

Jeremiah Chapters 20-21 John Karmelich

1. I'm tempted to call this lesson, "So you want the bad news first or the really bad news?" This isn't an upbeat lesson so let's accept that fact right now. OK then, why should I get depressed reading a bunch of bad news from over 2,500 years ago? And don't say, "Because it's in the bible so you've got to learn this stuff!" It's to grasp what to do when we go through our own hard times. Lately, I have been dealing with a lot of "woe is me" people. It feels like every time I turn around someone is hitting me up for a handout or endlessly complaining of their problems. Sometimes, I just want to stand up and scream, "Can everyone just leave me alone?" Often when too many problems are overwhelming us, it just gives us a desire to say, "Lord I just want peace, I can't fix the world. I've got my own issues. Why is it I'm being burdened with everyone else's problems right now?" Yes, God wants us to put other's needs as a priority over our own. But, at what point do we stand up and say, "Folks do you trust God or not? Why do you see "me" as the solution to your problem?" If this isn't you right now, there are always times when we feel like this so I'd like you to read on.
 - a) The reason I'm opening the lesson this way, is we'll read of Jeremiah suffering for what he preached and then gives a "woe is me" speech for the remainder of Chapter 20. Chapter 21 then has Jeremiah getting back at telling the Israelites in effect, "Yes it's going to be bad as your nation is going to be wiped out. Therefore surrender to the enemy, accept what God desires at this point in your life (i.e., surrender to Him) and stop trying to fight His will!"
 - b) This leads to my lesson title: "Woe is me!" The common theme of the chapters is Jeremiah and the Israelites struggling to accept God's will. They both are crying out, "woe is me" in so many words. They refuse at the moment to see the big picture of what they are dealing with and why they must suffer at that moment. The big question is why should I care for a bunch of people who lived 2,500 years ago? How does this affect me? We'll get to that!
2. OK John, I'm depressed and I'm only half way through Page 1. How do you expect me to read all of this lesson, when it's so horrid so far? You may or may not be having a "pity party" right now. I suspect all of us can relate to a "woe is me" moment as if nothing else in the world matters other than my problems. As we go through the horrid mess of these chapters, keep in mind that we are still to be His witnesses to the world, just as much when things go well, just as we are when life is going horribly. With that said, let me explain the stories told in these two chapters as we see how it can affect us "fighting God's will at any given moment. Let's begin:
3. The chapter opens with a new character named Pashhur. He's in charge of security at the temple. He's not the high priest but is a priest. He's bad news. He makes Jeremiah suffer by putting him in a stockade. That means he's twisted with his arms, legs and head stuck in wood for the night.
 - a) The next day when Jeremiah is let out, he doesn't say, "Woe is me, I messed up, I'm sorry I preached against Israel". Instead he lays into Pashhur saying in effect he will die as well as all his associates and friends when the Babylonian invasion occurs.
 - b) I should pause for the moment and mention that there were three separate attacks by that Babylonian empire over about a 20-year period. The real threat is the final one as it is the one that wiped out Israel all as a nation. Most scholars place Chapter 20 before the first of the three invasions and Chapter 21 right before the last one. Anyway Jeremiah's stating to whoever is listening, "The really big, bad one's coming and you're going to die from this!"
 - c) Personally I find it funny that Jeremiah is being "kicked out of the God's Temple", yet in a matter of a generation or two, his writing will be part of the Old Testament!
 - d) Then the pain of the night in the stockade sunk in. The rest of Chapter 20 is a "woe is me" speech by Jeremiah. It jumps back in forth between the "why do I have to suffer? Why is it I was called to preach all of this? I'm cursed. I don't get to have sex or a family (stated in Chapter 16) and God's called me to spend my life preaching all this bad news? Why did I get picked?" It's hard! It's Jeremiah's moment of complaining about how hard it is to be a servant of God. The interesting issue is what's mixed in with this message:

- e) Didn't Jeremiah know "He was stuck"? He was positive God called him to preach what he had to say and it doesn't matter if he liked it or not so he's stuck! That's a message for you and me. We're each called to use our lives to make some sort of difference for Jesus. Will it always be pleasant? Will it be hard at times? Will we'd be subject to rejection, ridicule or "the stockade?" Of course, however, like Jeremiah in effect, what choice do we have? It is a matter of accepting the fact God's in charge and sometimes that means life is going to be hard and we must deal with it!
- f) With that said, let me jump to Chapter 21. It's a good time to remind you that Jeremiah is not written in chronological order. Most likely he recalled events from different points of his life and put it together to form the book. My point is Chapter 21 is about 20 years after Chapter 20. One reason that's important is we get another man named Pashhur. Scholars are positive he's different from the one we read of in Chapter 20. Bottom line, Chapter 21 opens with a meeting of the top guys in the Israel kingdom with Jeremiah. Let me set the stage here to continue:
 - i) As I said on the previous page the Babylonians did three separate attacks on Israel.
 - ii) Chapter 20 may have been right before the first one.
 - iii) The scene in Chapter 21 is the Babylonians are "knocking on the door with the goal to completely destroy what's left of Israel" which is the third and final invasion.
 - iv) By this point the leaders of Israel are taking Jeremiah seriously and saying in effect maybe you were right after all, so what can we do to appease the situation?
 - v) Jeremiah responds effectively, "You want the bad news or the really bad news"? It is a situation where not only will God not help you, but He'll be helping out those Babylonians to destroy the place." Let the idea of God fighting against you sink in!
 - vi) His only words of consolation in effect are, "You might as well surrender, so you'll have your lives spared as prisoners as opposed to being dead."
 - vii) Jeremiah ends the chapter with more poetry to preach the bad news of "the end"!
- 4. All of that leads me back to my introduction comments: How do we handle the "woe is me" times of our lives? How do we help when others are crying "woe is me" and expect us to fix it? Let's be honest this chapter is one "woe is me" after the other. Jeremiah himself suffers harsh punishment for being God's witness and even complained about how tough it was to do what God called him to do. Yes, it's one big "woe is me" moment. Chapter 21 is the Israelites still living there crying as they are dealing with their own "woe is me" moment.
 - a) Yes we can discuss why each of them had to deal with that, but I suspect by now we get it as to why Jeremiah had to suffer for being the messenger and the Israelites had to suffer a lot for failing to be God's witness for Him. I won't beat that dead horse any more!
 - b) What I want to end this opening section with, is what is the proper response for our "Woe is me" moments in life? After all that's the big question being faced here.
 - c) First, sometimes we need to have the attitude to help how we can, when we can. In times of disasters, humans are generally very compassionate people and desire to help others as they deal with emergencies. Nobody likes to see people suffer. With that stated, that isn't my issue here: It's about accepting God's will for the moment. It's about realizing that I've got to accept my situation as bad as it is. It's about not trying to force other people to fix a situation they're not responsible for in the first place. It's about realizing that to believe in Jesus does not mean life will always go well. Just about every major bible character that I read about went through terrible suffering. In fact there wasn't always a happy ending to most of their lives. It's another reminder that are rewards are heavenly and often God lets us suffer for some greater purpose than we may grasp at the moment.
 - d) Now if that doesn't depress you nothing will! (Hopefully you're catching on to my humor by now.) All I want you to realize as we read what Jeremiah and the Israelites go through in this chapter is "Accepting God's will, is often painful and causes "woe is me" moment.

5. On that tough note, Jeremiah 20, Verse 1: When the priest Pashhur son of Immer, the chief officer in the temple of the LORD, heard Jeremiah prophesying these things, ² he had Jeremiah the prophet beaten and put in the stocks at the Upper Gate of Benjamin at the LORD's temple.
- a) Let's start by talking about this "Pashhur" fellow. The text says he was a priest by training. He was also the "chief officer in the temple", which means he's in charge of security at that temple. It also means he had the power to have Jeremiah arrested and put in prison if that was desire.
 - b) So why be so hard on Jeremiah? I doubt he was yelling. What I suspect is because he was saying "God's going to do this and that", so it made the security guy think that Jeremiah is falsely speaking in God's name. That leads to the question, how do we know if someone's speaking in God's name? The correct answer is compare it to God's word. Even if a person correctly predicts the future the bible teaches if a person preaches against God we should not listen. Anyway, I think because Jeremiah preached the destruction of Israel, Pashhur assumed he was a false prophet and that caused Jeremiah to be put in jail.
 - c) Before I get into describing "prison" for Jeremiah. What does all this mean for us? If we're going to be a witness for Jesus, just figure not everyone's going to love our message. Some will just argue but some will threaten physical violence. It doesn't mean we're stand there and "take it". If we can escape, do. If nothing else it shows that God allows those who are called to be His witnesses to suffer at times, even if they're doing His will.
 - d) So does this mean Satan was "behind" Pashhur to discourage Jeremiah? Who knows? All we know is this guy was in charge of security and if he says, "lock him up", then off to jail Jeremiah goes.
 - e) Why is there a reference to the "upper gate of Benjamin"? Jerusalem has a number of gates leading in different directions. The land of Israel was divided into twelve "states" with all of them named after one of the tribes of Israel. This was a very public place with many of the Jeremiah residents and visitors walking by. The point is Jeremiah wasn't just put in a stockade in hiding. His stockade was a very public location to humiliate him.
 - f) Now time for the "gruesome" part. If you've ever seen a "wood stockade" where someone has to put their arms, legs and neck inside wood holes, most likely that's the ideas. Could it be something different, of course. Whatever it was, it wasn't comfortable! Notice it says Jeremiah was beaten then put in the stocks. This is Satan saying in effect, "I don't like the fact you're preaching what God says and I'm going to make you suffer for it? In the book of Acts, Paul was regularly beaten and put in prison for preaching God's word. My point is that God often allows His people doing His work to suffer for some greater purpose. It is going to lead to Jeremiah's "woe is me" speech, but not until he chews out Pashhur first.
6. Verse 3: The next day, when Pashhur released him from the stocks, Jeremiah said to him, "The LORD's name for you is not Pashhur, but Magor-Missabib. ⁴ For this is what the LORD says: `I will make you a terror to yourself and to all your friends; with your own eyes you will see them fall by the sword of their enemies.
- a) Apparently Jeremiah left prison in a bad mood. Hey if I spent the night all twisted up I'd probably be yelling at the first person I saw too! Anyway, Jeremiah had no intention for any sort of "I'm sorry" speech. Instead he decides to rename "Pashhur". The new name is roughly translated "terror all around you" as implied in Verse 4. Later in the book we will read of this guys fall, but to put it simply he was among the people taken off to Babylon in the final big battle probably 20 years after Jeremiah preached this.
 - i) The prediction is Pashhur will see many people he knows die by the sword. What is being predicted here will literally become true as people there won't want to see him as he'll be associated with terror. I suspect because he's a "high official", that's why he's dragged off to Babylon versus dying in the battle over Jerusalem.
 - ii) Bottom line this is bad news and will cause more "woe is me" moments later!
 - iii) OK John, this is depressing, why continue? Bear with me and I'll explain!

7. Verse 4: I will hand all Judah over to the king of Babylon, who will carry them away to Babylon or put them to the sword. ⁵ I will hand over to their enemies all the wealth of this city--all its products, all its valuables and all the treasures of the kings of Judah. They will take it away as plunder and carry it off to Babylon. ⁶ And you, Pashhur, and all who live in your house will go into exile to Babylon. There you will die and be buried, you and all your friends to whom you have prophesied lies.' "
- a) This is obviously another "don't mess with God" moment. Want to know what'll happen to people who fight against people standing up for God? Let us just say it won't be good! So will they suffer more in hell than others? While the bible tells us very little about how "hell works", I suspect that in the same way there are eternal rewards in heaven, there will be different levels of suffering in hell. Even if I'm wrong, we're still talking about anyone who's fighting God's will and I wouldn't want to hang around them for very long!
 - b) An underlying point for us is using our lives to make a difference for Jesus does not mean we'll always be rewarded in this lifetime, but God will bless us if we use our lives to make a difference for Him, even though those rewards will be eternal and not always here!
 - c) The reason scholars suspect that Chapter 20 is even before the first time Babylon came to attack Israel is the reference to "all the wealth of this city". Again remember that Babylon attacked Israel three times over just under a 20-year period. The first two times was a big, "We're in charge now deal with it" type of attacks. That Israel nation was still allowed one of their own as being in charge. By the third time, the Babylon king enough of Israel being rebellious against him, so the king's son who was the head general (Nebuchadnezzar) did the "level Israel to the ground thing, where the land was completely destroyed!
 - d) Before the three attacks, there was still a battle for control over the Middle East. Egypt and Babylon were the two "big boys" and Israel was located between them. Jeremiah is telling them that "they're doomed but don't even know it yet!"
 - e) What is not stated but implied in the 2nd Kings and 2nd Chronicles account of these times is the fact that many of the top officials were favoring Egypt. So when Jeremiah states that this guy will be taken to Babylon it's the idea that he "bet on the wrong horse".
 - f) OK, you get the idea, since Jeremiah finished chewing this guy out, I suspect the physical pain of being in the stockade was sinking in. Jeremiah starts on his own "woe is me" talk beginning in the next verse.
8. Verse 7: O LORD, you deceived me, and I was deceived; you overpowered me and prevailed. I am ridiculed all day long; everyone mocks me. ⁸ Whenever I speak, I cry out proclaiming violence and destruction. So the word of the LORD has brought me insult and reproach all day long.
- a) My first question is "why is this here"? Could it be that Jeremiah was human and God is showing us it's ok to have a "woe is me" moment even if we're called to do His will? Yes it could be that. I think it's simply a reminder that being called use to make a difference for Jesus is hard work and yes we suffer at times. But it's still worth it. It's also ok, to tell God in effect, "Yes this is hard, you sure you got the right man for the job?"
 - b) If you've never used your life to do any sort of ministry work for Jesus, ask people who've done that type of work. They'll usually tell you it was worth it and they're glad they did it but they'll also tell you it was hard work and God didn't "let them off the hook" because it was a work for Him! Anyway, Jeremiah has his own little pity party here in this section. I would say if nothing else, it's ok to "blow off steam" to God when we can't stand all of the pain of the hard work or suffering for the Gospel sake.
 - i) Time for one more quick deviation then I'll discuss the text itself. Suppose we are suffering for some effort. How do we know if God wants us to continue it if we're getting all that resistance? That's when prayer comes in. If an overwhelming urge tells us to continue despite the pain and cost, and what we're doing is "biblical" it's God's way of saying stick at it, despite the pain it causes!

- c) Let me give a few comments on the text itself. Jeremiah felt like God deceived him. Why would Jeremiah think that? Maybe he wrongly thought that if he preached exactly what God told him to preach, it'd be easy and he wouldn't get any resistance.
 - i) So why would Jeremiah felt like God "deceived" him. Remember he just spent the night in a stockade so maybe he felt like "God this wasn't part of our deal! I get the fact You told me to avoid some things (Chapter 16) but You never told me that I'd have to suffer like this! Am I positive that's why he felt betrayed by God? No, but it follows the logic of the story. Verse 7 says, "Everyone mocked me". That's why I suspect Jeremiah felt this way.
 - ii) So what does Jeremiah mean by "(God) overpowered me and prevailed". I think it is a simple acceptance of His will, even when Jeremiah is being humiliated plus all the physical pain of the stockade. It's a matter of taking our "woe is me" moment a step further and saying this is God's will for the moment. Does that mean don't see a doctor for pain as an obvious example? Of course not. It just means that we must accept that bad things occur as we do our best to deal with the pain of it all! What I also gather from this text that Jeremiah hit a point of acceptance of it all that way!
 - iii) Verse 8 is making the point that while Jeremiah was proclaiming the message God wanted him to proclaim all it got him was say heartache and physical pain. I don't think Jeremiah was blaming God as much as he was thinking, I don't get why he is suffering for preaching what God told him to say.
 - iv) The good news is that thought leads well to Verse 9:
- 9. Verse 9: But if I say, "I will not mention him or speak any more in his name," his word is in my heart like a fire, a fire shut up in my bones. I am weary of holding it in; indeed, I cannot.
 - a) Let me paraphrase, "I can't stand not doing this. God put this desire in my heart so despite the consequences I'm going to do what God called me to do. Hey world, deal with it!"
 - b) Let me pause and ask, "What if I'm as not sure what God wants me to do as Jeremiah does or as obviously you are (given all the years of this ministry). I'd say "ask Him", or what is it you can't stand not doing or what do you enjoy doing and how can you use that gift for Him? Some of the greatest ministries I know came from trial and error. They came from a desire for people to use their lives for God and "figuring out what to do from there". No it doesn't have to be something "grand scale". Rewards in heaven aren't based on the size of a ministry but our loyalty to Him and a willingness to use our lives for His glory.
 - c) Now that I got that speech out of my system, back to Jeremiah. His key point here is he is unable to stop because the desire to please God is too great. So how does that work? The way I look at it is, I write because I can't stand not doing it. It's an overwhelming urge I've got to get out of my system. Jeremiah felt the same way here.
- 10. Verse 10: I hear many whispering, "Terror on every side! Report him! Let's report him!" All my friends are waiting for me to slip, saying, "Perhaps he will be deceived; then we will prevail over him and take our revenge on him."
 - a) Meanwhile there is " reality". In Jeremiah's case, it's the fact that people around him want him dead. Or at the least, they want him to "slip up" so they have an excuse to arrest him and put him back in the stockade or worse!
 - b) For me, along with most Christians, I don't get death threats for preaching Jesus. I do get a decent amount of spiritual resistance with stories that scare me to think about. That's why I always ask for prayer for this ministry. I do know of Christians who risk their lives to be a witness for Jesus so after all the millenniums, resistance to God's word is still there. The amazing thing to consider in Jeremiah's case is resistance came from those who should be a witness for God Himself. Often the greatest resistance we face when being a witness for Jesus does come from the "religious establishment". It was true in Jesus day and yes that's true in our day as well. Enough said on that, let's move on.

11. Verse 11: But the LORD is with me like a mighty warrior; so my persecutors will stumble and not prevail. They will fail and be thoroughly disgraced; their dishonor will never be forgotten.
- a) Verse 10 was the bad news. Verses 11-13 are the good news. It's the reminder that "God's God" and He will prevail in the end. When we experience our own "woe is me" moments, that's often when we forget God's in charge and He's allowing us to suffer however we're suffering at the moment. Yes He wants us to get relief when possible. The important thing is God's aware of our situation. It's especially true when we're using our lives as a witness for Him and resistance is still coming strong.
 - b) So how will the "fail and be thoroughly disgraced... and never forgotten?" Jeremiah is not saying ever bad act of history will be remembered by us, but by Him. Hell's for those who refuse to trust God with their lives and eternal suffering awaits.
 - c) I admit, I keep thinking of my favorite T-shirt I saw in Israel. It lists all the empires who at one time ruled over the land of Israel. On the shirt all of them are crossed off to indicate a true fact that they no longer exist, but Israel as a country still stands today. That's one way the disgrace of those who want to hurt God's people will never be forgotten. However, in this case, Jeremiah is talking about fellow Israelites working against him. Since his book is a part of the bible studied by millions in that sense, what Jeremiah predicted did happen!
12. Verse 12: O LORD Almighty, you who examine the righteous and probe the heart and mind, let me see your vengeance upon them, for to you I have committed my cause.
- a) Jeremiah's saying in effect, "Hey God, I'm on Your team. I'm tired of preaching about the coming invasion. Let me see it first hand to vindicate both of us." Obviously most of the Christians throughout history didn't live to see Jesus return to fulfill all that He promises about bringing the world under His rule, but the point is Jeremiah did get to see it.
 - b) Let me put it this way. Jeremiah had to work at least 40 years of preaching and saw few if any converts. So his reward for years of loyal service was at the least he saw what he said come true in his lifetime. Proof is he also wrote the book of Lamentations, which laments the fall of Israel.
 - i) That leads to another natural question. If Jeremiah saw the Babylonians destroy all of Israel, how do we know he didn't write all of this after it happened? One proof is simply the fact that Jeremiah was accepted as a prophet by the survivors so they are in effect testifying to his validity. Another proof coming up in a few chapters is Jeremiah accurately predicted the exact length of the captivity (70 years). That also is a complicated topic, which I'll save for when we get there. My point's simply the fact that what Jeremiah predicted in this verse did come true for him.
13. Verse 13: Sing to the LORD! Give praise to the LORD! He rescues the life of the needy from the hands of the wicked.
- a) So what does Jeremiah say after praising God in Verse 11 and asking to let him see God's plan come to fold in Verse 12? Back to pure praise. Sometimes once we realize He's really in charge, we let go of asking things, and simply praise Him for who He is.
 - b) Jeremiah is thanking God for rescuing him from the stockade and is now in a good mood!
14. Verse 14: Cursed be the day I was born! May the day my mother bore me not be blessed! ¹⁵ Cursed be the man who brought my father the news, who made him very glad, saying, "A child is born to you--a son!" ¹⁶ May that man be like the towns the LORD overthrew without pity. May he hear wailing in the morning, a battle cry at noon. ¹⁷ For he did not kill me in the womb, with my mother as my grave, her womb enlarged forever. ¹⁸ Why did I ever come out of the womb to see trouble and sorrow and to end my days in shame?
- a) You want to talk about a "pity party", I present the last five verses of Chapter 20. The key point is it reads as if Jeremiah wishes he was never born. It's very Jewish in it's style. For example, it's a curse to wish harm to your parents so Jeremiah gets around that by saying "cursed by the one who brought news of his birth".

- b) So why is Jeremiah getting all "suicidal" here? I think part of it is the physical pain when he was beaten the night before and spent the night in the stockades publicly is kicking in. That physical pain is coming out through a "woe is me" moment here.
- c) If you know your bible pretty well, one has to admit this reads a lot like Job during some of his lowest moments in his pain. The fact that these verses are in the bible show us that it is ok to cry out to God in our pain. When we have our own "woe is me" moment, yes it is acceptable to tell God how much pain we're in. What that does is help us to see what it is we're going through from His perspective. The physical pain Jeremiah had was real and he needed to pour it out of his system, even to the point of cursing his birth!
 - i) So did Jeremiah really have suicidal thoughts at this point? Could be. Let's get that discussion out of the way. To commit suicide is a sin, because murder is a sin, and to kill oneself is murder. I hold the view that the only unforgivable sin is the denial of Jesus as Lord and God is the only unforgivable sin, so people who do that in the moment of weakness can still be in heaven despite that sin. What people fail to see when they do that is someone has to clean up the mess they left behind when they commit that sin. Most people go through times of depression and weakness. The key is to realize time is the most valuable thing we own and God alone should be the one who decides how long we get to live in this world.
 - ii) Bottom line, Jeremiah is going through his own point of weakness here, and giving that weakness to God is a good way to get through those difficult times.
- d) What's interesting is the chapter ends on this note. The first verse of Chapter 21 is roughly 20 years later. My point is Jeremiah pours out his heart to God here and "that's that". The most likely explanation for this section is to show that it's ok to pour out our sorrow to the God who created us. Yes it was God's intent for Jeremiah to preach for decades. Jeremiah didn't know that, at this point in his life. Most likely this scene took place early in his life.
- e) My point here is the things God asks us to do is often hard. To live the Christian life does not mean we're exempt from suffering. It also means if we take a stand for Jesus we must deal with rejection and even suffering for that rejection. In fact, Paul promised that all of us who trust in Jesus will suffer persecution (2nd Timothy 3:12). I'm just saying that if we are going to use our lives to make a difference for Jesus this is the "bad news" so we might as well accept it now.
 - i) So if that's our future, why bother? What's the good news? Well everlasting life is a good start! Then of course, life will give us far greater joy by trusting in Jesus as a witness for Him than through any other way we could use our lives.
 - ii) Just realize the good far outweighs the bad, but if we're going to be His witnesses to the world we need to know the bad news as well as the good news.
 - iii) In summary, the "woe is me" moments are worth going through as the good parts will far outweigh whatever suffering we have to go through in this life.
 - iv) Jeremiah suffered here and will again in this book. Yet his book has been studied by millions and I'm positive he's got great eternal rewards, so it was worth it!
 - v) So what if we've wasted our lives to date? What if we've sinned a lot before we've made a commitment to Jesus? Exhale! God knows everything about us. God asks us to use the time we have left to make a difference for Him. It's not the size of the project but our willingness to use our lives to make a difference for Him! None of us are perfect and we all have our faults. The key is to pray, Heavenly Father, my time is in Your hands. Give me the wisdom as to how to use that time for You. I'd like the boldness to make a difference for You, so I pray for that boldness. May the Holy Spirit fill my life so as to make a difference for You.
- f) I suspect Chapter 21 takes place next is in both cases, we're reading "woe is me" stories. It is time to move on as we go through "Woe is me" Part 2.

15. Chapter 21, Verse 1: The word came to Jeremiah from the LORD when King Zedekiah sent to him Pashhur son of Malkijah and the priest Zephaniah son of Maaseiah. They said: ² "Inquire now of the LORD for us because Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon is attacking us. Perhaps the LORD will perform wonders for us as in times past so that he will withdraw from us."
- a) Let's start with another "who's Pashhur" discussion. Chapter 20, Verse 2 said, "Pashhur is the son of Immer". Verse 1 of this chapter says, "Pashhur son of Malkijah". In other words they are different guys. Want more proof? The king of Israel wanted Jeremiah to plead to God on Israel's behalf in Verse 1. I doubt the king would send "that" Pashhur to Jeremiah.
 - b) Now a little about the kings of Israel at this time. Jeremiah lived to see the last five kings of Israel reign before the country was destroyed. The last good one was Josiah. He got to be the king at age 8. Obviously he had advisors in the early years. He got along well with Jeremiah as best we can tell. The last four all had fairly short reigns. The one mentioned in Verse 1 (Zedekiah) was the last of them.
 - c) Time for a little Jewish history here to help set the scene. As I stated, Israel was attacked a total of three times in just under 20 years. Nebuchadnezzar (also famous in the first few chapters of Daniel) was the son of the king and lead the Babylonian army to attack Israel and Egypt. By the time of the third attack, his father died and now Nebuchadnezzar was the king over the Babylonian Empire. That's why scholars state Chapter 21 took place just before the final invasion of Babylon to wipe out Israel once and for all. Realize since Israel got attacked twice before by Babylon and lost, the Babylonian king had "say so" over who could be the king of Israel. That's why it changed hands a bunch of times in a short time!
 - d) The other thing to realize is the "hated Jeremiah" is now the one being sought by the king for spiritual advice! The king realized, "Wait a minute, Jeremiah was right all this time. I say it's time we ask him how to appease God, since he's tight with Him".
 - e) This will lead to the next set of verses, which leads us to, "Do you want the bad news first, or the really bad news". Let's read on.
16. Verse 3: But Jeremiah answered them, "Tell Zedekiah, ⁴ `This is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: I am about to turn against you the weapons of war that are in your hands, which you are using to fight the king of Babylon and the Babylonians who are outside the wall besieging you. And I will gather them inside this city. ⁵ I myself will fight against you with an outstretched hand and a mighty arm in anger and fury and great wrath. ⁶ I will strike down those who live in this city--both men and animals--and they will die of a terrible plague.
- a) My first thought was, if things are that grim, why didn't the king go himself? Why send a messenger (or a group) to Jeremiah? Maybe the king was afraid of what he might hear. A part of the politics of the last few kings was over whether or not they should rebel against Babylon or accept the fate. One of the great moments of Middle East history also occurred at that time when Babylon defeated Egypt, who never again rose to power after that.
 - i) My point is I'm guessing the king was scared for the future and for his own life, so he sent people to Jeremiah to ask in effect, "Is there anything I or Israel can do as to change the reality of history? Jeremiah's answer is the bad and really bad news:
 - ii) The bad news: Israel is going to lose and lose big time!
 - iii) The really bad news: God is working on behalf of the Babylonians here!
 - b) This leads to a couple of natural questions: If God is God, why didn't he just wipe out the Israelites if they were that bad with one big "swoosh"? Why have a foreign army do it? I'd say for a couple of reasons:
 - i) The first is to teach God's people the futility of idols. Babylon was full of them. It's like saying, "You want idols, here you go kids!"
 - ii) The second is to show that despite their sins, God's not through with His people as an entity. That's why they return to the land in 70 years and I'm convinced that's a reason why they're back in the land after almost 2,000 years of not being a country!

- c) The underlying point is when we fail to use our lives as a witness for God, we will pay the price for it! The Israelites turned from Him. If we as a nation or a church, or a group also fail to be a witness for Him, we may still be saved, but God can "end us" as to be a witness for Him with our lives. That's the scary reality that's always hanging over us!
 - d) The other thing to notice from these verses is how extensive the damage will be. The text doesn't say, "The Israelites lose, everybody cleans up the mess and that's that!" Instead it's a complete wipe out. Jerusalem will be completely destroyed, including all human life as well as animal life there. As I preach a lot, many innocent people die in wartime. If there's no next life, this one is definitely an unfair place to live! God wanted Jerusalem to end as a city (be burned to the ground) as a symbolic act of saying, "He's had it with Israel. They'll be in the "penalty box" for awhile, to show God's "not to be messed with" period.
 - e) Jeremiah's other message is in effect, "The best thing the Israelites can do is give up. It will be better to be alive as a slave in Babylon than to be dead in the streets of Jerusalem. That's the reply that Jeremiah gave to the king in so many words.
 - f) However, Jeremiah's not done yet.
17. Verse 7: After that, declares the LORD, I will hand over Zedekiah king of Judah, his officials and the people in this city who survive the plague, sword and famine, to Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon and to their enemies who seek their lives. He will put them to the sword; he will show them no mercy or pity or compassion.'
- a) Imagine telling a king, "After you lose this war, you and all of your top officials will be off to Babylon. That is the one's who survive the fighting, plagues and famine that come with a time of war will be carted off hundreds of miles away to the City of Babylon. There you will be killed by Nebuchadnezzar because you choose to rebel against him." To be honest, none of this would have happened if the Israelites just listened to Jeremiah a while back!
 - b) OK John this is horrid stuff. Why should I think about it? Will God tell us, "off with their heads" if we don't use our lives as a witness for Him?" No idea. I just know that a life not used for God's glory is a waste of a life and it's not good. In a sense, bringing a human life to an end like this is merciful because to live it out without God is again a major waste!
 - c) Anyway, that's enough preaching on that topic. Back to Jeremiah.
18. Verse 8: "Furthermore, tell the people, `This is what the LORD says: See, I am setting before you the way of life and the way of death.⁹ Whoever stays in this city will die by the sword, famine or plague. But whoever goes out and surrenders to the Babylonians who are besieging you will live; he will escape with his life.¹⁰ I have determined to do this city harm and not good, declares the LORD. It will be given into the hands of the king of Babylon, and he will destroy it with fire.'
- a) Here's Jeremiah telling the king to make a public proclamation to tell everyone to give up and surrender to the Babylonians as again, it's a better choice than death!
 - b) Again understanding "palace politics" is important here. The Babylonians hadn't yet won against Egypt. If you look at the geography the Babylonians had to go through Israel on a path to Egypt. My point is the king of Israel was still holding out hope Egypt would win a major battle with Babylon and thus protect Israel's existence. Plus for the king to tell those fighting for Israel to give up would cause a mutiny and the king could die that way!
 - c) My point is it would be tough for the king to just say "give up" even though God Himself, in effect is the one giving the order to do so!
19. Verse 11: "Moreover, say to the royal house of Judah, `Hear the word of the LORD;¹² O house of David, this is what the LORD says: " `Administer justice every morning; rescue from the hand of his oppressor the one who has been robbed, or my wrath will break out and burn like fire because of the evil you have done-- burn with no one to quench it.
- a) I admit, I struggled with Verses 11 and 12 as they seem to be preaching to the king and his family (the leaders were all descendants of King David) to do the right thing or else God's wrath will break out. To grasp these verses, one has to read them in context of the verses both before and after them. Let me explain:

- i) What a leader fears the most is rebellion against those under him. If he tells say the soldiers fighting for Israel to quit, it'd start a major rebellion against Him. I'm sure Jeremiah realized all that. That's why these verses address the king and his family to "do the right thing no matter the cost".
 - ii) Yes it's too late for Israel to stop the invasion. Jeremiah's preaching however, one's eternal salvation is always an issue. Until that rebellion occurs, you're still ruling, so do the right thing and "rule correctly".
 - iii) It's a plea to do the right thing not because it'll change the inevitable, but because it is how God calls us to live. If one's called to lead, one must lead properly. That's a call to do the right thing.
 - iv) But John, doesn't the text say that "fire will burn out" if they don't repent in effect. I thought it was too late. Some argue that Jeremiah's editors threw this in here. I'd argue that it's a "hell" reference. It's the idea that eternal hell awaits anyone who is refusing to use their lives as a witness for God as they're not making him "Lord".
 - v) Either way, it's bad news for the king and the royal court.
- b) Does this mean we can lose our salvation if we're not a good witness for Jesus? The proof is "in the pudding" as the saying goes. Only God knows our hearts as to whether He's the Lord of our lives. How we act is the proof to those around us that we believe that. All I'm saying is "Don't mess with God as we're in big trouble if we do!"
20. Meanwhile, Verse 13: I am against you, Jerusalem, you who live above this valley on the rocky plateau, declares the LORD-- you who say, "Who can come against us? Who can enter our refuge?"
- a) Best to start with a quick geography lesson here. The old City of Jeremiah is up on a hill with valleys on three sides of it. The modern Jerusalem is much bigger and is spread over much of the surrounding area. The point is the Israelites thought they were safe within a series of walls inside of Jerusalem as they can see any army coming in any direction. For the residents of Jerusalem to even think they're city is impenetrable means they've forgot their history (that city has been conquered a number of times) and they underestimate the power of God. The Babylonians conquered Jerusalem by surrounding the city with a big army and starving out the residents. It's yet another reminder of "not to mess with God".
21. Verse 14: I will punish you as your deeds deserve, declares the LORD. I will kindle a fire in your forests that will consume everything around you.' "
- a) First the good news, we made it to the end of Chapter 21. Jeremiah will continue with all of this "threatening stuff" for a few more chapters. The topic of the book does change as it is not the same sort of horrid message from Chapter 1 to Chapter 52.
 - b) Now the bad news: God declares in this final verse here that Israel's will lose big time. So why the endless badgering of that nation? Why not just say "You're going to lose and you have to deal with the consequences for ignoring Me for a long time?" First to remember a simple fact that God loves us and will go "out of His way to draw us back to Him". If that isn't working then He'll make an example of us so future generations will know one can't mess with God and not suffer the consequences.
 - c) Jeremiah goes "on and on" to describe all the suffering that will occur before it does. It's a big warning to us never to mess with God or we too can suffer horribly as well.
22. That leads me back to "woe is me". Let's face it Jeremiah had his own set of "woe's" in this lesson and those still living in Israel at that time are about to get their own "woe is me" in a horrific way! The point to you and me is not that we can't seek God in horrific times. It isn't that we should not try to get all the help we can. It's the fact that God's in charge, we live in a fallen world and all of us who claim to be Christians need to use our lives as a witness for Him, even during the times of our lives where we're having our own "woe is me moments".
- a) In the meantime, we should regularly be seeking Him for wisdom and guidance, which is going to be the theme of my ending prayer. Speaking of which:

23. Heavenly Father, we thank You that You've separated us to be a witness for You. We know that means it won't always be easy. We also realize it's the greatest purpose one can have in life is to be a witness for You. Guide our lives. Give us with wisdom to live as You desire. May we have a strong sense of boldness to live as You desire. Guide us, protect us and help us to make the type of difference for You that You desire of our lives. We ask this in Jesus name, Amen