

Jeremiah Chapters 26-27 John Karmelich

1. If you've been reading Jeremiah so far, you'd recognize the phrase, "The burden of the Lord". It is used a number of times in this book. In this context it essentially means, "God wants me to preach this message and I have to do it because I can't stand not doing it! Yes, that idea leads perfectly to my lesson title. It is, "The price we pay to live the Christian life". In Chapter 26 Jeremiah "gets the blues" so to speak, as many people in Israel wanted him dead for saying God's going to destroy it (the Israel nation). Jeremiah gets on his "soapbox" here to give his standard repent or else lecture. The problem is that speech gets him arrested and put on trial for preaching what God told him to preach. To make a long story short, he survives the trial but it was close. Chapter 27 takes place a few years later. It's another speech to say in effect, "Babylon's going to rule everything in sight, so accept it and go live where you will be relocated as a witness for Me." Let's be honest, this isn't a popular message to preach, but he is stuck with "The burden of the Lord". So be it.
 - a) This leads me back to my lesson title, "The price we pay to live the Christian life". Living as God desires, let's be honest is hard work at times. We may have a love for what God is calling us to do, but that doesn't mean we can avoid plain old hard work. Most Christians I know in the world of ministry work very hard at it. They like me do it because they can't stand not doing it! They feel the "burden of the Lord" to use their life to make a difference for Him. Grant it not all Christians are called to be in the "Professional Ministry". The way I view living the Christian life is "If we're not on the front line fighting the battles directly, we need to be on the back line providing the ammunition (prayer)". God gives all of us at least one gift where we're better at something than most people. What God wants is for us is to find ways to use those gifts to make a difference for Him. That's what living for Jesus is all about!
 - b) The bad new is living that way, is we get spiritual resistance. Keep in mind the purpose of demons is to draw people away from God. Therefore, they're going to work to make all of us ineffective witnesses for God. They do not "waste their ammunition" so to speak. They exist because God created them to prove His power is greater than theirs! If you have ever why there's so much resistance to preaching Jesus, I'm positive demonic forces have much to do with that issue. Jeremiah like us get resistance because people didn't want to change the status quo. Still, I'm sure there are forces behind such actions.
 - c) That leads to the good news. It's "worth it". It's worth it for us, because obviously we are using our lives to make a difference for Jesus and that has eternal benefits. Then we must remember that some people will "get it" despite that resistance. When God puts it on our heart to do something, He's got a purpose behind it so it's not a waste of time.
 - d) Therefore, as we read of Jeremiah battling forces that oppose him and tell of all the horrid things that are about to happen to the Israelites, it's because God has a purpose for him to do all of this, first to teach those Israelites about trusting Him throughout our lives despite the fact we've messed up badly "so far". It's also a message of how God desires we live as a witness for Him. That message runs through the book and through the bible.
2. With all that out of my system, let me summarize these two chapters:
 - a) Chapter 26 appears to take place shortly before the first Babylonian invasion. For those of you who are new, let's do this real fast. Israel as a kingdom started with David roughly in the year 1,000 BC. At the time of his grandson, it split into two. The north one was called Israel and it was wiped out over hundreds years prior to Jeremiah. The south one's called Judah and that's who Jeremiah is preaching to. The big threat at the time was a city nation called Babylon. Within a generation of this chapter, Babylon will conquer all the countries in the Middle East including Judah and it'll all be part of the Babylonian Empire. A major reason Jeremiah was called to preach was because the Israelites had turned their collective backs on God and now He's going to let them suffer for failing to be a witness for Him!

- b) With all that said, God told Jeremiah to stand on the courtyard of the temple. Three times a year all the Israelites came to Jerusalem for a big feast. The Israelites were going through the motions of worshiping God, but their hearts were not in it, to put it mildly.
 - i) This speech appears to be the same as one made in Chapter 7. In that chapter, the focus was on what Jeremiah said. In this chapter the focus is on the consequences he suffered for preaching that message. Because this was prior to the first invasion the message is still "repent or be wiped out". As an illustration Jeremiah mentions a city in Israel where the tabernacle stood before David moved it to Jerusalem That city was destroyed by the Philistines before David was king. Anyway, the point is simply that unless the Israelites repent their country would be like that city.
 - ii) All of that leads into a trial over Jeremiah's preaching. The text mentions Micah, as in the Old Testament book of Micah. He lived about a hundred years earlier. The point there is the Jewish king at that time listened to Micah and Judah was spared punishment. Then another prophet named Uriah is mentioned. The short version is he preached during the reign of a fairly recent wicked king. That prophet who's not mentioned elsewhere in the bible was killed for preaching God's message.
 - iii) Anyway, after all the "bru-ha-ha" calmed down, Jeremiah escaped death, but those who lived in Israel refused to change their habits, so in that sense "it was a draw".
 - iv) So why have this whole chapter? I suspect it's to teach us what price we'll have to be a witness for Jesus. The bible never promises great riches in this life or even the promise of a long and prosperous life. God expects us to use our lives to make the type of difference that He desires. The length of our time frame is His business.
 - c) Anyway, all that leads to Chapter 27. This takes place some years later, during the rein of the last king. The two chapters go together as if to say, I started all of this at the time when I preached Chapter 26 and it's continuing until the "bitter end" which is near the time here in Chapter 27. The messages are meant as contrasts. Chapter 26 asked the Israelites to not turn to the false gods and repent or avoid captivity. Chapter 27 is now saying "it is too late for that" as a contrast to the Chapter 26 message. It's another accept the captivity and God will be with you during it. If you fight the Babylonians, you'll lose to the point of death.
3. OK John, assume most of us have been reading your Jeremiah studies to date. This is old news to us. How are these chapters different and why study them? The answer has nothing to do with us learning ancient Middle East history. It has to do with understanding what God expects of us as a witness for Him. We may not have to face death like Jeremiah, but if we're living as a witness for Jesus, both spiritual and human resistance is going to come. If we realize that, we can accept it as part of God's plan. To be a Christian means we won't bat "1000" as we use our lives to make some sort of difference for Jesus, but we won't bat "0" either. If you don't grasp my baseball references, it just means that not everyone we witness to draws closer to Him by our efforts. Realize that our heavenly rewards are not based on the number of people we save. It's strictly based on whether or not we're using our lives to make the type of difference for Him that He desires.
- a) Before I get started let me say a few words to those of you thinking, "I know all of this. Do I have to read on if I know that spiritual resistance and rejection are part of the game?" Yes I would encourage it. Not to be an expert on Jeremiah's life thousands of years ago. But to read how he handled it. How he stood strong for God and had boldness when facing lots of people who not only rejected him but wanted to kill him. Let's be honest, being bold as we use our lives for God is hard and it's easy to get discouraged. An inspirational story is often what we need to remind ourselves why He created us and what He expects of us as we go through our lives. That's the type of inspiration that underlies these chapters.
 - b) On that positive thought, it's time to read through Jeremiah's trials as we realize, if he can do that, what's stopping us from using our lives to make a difference for Him. As hard as it is to live the Christian life at times, if this is "reality", in effect what choice do we have. I am saying we all must bear "The Burden of the Lord". OK, then let's start on the details:

4. Chapter 26, Verse 1: Early in the reign of Jehoiakim son of Josiah king of Judah, this word came from the LORD: ² "This is what the LORD says: Stand in the courtyard of the LORD's house and speak to all the people of the towns of Judah who come to worship in the house of the LORD. Tell them everything I command you; do not omit a word.
- a) First let's give a time stamp. Most scholars date this speech prior to the first Babylonian by a few years. This king is the first of the final handful of kings who all failed to live as what God commanded them to do (lead the Israelites closer to Him and do His will). As I stated earlier, this chapter appears to be the same speech as one given back in Chapter 7. It's here not to repeat the same points but to explain what happened as a result of that speech.
 - b) In order to do that, Jeremiah had to highlight a few things he said to make the connection. A little more background would help here. Three times a year the Israelites were required to go to Jerusalem for big feasts. Yes I know I've been lecturing how the Israelites had as a whole turned from God, but they still went through these rituals as they're accustomed to doing them and the travel was a festive time. Anyway, since Jerusalem was crowded now, God said to Jeremiah in effect, "Take advantage of the crowds, go stand in the outer court of the temple where the crowds can see you and preach everything I tell you. Yes, we got another example of "The Burden of the Lord" here.
 - c) OK John, what does all of this mean to us? Do we have to go to say big sporting events as to hand out Christian literature to whoever wants to take it? I've talked to people who do that and they said, "You'd be surprised how many people will take our literature if we are not too obnoxious about how we preach it!" For most of us, we simply should pray about how God wants us to use our lives. Then we should consider what spiritual gifts we have and find ways to use them for His glory. That's our "Burden of the Lord" whether we like it not! With that said, let's get back to Jeremiah.
5. Verse 3: Perhaps they will listen and each will turn from his evil way. Then I will relent and not bring on them the disaster I was planning because of the evil they have done. ⁴ Say to them, "This is what the LORD says: If you do not listen to me and follow my law, which I have set before you, ⁵ and if you do not listen to the words of my servants the prophets, whom I have sent to you again and again (though you have not listened), ⁶ then I will make this house like Shiloh and this city an object of cursing among all the nations of the earth." "
- a) Here God tells Jeremiah the message God wants him to preach is "Repent or else". If God is God, doesn't He already know this will be a waste of time? Of course. However, there may be individuals in the crowd who'll draw close to God despite the horrible things that are coming. Obviously there will be millions of people through history who will read this book and realize, "I can't make the same mistake and draw closer to Him!"
 - b) Anyway, God told Jeremiah to preach "repent or else", so like us what choice do we really have when God tells us to do something. Like the old army joke, when our commanding officer tells us to jump, the correct question to ask is "how high?" We got to give Jeremiah a little credit for doing what has to be hard to do, "telling Israelites in Jerusalem for one of the big feasts to repent. Jeremiah had to know that would bring him resistance. Again, if God tells us to do something in effect what choice do we have when the burden is there?
 - c) So what are the specifics Jeremiah is preaching? Essentially it's the classic, "put our money where our mouth is" lecture. He's saying, "Hey you travel to Jerusalem for this festival, as God I appreciate it. However, rituals don't get you saved. Living as I desire does. That is to obey His commandments. By the time of Jeremiah, most of the prophets named in the bible have already come and gone. He's saying, you really want to please God? Great, go live as He desires. Turn from the false prophets and obey the commandments!
 - d) Finally he mentions a place called Shiloh. When the tabernacle first was set up in Israel, it was at a place called Shiloh. Around 1,000 BC, a war occurred between the Philistines and the Israelites. The short version is the Philistines won and Shiloh was destroyed. Yes they got the ark back, but that town where God's presence was, was dead at Jeremiah's time!

- e) The obvious point to them that Jeremiah is making is, God's presence was in Shiloh as the "ark of the covenant" and the portable tabernacle were there. Yet He allowed that town to be destroyed due to disobedience of the Israelites. If He allowed it then, what makes those Israelites think God won't "wipe this place out again" due to disobedience. I could just see the Israelites thinking, "Wait a minute. We're here for this festival. His permanent temple not a portable tabernacle stands here. God's not going to destroy this place, He's set us up as a witness for Him, He can't change that. Therefore, who are you to tell us otherwise?"
 - i) Let's just say resistance to what Jeremiah is preaching was building and yes it will mean that he's in big trouble for preaching what God told him to preach.
 - ii) Let's be honest, when we talk about Christianity to others, it's amazing to listen to all of the excuses people will give to not change their lifestyle. A lot of times it will come down to "I don't want to change" or "God knows how I am why should I told to change my lifestyle?" It can also be "I go to church almost every Sunday, why do I have to do more than that?" Remember the issue isn't salvation, it's what are we doing with that salvation? Are we using our lives as a witness for Him? Yes I have been pounding that point all through Jeremiah, but that's the underlying issue that he is preaching. OK we get that by now. So let's return to the text.
6. Verse 7: The priests, the prophets and all the people heard Jeremiah speak these words in the house of the LORD. ⁸ But as soon as Jeremiah finished telling all the people everything the LORD had commanded him to say, the priests, the prophets and all the people seized him and said, "You must die! ⁹ Why do you prophesy in the LORD's name that this house will be like Shiloh and this city will be desolate and deserted?" And all the people crowded around Jeremiah in the house of the LORD.
- a) Way back in Chapter 1 when God first called Jeremiah to the ministry, God warned him it would not be easy and people would resist his message. He was told to preach it anyway! Remember that this scene was fairly early in his ministry so here's Jeremiah warned what the results would be but he goes forward and does it anyway!
 - b) With that understood Jeremiah did what he was told and preached "repent or else" as he's instructed to do. So what was Jeremiah's reward for this? He was taken prisoner and told "he must die" for preaching the truth. So how are we supposed to be His witness to those He's called us to make a difference if our rewards is death threats? Let's be honest if there is no next life, it's not the best gig to have! So how does one develop this burden? I'd say it's a matter of grasping what the bible is really teaching (that our salvation depends upon our trust that Jesus is God, we can't earn our salvation and that the purpose of living is for us to use our lives to make a difference for Him. If we're living that way and desiring that the Holy Spirit guide us to make that difference we too can have that "burden".
 - c) Does that mean we have to face death daily for preaching Him like Jeremiah? For some it can be a yes answer, but for most of us, it's simply a matter of having the boldness to be a witness for Jesus and be willing to stand up for the truth no matter what the cost.
 - d) Believe it or not, that thought leads perfectly back to Jeremiah. He's saying in effect that if the Israelites don't repent, where they're living will be a "ghost town". He names one place that was a ghost town in Jeremiah's day. He's saying if God could wipe out the place that His presence stood once he could do it again! In other words, locations aren't important to God, being a witness for Him is! That's the message here.
 - e) By the way, noticed who seized Jeremiah. The priests and the prophets. The priests have a higher sense of accountability to God. They're supposed to know His word and the fact that God cares about accountability and can wipe places out where God calls us to be the type of witness He desires, but we fail to use our lives as a witness for Him. A logical idea here is the prophets are the false ones who were essentially saying, "God can't destroy the place where you're standing because His presence is here".
 - f) Bottom line you can sense the anger building because of what Jeremiah is preaching.

7. Verse 10: When the officials of Judah heard about these things, they went up from the royal palace to the house of the LORD and took their places at the entrance of the New Gate of the LORD's house. ¹¹ Then the priests and the prophets said to the officials and all the people, "This man should be sentenced to death because he has prophesied against this city. You have heard it with your own ears!"
- a) Word of what Jeremiah preached reached the "big guns" and now it is time for the trial to begin. A word about trials ancient court trials. It's not like they set a date and all parties returned for the trial. It was a "there on the spot" kind of thing. One of the jobs of the city leaders was to judge cases that aroused. Remember that Jeremiah preached this at a time when Jerusalem was crowded for a big holiday. In that atmosphere, the city leaders needed to be the judges. The prosecution were the "priests and the prophets". Notice that they're accusing Jeremiah of a capital crime. They said he should be killed for just suggesting the idea that God was going to wipe Israel "off the map".
 - b) OK John, this is horrible. However, we're only half way through this big book and at the least we know there is a Chapter 27, so I assume Jeremiah will survive this trial. What we are to learn here isn't so much the fact that Jeremiah survives as much as it is that we can suffer greatly just being a witness for God. We are never promised long life and riches in this world for trusting in Jesus. I live my life hoping for the best and expecting the worst. That's a good for Christians to view things. To take a stand for Jesus will mean opposition will arise. Let's face it, most people want to think their life means something just as it is opposed to surrendering their lives to His control. That's why Christianity can be a tough sell at times. It's the "let go of control" that's always the hardest part for people to accept!
 - i) So if we let go of control, how do we use our lives to make a difference for Him. It is not an excuse to be lazy. It's to live as He desires and using our gifts to make the type of difference for Him that He desires. It's about praying for His guidance and asking the Spirit to guide us as well as give us boldness to make that difference!
 - ii) OK then, off my soapbox and back to Jeremiah! I'll let him preach it!
8. Verse 12: Then Jeremiah said to all the officials and all the people: "The LORD sent me to prophesy against this house and this city all the things you have heard. ¹³ Now reform your ways and your actions and obey the LORD your God. Then the LORD will relent and not bring the disaster he has pronounced against you. ¹⁴ As for me, I am in your hands; do with me whatever you think is good and right. ¹⁵ Be assured, however, that if you put me to death, you will bring the guilt of innocent blood on yourselves and on this city and on those who live in it, for in truth the LORD has sent me to you to speak all these words in your hearing."
- a) Here's Jeremiah on trial for his life for the horrid crime of preaching what God told him to say. Notice Jeremiah isn't backing down on what he says. Instead, he's appealing them to the fact that they're gathered in Jerusalem for some big holiday to honor God. That's why he appeals to one of God's laws that says in effect, "If you put an innocent man to death, it means you'll be held accountable for it!" Notice there's still enough faith in God here that Jeremiah can appeal to their sense of "doing the right thing" here.
 - b) One has to admit Jeremiah has a lot of boldness here. It's not like he says, "I'm preaching what God told me to say, deal wit it!" Instead he appeals for his own life by saying, there is only one way to tell if I'm preaching what God told me to say, compare it to His Word, and watch the results of my predictions if you're not willing to trust in that Word! We get the impression Jeremiah isn't afraid to die here. Got to give him credit for having boldness to preach God's message despite the threat of execution!
 - c) By the way, that's a common thing in the bible. History records that most of the prophets were killed for standing by God's word. History also records that the apostles were killed for refusing to deny Jesus is God despite the threat of painful deaths. I'm not saying all of us will be martyrs. I'm saying having boldness for Jesus often comes with a steep price!
 - d) Anyway, Jeremiah says in effect, "do what you think is right, I'll still stand up for God!"

9. Verse 16: Then the officials and all the people said to the priests and the prophets, "This man should not be sentenced to death! He has spoken to us in the name of the LORD our God."
- Remember the "priests and the prophets" were the prosecuting attorneys. The officials as well as the crowd were saying, "Wait a minute, this guy claims to be speaking in the name of God. To do that requires being 100% right all the time. That's a tough price to pay. We should wait and see if what he predicts come true or at least live as God desires we live!"
 - That will lead us to two examples of other prophets. The first one we know of as he's one of the Minor Prophets. The second one is not mentioned outside of this book. That teaches us that not all prophets have their own books. As a simple example Elijah was considered one of the great bible prophets but doesn't have his own book. The point is don't assume one has to have their own Old Testament Bible Book in order to legitimately be a prophet!
 - Anyway, next comes the first bit of evidence to support Jeremiah:
10. Verse 17: Some of the elders of the land stepped forward and said to the entire assembly of people,¹⁸ "Micah of Moresheth prophesied in the days of Hezekiah king of Judah. He told all the people of Judah, 'This is what the LORD Almighty says: "Zion will be plowed like a field, Jerusalem will become a heap of rubble, the temple hill a mound overgrown with thickets.'
- Translation, about a hundred years earlier Micah (yes one of the Minor Prophets) made a prediction that Jerusalem and all of Israel will be wiped out. Obviously that prediction is similar to what Jeremiah predicted and in that sense it supports Micah as a prophet.
 - Notice that here is Jeremiah living roughly a hundred years after Micah and Israelites are considering Micah a prophet of God. It is sort of the ancient question of when did people know someone was a prophet of God or a book was bible worthy? Yes there were formal debates at different times in history, but I suspect people just knew.
 - The purpose of bringing Micah up is to say in effect, "before we judge Jeremiah remember that Micah preached pretty much the same message back when Hezekiah was king. That's going to lead us well to the next verse.
11. Verse 19: "Did Hezekiah king of Judah or anyone else in Judah put him to death? Did not Hezekiah fear the LORD and seek his favor? And did not the LORD relent, so that he did not bring the disaster he pronounced against them? We are about to bring a terrible disaster on ourselves!"
- When Hezekiah was king he heard what Micah preached. Micah never stated a timetable so Hezekiah "played it safe" and did all he could to fear God and seek His favor. That just means He lived as God expected him to live just as He expects us to live that way.
 - It also meant that no major disaster occurred against the Southern Kingdom in the days of Hezekiah. In fact, the Assyrian army (the big boys on the block in Hezekiah's day) as they were surrounding Jerusalem was wiped out one night by a single angel. (2nd Kings 19:35) tells us 185,000 Assyrians died that night. It also teaches us not to mess with angels!
 - Anyway, one of the reasons God did that is simply because that king sought God. That is made into an example of why the Israelites should listen to Jeremiah as he preached what is essentially the same message.
 - So much for the good news. Now comes the bad news:
12. Verse 20: (Now Uriah son of Shemaiah from Kiriath Jearim was another man who prophesied in the name of the LORD; he prophesied the same things against this city and this land as Jeremiah did.²¹ When King Jehoiakim and all his officers and officials heard his words, the king sought to put him to death. But Uriah heard of it and fled in fear to Egypt.²² King Jehoiakim, however, sent Elnathan son of Acbor to Egypt, along with some other men.²³ They brought Uriah out of Egypt and took him to King Jehoiakim, who had him struck down with a sword and his body thrown into the burial place of the common people.)
- Short version another prophet we never heard of named Uriah also preached during the time of a wicked king named Jehoiakim. The prophet knew this was a bad dude and that made him run to Egypt. The king sent men to find him and that prophet was killed.

- b) I could get technical and tell you about the fact that when Jehoiakim was ruling, they did have an alliance with Egypt. That alliance probably allowed the Israelite officials to go to Egypt to hunt down that prophet. Now that you know that, I'll let it go.
 - c) The more important message is here was some guy named Uriah who appears to preach a message similar to Jeremiah and Micah. How did God reward him for loyal service? He's caught in a foreign country running away, from a wicked Israel king and he got killed for preaching what God told him to preach. It makes you ponder, "Is it worth it?" I can't tell you how many times in my life I've been told how I am "wasting my life away" preaching God's truth. I've been told I'm not living up to my own standards. I've been told that this is all one big waste of time. Yet I simple know it's what God called me to do, so faults and all, I keep at it. If I end up dead or hurt for preaching God's truth, that's His business. Yes I'll do all I can to stay alive and protect myself, but persecution for preaching His truth is a price that Christians bear when we use our lives to make a difference for Him.
 - d) With that said, Uriah's reward for preaching God's word was death by a wicked king and the text says he was "buried in the common grave". That's like saying here's where we go bury the "John Doe's" of the world because nobody else claimed the body. Which reminds me, I've never given much thought to wear I'm going to be buried. As far as I'm concerned I could be buried in a common grave myself. It's never been a big deal to me. The way I've come to look at life is God called me to be a witness for Him, and when He's done with all He's called me to do "that's a wrap". OK enough of the morbid stuff, back to Jeremiah!
13. Verse 24: Furthermore, Ahikam son of Shaphan supported Jeremiah, and so he was not handed over to the people to be put to death.
- a) The chapter and story ends on the simple note that someone named Ahikam. There's not a lot of cross-reference to him. All we know is his son was appointed governor over that area after Nebuchadnezzar destroyed the place. (2nd Kings 25:22) Whoever this guy was, he is an official who in effect saved Jeremiah's neck. Maybe that's why God let his son be promoted after all the damage was done. The main point is that God wasn't through with Jeremiah. However, we have reached the half way point in the book, so take a break have your favorite beverage, congratulate yourself and we'll start on the 2nd half of this book.
14. Chapter 27, Verse 1: Early in the reign of Zedekiah son of Josiah king of Judah, this word came to Jeremiah from the LORD: ² This is what the LORD said to me: "Make a yoke out of straps and crossbars and put it on your neck. ³ Then send word to the kings of Edom, Moab, Ammon, Tyre and Sidon through the envoys who have come to Jerusalem to Zedekiah king of Judah.
- a) Chapter 27 takes place about a decade after Chapter 26. Most scholars see Chapters 26 all the way to Chapter 29 as one block with a similar message. However, these two chapters is enough for one lesson, so we'll just go from here.
 - b) Local politics are an important background point here. The Babylonians were on the move at this point in history. Therefore the smaller nations and cities like those listed in Verse 3 were having a big "Pow Wow" in effect to say, "How can we stop the Babylonians?" All of those places sent envoys to Jerusalem for this meeting. Therefore God says, Jeremiah here is a big chance for you to preach for me. Not only to the Israelites, but also to all the other nations in the area that they're going down big time!
 - c) Since Jeremiah wasn't a government official, doing something dramatic to get the envoys focused on Jeremiah was a helpful idea. With that said, time for a "yoke" lesson. This is a piece of wood placed around an ox's neck to guide them. Some translations say yoke and a thong referring to leather straps, not a bikini. The idea is this thing was tied around the animal's neck to make them go where the owner wants them to go. As a side note, Jesus said, "My yoke is easy", (Matthew 11:30). The idea is that to be a Christian means we are guided by what He says and teaches, but how He guides us is much easier than how the world or our natural instinct wants to guide us. Anyway, Jeremiah wears a yoke around his neck to get the attention of the convoy coming to Jerusalem for the big "Pow Wow".

15. Verse 4: Give them a message for their masters and say, `This is what the LORD Almighty, the God of Israel, says: "Tell this to your masters: ⁵ With my great power and outstretched arm I made the earth and its people and the animals that are on it, and I give it to anyone I please. ⁶ Now I will hand all your countries over to my servant Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon; I will make even the wild animals subject to him. ⁷ All nations will serve him and his son and his grandson until the time for his land comes; then many nations and great kings will subjugate him.
- a) First thing I want you to notice is how "general" the message is. On one hand Jeremiah is saying that the God of Israel is also the God of the world. For those of you who wonder if God ever claimed to be "God of everything", here is one of those verses. Then Jeremiah is getting to his main point: "The God who made everything and knows everything will let Babylon rule the greater Middle East for a while, so "deal with it".
 - b) The next thing to catch is the fact this won't be forever. Nebuchadnezzar will rule as well as his son and grandson. In the Hebrew, there is no word for grandson. The text's saying his son and "his son". If you study the book of Daniel, Chapter 5 describes in effect when Babylon fell to the Medes and the Persians. The king in charge then yes was the grandson of Nebuchadnezzar. Obviously Jeremiah didn't live to see all of this so that prediction is a strong one in the sense he predicted to the man how long that empire would last.
 - c) I'm fascinated by the fact that Nebuchadnezzar is called "God's servant". No "Nebi" didn't realize that although in the book of Daniel he did have a letter sent throughout the entire empire to effectively acknowledge God as God. I always suspect he got saved but we will have to find out one day in heaven.
 - d) Coming back to Jeremiah himself the reason for this meeting is to try to convince all these officials to "stop trying" because God says Nebuchadnezzar will win, so don't resist that!
 - e) An interesting bit of trivia here is that Jeremiah even says the "wild animals will be subject to Nebuchadnezzar. How does that work? I guess a lot of animals were caught to be used as food and supplies for the Babylonian army. I don't think it refers to say "lions" as much as I think it's saying, "This guy's in charge and everything that moves will be subject to his rule, so let's all accept it and make life a lot easier." With that said, he's not done yet!
16. Verse 8: " ` "If, however, any nation or kingdom will not serve Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon or bow its neck under his yoke, I will punish that nation with the sword, famine and plague, declares the LORD, until I destroy it by his hand. ⁹ So do not listen to your prophets, your diviners, your interpreters of dreams, your mediums or your sorcerers who tell you, `You will not serve the king of Babylon.' ¹⁰ They prophesy lies to you that will only serve to remove you far from your lands; I will banish you and you will perish. ¹¹ But if any nation will bow its neck under the yoke of the king of Babylon and serve him, I will let that nation remain in its own land to till it and to live there, declares the LORD." ' "
- a) Speaking of yokes, it gets an encore discussion in Verse 8. Jeremiah says in effect, a nation that doesn't submit to the yoke of Babylon is going down big time! Then Jeremiah lists all the professional "liars" who claim none of this will happen. Keep in mind the prime goal of demons, to draw people away from God. My point is I suspect a lot of these false guys (and gals) had visions and thoughts that the Babylonian invasion won't happen. I'm sure demonic forces are behind it simply because it was God's will for this to happen!
 - b) The bottom line here is Jeremiah says, "if you agree to let the Babylonians rule over you, it means you can stay home and live there. However, if you fight them, you're going down for the count and it's not good.
 - c) OK John, this is all interesting ancient history. Hit is with your "why we should care" bit. The prime answer is about accepting God's will. Yes many people live to old age and will not bow the knee to God until they're forced to after they die. We, like Jeremiah are called to preach "Trust God, even though it may be painful. Even though we won't be in charge. It's the idea that God's in charge and we must accept it to live as He wants us to live.

17. Verse 12: I gave the same message to Zedekiah king of Judah. I said, "Bow your neck under the yoke of the king of Babylon; serve him and his people, and you will live." ¹³ Why will you and your people die by the sword, famine and plague with which the LORD has threatened any nation that will not serve the king of Babylon? ¹⁴ Do not listen to the words of the prophets who say to you, 'You will not serve the king of Babylon,' for they are prophesying lies to you. ¹⁵ 'I have not sent them,' declares the LORD. 'They are prophesying lies in my name. Therefore, I will banish you and you will perish, both you and the prophets who prophesy to you.' "
- a) Here's the conclusion of Jeremiah's message to the foreign leaders visiting Jerusalem. He is saying they're "false prophets". Time for my standard line on how do we spot the false one when he speaks? Obviously they're not wearing a button saying "false prophets". I'd say the first clue is what are they saying and how does it line up with God's word. Then it is a matter of watching to see if they're putting their "money where they're mouth is"! I've also stated in the past that God gives some people in the church the gift of discernment of false teachers. My point is we don't need a Jeremiah to know a bad one. We can tell by a number of ways. To state the famous Christian saying, the more time one spends with the "real thing" (i.e., getting to know your bible) the easier it is to spot the false!
 - b) These verses are also proof that God doesn't just care about the Israelites. In this section, it is a warning to envoys of other nations to also do as God says. It also shows that Jeremiah didn't just preach to his fellow Israelites. He didn't say, "you aren't Israelites so too bad for all of you". Instead Jeremiah is telling them how they can preserve their lives by listening to what Jeremiah (and the true God) has to say.
18. Verse 16: Then I said to the priests and all these people, "This is what the LORD says: Do not listen to the prophets who say, 'Very soon now the articles from the LORD's house will be brought back from Babylon.' They are prophesying lies to you." ¹⁷ Do not listen to them. Serve the king of Babylon, and you will live. Why should this city become a ruin?
- a) At this point, Jeremiah addresses his fellow Israelites again. Remember that these are for the most part, the same bunch of guys who wanted to put Jeremiah to death in Chapter 26 as we read a few pages back. If nothing else, it shows that Jeremiah's forgiven them to the point of saying, God still wants you to repent despite what you tried to do to me all those years ago!
 - b) This scene (chapter) took place after Babylon's first invasion of Israel. At that time "Nebi" took away a lot of the gold items to put in "his trophy case". We don't know the specifics other than the fact the temple itself still stood until the third invasion.
 - c) All of this leads to an interesting question: What happened to the ark? This was a wood box lined with gold inside and out that represented God's holy presence. That box is not mentioned again. No it's not in a government warehouse like in the movie. Speculation is that Jeremiah hid it. Personally I disagree simply because I believe Jeremiah feared the idea of messing with what is holy to God. Some say it just got taken to Babylon and then the gold was melted down at that point. There's another theory that says it's now located in Ethiopia as there is a small group of Jewish people living there who guard a box that is fairly identical to that ark. Is it the same or a copy? Don't know. If it's real, why isn't the county of Israel demanding it back? Their answer is it's being kept safe until the Messiah shows up to rebuild the temple. The truth is no one knows and since there's no mention of it when the temple was rebuilt after the Babylonian captivity, it remains a mystery.
 - d) Anyway, Jeremiah's saying, "Nebuchadnezzar's not returning the stuff. Deal with the fact the Babylonians are going to win for a good while. If you don't want to die, accept this as fact and at least our city won't be in ruin!" Wait a minute didn't God know that Jerusalem would be wiped out? Of course. Still at this point Jeremiah's doing what he can to get the Israelites to repent and offering a positive promise to turn to God or else! Also that's what God's telling us as Christians to preach. A "too late to repent" is coming, so please turn to how God wants us to live before that too late "hits in the face!"

19. Verse 18: If they are prophets and have the word of the LORD, let them plead with the LORD Almighty that the furnishings remaining in the house of the LORD and in the palace of the king of Judah and in Jerusalem not be taken to Babylon.
- a) Here we get a clue that Jeremiah already knew what was coming. He's saying if the false prophets want to "prove themselves" let them pray to God that the rest of the temple stuff not be taken to Babylon. The underlying point is Jeremiah understood what disobedience to God meant and he understood ultimate destruction was coming. His way of providing proof that the false prophets were false, was to lay out this challenge.
20. Verse 19: For this is what the LORD Almighty says about the pillars, the Sea, the movable stands and the other furnishings that are left in this city,²⁰ which Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon did not take away when he carried Jehoiachin son of Jehoiakim king of Judah into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon, along with all the nobles of Judah and Jerusalem--²¹ yes, this is what the LORD Almighty, the God of Israel, says about the things that are left in the house of the LORD and in the palace of the king of Judah and in Jerusalem:²² 'They will be taken to Babylon and there they will remain until the day I come for them,' declares the LORD. 'Then I will bring them back and restore them to this place.' "
- a) Here's where Jeremiah "pours it on". He's saying all the stuff still part of the temple that were not taken away when King Jehoiachin was taken prisoner there, will be taken or at the least destroyed. We also get another hint that this won't be forever. Verse 22 tells us of the "day I will come for them". We're in effect back to the 70-year prediction that those Israelites (ok, their descendants and only some of them) will return to Jerusalem. All that means is the Babylonian captivity won't be permanent.
- b) That alone is a positive message to anyone who is "God's chosen". As long as we are one of His people (that is a belief that Jesus is God, Lord of our lives and paid the full price for every sin we ever did commit or ever will commit, we too can in effect, be spending some of our valuable time living in our own Babylon. What that city represented was living in a way where we seek everything but the true and living God. It is "Idol headquarters" so to speak. It's the location of the first organized rebellion against God (Tower of Babel). It is also mentioned near the end of the book of Revelation when it gets destroyed. It can be a literal destruction and it can also be the destruction of all systems that oppose how it is God expects us to live as a witness for Him.
- i) My point is the reason Jeremiah and the bible spends so much space dealing with the literal and symbolic issue of Babylon is it represents all there is in this life as a choice other than God Himself. Yes we as believers can easily get ensnared to live in our "Babylon" as we pursue things that ultimately are a waste of time. This isn't a lecture against hobbies. It's a lecture that God wants to be part of every aspect of our lives including our hobbies and interests. With hobbies, the classic question is, "Do you control it, or does it control you?" Anyway, that's why it's Babylon's such a big topic in the bible.
21. In the meantime, I'll end here as we each deal with our own "Burdens of the Lord" as God wants each of us to be a witness for Him. That's a good topic for our closing prayer as we ask for Him to guide us and emboldens us to make that difference for Him:
22. Heavenly Father, As always, first we thank You that You have separated us to be Your witness to a lost and dying world around us. Help us not to get caught up in our own "Babylons" and help us to use our lives as You desire as a witness for You. May Your Spirit guide us and give us the wisdom we need to make that difference for You. Give us the boldness to do what is Your will as You make it obvious to us how it is You desire we serve You. We ask this in Jesus name, Amen