

1. I'll be the first to admit, the last few chapters have been tough going. Let's be honest who wants to read numerous lessons on God's judgment when we'd rather hear about His love for us, or we could be out doing other things? Why's Jeremiah effectively opening his book with a long speech on how God's going to judge Israel for bad behavior? More importantly, why should we care about all this ancient history? What does all this have to do with us? If we're saved by His grace and we can't mess that up if we tried, why should we worry about His judgment? After all, if we are saved no matter what, why should we even think about His judgment? The answer is the main topic of this lesson. My first point here is it matters a lot. Let me explain:
 - a) Let's start by remembering that judgment is more than eternal judgment. The issue here's on being a good witness for God, both individually and collectively. "Group judgment" is a reality just as much as individual judgment. For example, if our church fails to be a good witness for Jesus, I've seen God bring many a church to an end one way or another. If we fail as a "Christian nation" (The Christians within that nation) fail to stand up and say here is how the God who created us expects us to live, yes, He can and does bring such nations to an end. As I like to say every now and then, sometimes its better to shoot a horse to put it out of its misery than to try to save it! Israel at the time Jeremiah had gotten to a point of being "beyond fixing" and God's only option left to make His people a witness for Him by exiling them including have lots of people die as for an example to future generations of "Do this and you'll suffer as badly as well!"
 - b) Need some modern examples? The sin of public acceptance of homosexuality is common as most of us know by now. Pornography's a billion-dollar business. Many get away with all sorts of sins all the time. God doesn't expect us to fix all these things. He does expect us to stand up and say, "We won't live like that, because we refuse to be a bad witness for God in spite of this!" God doesn't expect us to act like we're better than others, it's a matter of public awareness of the fact that we choose to live as God desires we live in the world, despite how the world around us is acting! We can't stop all the things that are destructive to a society but we can be a witness to the world in the sense that telling who's willing to listen that not living as God desires not only leads to eternal damnation but also leads to a life of misery. That's the message Jeremiah was told to preach and that's also the message we as Christians are called to preach. That's why we study this book!
2. With that tough speech out of my system, let me summarize these two chapters, and then we will start on the verse-by-verse commentary!
 - a) Let's start with the fact we're finishing a five-chapter speech by Jeremiah. (As I love to say, "No chapter breaks in the original text".)
 - b) He starts Chapter 5 with the question, "Is there anyone left around here that seeks God?" I picture Jeremiah walking around Jerusalem looking at how people are acting as he thinks, "Is there anybody around here that actually fears God's judgment based on how they act? Am I the only one left around here that thinks about these things?"
 - i) There's a fairly famous story in Genesis of Abraham "haggling" with God. He asks God in effect, "Will You destroy Sodom and Gomorrah if there are 50 people there who care about living as You desire? What if there are 45, 40, 35, etc.?" I'd bet that if there was one person left in those cities that cared about pleasing God, He'd not use them as an example for all history to contemplate. (All of that is from Genesis 18: 16-33, except Abraham stopped haggling at 10 people).
 - ii) The reason I bring that up is God and Jeremiah are effectively going through the same motions, only this time it's over the place where God separated His people to be a witness for Him. Bottom line is they're failing at what they're called to do as we read of Jeremiah "calling them out" for it.

- iii) Does this mean Jeremiah was a better person than everyone else there? Of course not. It simply means others there were not interested in seeking God and Jeremiah (along with us) are called to be a witness to a "lost and dying world" that way! It's what we're supposed to do as Christians. Be a witness to the world around us!
 - c) So after a bunch of verses about searching for believers, Jeremiah describes the upcoming destruction like "attack animals" (a lion, a wolf and a leopard). It's Jeremiah's way to say, "Judgment is coming. You all can avoid it by turning to God or suffer the consequences!"
 - d) Then Jeremiah explains why judgment's coming whether you like it or not! The reminder to us is that none of us know how long we'll get to live. Therefore we can use that time to only enrich our own lives or also use it to make a difference for Him, which is why we're created in the first place.
 - e) Chapter 5 goes on to discuss both the rich and the poor (in terms of knowledge about God and His judgment) have individually and collectively turned their backs on God. In effect it's part of the same opening scene of these chapters of Jeremiah looking for anyone who cares about having a relationship with God. Bottom line is the residents of Israel are going through their daily motions of temple worship but for all intents and purposes no one can be found who truly wants to seek God in their lives.
 - f) Therefore, Jeremiah announces, "OK everyone, you don't want to live by God rules? You want to worship other things, then God's going to give you what you want". There's going to be an invasion from the north and everything you know is going to be destroyed. That is how judgment will come on Israel. That's the essence of these two chapters.
 - g) Two questions came to mind as I thought about these chapters? The first is why Babylon? After all God could have had any nation conquer Israel. Why them, and of course why do we need to know that? To answer, first remember that I sometimes refer to the bible as "A tale of two cities" to steal a famous book quote from Charles Dickens. The bible's got a lot of space dedicated to the origins, history and destiny of both Babylon and Jerusalem. The last two chapters of Jeremiah deal with Babylon's destiny as a hint. My point is Babylon is God's symbol of everything that God "isn't" and has all the world has to offer! Therefore, it is the perfect nation to conquer Israel in the sense of, "You don't want Me (God) to rule over your lives, great I'll give you all that you want and watch the consequences unfold!"
 - h) Finally, we need to discuss the all too important "why should I care" subject. Let's say we are using our lives to make a difference for God. Why should I care that 2,500 years ago, a great empire conquered Israel and it's symbolic of turning from God? It's to remind us of what God called us to do, be a witness for Him. In effect "Babylon is here" for all who will not turn to God. It's the sad reality that whatever joy one gets in life, is all that they're ever get. It's for us to preach the emptiness of only living for this life! Just as judgment came to those Israelites back then, so judgment in one form or another is coming to those who will refuse to care about the Gospel message.
3. Bottom line, this section of the bible is all about judgment. Yes "judgment" is my lesson title. Yes, I'd much rather talk about more positive things that the bible teaches. However, we must accept the fact of judgment day coming, not just for unbelievers but believers as well! For believers, God will judge us based on what we did as a witness for Him! Yes that's tough stuff, and it's designed to keep us on our toes. Like the Israelites 2,500 years ago judgment may come in the form of national trouble or even judgment against our church or our family. The point is there's a price to be paid to turn from God in our lives. Even if we're doing what's right, sin is always knocking on the door. That is why we need to stick close to God and be accountable to other believers.
- a) OK then, lots of details to discuss in these chapters! Let's see what God wants to teach us on the topic of judgment as we all need to hear it as much as any nonbeliever does! These two chapters end Jeremiah's five chapter speech on the topic of "Judgment's coming, it's a bad thing and we'll all suffer for the sin of turning from God in our lives!" By now you get the point about judgment. Let's see what Jeremiah has to say about it now:

4. Chapter 5, Verse 1: "Go up and down the streets of Jerusalem, look around and consider, search through her squares. If you can find but one person who deals honestly and seeks the truth, I will forgive this city.
 - a) The first thing God wants to do is "test" Jeremiah. God somehow tells him to look around and see why judgment is necessary. Remember that Jeremiah has already preached about God's judgment coming and now God's telling Jeremiah in effect, "I'll show you why all of this is necessary, go look around town and see who's worshipping Me and who's not!"
 - b) Notice God says if Jeremiah can find "one righteous person" He'll hold off on judgment!
 - i) In that sense, this scene's similar to Abraham's "haggle with God" that I mentioned in my introduction. Jeremiah is going to "look around", as we'll see in a moment.
 - c) First let me discuss with God meant by finding a "saved" person. This isn't about being a perfect person. Nobody is. The criteria is honesty and "seeks the truth". It's a short way of asking if anyone studies their bible enough to care about God and then "puts their money where their mouth" is by acting in a way that God wants us to act.
 - d) Let's be honest, most people are so wound up in their own things, they don't really think about God other than maybe an hour a week at church if that. God's always looking for a kind of person willing to be used by Him to make a difference for Him! That's the point of the question!
5. Verse 2: Although they say, 'As surely as the LORD lives,' still they are swearing falsely."
 - a) Translation: They claim to be worshipping God, but they're spending their time and cash on other things. I'm not claiming we have to spend "24/7" in church or give every dollar of our income to Christian causes. I'm saying if we really care about God, we'd show it in one way or many ways! If we really cared about serving God we'd do more than say go to church once a week then forgot about Him every hour of the week. That's what the Israelites were guilty of. I'm sure a lot of them still did synagogue once a week. I picture God and Jeremiah asking, "Is that it? You call that a commitment" Realize what God desires of us, a close intimate relationship with us. That's why He wants to get us in that sort of close relationship with Him!
6. Verse 3: O LORD, do not your eyes look for truth? You struck them, but they felt no pain; you crushed them, but they refused correction. They made their faces harder than stone and refused to repent. ⁴ I thought, "These are only the poor; they are foolish, for they do not know the way of the LORD, the requirements of their God.
 - a) Ever wonder why God doesn't skywrite His name across the sky or some other great act as to get our attention? The answer is it'd scare us into worshipping God, and we won't be doing it out of gratitude for how He'd bless our lives. Therefore, God does other things in order to get our attention. He may cause bad weather to occur or bad politicians to rule over us. In other words God does manipulate the world in order to get those who should be seeing Him to do so! God's also not above allowing people His people die in order to draw others to Him out of desperation! In a sense that's what Verse 3 means when it says, "You struck them but they feel no pain". The Northern Israel kingdom got wiped out, yet the Southern one is acting no better. The "South" one is threatened by major empires, who want to control the Middle East under their dominance. Yet the Israelites aren't looking to God to protect them despite these obvious dangers.
 - b) OK, what about us? We're not united and I don't see another nation threatening us. Don't put it past God to find ways to get our attention. As the old saying goes, "Your arms are too short to box with God!"
 - c) Jeremiah isn't giving up that easily at the question of "Does anyone seek God?" Jeremiah's answer in effect is everyone I see is the poor or people who don't care about God, which is what the biblical definition of a fool is all about! He's essentially saying, let me check with those who have power or influence in this town. Somebody there must be seeking God. I would say that leads perfectly to the next verse. Speaking of which:

7. Verse 5: So I will go to the leaders and speak to them; surely they know the way of the LORD, the requirements of their God." But with one accord they too had broken off the yoke and torn off the bonds.
- a) Keep in mind Jeremiah was raised as a priest. He didn't work in Jerusalem but I'd argue that he had enough "hoospa" to walk up to civil and religious leaders there and ask them, "Do you want to put your life in God's hands or not?"
 - b) One has to keep in mind that God has both a "one way contract" and a "two way contract" with us. The "one way contract" is that God promises that if we trust that He's God and if we believe that Jesus died for our sins and He's God, then we're saved and we can't mess that up if we tried. The "two way contract" is about being a good witness for Him. He'll take away our ministry opportunities if we fail to live as He desires. We don't obey God's laws to earn points with Him. We should obey them as that's the best way to live life as a witness for Him. Obviously, the New Testament interprets for us, how the law is properly to be observed. My point is like these Israelites, they didn't care about living as God does want them to live. Whether they were saved in the first place, is God's business. Our job is just to be a good witness for Him and focus on our "two way contract".
 - c) I'm getting into all this here, because Jeremiah said they "broken off the yoke" (a harness that was used on an ox) if what God requires of us. Remember that Jesus said, "my yoke is easy". (Matthew 11:28) Jesus never said we have no yoke (the burden upon us to be His witness to the world), but that the yoke is easy in the sense if we trust in the Spirit for His guidance, again, "the yoke is easy" in terms of what He desires of us. That leads us back to Jeremiah. He's preaching to those in leadership that they've broken off the "yoke" of what God required of them: To lead people closer to God and not away from Him!
 - d) OK now that Jeremiah got the picture that "everyone's" turned from God, time to discuss the consequences:
8. Verse 6: Therefore a lion from the forest will attack them, a wolf from the desert will ravage them, a leopard will lie in wait near their towns to tear to pieces any who venture out, for their rebellion is great and their backslidings many.
- a) So is Jeremiah being literal or figurative? Obviously, wild animals didn't destroy all those Israelites! It's figurative that his audience can relate to the danger of any attack animal. Is it possible some of those leaders were literally killed that way? It's very possible Jeremiah is being that literal. Remember that most Israelites didn't start reading his book until after the captivity began. Therefore, it's a warning to all claiming to be trusting God with their lives.
 - b) A question at this point the Israelites might be wondering is, "Why doesn't He just forgive us? After all no one is perfect and we're going through the motions? Why are we singled out for complete destruction versus previous generations?" Jeremiah tackles that next:
9. Verse 7: "Why should I forgive you? Your children have forsaken me and sworn by gods that are not gods. I supplied all their needs, yet they committed adultery and thronged to the houses of prostitutes.⁸ They are well-fed, lusty stallions, each neighing for another man's wife.
- a) God through Jeremiah is effectively asking, "What's my motivation to forgive all of you? I don't see any repentance on your part. I see people concerned with everything in life but Me! Your food effectively comes through Me (rain for the crops as an example), yet all of you are just going about your lives as if it doesn't matter."
 - b) If that isn't bad enough, Jeremiah makes a reference to how common adultery occurred in that time era (as it is now!). It's like saying, "Life's so good right now, you have the time as well as the inkling to cheat on your marriages because it feels good!" There's an old saying that men have to control their desire to have sex with every good looking women they see and women need to control their desire to want to fix their man. Another reason adultery is singled out is because it's a good comparison to our relationship to God. In both cases it is about cheating on a relationship we've committed our lives to uphold!

- c) I was taught many years ago, that sometimes God gives us over to the women who we're having an affair with just to show us that the "grass isn't greener on the other side"! God's aware I've committed countless sins in my life, but thank God I never crossed that bridge in my marriage.
 - d) Remember why Jeremiah's preaching this. The issue isn't the sin as much as it is they lack the desire to turn from it. That's why Jeremiah is going on and on about this. Speaking of which, let's continue:
10. Verse 9: Should I not punish them for this?" declares the LORD. "Should I not avenge myself on such a nation as this? ¹⁰ "Go through her vineyards and ravage them, but do not destroy them completely. Strip off her branches, for these people do not belong to the LORD. ¹¹ The house of Israel and the house of Judah have been utterly unfaithful to me," declares the LORD.
- a) One of the important things to grasp is the "hard part" about being a believing Christian is God now holds us to a higher standard than nonbelievers. The good is we avoid eternally being damned by making that decision. The bad news is God now says to us, "Because of Your commitment to Me, I now hold you to a higher standard for "knowing better" and as a living witness for Him".
 - b) I state that obvious fact first so you understand that God has every right to punish people who claim to be His when He wants. The Israelites back then reached the point where He is saying, "I've had it! Yes, I know nonbelievers sin and of course previous generations of Israelites have sinned badly and I (God) have collectively punished them for it, but they're at a point collectively where it's time to make an example them". It's the great reminder of the fact God's never to be messed with!
 - c) I'm getting into all that because God is explaining in Verse 9 why all this judgment is now an issue that won't be delayed any longer. Verse 10 is a "how" the judgment is coming. It is a reminder that armies "travel on their stomach" and will strip the land bear of its food as they travel through the land. When Verse 10 says, "strip off her branches" it's simply a way of saying that the foreign army coming is going to destroy things when they come.
 - d) Verse 11 gets us back to "why". It's back to my first paragraph here that God holds us to a higher standard than nonbelievers. Judgment is coming. Remember that Jeremiah wasn't strongly read until after it happened. Therefore, the question for those believers as well as for Christians today, is "so what"? We don't live in one location like they did? If salvation is only by grace, why should I care? Well God may not send the Babylonians to run down our driveway, but don't put it past God to find a way to punish us individually or as part of a group, He'll find ways to drive us back to Him or make us suffer for failing to live as a witness for Him. Let's just say I wouldn't want to "push Him" that way toward me, so I try to live as a witness for Him. Do I fail at times? Do I sin? Of course. Yet I know that I am accountable to Him so that drives me back to Him when I fail.
 - e) That thought leads me perfectly to Verse 12.
11. Verse 12: They have lied about the LORD; they said, "He will do nothing! No harm will come to us; we will never see sword or famine.
- a) We're back the deniers here. Let's face it, people will say; "there hasn't been a biblical sized miracle in millenniums. Why should I fear that type of judgment? Won't life just go on as it always does?" Even if disaster does come, how do we know it is God ordained? Well in this case, Jeremiah is describing it in details roughly a generation before it occurred. I just stated a moment ago, "I wouldn't want to push God to find out such things." We rarely do know why any horrid thing occurs. We just deal with it as it does. Being a Christian does not mean we're exempt from suffering or punishment!
 - b) Think of it this way, why does Revelation spend a book describing horrid things that will occur before the world ends? It's not just so we know when it happens! It's also designed to keep us on our toes until whenever that unknown days occur! Remember that the bible says the "beginning of wisdom is the fear of God". (Proverbs 9:10.) That applies here.

12. Verse 13: The prophets are but wind and the word is not in them; so let what they say be done to them."¹⁴ Therefore this is what the LORD God Almighty says: "Because the people have spoken these words, I will make my words in your mouth a fire and these people the wood it consumes.
- a) If you don't think "false prophets" are not part of a society, you haven't been watching the bad one's on television! Back in Jeremiah's day, I'm sure they had people willing to preach "Everything's ok, peace is here, go enjoy your lives" and claim God told them to preach it to them. That's what Jeremiah is warning against!
 - b) So how do we tell a true prophet from a false one? Easy, watch and see if what they say is coming true or not! See if what they say lines up well with the Word of God! Don't write a check to people claiming to be speaking on God's behalf. I've heard many stories of people who claim to be faithful preachers of God who simply cash the checks and throw away in the trash the letters they get unread. The point is the dangers of the false prophets are just as much part of today's society as it was back then. A true prophet is one who truly cares for the people they're serving and not just want to preach a message or cash their checks!
 - c) OK John, we get that. Still how do we know for example Jeremiah was a true prophet and not just someone who wrote this book after the invasion happened? The evidence is about the fact that his book wasn't even written or put in circulation until after the captivity did occur. The book of Daniel was written during that captivity and he mentions the fact that he got a copy of the scroll that Jeremiah had and Daniel considered him a prophet and he is quoted in Chapter 9, Verse 2. The point is those people who heard Jeremiah preach of a time of doom before the captivity were now reading his book and saying, "That guy was a prophet of God after all!" My point is simply time separates true prophets from bad ones!
 - d) That leads to a natural question Jeremiah would have: How do I know people will believe me? After all you (God) told me that no one would believe me back in Chapter 1. Why is it I should preach if people are just going to listen to the false prophets? That's why we're reading an illustration in Verse 14 where God says in effect, "Your words will be like a fire to people and their mouths will be like wood that will burn". It's the proof that people did listen to Jeremiah but didn't believe him until it was too late.
 - e) One more time, "we get all that". Why should we care, 2,500 years later? Because what the message Jeremiah is preaching still applies today, that consequences exist if we turn from how God expects us to live. That's Jeremiah in a "nutshell". Meanwhile time for details:
13. Verse 15: O house of Israel," declares the LORD, "I am bringing a distant nation against you-- an ancient and enduring nation, a people whose language you do not know, whose speech you do not understand. ¹⁶ Their quivers are like an open grave; all of them are mighty warriors. ¹⁷ They will devour your harvests and food, devour your sons and daughters; they will devour your flocks and herds, devour your vines and fig trees. With the sword they will destroy the fortified cities in which you trust.
- a) Scholars debate about how far in advance Jeremiah wrote this before the Babylonians did invade the land of Israel. Most scholars speculate it was 20 to 40 years in advance. Keep in mind that there was no satellite television. The only way an Israelite would even have any knowledge of foreign countries other than what they read in the bible to date would be by visitors. Babylon was a city a few hundred miles due east of Jerusalem. Earlier we read that the attack would come from the north. That's because the army came from that direction to attack Israel. At the time this was written, Babylon wasn't even the big power in that region. The "big two" were Assyria and Egypt. Therefore, for Jeremiah to predict a nation who's language was unfamiliar to the Israelites would be "natural" since I'd bet the Israelites had no significant dealings with the Babylonians in terms of them being a power on the scene of that region.
 - b) As one can tell from reading the biblical text here, it's all bad news. A quiver is for holding the arrows before their fired. Bottom line a big army will devour the land of Israel. While they kill, take will take their food and level the cities that existed in Israel at that time!

14. Verse 18: "Yet even in those days," declares the LORD, "I will not destroy you completely. ¹⁹ And when the people ask, 'Why has the LORD our God done all this to us?' you will tell them, 'As you have forsaken me and served foreign gods in your own land, so now you will serve foreigners in a land not your own.'
- The good news is that Jeremiah is "not all bad news". One of the chapters coming up later in the book is one of the greatest promises made to people in the bible (Chapter 31). Here we also get a hint of good news besides all that destruction talk!
 - The good news in effect is "Not everyone's going to die". It's not the "end" of God's chosen people. A couple of reasons for this statement. First the Israelites reading this while living in the Babylonian empire might think, so is that it, for God's relationship with His people? Obviously, this wasn't good news for the many who died. Still it was a glimmer of hope of those who survived. For those who don't know their history, the nation of Israel holds the distinction of being the only nation ever to be conquered, scattered and become a nation a second (and a third) time! My point is Jeremiah implies this will come true here. We'll get later in this book to specific predictions about the time frame the Israelites were there.
 - As the Israelites read this in Babylon, they could ponder Verse 19 well. It tells us why He did this specific punishment. In effect God says, "You desire to worship something other than Me, then I'll make it easy for you and put you in a place where you can do that! The message here for all of us is that God gives us what we want. If we choose to ignore Him that's what we'll get for all of eternity. Just as people who choose to worship things other than the true and living God (Everybody worships something. See how people spend the spare time and income they have, and you'll see what they "worship"!)
 - Bottom line of the whole book of Jeremiah, horrible pain and destruction is coming, but it is not a complete end with God's relationship with His people.
15. Verse 20: "Announce this to the house of Jacob and proclaim it in Judah: ²¹ Hear this, you foolish and senseless people, who have eyes but do not see, who have ears but do not hear: ²² Should you not fear me?" declares the LORD. "Should you not tremble in my presence? I made the sand a boundary for the sea, an everlasting barrier it cannot cross. The waves may roll, but they cannot prevail; they may roar, but they cannot cross it. ²³ But these people have stubborn and rebellious hearts; they have turned aside and gone away.
- Here is God saying through Jeremiah, "Hey everyone, don't you get it? I'm in charge. I'm the one who created the oceans and the roaring waves never get past the sand because it's the way I made it. At the same time, I created My people to be a living witness for Me. It is obvious you're blowing it big time and that's why all this horrid destruction is coming!"
 - A couple of thoughts. It had to be hard for Jeremiah to witness the fact no one cared about what he was saying. Sometimes we have to do what God calls us to do even if makes us a very unpopular person to those around us! Being used by God brings far greater rewards than whatever suffering we may get in this lifetime, and believe me, Jeremiah will have to suffer before this book ends for preaching "doom and gloom".
 - Too bad for him. What does that have to do with you and me? The answer is God calls us to be a witness for Him. Sometimes that's going to be hard and make us unpopular. This is about keeping an eternal perspective despite whatever suffering we must endure now!
 - At this point I can speed it up a little, as I suspect you're getting the flavor of all of this!
16. Verse 24: They do not say to themselves, 'Let us fear the LORD our God, who gives autumn and spring rains in season, who assures us of the regular weeks of harvest.' ²⁵ Your wrongdoings have kept these away; your sins have deprived you of good.
- Jeremiah is getting on a role by these verses. He's saying in effect, "no one appreciates all of the good things I (God) do around here. Keep in mind the prominent false god "Baal" promises good weather for worshipping him, so it's a "double" meaning. God assures the Israelites of good harvest based on the weather. (They needed rain for the crops!) What God is saying is their choice to ignore Him is what's causing the suffering to come!

- b) So does that mean if we're suffering, it's due to some sin? My view is I take inventory in a case like that, but I never make that assumption. I do figure God has a purpose when such times occur but I never assume that. I simply figure my job is to pray to Him daily, to stay regularly in His word and do my best to be a good witness for Him. If we understood all of God's purposes "We'd be God". Just as Jeremiah went around warning people of what will happen when we ignore God, we too must do that. Not by wearing a big "sandwich board", but by living differently enough that people can tell we're a witness for Him.
- c) Meanwhile Jeremiah's on a roll and I interrupted him. He gives examples of wickedness!
17. Verse 26: "Among my people are wicked men who lie in wait like men who snare birds and like those who set traps to catch men. ²⁷ Like cages full of birds, their houses are full of deceit; they have become rich and powerful ²⁸ and have grown fat and sleek. Their evil deeds have no limit; they do not plead the case of the fatherless to win it, they do not defend the rights of the poor.
- a) The essential idea is Jeremiah is explaining to the "big shots" in Jerusalem why judgment is coming. He's accusing them of taking advantage of innocent people to take their money so they could get rich. I am sure all of us have examples of that in our heads so I won't be explaining that any further!
- b) So what does "cages full of birds" mean in Verse 27? Don't think of it as having a cute bird as a pet. Think of it as catching a bunch of birds that don't want to be caught! It is talking about setting traps for people and using birds as an analogy! By Verse 28 Jeremiah gets a lot more specific by saying they take advantage of woman and children that don't have a father to protect them. Then it's about rich people taking advantage of the poor. Yes that story is as old as mankind itself. Why single out this generation for that?
- i) Again, we're back to the issue of God holding His people (that's us Christians too!) to a higher standard than nonbelievers. Let me put it this way, I'm convinced that salvation is by faith in who Jesus alone. Not denying that. If we truly believe that, we should naturally want to put our time and money where "our mouth is".
- ii) We can't lose our salvation if we tried! What we can lose is our ability to be a good witness for Jesus. God can and does take that away from us if and when we fail to live as He desires. Yes I'm throwing a guilt trip here, but I know I'm preaching the message even us devout Christians need to hear and remind ourselves about on a regular basis! We may not be a "big shot" or taking advantage of the less fortunate but none of us are perfect and we must watch our behavior.
- c) Coming back to Jeremiah how bad was it back then? Was it any worse than it is today? I don't know as I wasn't there. I just know God holds "His" to a higher standard. Ok, that's enough guilt for these verses. Let's try the next ones!
18. Verse 29: Should I not punish them for this?" declares the LORD. "Should I not avenge myself on such a nation as this? ³⁰ "A horrible and shocking thing has happened in the land: ³¹ The prophets prophesy lies, the priests rule by their own authority, and my people love it this way. But what will you do in the end?
- a) God's saying in effect, "This is so bad I must do something!" One of the important things to grasp about God is He's patient with us but there's an unknown limit to His patience. I would argue it's more about us than Him. What I mean is if we get to a point in life where if all we care about is ourselves (as in growing in our wealth or fame at anyone's cost) that means we've gotten to a point of no return!
- b) I can just here everyone out there screaming, "But that's not me, I'm a devout Christian as I pray daily and do this and that good deed." I'm sure the Jewish leaders back then were also saying the same thing in effect. Remember why Jeremiah's saying all of this, people weren't putting their "hearts where their mouth was". They were going through all those religious motions, but their deeds didn't match what they claimed to believe. It's a danger that all of us must constantly watch out for in life!
- c) All of that leads to Verse 31, that says in effect, "People do whatever they want to do!"

- i) Verse 31 is a condemnation of priests and those who claim to be prophets as they are giving the people "what they want" as opposed to preaching God's word! The world is full of people willing to tell us what we want to hear as opposed to saying what we need to hear, which is the reminder that we're all going to be judged one day (even believers) based on what we did "with" what we knew about Jesus! Yes it's a scary thing to comprehend but keeping that information front and center will help us to "keep our eye on the ball" so to speak!
 - d) With that said, the really good news is we're now come to the final chapter of this endless speech (OK it's five chapters, but it seems endless) by Jeremiah on what is God expects of us as we live as a witness for Him. It's shorter than Chapter 5, so let's get through it!
19. Chapter 6, Verse 1: "Flee for safety, people of Benjamin! Flee from Jerusalem! Sound the trumpet in Tekoa! Raise the signal over Beth Hakkerem! For disaster looms out of the north, even terrible destruction.
- a) This verse requires a little explanation. Remember that the nation of Israel was divided in twelve territories, one per tribe. Jeremiah was from the tribe of Benjamin. (See 1:1). That just means he cares about his own "group" within the context of all the Israelites living in the Southern (remaining) Israelite country of Judah at that time. It's like saying, I get that the leaders in Jerusalem refuse to listen to me, but maybe my fellow Benjaminites can grasp this message and get out of town before the danger begins!
 - b) Remember that Jeremiah understand that God's going to bring a horrible judgment on the city of Jerusalem so Jeremiah's saying, "Hey even if the Israelite leaders don't get it, maybe my fellow Benjaminites will get it and get out of town before this destruction begins!
 - c) For those of you familiar with siege warfare, it's a scary thing. Essentially what it is, is an army surrounding a city and starving it out! It's a lot of death and destruction and it's one of the most painful ways to die one can imagine. Therefore Jeremiah's effectively saying to everyone who's willing to listen to him, "Get out of town while you can!"
 - d) The reference to "Beth Hakkerem" is simply a "look out tower". It's a way of saying those who are on watch for danger, "Raise the danger signal as it's coming!" You can't say God's people were never warned of the danger to come! Both city references are to places which are not far from Jerusalem and should be "look out places" for coming danger. For those who think God just wanted them all to die as "it's too late", notice how hard Jeremiah was sent to preach about here's what should be done as a warning about all this danger!
20. Verse 2: I will destroy the Daughter of Zion, so beautiful and delicate.³ Shepherds with their flocks will come against her; they will pitch their tents around her, each tending his own portion."⁴ "Prepare for battle against her! Arise, let us attack at noon! But, alas, the daylight is fading, and the shadows of evening grow long."⁵ So arise, let us attack at night and destroy her fortresses!"
- a) Never underestimate how much God loves those He's called despite all the destruction of the nation of Israel we're about to read about. God doesn't get any pleasure by causing a great suffering of His people! He does it out of necessity. It's about people getting to the point in life where God doesn't have choice left but to make an example of out His people hoping that future generations grasp the point that God's not to be messed with!
 - b) Realize the key reason that Jeremiah is part of the bible isn't to describe the horror that did occur 2,500 years ago. It's written as a warning to all future generations of people who are trusting in God that He's "not to be messed with". If you grasp that, then you get why this book is part of the bible!
 - c) With that understood, Jeremiah is giving specifics about the battle to come. Obviously He (God) cares for His people, which is why these details are given. It's not so we can learn a lot of historical facts about how Jerusalem was destroyed. It's so that we get the fact God's "not to be messed with" which I'm realizing now would have made a better lesson title for all of this! With that understood, let me describe a little of the specifics here! Remember it is describing the specific destruction of the city of Jerusalem as it did occur historically.

- d) Jeremiah is describing battle preparation. Notice the reference to attacking at noon as well as at night (Verse 4 and Verse 5). The invading army is compared to a shepherd and their flock. Remember that Israel was an agricultural society. A lot of them had never seen the likes of a large army invading. So Jeremiah uses imagery they could relate to. Notice that in Verse 5 the reference to "destroy the fortress". Picture a medieval castle with big walls. All I'm saying is such protection will be useless when this large army invades the land.
 - e) Let me add Verse 6 and then I'll comment further on why all this detail is necessary.
21. Verse 6: This is what the LORD Almighty says: "Cut down the trees and build siege ramps against Jerusalem. This city must be punished; it is filled with oppression.
- a) If you think about it, "God is God". He could have wiped out Israel with the "snap of His fingers" or some great plague or earthquake. Why use this foreign empire to attack Israel specifically the way the text describes it? If you don't know the specifics involve starving out a city by building ramps all around it and climbing over the walls into it!
 - b) One reason for all these details is so those that survive could tell others in Babylon that it did occur exactly as Jeremiah described it! It validates him as a prophet! Let's face it, this book never would have had public acceptance if it didn't occur exactly as he predicted!
 - c) I'd also argue that it was this method to show "God's not to be messed with". If Israel was destroyed by a plague or an earthquake, people might say it was bad luck. If it happened exactly as predicted, again it validates Jeremiah as a prophet.
 - d) OK John, we accept this is all historically accurate and Jeremiah is a prophet. Why should I care about all these details? Because it teaches us to take God's word seriously. When we read all of those horrid things in Revelation, it also validates future predictions that they'll also come as literally true as the one's we're reading here! More importantly it teaches the fact that God can and does make people suffer who are called but refuse to be His witness with their lives. That's enough guilt for these verses. Let's move on.
22. Verse 7: As a well pours out its water, so she pours out her wickedness. Violence and destruction resound in her; her sickness and wounds are ever before me. ⁸ Take warning, O Jerusalem, or I will turn away from you and make your land desolate so no one can live in it."
- a) Remember what God called Jeremiah to do: Preach that destruction is coming and why it is necessary. Yes, no one listened until it was too late. A question we must all ask, is God calls us to something, do we really have a choice? The point is whether Jeremiah like it or not, this is what he was called to preach.
 - b) With that said, his focus here is back to the issue of why all this destruction was necessary and why "now". Jeremiah likes to use analogies that people can relate to. That's why he's saying just as the purpose of a well is to pour out water for our use, so the Israelites have been pouring out their wickedness. The idea is about willfully sinning and not caring if it is known. When a society, or a nation gets to a point where nobody cares about honoring the God who created them, then He has no choice but to say in effect, "Whether you like it or not people were created to honor Me with your lives. When you get to a point where it is meaningless to you about living as I desire, I've got no choice but to turn society over to the type of life you desire."
 - c) OK John, you're preaching to the choir again, cut it out! Not really. Our job as Christians is to be that light. We like Jeremiah are called to be a witness to a lost and dying world or it will be too late for our community, nation or even our church.
 - d) That's why Jeremiah is preaching in Verse 8 that the land of Israel will be desolate as they are failing to live as God desired. For us, that means living as God desires as a witness for Him so people we're see "we're different" and whether we realize it or not, we're why God hasn't destroyed our "land" as of yet! We're either part of the disease or part of the cure!
 - e) OK, time to get off my "hell and brimstone" pulpit and back to the text. The next question to be pondered is "now what". Jeremiah is about to give some details about why all this is necessary and exactly what's going to happen to God's people and His land.

23. Verse 9: This is what the LORD Almighty says: "Let them glean the remnant of Israel as thoroughly as a vine; pass your hand over the branches again, like one gathering grapes." ¹⁰ To whom can I speak and give warning? Who will listen to me? Their ears are closed so they cannot hear. The word of the LORD is offensive to them; they find no pleasure in it.
- a) Essentially Jeremiah is preaching that no one cares what God thinks about their lives. He's back to complaining about the fact that "it's too late". Israel will be "fruitless" as if a farmer is picking out every last grape in a vineyard. The literal aspect of the text implies Israel is suffering from "uncircumcised ears". It's not any sort of physical ailment. It's describing a state of mind where no one cares about what God has to say. We could be looking at our fellow church members and say, "What is the problem?" However, when our society is at a point where everybody is doing whatever they feel like doing and ignoring Him? Yes it also means judgment would come in one form or another on our society as well.
 - b) So is Jeremiah trying to scare us into worshipping God? Wrong way to look at it. What he is stating is the reality of this world whether we like it or not! So if we're strong Christians using our lives to make a difference for Him, should we be worried? About our salvation? No, but about our lives here and our society, always!
 - c) OK, we're almost through this five-chapter speech. Let's keep moving!
24. Verse 11: But I am full of the wrath of the LORD, and I cannot hold it in. "Pour it out on the children in the street and on the young men gathered together; both husband and wife will be caught in it, and the old, those weighed down with years. ¹² Their houses will be turned over to others, together with their fields and their wives, when I stretch out my hand against those who live in the land," declares the LORD.
- a) Sometimes it's hard to tell when God is speaking and when Jeremiah is speaking for Him. Here it's Jeremiah saying what he has to say because God's filling us with thoughts we are unable to keep in our heads! The ugly truth is that God's going to destroy the place where He intended His people to be a witness to the world. The essential idea here is everything is going to be wiped out, so deal with it!
 - b) Pause to think how hard this must have been for him to preach. Imagine telling everyone around you that all you know will be destroyed! You'd only do this if you're convinced of the fact that God Himself is calling you to be a witness for Him. The good news is He will not call most of us to walk around with a big sign saying repent or die! For most of us it is a matter of being a living witness for Him in a way that works with the spiritual gifts that all believers have and use them for His glory.
25. Verse 13: "From the least to the greatest, all are greedy for gain; prophets and priests alike, all practice deceit. ¹⁴ They dress the wound of my people as though it were not serious. 'Peace, peace,' they say, when there is no peace. ¹⁵ Are they ashamed of their loathsome conduct? No, they have no shame at all; they do not even know how to blush. So they will fall among the fallen; they will be brought down when I punish them," says the LORD.
- a) As we get near the end of this long sermon by Jeremiah he's returning to his key points: one of them is the fact that Israel's leaders (spiritual, as well as political) are only focused on what's the best for themselves. They're preaching, "be at peace" when people should be living to draw close to God and rely upon His power to make a difference. Tell me if this seems familiar: Religious leaders preaching, "Send us a check and we promise you'll have internal and external peace. If you do that, you won't have to study your bible or pray to God, but just trust us as we are your leaders and we're praying for all of you"! That's how I picture this and yes this is a lot like our world today!
 - b) Then Jeremiah goes on to say that the religious leaders are not even ashamed of the fact of how they are taking advantage of people for their own gain.
 - c) Before you start looking at your pastor giving him a dirty look that he's messing up in his ability to lead, keep in mind we can't fix what we can't fix! Our job is to be a good witness for Jesus. Our leaders are accountable to God. Ours is to be a good witness for Jesus.

26. Verse 16: This is what the LORD says: "Stand at the crossroads and look; ask for the ancient paths, ask where the good way is, and walk in it, and you will find rest for your souls. But you said, 'We will not walk in it.' ¹⁷ I appointed watchmen over you and said, 'Listen to the sound of the trumpet!' But you said, 'We will not listen.'
- a) Another big theme of this speech that Jeremiah's wrapping up with is the importance that the Israelites realize they were warned. The reason God called Jeremiah to do all of this is so they won't have any excuses that we didn't know any better! We know all of this is true as Jeremiah was studied as God's word pretty much as soon as they were in captivity. The long-term purpose of this book is to remind us that "society judgment" wasn't just this one time event! For example Israel was destroyed again by the Romans. Even us living in the United States must realize that we're not exempt from God's society judgment if we fail to be the type of witness for Him that He desires of us. Should that scare us? Yes, and that's why I'm at it and that's why Jeremiah is still studied.
 - b) That little sermon leads me right to these verses. God's saying through Jeremiah that he'd put "watchmen" (think of all the prophets who came before Jeremiah who was historically one of the last Old Testament prophets. A few came after the captivity, but most preached long before Jeremiah was on the scene. The point is the Israelites were out of excuses here as Jeremiah points out how Israel has ignored God's messengers historically as well as the time period where Jeremiah himself was preaching.
 - c) So why aren't there prophets today? We have His word in our laps. It's how He preaches to us today. Obviously we need to listen as much today as they did then. Ok, back to it!
27. Verse 18: Therefore hear, O nations; observe, O witnesses, what will happen to them. ¹⁹ Hear, O earth: I am bringing disaster on this people, the fruit of their schemes, because they have not listened to my words and have rejected my law.
- a) Obviously Jeremiah didn't have internet access to preach to other countries. What this is saying is when Israel gets destroyed and given the fact that many people in surrounding countries were aware that Israel claims to be worshipping the true God, the word of their destruction will be a witness all to itself! For those who don't know King Nebuchadnezzar of "Daniel" fame, was the general who lead this invasion of Israel. Because in "Daniel" that foreign king publicly praised the Israel God and held "press conferences" to do so, all that means is Jeremiah's prediction here came literally true not long after the invasion!
 - b) Verse 19 explains why all this judgment is necessary. It came down to the fact those who should be "God's people" were ignoring His laws of how they were supposed to live. Yes that makes me nervous and hopefully it does you as well!
28. Verse 20: What do I care about incense from Sheba or sweet calamus from a distant land? Your burnt offerings are not acceptable; your sacrifices do not please me."
- a) During all this time, the rituals at the temple were still being formed. Imported items were used to make things for those rituals. God's saying in a sense, "Who cares? All your rituals don't impress me. It's having a heart for me and "putting your money where your mouth is" is what I care about. By the way, the next section of Jeremiah focuses on all the rituals of temple worship. The condemnation was so harsh, that's what lead to his persecution. I am getting ahead of myself, but that's the focus of the next several chapters. Meanwhile, I still got ten verses left, so bear with it while we get through them!
29. Verse 21: Therefore this is what the LORD says: "I will put obstacles before this people. Fathers and sons alike will stumble over them; neighbors and friends will perish."
- a) To put it mildly, this invasion "won't be pleasant". It'll mean death to a lot of people. I'd say the main reason Jeremiah is preaching as hard as I visually see him doing, is he is not interested in seeing all this judgment. Keep in mind that Jeremiah is preaching against all that he loves and treasures. He was a priest himself. He's not doing this for his ego, but to try to save his nation before it was too late! That's what God calls us to do too, preach that God's judgment is coming and only by turning our lives over to Him can we be saved!

30. Verse 22: This is what the LORD says: "Look, an army is coming from the land of the north; a great nation is being stirred up from the ends of the earth. ²³ They are armed with bow and spear; they are cruel and show no mercy. They sound like the roaring sea as they ride on their horses; they come like men in battle formation to attack you, O Daughter of Zion." ²⁴ We have heard reports about them, and our hands hang limp. Anguish has gripped us, pain like that of a woman in labor. ²⁵ Do not go out to the fields or walk on the roads, for the enemy has a sword, and there is terror on every side.
- Here we get Jeremiah describing an invading army probably 20 years before it occurred. I would say he's describing it as if he's watching it first hand. I suspect he got all of this as a vision and was trying to describe what he saw.
 - The way this army would attack is they'd surround a city, try to starve it out and also use a bunch of methods to open the gates and get inside. I mention that because the text tells of us "no mercy", soldiers riding on horses and in battle formation. The horror of all this is the fact the Israelites could do nothing but watch everything they love get destroyed as well as death all around them. Jeremiah is also describing prolonging the inevitable if the Israelites go outside the city walls as the enemy is better armed and in great numbers.
 - The key point is this is a form of "group judgment". Yes it's harsh. Yes this story has been repeated in many forms all through history! While we may not get anything this literal in our own lives, I wouldn't put it past God to find a way to judge us for failing to live as the type of witness He wants us to be.
31. Verse 26: O my people, put on sackcloth and roll in ashes; mourn with bitter wailing as for an only son, for suddenly the destroyer will come upon us.
- Jeremiah is describing how people in those days showed "remorse". He's begging all his fellow Israelites to "say you're sorry like you really mean it, or else all of this will happen!"
 - With that said, the imagery here is pretty self explanatory. OK four verses left:
32. Verse 27: "I have made you a tester of metals and my people the ore, that you may observe and test their ways. ²⁸ They are all hardened rebels, going about to slander. They are bronze and iron; they all act corruptly. ²⁹ The bellows blow fiercely to burn away the lead with fire, but the refining goes on in vain; the wicked are not purged out. ³⁰ They are called rejected silver, because the LORD has rejected them."
- This speech ends with some reflection on Jeremiah's part. If you've ever worked with any metal like bronze, iron, silver or gold, there is a process to remove the impurities. What's being described here is the refining process is a "waste of time". Israel as a nation is being rejected and the judgment is necessary! Just as Israel at that time has rejected God, so He's rejecting them.
 - A few quick final thoughts: If all this judgment is necessary, why was it necessary for all this preaching by Jeremiah? Why not just wipe them out and get it over with? Part of it is to explain why it's necessary. Part of it was for the Israelites to understand that it was God who was behind it and give us all the horrid details before it occurs. Using Babylon as the instrument of God's judgment is back to the "tale of two cities". God is saying if you don't want to live as I desire, I'll give you all you want of life without Me".
 - Finally, how does all this judgment affect us? If you've read this far, obviously you get the idea that God works in patterns. That is, He's just as willing to judge His people (Yes, that is you and me) today as He was back then. Should that scare us? Yes. It reminds us of the reason why He created us in the first place, to be a witness for Him. While we're thinking about how to fulfill that role in our own lives, I'll mercifully end this in prayer!
33. Heavenly Father, first, we need to thank You for separating us from the world. We don't know why You picked us but we're grateful that You have. While obviously it's better to be saved than not to be, that salvation comes with responsibility. That's to be a good witness for You. The great secret of living that life is to rely upon Your Spirit to guide us so that we can make a difference for You with our lives. We pray for that guidance, in Jesus name, Amen!