

Jeremiah Chapters 36-37 John Karmelich

1. I was thinking of calling this lesson "Inside Baseball", which is an American expression to explain how a sport (or other things) works "behind the scenes". A better one, "Truth or consequences" hit me. It summarizes these two chapters better. Bear with me, as I explain quickly what happens in these two chapters and you can decide which title describes these chapters better:
 - a) Chapter 36 is mainly about the public and private reading of Jeremiah's writings to people in Jerusalem and then to the "head guys" and finally to the king himself. Jeremiah himself couldn't read it, because this was during a time where he was locked in prison because he preached of Israel's destruction. So he had his sole convert named Baruch do that reading to the Israelites gathered in the temple courtyard and then again to the royal family. Then the royal secretary did the final reading to the king. The text reveals those who heard this knew Jeremiah was the author. The text implies the Israelites heard all of it but it did not affect their lifestyle. The king burned Jeremiah's scroll piece by piece as he listened to it.
 - b) Chapter 37 takes place at a different time when the Babylonians had gone away to go deal with the Egyptians. (A big victory for the Babylonians, but that's another story.) While it was occurring the king was worried about then returning. This section was written while Jeremiah was put in prison. The king sent messages to Jeremiah effectively asking, if he'll pray for the nation, as he's nervous about the future. The king hoped Jeremiah would give him a different message from what he's been preaching essentially all adult his life. Let us just say Jeremiah preached the same thing. Therefore the king kept him there as he feared a rebellion due to his response.
 - c) The text also involves Jeremiah having to go into hiding because the "top officials" wanted him dead. We read that God helped hide both Jeremiah and Baruch then. Then while the Babylonians paused to deal with the Egyptians, and Jeremiah got released for a bit, we get a story of Jeremiah returning to his hometown for a visit. That got Jeremiah back in prison because they thought he was defecting. Even though he only did what was "logical" it still got Jeremiah in trouble and in a horrid situation. If nothing else it reminds us that being a servant of God means that at times He will let us sink low in order to accomplish His will.
2. OK that's enough horror stories for one introduction. What does any of this half to do with those titles you choose and more importantly, what does it have to do with our lives? I'll take those two questions in order:
 - a) First the "inside baseball" reference. These chapters teach us how the scrolls were written, as well as destroyed and a little about how they were inspired. It also teaches us how His word inspires people to believe what is written is actually the Word of God.
 - b) The "Truth or Consequences" fit the chapters well, because God's truth about what's going to happen to them is a reality they must face. Because they heard God's word and ignored what was said, they'll suffer the consequences for it. One of the things that I argue today's the fact that the bible is available for free to anyone with internet access. That means there is less excuse for most people to claim "innocence" of knowing what God's word says.
 - c) OK, too bad for them, what about us devout Christians who read His Word faithfully? Do we have incentive to learn this stuff and don't just say, "Because it's in the bible!" To begin we learn some "inside baseball" stuff about how God inspires the writing of scripture and teaches us the consequences of those who try to maliciously destroy God's word (this isn't about those who destroy bibles because they're worn out). I am going to describe how His word has amazingly survived lots of attempts to completely destroy it in the world.
 - d) Even if we agree with that stuff, what about applications? Isn't that why we're here? Yes, it is. First it's the reminder that God's word will come true despite horrible circumstances. This lesson is a reminder that being a devout Christian does not mean a leisurely life now. It's to realize we're called to make a difference even if it "hurts".

- e) Let's be honest, in these chapters we'll read of Jeremiah being arrested, put in prison and I suspect treated rather horribly. This is the reward he got for being faithful to God? Then we'll see that after essentially 20 years, he'll get only one real convert: "Baruch". What will he get for helping Jeremiah? He too had to run and hide as the king wants him as much as he wanted Jeremiah in prison. All in all, these are tough but necessary chapters to remind us that being a Christian is not a call to "comfortable and an easy life". Yes He will give us peace, but it's peace through difficulties not peace from difficulties.
 - f) As one of my mentors puts it, a Christian is one who is constantly joyful and constantly in trouble. I don't know about the rest of you, but that describes my life pretty well! If that's not you, "hang tight". Making a difference for Jesus means resistance will come, and yes it will be hard at times. The big question is, "Is it worth it?" If there's an eternity and Jesus is going to rule it, then yes it's worth it. It doesn't mean we should look for trouble. I would also argue that we should do our best to avoid physical pain. Jeremiah himself pleads for his life in these chapters. He doesn't say, "You got me, do your worse!" My point is simply that we must accept hardships are a part of life and especially the believer's life.
3. OK John, you're depressing me and we're not even done with the introduction yet. All I'm trying to do is prepare you to walk the Christian life. Yes we get joy through it. Yes God promises us we will endure and He'll give us patience. We also must accept the fact that resistance comes. Why? For starters, remember what Satan's goal is, to make us a bad witness for Jesus. He can't prevent our salvation, but he and his demons will work to make us a bad witness for Jesus. So why does God simply block them so we can be a more effective witness? To show that His power is greater than all the forces of the demonic world as well as those who simply don't want God in their life.
- a) Suppose we know all of that. Suppose we've been following Jesus for years and have had to deal with our own problems in life. Again, why should we study this stuff? To realize that it's all "worth it". Let's face it, we can all get down at times and think it's not worth it or question the reality of the eternal life. Do I ever have doubts? Of course. All Christian teachers have had his or her moments of doubt. How do we combat those doubts? It requires regular study of His word. When we read of Jeremiah having to play his version of "Truth of Consequences", it makes us realize that we too, must deal with those issues as well as those around us. Weather we like it or not, God's called us to be His witnesses to a lost and dying world around us. Grant it, a lot of people will reject that message and reject us for preaching it. I'm well aware of the fact a lot of people reject what I teach. But I also see people accept it and grow closer to God because of it. That makes all this worth it!
 - b) Hopefully that inspires you to want to read through this lesson. As I tell my regulars, it is not about learning Middle East History 2,500 years ago. It's about learning how He wants us to be a witness for Him despite the difficulties and hardships that go with what He has called us to do in life. Therefore we don't push on by trying harder! We do it by our trust in His Spirit to guide us so that we use our lives to make a difference for Him. Therefore, it is my prayer that each of you stick close to God and to His word so that together we can make a difference for Him in the world around us.
 - c) Hope that makes up for a tough opening. With that said, let's start on the verse-by-verse commentary on these two chapters. Thanks as always for reading.
4. Chapter 36, Verse 1: In the fourth year of Jehoiakim son of Josiah king of Judah, this word came to Jeremiah from the LORD: ² "Take a scroll and write on it all the words I have spoken to you concerning Israel, Judah and all the other nations from the time I began speaking to you in the reign of Josiah till now. ³ Perhaps when the people of Judah hear about every disaster I plan to inflict on them, each of them will turn from his wicked way; then I will forgive their wickedness and their sin."
- a) Let's start with the "time stamp". This is about 605 BC. The first Babylonian invasion will occur soon after this, based on text later in the chapter. Yes God knows the future, but still wants His people to repent to turn their lives over to Him in spite of future consequences.

- b) That's essentially why Jeremiah was called to preach this. God knew they would not listen to Jeremiah, but the message is there for people to know what "their options are!" Yes it is also for future generations like us to read these warnings to realize our options are too.
 - c) Notice the last part of Verse 3 says, "then I will forgive them". Yes God knows all things. I would argue He knew the Babylonian captivity was a necessity. This is a "what if" story: If the Israelites did repent, maybe God would have relented. That message is also for you and me. It's the idea of "it's never too late to repent until we die". So if that's the case, why not wait until the last minute to give our lives to Jesus? For starters, it's about reward we get for using our lives as a witness for Jesus. Next living the Christian life as hard as it can be at times is "worth it". As I pounded the point in the introduction, we're called to live as a witness for Him in spite of whatever hardships we must face in order to use our lives as well, "a witness for Him".
 - d) For what it's worth from the time God first called Jeremiah until the date given here, was about a 20-year period. So Jeremiah's already been at it a while. That leads to my first of many "inside baseball" questions of this lesson. Did Jeremiah already have messages God gave him written down, that he could collect as God told him to write here? Will this be a new message that God wants him to write? How did God communicate what He wanted to say to Jeremiah anyway? Was it taking dictation? Did God just put ideas in Jeremiah's head? I suspect the latter. When one reads through the bible, one can see the personalities of the authors come out. That's why I suspect God simply somehow made it obvious what He wanted to communicate to Jeremiah and then he put it down "his way".
 - e) Notice the message is pretty encompassing. It includes what He wanted them to know of the future of all Israelites (including those from the Northern Kingdom taken to captivity over 100 years earlier). It also included messages for other nations. If you've been reading and studying Jeremiah to date, you know we're covering old ground as Jeremiah tells us a lot of things about what will happen in the Middle East at that time.
 - i) So why now? Yes the first Babylonian invasion is about to happen. I suspect that's why the timing is what it is. God's saying, "Things are about to get bad and then it will get worse. That's why I need all of you to turn from the idols you've sought as I want you to use your lives to be a witness for Me to the world around you." The underlying idea is God's always reaching out to us to ask for repentance before it's too late.
 - f) Time for a little more "inside baseball". When we think of a scroll, we tend to picture one that's fairly small in size that unrolls from top to bottom when someone reads a message. A biblical scroll unrolls from side to side. Typically pages are placed in order within that scroll and read. That way if a mistake is made writing, only a page was replaced, not the whole scroll. Which reminds me, let me explain how copying Old Testament scrolls were kept accurate: The answer is each letter is also a number, kind of like A=1, B=2 etc. What the scribes did was they added up the numerical value of a page. If the numbers from all the letters on one page added up to say, 11,343 and when they copied it, the copy was off by a number or two, they started all over again.
5. Verse 4: So Jeremiah called Baruch son of Neriah, and while Jeremiah dictated all the words the LORD had spoken to him, Baruch wrote them on the scroll. ⁵ Then Jeremiah told Baruch, "I am restricted; I cannot go to the LORD's temple. ⁶ So you go to the house of the LORD on a day of fasting and read to the people from the scroll the words of the LORD that you wrote as I dictated. Read them to all the people of Judah who come in from their towns. ⁷ Perhaps they will bring their petition before the LORD, and each will turn from his wicked ways, for the anger and wrath pronounced against this people by the LORD are great."
- a) Here's the first we read of a minor character in this book named Baruch. He'll be involved in this book from here on out. Think of him as "Jeremiah's right hand man" as he'll write a few messages on Jeremiah's behalf. He's probably involved in the book composition.

- b) The other "inside baseball" thing to know about Baruch is he may be the only convert that Jeremiah got, or at least the only one recorded that he got in his lifetime.
 - c) Notice that God will make it possible for Baruch to address all the Israelites who will be in town for a "national fast" coming up. We don't read of Baruch questioning Jeremiah or ask how all of this will occur. He believes God and believes Jeremiah is God's prophet and he will do as Jeremiah commanded without asking questions. My point here is we don't have to be a great "Jeremiah" to be used by God. For all we know, Baruch's eternal reward may be as great as Jeremiahs simply because he obeyed him and served as Jeremiah's assistant.
 - d) The specific's here is that Jeremiah dictated to Baruch words into a scroll. No this isn't the book of Jeremiah as we know it. That's because what Baruch is going to write here will be burned before the chapter is over.
 - e) The next thing the text tells us is Jeremiah was "restricted". It's not the "arrest" that we read in the last chapter, as this takes place before the first invasion. What's probably going on is simply that Israelites were protecting the city. Since Jeremiah is preaching the Babylonian army is coming, I'm guessing he was either in jail or warned not to preach where Israelites gathered. Whatever the reason Jeremiah couldn't preach to the Israelites themselves. He's not sitting around feeling sorry for himself. He does what God told him to do which is to have this "other guy" Baruch preach what God wanted the Israelites to know what's going to come down the pike really soon!
 - f) So what's the day of fasting? The only day of the year that God ordained a fast is on "Yom Kippur" the holiest day on the Jewish calendar. It wasn't then because it doesn't match up with the time of year given in Verse 8. Let's be honest with the Babylonians nearby, it'd be natural to call for one. The Israelites must have hoped God would pull off a big miracle so they fasted hoping that God will rescue them from the Babylonians.
 - i) While I'm in the neighborhood, a few quick words on fasting. It doesn't mean God has to react to our request because we fast. It's just a way of showing God that we are serious about prayer in that He means more to us than eating. The reason God didn't respond is because the people refused to repent of their sins. OK, so be that!
 - g) Anyway, whether or not God respected this fast for it's original purpose, God did use that as an occasion to preach what He wanted to say which as most of us know by now "You'll lose big time, deal with it". Actually what God was hoping for is some repentance. This is for us to realize that God would have held off judgment if people seriously would go turn from their idolatry and back to God in the first place. Yes God knows all things and yes it was a waste of time and God knew that. Still He wanted to give the Israelites a change to prove themselves so they'd have no excuse when judgment came down the pike! We also get that same type of message that judgment is coming, deal with it!
 - h) Anyway, time for that event itself:
6. Verse 8: Baruch son of Neriah did everything Jeremiah the prophet told him to do; at the LORD's temple he read the words of the LORD from the scroll. ⁹ In the ninth month of the fifth year of Jehoiakim son of Josiah king of Judah, a time of fasting before the LORD was proclaimed for all the people in Jerusalem and those who had come from the towns of Judah. ¹⁰ From the room of Gemariah son of Shaphan the secretary, which was in the upper courtyard at the entrance of the New Gate of the temple, Baruch read to all the people at the LORD's temple the words of Jeremiah from the scroll.
- a) Anyway, here's the actual event itself. Verse 8 gives a date. To remind you of the kings, it is describing the fourth to last king (if memory's correct) who ruled during the time of the first Babylonian invasion and the exact date is in the wintertime before it. For those of you who like dates, we're taking 605BC. However, that's not on the final exam! What's I'd say is important is the act of obedience. God called Baruch to read and God used an event He did not ordain (so to speak) so He could again make His plans clear. The general idea that God wants to get across is He demands obedience,

- b) I don't know how God made it possible for Baruch to speak. However it worked out, the point is it did. Apparently Baruch had enough connections that he was allowed to address the crowd. He spoke from a balcony that overlooked a courtyard that's just outside of the temple itself. Again a lot of Israelites gathered there, as truthfully they feared for their life as the threat of the Babylonians was real. So while they were hungry and focusing on God Baruch read Jeremiah's letter from the balcony to them.
 - c) OK I beat that point to death, with an emphasis on the importance of obedience. Time for us to move on.
7. Verse 11: When Micaiah son of Gemariah, the son of Shaphan, heard all the words of the LORD from the scroll, ¹² he went down to the secretary's room in the royal palace, where all the officials were sitting: Elishama the secretary, Delaiah son of Shemaiah, Elnathan son of Acbor, Gemariah son of Shaphan, Zedekiah son of Hananiah, and all the other officials. ¹³ After Micaiah told them everything he had heard Baruch read to the people from the scroll, ¹⁴ all the officials sent Jehudi son of Nethaniah, the son of Shelemiah, the son of Cushi, to say to Baruch, "Bring the scroll from which you have read to the people and come." So Baruch son of Neriah went to them with the scroll in his hand. ¹⁵ They said to him, "Sit down, please, and read it to us."
- a) I keep thinking about how nervous Baruch must have been. He knew Jeremiah wasn't a popular person at that time. Let's be honest he was in and out of jail for preaching what God wanted him to say. In fact we're going to read of both Jeremiah and Baruch having to go hide after they finished all this. Surveys have been done showing public speaking is the number one fear people have, even more than dying. Once Baruch was done, I guess he thought, "Well, that's that, I'm done now".
 - b) Yet, the plot thickens. The names we have here are essentially the "top dogs" in Jerusalem at that time other than the king himself. Apparently they wanted Baruch to read the same speech to those "top dogs". If you've ever done public speaking the second time is usually a little easier. This time Baruch sat in a chair and read again Jeremiah's speech to them. I am sure Baruch wondered what would happen to him for doing this, but he probably just figured this is from God and if this is what He wants me to do, "Damn the consequences".
 - c) Yes I could give some boring details on who each of these people are and how they connect to other people in Israel at that time. I'm guessing we're all going to forget those names at a pretty fast pace. The main point is Baruch was obedient to God and that helped with his eternal rewards whether he realized it or not. (That's a clue for you and me, folks!)
8. Verse 15 cont.: So Baruch read it to them. ¹⁶ When they heard all these words, they looked at each other in fear and said to Baruch, "We must report all these words to the king." ¹⁷ Then they asked Baruch, "Tell us, how did you come to write all this? Did Jeremiah dictate it?"
- a) The fascinating thing here is the "big guys" heard the speech and the first question is, "Did Jeremiah write this?" That means they've had enough experience hearing Jeremiah speak to ask that question in the first place! The other thing they effectively said is "We must tell the king what you just said." Keep in mind that thought had to scare Baruch as he realized Jeremiah wasn't allowed to say these words himself because of the king. In that world, at that time, whatever the king says goes, and there's no appeal. Therefore, this was really a threat to Baruch's life for making speech number #2.
 - b) That leads me back to my title of "truth or consequences". The top guys needed to accept what God has spoken to them or yes deal with the consequences. That's the same idea we must accept as Christians. It's far more than just believing Jesus died for our sins. As I've been preaching all through Jeremiah the issue's about being a good witness for Jesus as to obey the commandments not to earn His love, but to be a good witness for Him. With the case of Jeremiah the way that they should know "it's the truth" is essentially the same way we know: Does it violate God's word? The Israelites were worshipping other gods and it's also about trusting in God through tough situations as that's what the Israelites didn't do as they still wanted to live however they wanted and just give God "lip service".

- c) Before I move on, let me ask the question most people wonder? What if the situation I'm dealing with can't be answered by the bible? First, pray for God's wisdom. I make that a part of my daily prayer simply to remind myself I'm trusting He's guiding my decisions. I would argue that if we're trusting that then make the best decision we can given whatever is the situation is. As I've been taught, God says in effect, "I've given you a brain, use it!"
 - d) Meanwhile, back to Baruch.
9. Verse 18: "Yes," Baruch replied, "he dictated all these words to me, and I wrote them in ink on the scroll."
- a) Keep in mind Jeremiah couldn't read this himself. He was somehow restricted. That could mean jail, but most likely it was simply at this point he preached defeat and the leaders in Israel didn't want the troops to be discouraged. My point is give Baruch a little credit for having the courage to admit that Jeremiah dictated it and he read it in spite of any and all consequences for taking "God's side" on this issue.
10. Verse 19: Then the officials said to Baruch, "You and Jeremiah, go and hide. Don't let anyone know where you are."
- a) This verse tells us that Jeremiah wasn't in prison at this time as he could "go and hide". It also is a reminder to us that standing up for Jesus can get us into trouble with people who don't want to hear God's truth even if it's painful.
 - b) If you think this doesn't apply today, try telling people that they're going to hell if they're refusing to believe Jesus is God and paid the full price for your sins. Then say we have to consider Him to be in charge of our lives for salvation. That's often when we too will meet resistance as people don't want to hear "Jesus is the only way" or "Good works won't be a test to get into heaven". Bottom line preaching God's truth is controversial to many today as it was back then. That's my sole point.
 - c) Meanwhile, the Israelite officials know that the king won't like this message so they give a good piece of advice, "Go run and hide". As we'll read later in the chapter, yes they did.
 - i) So while I'm in the neighborhood, let me ask is it appropriate for Christians to go "run and hide"? If you've read the New Testament, Jesus escaped from the crowd on more than one occasion as Jesus wanted to wait until a specific date when He's destined to "do His thing". Paul also was hid in a basket to escape after he got in a lot of trouble for preaching the bible. All I'm saying is there are times when we're to "stand our ground" and be a witness for Jesus and there are times where we will be led to hide for our lives. Either to hide or not hide are both given many times in the bible. That's the point. Obviously we're to pray and let God guide us that way!
 - ii) Enough of that. Back to Jeremiah!
11. Verse 20: After they put the scroll in the room of Elishama the secretary, they went to the king in the courtyard and reported everything to him. ²¹ The king sent Jehudi to get the scroll, and Jehudi brought it from the room of Elishama the secretary and read it to the king and all the officials standing beside him. ²² It was the ninth month and the king was sitting in the winter apartment, with a fire burning in the firepot in front of him. ²³ Whenever Jehudi had read three or four columns of the scroll, the king cut them off with a scribe's knife and threw them into the firepot, until the entire scroll was burned in the fire. ²⁴ The king and all his attendants who heard all these words showed no fear, nor did they tear their clothes. ²⁵ Even though Elnathan, Delaiah and Gemariah urged the king not to burn the scroll, he would not listen to them. ²⁶ Instead, the king commanded Jerahmeel, a son of the king, Seraiah son of Azriel and Shelemiah son of Abdeel to arrest Baruch the scribe and Jeremiah the prophet. But the LORD had hidden them.
- a) Now comes time for the next scene. Details include the fact it was winter. To keep warm, the king was sitting by a firepot (think a fireplace in the middle of a room). Apparently he had a "winter apartment" whatever that means. Most likely it was simply a place to live in Jerusalem that was suitable for colder weather of the wintertime. Anyway, the king heard what Jeremiah preached and as the words were read, he tore pieces off to be burned.

- b) The reasons the details were given about the firepot was so we could have a visual of the king burning Jeremiahs words as they were being read. The other reason is to show us of the "lack of seriousness" the king had for Jeremiah's prediction.
 - c) Keep in mind this king refused to believe Jeremiah was "tight with God". Obviously he is more concerned with keeping his job as a king and keeping the Babylonians at bay. Keep in mind also there were false prophets at this time preaching "all is well" and God's going to wipe out the Babylonians. The "proof is in the pudding" of who was on the march!"
 - d) Realize that this king isn't the first or last to try to "burn the bible". This kings great grand-grandfather was considered the worst of them and banned the reading of the bible. Even during the Roman period, there were periods where bibles were burned. One emperor in the 4th Century AD hated Christianity so much that anyone caught with a bible was killed and the bibles themselves were burned. I simply want us to realize the risks some people took in order to keep the Word of God alive all these millenniums.
 - i) Which leads us back to this king. I visualize a page of the scroll being read, then I see the king slicing off that page and throwing it in the fire. Because he was king, I don't think anyone had the nerve to question him. It shows you the officials feared the king much more than they feared God even if they suspected Jeremiah's words were God inspired. So does that mean if I refuse to take a stand for God, I'm not a real Christian? We all have moments when we're scared. The question to ponder is, "When the chips are on the line are we willing to take a stand for Jesus or not?" That's the underlying issue. For what it's worth, the more time we spend studying His word the more likely we are to take a stand for Him when it counts. If you did fail in the past, don't panic! Just keep studying and trusting Him as we grow close to Him. That's the underlying idea here.
 - e) Finally notice the last line of the text, "But the LORD had hidden them". Want to discuss a feeling of being safe? God hiding you! Yes we're "hidden in Him" in the sense that as long as we're trusting Jesus is God, etc., we can't lose our salvation! So if all of that is true what about say, Christians who die of cancer at a young age? Where is God there? Still with us as we be a witness for Him even in the worst moments of life. My simple point is God can do things to help us because "He's not through with us" yet and He also allows some to be a witness for Him even through death. Because God hid both of them it's an indication of God approving of Baruch doing what he was told despite the risks and more importantly that God's not through with using both of these men at this point in their lives.
12. Verse 27: After the king burned the scroll containing the words that Baruch had written at Jeremiah's dictation, the word of the LORD came to Jeremiah: ²⁸ "Take another scroll and write on it all the words that were on the first scroll, which Jehoiakim king of Judah burned up.
- a) The first thing to realize is God told Jeremiah in effect, "Remember that scroll I told you to write?" Well the king burned it. No problem, time for you to repeat the process. We'll see a little later in this lesson that the second scroll was also dictated to Baruch and it wasn't a word for word copy but a little different.
 - b) I kind of find it funny that God says in effect, "Since I got you and Baruch hiding together from the king, I got an assignment for you to keep you busy in the meantime". I assume it was done from memory, which is why it wasn't exactly like the first one!
13. Verse 29: Also tell Jehoiakim king of Judah, `This is what the LORD says: You burned that scroll and said, "Why did you write on it that the king of Babylon would certainly come and destroy this land and cut off both men and animals from it?" ³⁰ Therefore, this is what the LORD says about Jehoiakim king of Judah: He will have no one to sit on the throne of David; his body will be thrown out and exposed to the heat by day and the frost by night. ³¹ I will punish him and his children and his attendants for their wickedness; I will bring on them and those living in Jerusalem and the people of Judah every disaster I pronounced against them, because they have not listened.' "

- a) Remember that Jeremiah was hiding from the king. Yet God told Jeremiah to tell the king in effect, "Hey buddy, you mess with the bull, you get the horns". Specifically, Jeremiah is saying, the Babylonians are coming and they're going to destroy this place! As to the king himself, Jeremiah is to tell him that his dead body will be 'thrown out in the streets' which means he won't have a proper burial. Next Jeremiah states that his children will suffer as well. Going back to the history of that country, he a son who ruled, but he ruled only for a few months. Remember the "royal court" sat around as the king burned the scroll. None of them said anything. Bottom line God lays out some predictions to show that He's never to be messed with! Yes the predictions also state the "standard horror" that the kingdom will die. However, I assume most of us know that by now.
 - b) While I'm in the neighborhood, let me ask, how do we destroy a bible without getting into a lot of trouble? I think a lot of it is based on intent. If we're a devout Christian and we've worn out a copy of the bible and just want a new one, we're not in trouble for destroying a copy that's worn out. If we're burning bibles to make the anti-Christian statement, I'll just say I want to not be in their shoes on judgment day! What if we spent years hating what it says but then gave our lives to Jesus? Exhale! Jesus died for all our sins!
 - c) Coming back to Jeremiah, the point is these people refused to listen to Jeremiah and not it is consequences time! Just as people today must accept the consequences of rejecting God when they face His judgment.
14. Verse 32: So Jeremiah took another scroll and gave it to the scribe Baruch son of Neriah, and as Jeremiah dictated, Baruch wrote on it all the words of the scroll that Jehoiakim king of Judah had burned in the fire. And many similar words were added to them.
- a) The final verse of this chapter states that Jeremiah did the dictating again and Baruch did the writing again. We also get the reference to the fact it wasn't exactly the same as it was given to the king a few verses back. So was this the version that made the final cut? Most likely yes. The way Jeremiah was written was he collected his recollections late in his life possible with writings in hand from different times in his life. (Hey I said this lesson had a lot of "Inside baseball".) OK then, Chapter 37, which takes place years later.
15. Chapter 37, Verse 1: Zedekiah son of Josiah was made king of Judah by Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon; he reigned in place of Jehoiachin son of Jehoiakim. ² Neither he nor his attendants nor the people of the land paid any attention to the words the LORD had spoken through Jeremiah the prophet.
- a) The first thing to realize is this section talks about the final Israel kingdom. The guy from the last chapter was "two kings ago". That king's son ruled for a few months and now the last one is the uncle of the last king is on the throne. A little background on this king may be helpful here. We're close to the final wipe out of the Israelites. The leaders under that king were busy appealing to Egypt to help the Israelites. Apparently we're at the point in their history where the Babylonians stopped their siege on Jerusalem to go face Egyptians at that moment. This will all become clear later in the chapter. The point here is because the Babylonians broke off their siege, no one was taking Jeremiah seriously that Babylon's going to return to wipe out the land of Israel once and for all.
 - b) That leads us to Verse 3:
16. Verse 3: King Zedekiah, however, sent Jehucal son of Shelemiah with the priest Zephaniah son of Maaseiah to Jeremiah the prophet with this message: "Please pray to the LORD our God for us."
- a) Let's be honest with the fact that the Babylonians had already attacked Jerusalem twice in their recent history and the fact they're "still in the neighborhood", the king had to realize, Jeremiah's "tight with God" so let's have him pray for us. Roughly 100 years earlier, God had an angel wipe out the Assyrian army for trying to destroy Jerusalem. In that case, the king of the Southern Kingdom (Hezekiah) did repent, so that's different from the story we have here. The story about Hezekiah and Isaiah praying to God and a single angel wiping out that army is told in 2nd Kings 19, Verse 35 among other place in the bible.

- b) Anyway, the king figured, "Hey it worked 100 years ago, let's see if Jeremiah really is tight with God and can help end this situation!"
17. Verse 4: Now Jeremiah was free to come and go among the people, for he had not yet been put in prison. ⁵ Pharaoh's army had marched out of Egypt, and when the Babylonians who were besieging Jerusalem heard the report about them, they withdrew from Jerusalem.
- a) Here we get the biblical reference to the fact that the Babylonians stopped their siege long enough to go fight the Egyptian army. Realize the Babylonians defeated Egypt some years back in a famous battle near Babylon. So the Egyptian army was smaller at this point. The joke I liked was is the Egyptians saw the Babylonians coming and said, "Check please!" In reality, it was a second defeat for Egypt and they became part of the Babylonian Empire.
- b) Anyway, this part of the story took place during the time the Babylonians withdraw from their siege of Jerusalem to go deal with Egypt. I'm sure the false prophets were cheering at this point thinking they were right all along! Anyway, with the Babylonians not being any sort of threat at the moment, Jeremiah was free to come and go as he pleased. That will be a significant fact when we get to Verse 11. Meanwhile Verse 6.
18. Verse 6: Then the word of the LORD came to Jeremiah the prophet: ⁷ "This is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: Tell the king of Judah, who sent you to inquire of me, 'Pharaoh's army, which has marched out to support you, will go back to its own land, to Egypt. ⁸ Then the Babylonians will return and attack this city; they will capture it and burn it down.'
- a) With the residents of Jerusalem feeling good that the Babylonians had withdrawn, God is using this moment to preach to Jeremiah again. The message is in effect, "The Babylonians are going to defeat Egypt big time and then they're going to come back to wipe you out!
- b) Keep in mind that the top staff of the Jewish king thought Egypt would rescue them!
- c) Before we move on, when we start depending upon the "world" and not God to rescue us from an eternal fate, realize we're barking up the wrong tree! So does that mean we can't have a non-Christian doctor in a bad situation? Of course not. We never know who God can and will use to help us. The point is our ultimate trust comes from Him!
- d) Meanwhile Jeremiah's still doing what God called him to do! Preach His truth in spite of what was the present situation. It's another reminder that God's truth still stands and we will face the consequences for rejecting that truth.
19. Verse 9: "This is what the LORD says: Do not deceive yourselves, thinking, 'The Babylonians will surely leave us.' They will not! ¹⁰ Even if you were to defeat the entire Babylonian army that is attacking you and only wounded men were left in their tents, they would come out and burn this city down."
- a) Whoever says God doesn't have a sense of humor, has obviously never studied their bible carefully enough. When Jesus said, "get the log out of your eye before you can see a speck in your brother's eye" is cute and shows a little humor. (Matthew 7:5, by the way.) When I read the text here saying, "If only the Babylon wounded men of attack Jerusalem, they are still going to win and wipe out this city." Yes it's a scary thought if we were there, but I'd say also shows the bible has a grain of humor in describing things! Bottom line, Jeremiah is saying the Israelites will still lose even though the Babylonians have withdrawn for the moment. Despite all of that, a key point is the Israelites still refused to believe Jeremiah and yes the consequences are still coming soon.
- b) With that said, it's time for the story to switch focus back on Jeremiah's own life:
20. Verse 11: After the Babylonian army had withdrawn from Jerusalem because of Pharaoh's army, ¹² Jeremiah started to leave the city to go to the territory of Benjamin to get his share of the property among the people there. ¹³ But when he reached the Benjamin Gate, the captain of the guard, whose name was Irijah son of Shelemiah, the son of Hananiah, arrested him and said, "You are deserting to the Babylonians!"
- a) With the "coast clear" for the moment, Jeremiah decided he wanted to go home for a bit.

- b) You may recall from Chapter 32, that Jeremiah "did a real estate deal" to buy a field that's in his hometown. When that occurred Jeremiah was under "house arrest" and that deal of transferring the real estate took place at that time. Now that the "coast is clear" as there is no army surrounding Jerusalem, Jeremiah decides it's time to go to his hometown to deal with the land he had. Why? Scholars have debated that for millenniums. I suspect it was a simple matter that since Jeremiah had no children, he wanted to travel to his hometown in Israel (a few miles away if memory is correct) to set his "affairs in order". It was to show the residents of his hometown who owns this land and who'll have it after it's all over.
 - c) Am I positive the reason, no, but it makes sense. The important point is as he was leaving town, he got arrested and being accused of deserting to the Babylonians. Yes that army is no longer surrounding Jerusalem but they were still "in the vicinity" dealing with Egypt.
 - d) So why was it such a threat to Jerusalem if Jeremiah left? Because he had a reputation for preaching against the Israelites and the leaders must have feared Jeremiah telling those in the Babylonian army that God said they'd win. That leads us to Verse 14.
21. Verse 14: "That's not true!" Jeremiah said. "I am not deserting to the Babylonians." But Irijah would not listen to him; instead, he arrested Jeremiah and brought him to the officials.¹⁵ They were angry with Jeremiah and had him beaten and imprisoned in the house of Jonathan the secretary, which they had made into a prison.
- a) Picture Jeremiah thinking, "You know this is a good time to go visit the relatives. I can go check out the land I bought and settle my affairs with my relatives. Then all of sudden he got arrested, beaten imprisoned and put in prison. Jeremiah had to think, "All of this just because I wanted to visit my family". So was it God's will for Jeremiah to escape town? I hold the view when the bible doesn't tell us what to do, we simply make the best decision we can with the information at hand. It was logical for Jeremiah to make this trip now. I also believe it was God's will for Jeremiah to be imprisoned at this time as it was a reason for Jeremiah to trust God more in spite of everything that is happening!
 - b) As most veteran Christians know, God allows us to go through things to test us and as to draw us even closer to Him during the worst of times. That leads to the next story point:
22. Verse 16: Jeremiah was put into a vaulted cell in a dungeon, where he remained a long time.¹⁷ Then King Zedekiah sent for him and had him brought to the palace, where he asked him privately, "Is there any word from the LORD?"
- a) Notice the king knew that Jeremiah was thrown in a dungeon. The king figured this guy's tight with God maybe I should ask him what's God's plan for our country. It also shows it was God's will for Jeremiah to be arrested so he'd be around for the king to talk to him!
 - b) As I stated earlier, the king probably thought Isaiah prayed for Hezekiah about 100 years earlier so maybe I can ask this guy to "pray for me" since he's stuck here in jail. Notice the lack of effort to get Jeremiah released. Just a "pray for me since you're stuck here" request.
23. Verse 17 (cont.): "Yes," Jeremiah replied, "you will be handed over to the king of Babylon."
- a) The big difference between Hezekiah back then, versus this king is this guy refused to act based on what Jeremiah was preaching.
 - b) Keep in mind why the king was so afraid. The Babylonians put him in power. Now He is actively rebelling against them. Therefore even with the Babylonians withdrawing, he had to be scared of their possible return. That's why he visited Jeremiah in the first place. Yet he refused to repent and turn to God and essentially give up. Therefore Jeremiah's saying the consequences are coming when we ignore God in the first place.
24. Verse 18: Then Jeremiah said to King Zedekiah, "What crime have I committed against you or your officials or this people, that you have put me in prison?¹⁹ Where are your prophets who prophesied to you, 'The king of Babylon will not attack you or this land'?²⁰ But now, my lord the king, please listen. Let me bring my petition before you: Do not send me back to the house of Jonathan the secretary, or I will die there."

- a) Jeremiah used this moment to plea to get out of the prison. He didn't say, "God allowed me to be in prison at this time, so I'll accept my fate. Instead it was Jeremiah saying, "OK, I said my peace, so get me out here your highness. I'd like to live a little longer not here in prison, if it's ok with you, so please get me out of here!"
 - b) Believe or not this leads me to explain what Jesus meant by "turn the other cheek" (From Matthew 5:39). People falsely think that expression means if someone hits us, we should let them hit us over and over again. What it really means it to point out the faults of what was done, without physically striking back. That's what Paul did when he was on trial in Acts facing the Jewish high priest. (Acts 22-23). Here was Jeremiah falsely arrested due to the false charge of desertion and he uses the opportunity to point out the wrong doing!
 - c) Unfortunately, to be witness for God, often means we must bear false accusations! It also means we can suffer essentially for being a good witness for God. That's what Jeremiah's going through at this moment.
 - d) Keep in mind that Jeremiah is probably half starved to death at this point. For Jeremiah to return to where he was sentenced in his mind meant certain death. That's why he pleaded to not go back since the had the king in earshot.
25. Verse 21: King Zedekiah then gave orders for Jeremiah to be placed in the courtyard of the guard and given bread from the street of the bakers each day until all the bread in the city was gone. So Jeremiah remained in the courtyard of the guard.
- a) Bottom line, the king thought he could do a compromise. He said Jeremiah has to go back to prison but he promised to bring him daily bread until "supply ran out". Remember the Babylonians were not attacking Jerusalem at that moment, so the editorial comment about the food running out was probably an editorial comment added later.
 - b) Also keep in mind the king refused to repent and surrender. He thought he was doing the right thing to preserve the kingdom and "save face" by keeping Jeremiah in prison. Yet he is the one who will soon face the consequences for opposing God's will. If you recall from Chapter 34, this king will have his eyes put out with his last sight being seeing his kids be killed in front of him. Details of that will come up in Chapter 39, so stay tuned for that.
 - c) In other words, this king will face the consequences for opposing God's will.
26. All of that leads back to my title, "Truth or consequences". The common theme running through both chapters is people had to face the truth of what God is saying or suffer the consequences. It can seem like we're doing the right thing (e.g., put Jeremiah in jail so he wouldn't preach against any act of surrender), but life comes down to doing what is His will.
- a) OK John, most situations are not that obvious. We usually don't know what is His will at any given moment. That's why it's necessary to pray for His wisdom on a regular basis as we make the best decisions possible given the information that's in front of us! That's how we live out the Christian life as a witness for Him. Making the best decisions we can with the information we have, living by biblical principals as we use our lives to be His witness to the world around us. With that tough but necessary truth stated, let's end in prayer.
27. Heavenly Father, first we express our gratitude that You've picked us to be Your witnesses to the world around us. We realize that means we get to live in Your presence forever. We'll serve You then as we do now. We don't know how much time you'll give us to live in this world, but we do ask that Your Spirit guide us so that we use the time You've given us to be a witness to the world around us. Make it obvious to us what it is You desire of us at this moment. Then give us lots of boldness so that we live as it is You desire as a witness for You. We ask this in Jesus name, Amen