pot breaking speech" it appears he went back in the city to proclaim in effect the same message!
  - c) If nothing else, it's a reminder to us, unless God makes it clear for us to change course, we are to stick to the "game plan" of using our lives as a witness for Him. Even if it means we have to suffer for what God's called us to do, we stick to the "game plan".
  - d) So what if I don't know the "game plan"? Welcome to the club! Start by asking people the things you're good at. Figuring out what your special gifts are. Think about things you'd enjoy doing and finding a way to combine those talents for God's use. You may not reach a dream job or dream ministry today, but one has to remember God gave you those things for a purpose and that's to glorify Him with them!
  - e) Anyway, Jeremiah ends these two chapters in effect the same way he started them by him preaching "doom in coming deal with it". The next chapter will start with Jeremiah being thrown in the "stockade" for what he's been preaching and I'll talk about that when I write on the next chapter. Going to end this one a little shorter than usual. Truthfully it's tough stuff to get through and very condemning. However, it's part of the bible for a reason, to keep us on our toes as a witness for Jesus. Therefore we all must deal with these warnings as just as much of reality as God's love for our lives.
23. Okay, I've preached enough "doom and gloom" for one lesson. Let me wrap this up by returning to my title of "Who's in charge anyway". Personally, I don't think, God cares that much if we do become an expert in ancient Middle East history. What He's far more interested in, is us being the type of witness for Him He desires we be. God's made the decision to work through people as to lead others to Him and closer to Him. That's what we're all called to do. As another mentor said, "If we're not on the front line firing the bullets (leading others to Jesus) then we need to be on the back line providing the ammunition (prayer). The key point is if we believe Jesus is in charge of all areas of our lives, then we need to act like it or we too can face the same "doom" as we read of here in these chapters. On that scary thought, I'll wrap this up in my closing prayer.
24. Heavenly Father, First, thank You for choosing us. We don't know why, but we do know that to serve You not only means eternal life in Your presence, but also responsibility. You've called us not only to salvation, but to use our lives as a witness for You. Make it obvious to us the specific things You desire of us as we use our lives as a witness for You. Help us be aware of areas of our life that we're not depending upon You for our guidance. Be with us, as we use our lives for Your glory, in Jesus name, Amen!