

## Jeremiah Chapters 7-8 John Karmelich

1. Well the last five chapters was one big, condemning speech by Jeremiah. The good news is we're all done with that speech. The bad news is he gives another one that covers the next four chapters of this book. I doubt this one came right after the last one. When this book was put together, this seemed like a natural spot for it. Let me explain: Jeremiah just gave a long speech on why those called to be His people were ignoring Him. There's more of that in these chapters. I'd argue that the primary focus of these chapters is on "excuses". It's like arguing that I can't be a good witness for Jesus because of "x". Or God can't destroy this place because of "y". We'll read in this lesson as well as the next one excuses the Israelites give Jeremiah why they thought he's wrong about what he is predicting about Israel's destruction as well as why he's wrong about them ignoring God.
  - a) Historically commentators believe it was this speech that got Jeremiah hated and exiled in his later years before the Babylonians actually destroyed Israel. My point is often if God is calling us to preach, teach or do anything on His behalf, He expects us to be a witness for Him with our lives. OK, I've been pounding that point on everyone's head in the last few lessons. What's special about this one? Glad you asked.
  - b) That leads to my lesson title: "Excuses and consequences". Chapters 7 through 10 give us a bunch of excuses we can make to God for never using our lives to make a difference for Him and what those excuses mean to God? Even if we go through the "church motions" a day a week or even go to a weekly bible study, remember that those of Jeremiah's day did a lot of that too. To put it simply, "actions matter", and I'm saying that to Christians that I believe like myself believe we're saved by grace alone! We're saved by grace alone, but it leads to the question of "Saved to do what?" That "what" is the focus of my ministry. For these chapters of Jeremiah we're going to focus on some specific excuses people make to God and what are the consequences of those mistakes.
  - c) I can just see a lot of you reading this and thinking, "That's not me! I do this and that for my relationship on God! Why should I make myself feel guilty for not doing enough? I would see this chapter as a checklist. Think of it as "that doesn't apply today, but there's always the possibility that I stumble tomorrow". Or there may be a point where you are thinking, "That's a good point. I hadn't thought of that. Then ask the Holy Spirit to draw you closer to God in that area of your life". Like every one of these lessons, I preach to myself as much as anyone else! The point is a wise man is always willing to listen to biblical advice and "see if the shoe fits". OK, enough guilt there, back to Jeremiah!
2. Again, Chapters 7-10 form a single lecture on the issue of excuses we give to God and knowing of the consequences of thinking that way. I'll wait until I write the next lesson before I simply call it "Part 2". Anyway, let me give you some details about the text of these two chapters and you'll be the judge if the "shoe fits" in anyway to your life. Realize that what Jeremiah preached here most likely is the reason he was hated in Israel and got him rejected among his people as we'll find out later in this book. My point is standing up for what's right can be emotionally painful or a big risk to our lives physically. OK, since most of you don't know where I live, time to take that risk as the truth of God's desires for our lives do not change from the Old Testament to the New. Now that I made that clear, let me break down and discuss the details of this chapter.
  - a) Let's begin. The first argument people bring up against Jeremiah's preaching is the simple fact that God's temple existed in Jerusalem at that time. It's the argument of God went to a lot of trouble to get Israel to that land to be a witness for Him and His Temple stands as a witness for Him so therefore, God can't remove the Israelites out of that land because He needs them as a witness for Him. That's like God saying, "He can't destroy say the United States because it's the last great hope for Christianity". Or "God can't make our church an ineffective witness for Him due to all the history He's had here!" Or thinking many people worked hard to make this place a witness for God, so we can't sin enough to mess it up!"

- b) God's response in effect is "So what?" I don't need a location to prove my love for people. What happened historically is well, history! What I care about now is people living today as a witness for Me and failure to do so means harsh punishment is coming because of the failure to use one's life to be a living witness for Me!
    - i) In fact, God tells Jeremiah not to pray for these people. That's why many scholars argue this letter came later in his ministry. The underlying point for us, is there is a "too late" with God. We can go down a road of ignoring Him for so long that it's an impossibility to return. None of us know what that point of no return is, all I'm saying is that point does exist and it's never to be crossed.
  - c) Then Jeremiah gets practical. In effect he lists most of the 10 Commandments and explains how the Israelites have violated them. He also lists the kind of people the Israelites should show extra kindness to, because they have less of an advantage than other locals. They're simply listed as widows, orphans and strangers. The underlying point is as believers we should be concerned about the lives of others and put our money and our time where our mouths are, so to speak!
  - d) Jeremiah also lists a place where God's tabernacle used to stand centuries ago. The point's simply that God can destroy places associated with Him before for disobediences, so why should we think we're exempt today for failing to be a good witness for Him?
  - e) Then Jeremiah preaches in effect, "Go keep up your meaningless rituals as if that'll make a difference! You'll see through the destruction of your lives how important that really is!" God's not interested in our rituals. He cares about using our lives to make a difference for Him and being a witness for Him. Anyway, Jeremiah pounds that point home here!
  - f) These chapters also get into the consequences of turning from God. It includes the idea of digging up the bones of leading Israelites of that day. It's a way for foreigners to "rub it in their face" how superior their gods are to the Israelite gods!
  - g) Then Jeremiah breaks into poetry again. It's God preaching through Jeremiah what must I do to get My people to live like I desire? What did I do wrong? How did I not bless them in the past that got them collectively to ignore Me? Then he jumps back and forth between describing the upcoming destruction in detail and why this suffering will be necessary!
    - i) Jeremiah lists more excuses in between describing horrid destruction to come for refusing to live as God desires. The text describes the Israelites trying to delay the inevitable by running to their "big walled" cities for protection. It tells of the failure of the look outs to warn what's to come.
3. OK, you get all the horrors by now. I'll describe the details as I go through my verse-by-verse talk on these chapters. The big question is, "Why should I focus my time on all this ancient history if I have my own problems to deal with? How does any of this affect my life?"
- a) Consider the fact that part of the text asks the Israelites to consider the place where God's tabernacle used to stand. If you think about all the good you do, and say, "that's enough, I can rest easy and sin away as my good deeds outweigh my bad deeds!" The fatal mistake too many people make is they think a perfect God "grades on a curve". I speculate there is different levels of punishment and different levels of rewards in the afterlife. That's not an issue here. What is, is the idea that God expects us to use our lives as a witness for Him all the time. Yes, of course we need rest and down time. The point is God should always be a part of our lives in all that we do. The failure to obey His commandments becomes all the evidence one needs to see if we're putting our time and money where our mouth is.
  - b) That's enough guilt for one introduction! The positive news is we're saved strictly by our belief that Jesus died for every sin we'll ever commit. If we truly believe that, and believe Jesus is in charge of our lives, then our salvation is secured. The next step of course is for us to ask the question, "OK, great what have you done with your salvation now that we've accepted Jesus as God?" Excuses and punishment is painful but we must think about this stuff as our lives here and now as well as eternally are affected by how we live.

4. OK time to get off my soapbox, and back to Jeremiah. Chapter 7, Verse 1: This is the word that came to Jeremiah from the LORD: <sup>2</sup> "Stand at the gate of the LORD's house and there proclaim this message:
- a) Let's start with a little geography. If you've ever been to Jerusalem, you'd know that no Jewish temple has stood there since the Romans destroyed the last one in 70AD. The one that Jeremiah is describing stood until the Babylonians destroyed it roughly 600AD. The reconstruction of the temple started 70 years after that captivity. During the Roman times the temple was expanded in size. My simple point is wherever that temple stood Jeremiah was standing at the gate and giving a message God told him to give. The most likely spot is what is called "The Temple Mount" although there's debate among scholars as to where exactly it stood on or near that mount.
  - b) Scholars also debate when this speech took place. There's a similar passage we'll read later in the book and that one is dated to a wicked Israel king who lived later in Jeremiah's life. I agree with the majority of scholars that this letter probably dates to that king as that's the point of "no return" for the Israelites as we'll discover in the text of these chapters!
  - c) The essential message of this speech is "You've claiming this and that as an excuse why no destruction of Israel and the temple's necessary, but let me (Jeremiah) explain why all this is necessary". That's the flavor of the chapters. Also realize he wasn't doing this to win a popularity contest! In fact the book implies Jeremiah was hated for preaching this. That's another reminder that often things God calls us to say will make us unpopular in a world full of people who refuse to take their relationship with God seriously.
  - d) For those of us who do take it seriously, hang tight, "The shoe might fit" in verses coming up later in the lesson.
5. Verse 2b: "Hear the word of the LORD, all you people of Judah who come through these gates to worship the LORD. <sup>3</sup> This is what the LORD Almighty, the God of Israel, says: Reform your ways and your actions, and I will let you live in this place. <sup>4</sup> Do not trust in deceptive words and say, "This is the temple of the LORD, the temple of the LORD, the temple of the LORD!"
- a) Before I get into the specifics of these verses, the big underlying question here is, "Is there a too late in life?" To answer that question, one has to separate salvation from how God's called us to be a witness for Him! When it comes to accepting Jesus as one's payment for all our sins, no matter what we've done, it's never too late until we die. For those die with no knowledge of Jesus, God will judge them fairly based on what we did know or should have known. With that statement made, the next issue is our witness for Jesus. Just as it's "too late for the Israelites" in this story, yes there's a too late for us. That fact alone is a big motivation to do use my life to make a difference for Jesus and hopefully you are thinking the same thing! OK, now that I've scared everyone, back to the text!
  - b) In this verse Jeremiah is standing at the entrance to God's temple. Therefore, he's speaking to those who think they're "religious" because they go to synagogue, say "every Saturday". As I've been saying throughout Jeremiah so far, he's essentially saying, "put your money as well as your time where your mouth is!"
  - c) I'll come back to Verse 3 in a second. Notice the repeated phrase in Verse 4 of "The temple of the Lord". It's like saying, "Look, we're coming here every week, why are we the one's in trouble since we're doing what we are supposed to be doing? Jeremiah will answer the charge in the next bunch of verses. I have to admit, it reminds me of my childhood when I was raised Roman Catholic and told to pray "Five Hail Mary's" as if repeating a prayer's the "way to go". Anyone who was raised Catholic would get that. The simple point is the God we served isn't impressed by rituals done over and over again. What He really cares about is our attitude and using our lives to make a difference for Him. For what it's worth I have a good number of friends who are devout Catholics who I'm positive are saved just because they use their lives as a witness for Jesus and believe He paid the full price for all of their sins. OK, I'm off topic, back to Jeremiah.

- d) All that leads me back to Verse 3. I admit I'm fascinated by the fact the God who made all we can conceive of, says a little piece of real estate known as the land of Israel is His. The great historical debate exists over who owns the land of Israel? The biblical answer is God owns that land and the nation of Israel can "park there" as long as they're being a witness for Him. If that's true, how do you explain the fact that modern Israel is mostly secular? I would hate to be in their shoes for that reason. Some are devoutly Jewish and even there is a good number of Christians there. I believe God is sparing it as long as there are some believers there. I also hope its there as a "set up" for Jesus return, but that's on His timing, so I leave that up to God as to when the Messianic age begins. This all ties to Verse 3 as it reminds us that the land of Israel is "God's" so the fact that "the" Temple is there, is not an argument that the Israelites can't be kicked out of there if God says so!
6. Verse 5: If you really change your ways and your actions and deal with each other justly, <sup>6</sup> if you do not oppress the alien, the fatherless or the widow and do not shed innocent blood in this place, and if you do not follow other gods to your own harm, <sup>7</sup> then I will let you live in this place, in the land I gave your forefathers for ever and ever. <sup>8</sup> But look, you are trusting in deceptive words that are worthless.
- a) There is a contradiction to this section. In Verse 16 coming up, Jeremiah is told not to pray for these people implying it's too late. Yet in this section we're reading that God is saying it isn't too late because if they just repent, then God would relent on all this judgment. So what gives? The best way to look at these verses is to see them as if talking to someone is that refusing to change. It's like a last minute plea with someone who's so set in his or her way that in effect nothing's going to change their mind. That's the same with the "no pray" request of Verse 16. The reason Jeremiah wanted to include it, so that future readers of his letter can realize that there is a "too late" and if we're just willing to change, punishment is something that can be avoided (either in this lifetime or eternity).
- b) OK John you're preaching to the choir again. Why should we care? Because we can point to these verses when we encounter someone who tells us, "I can never be a Christian, you don't know what I've done in my life". We can show them verses like this which indicate there's a "never too late" for those willing to repent. If that's the case, why not wait until a "death bed" conversion? First we never know when we'll die. Next living how God wants us to live is always the best choice to make.
- c) With that said, the rest of verses focus on examples of what they were doing wrong. Here we get references to aliens, fatherless (orphans) and widows. The point is to take care of a person who can't take care of themselves very easily! Then we get into more obvious type of examples such as murder and worshipping other false gods. These verses aren't meant as a complete list of wrong doings, but examples that were obvious to the eye and I'd bet it is examples of what was occurring among the religious leaders. It's another case where the Israelites were going through the motions of church, but their hearts were not in it!
- d) Speaking of examples of wrongdoing, let's look at the next three verses.
7. Verse 9: " `Will you steal and murder, commit adultery and perjury, burn incense to Baal and follow other gods you have not known, <sup>10</sup> and then come and stand before me in this house, which bears my Name, and say, "We are safe"--safe to do all these detestable things? <sup>11</sup> Has this house, which bears my Name, become a den of robbers to you? But I have been watching!" declares the LORD.
- a) Let's start with the second to last phrase in Verse 11: "But I have been watching!" If you'd ever want to know my motivation to do or not do a certain thing, it's the reminder of God watching me that tends to put me on the right course in life. Obviously we can't focus on God "24/7", but when it comes to making decisions simply accepting the fact we're all be judged one day even the saved, keeps me on my toes. But aren't we Christians saved by grace? Yes, but accountability is still a big part of the Christian life. I'm convinced there's going to be rewards in heaven based on how we lived and what God expects of us in life!

- b) All that leads back to the sins listed in Verse 9: stealing, murder, adultery, perjury as well as worshipping the popular false god of that time and era, "Baal". It doesn't mean all those Israelites committed every one of those sins, it just means the problems were "rampant" as the Israelites were not living as God wanted them to live. Now pause and consider any of the modern societies. Do you think God would be any less lenient on us then He would be on Israel in those days? So if our society is going this bad, how do we know if and when a major action by God will take place? We don't, all we can do is be a good witness for God and teach and show how living as He desires is the best way to live, period.
  - c) So why is there such a heavy emphasis on "the temple"? It's the idea that we think we are safe from judgment because we're doing rituals A, B and C. God's interested in how we're living as a witness for Him far more than any and all rituals we perform.
  - d) Now that I've poured on the guilt here, time to move on!
8. Verse 12: "Go now to the place in Shiloh where I first made a dwelling for my Name, and see what I did to it because of the wickedness of my people Israel. <sup>13</sup> While you were doing all these things, declares the LORD, I spoke to you again and again, but you did not listen; I called you, but you did not answer. <sup>14</sup> Therefore, what I did to Shiloh I will now do to the house that bears my Name, the temple you trust in, the place I gave to you and your fathers. <sup>15</sup> I will thrust you from my presence, just as I did all your brothers, the people of Ephraim.'
- a) What's Shiloh and why should I care? When the Israelites first "parked their behind" there in Israel, it's where the tabernacle of God first stayed put. The short version is while all of the Israelites were traveling through the desert for 40 years, they were carrying with them a portable tabernacle structure they'd set up when they stopped. By the time they actually got settled in Israel, a place called Shiloh is where the tabernacle got settled. That place is in "North" Israel, which was conquered roughly a 100 years prior to Jeremiah. His point is simply that the Israelites were saying, "God can't wipe us out, the temple is here". His big response to that accusation is, "Hey, look what happened to the spot where the tabernacle stood. What makes you think the temple is any safer?"
  - b) Again a few hundred years before Jeremiah, Israel spit into two nations. The north one is at this point in history "dead" as an empire called the Assyrians destroyed that place and the Israelites who lived there got relocated all over the Assyrian empire. When Babylon became the dominant player in the region, they conquered the Assyrians and inherited all the people groups that were conquered. All that leads back to "North" Israel. The largest of the tribes that got conquered was called Ephraim. It's a nickname for "North" Israel. All Jeremiah is saying here is in effect, "You want to know God's response to "The" Temple as an issue? Think what happened centuries ago to where the portable tabernacle stood for a long time. That's the point here.
  - c) The application is obvious. If we think God can't destroy "this church" or this town due to it's history, places don't interest God as much as having people be a witness for Him!
  - d) If you think all of this is strange, wait until the next set of verses, speaking of which:
9. Verse 16: "So do not pray for this people nor offer any plea or petition for them; do not plead with me, for I will not listen to you. <sup>17</sup> Do you not see what they are doing in the towns of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem? <sup>18</sup> The children gather wood, the fathers light the fire, and the women knead the dough and make cakes of bread for the Queen of Heaven. They pour out drink offerings to other gods to provoke me to anger. <sup>19</sup> But am I the one they are provoking? declares the LORD. Are they not rather harming themselves, to their own shame?"
- a) Here God tells Jeremiah not to pray for the Israelites. Ask yourself, if you believe God is telling you not to pray for something, would you hold off? To me, it's kind of like saying, "do not open that door whatever you do". So whether not Jeremiah was tempted to say a prayer or not, it's a non-issue because God's saying "it's too late for these people". Sure it's possible there are individuals who's heart is right toward God. The point is the nation had gotten so corrupt, God's saying nothing is going to change the future as He planned it!

- b) Before I get into the specific examples of what the Israelites were doing wrong as listed in these verses, I'd like to pause for a minute to ask the question, "why is this invasion such a big topic in the bible? After all it's covered here, in Ezekiel at the end of 2<sup>nd</sup> Kings. In fact the book of Revelation describes the ultimate destruction of Babylon as if it will occur in a future date. If it's going to be literally destroyed in the future, that means it literally has to be built again and be significant again. The ruins of Babylon stand today and effectively a suburb exists that's part of the old city. All I'm saying is it may be literally rebuilt or it can refer to some other "thing" representing Babylon.
    - i) My answer is the fact that the bible is in effect, "The tale of two cities". It's got a lot to say about the origin, existence and destruction of both Babylon and Jerusalem.
    - ii) The tower of "Babel" is the same location. Babylon represents the ultimate rejection of God while Jerusalem represents the ultimate acceptance of God's rule over us. It is a classic contradiction and that's why it's so prominent in the bible.
  - c) OK, enough theology on Babylon. Back to the text. Jeremiah is listing specific sins as if to say, "Here's why Israel is doomed and nothing's going to change it". The major sin is the fact that the Israelite women are blatantly worshipping a false goddess referred here to as the "Queen of heaven". In Revelation, there's a reference to a woman "who sits enthroned as a queen" (18:7), and many would argue that reference ties here to Jeremiah. I can't say if they're connected other than the fact the terms are similar as both represent female deities associated with Babylon.
  - d) In both of these cases, it refers to a false female deity who was popular among women at the time of Jeremiah's writing. He wrote during the lives of several kings. Most likely it's describing the last "long reigning king" who was bad news and tolerated all sorts of false religions in Israel. This one was a female deity associated with Baal worship. I don't want to get into a lot of detail about historical false deities, as I'm more concerned about how do we relate to this passage. Notice the women are having their children help them. It shows a bad habit being past on to the next generation. The text also mentions drink offerings. A method of associating oneself with what is offering is to pour a drink out over it.
  - e) The key verse is the last one where Jeremiah says in effect, "Don't you realize that you're harming yourself by doing this?" Don't you realize you were separated to be a witness to My existence? By acting "just like everyone else", you're failing to be a witness for Me and that's a big reason why all this bad stuff is coming! Speaking of bad stuff, Verse 20:
10. Verse 20: " `Therefore this is what the Sovereign LORD says: My anger and my wrath will be poured out on this place, on man and beast, on the trees of the field and on the fruit of the ground, and it will burn and not be quenched.
- a) OK, we can grasp how God's going to wipe people out for failing to be a witness for Him, but why emphasize the suffering of animals and plant life? For starters, it's a reminder of all the benefits of that land (think oxen, not lions) and trees that bear fruit. Not only will the Israelites be wiped out but a large foreign army coming into that land is going to wipe out in every way imaginable. Remember that God told Jeremiah not to pray for them. He also told Jeremiah back in Chapter 1 that people wouldn't listen. So why preach all of this hard stuff? For starters when the survivors see how literal Jeremiah's predictions came to pass, it validated him as a prophet. More importantly it's a reminder to us that God is not to be "messed with". God may not ravage our farms for disobedience, but I don't want to be in the neighborhood if the God who created everything is ticked off for ignoring Him.
11. Verse 21: " `This is what the LORD Almighty, the God of Israel, says: Go ahead, add your burnt offerings to your other sacrifices and eat the meat yourselves!
- a) The most important thing to grasp about this section is the reminder that none of us get away with anything! The sacrifices and meat being described here is not condemning a meat-based diet. The issue is sacrifices to idols. A burnt offering is showing a complete commitment so something and the Israelites are showing that to a false deity here.

- b) If you think this is just "ancient life", stop and think how devoted many are to causes and issues that are not only ungodly, but lead to a quicker death. An obvious example is those battling bad drug addictions. It can also refer to those seeking fame or power with no care of any eternal consequences. My simple point is while making of idol statues isn't like life in those days, idols are very much alive today in many forms.
12. Verse 22: For when I brought your forefathers out of Egypt and spoke to them, I did not just give them commands about burnt offerings and sacrifices,<sup>23</sup> but I gave them this command: Obey me, and I will be your God and you will be my people. Walk in all the ways I command you, that it may go well with you.<sup>24</sup> But they did not listen or pay attention; instead, they followed the stubborn inclinations of their evil hearts. They went backward and not forward.<sup>25</sup> From the time your forefathers left Egypt until now, day after day, again and again I sent you my servants the prophets.<sup>26</sup> But they did not listen to me or pay attention. They were stiff-necked and did more evil than their forefathers.'
- a) Now Jeremiah gets all "historical" on them! Since most Israelites knew their basic history, it'd be logical to say, "Hey, remember how we Israelites first got to the Promised Land? It started with an agreement our ancestors made with God at Mount Sinai. They didn't keep their word back then and it cost most of them their lives. Now your generation must pay a similar price. They died in the wilderness for failing to obey Me. Now this generation is about to pay a similar price for gross negligence!
- b) Jeremiah's main point is that his (current) generation is worse. God's instructions to those who came out of Egypt was to go conquer Israel. Because they were afraid, they were told they were die in the desert over the next 40 years. Jeremiah's generation knew all of that, I would say they (and us) are much more accountable for knowing their history and failing to be a witness for God. I've always preached that the good news of knowing our bible is it draws us closer to God. The bad news is we're now accountable for what we know. It's a dangerous two-edged sword, but that's the way "the life game works" whether we want to accept it or not! The truth is God created us so we can glorify Him with our lives. Once we know that, we're accountable for that fact! Failure means suffering in this lifetime. It's worse for the believer because God holds us accountable as His witnesses to the world!
- c) The other thing to notice in the bible text is that Jeremiah didn't say, "God told them once and that was that!" There are references to the prophets who came before Jeremiah.
- i) That means that prophets before Jeremiah were known and accepted as prophets.
- ii) It also means what they taught was widely known.
- iii) The emphasis is on the fact that despite all of this, the Israelites refused to change.
- iv) The idea of warning about the Babylonian invasion is in effect God saying, "I don't know what to do. I've tried every other method. I have to resort to this now as it's gotten to a point of no return!
- v) Was God cruel to kill lots of people including innocent children just because they refused to turn to Him? The answer is to see the "bigger picture". Yes it meant a lot of them didn't get to grow up live a full life. The survivors were dragged in a cruel fashion hundreds of miles away to be captive! If there was n afterlife, this is a very unfair thing to do. If God judges us fairly and we live forever based on the information we had about God and what we did with it, then it's very fair.
- vi) The bigger picture is God did this to teach millions of people that He's never to be "messed with", or this will happen. If that doesn't scare you to do what's right, I'm afraid nothing will! That's why Proverbs 9:10 is, "The fear of God is the beginning of wisdom!"
- vii) My point is the picture is much bigger than Jeremiah preaching to a bunch of those who refuse to listen to Him. It's meant as a warning to anyone who understands if there is a God, we must be accountable to Him. Time to get off the soapbox!
- viii) Meanwhile, Jeremiah is still preaching from his soapbox, so to speak:

13. Verse 27: "When you tell them all this, they will not listen to you; when you call to them, they will not answer. <sup>28</sup> Therefore say to them, `This is the nation that has not obeyed the LORD its God or responded to correction. Truth has perished; it has vanished from their lips. <sup>29</sup> Cut off your hair and throw it away; take up a lament on the barren heights, for the LORD has rejected and abandoned this generation that is under his wrath.
- a) Speaking of being rejected, notice Verse 27 reinforces the fact that effectively, Jeremiah is wasting his time preaching to that generation! Again, the reason God's asking him to do all of this is so they will know He's God when everything Jeremiah says accurately will be happening. It's also to every future generation about how God's not to be messed with!
  - b) The next set of verses is what I call "Samson in reverse". I assume all of you are familiar in a minimal way with the story of Samson and Delilah and the fact he had long hair as part of his commitment to God. The more detailed version is the long hair was a sign of one's commitment one can make to God by looking different than other people. I bring that up here, because with Jeremiah cutting his hair and throwing it away, it is a "reverse sign" in effect of that commitment between God and His people!
  - c) The point is for the "time being", God's rejected the nation of Israel as being a witness for Him and that's why Israel is going into the "penalty box". We'll get to the issue of why He brought them back later. The short version is what I call "God's dilemma". That is the idea that God promised the Messiah would come into the world through that nation. Therefore God had the dilemma of how do I punish them and still keep them as a nation? I'm sure it is also why that nation is still around today, despite the fact it's mostly secular!
  - d) Bottom line, "it's too late for them" except as a witness to future generations to obey Him!
14. Verse 30: " `The people of Judah have done evil in my eyes, declares the LORD. They have set up their detestable idols in the house that bears my Name and have defiled it. <sup>31</sup> They have built the high places of Topheth in the Valley of Ben Hinnom to burn their sons and daughters in the fire--something I did not command, nor did it enter my mind. <sup>32</sup> So beware, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when people will no longer call it Topheth or the Valley of Ben Hinnom, but the Valley of Slaughter, for they will bury the dead in Topheth until there is no more room.
- a) The logical question the Israelites could ask in response to all of this is "What specifically did we (that generation) do wrong?" Well, guess what, God is going to take that on right here and now! Keep in mind, the issue isn't being perfect. The issue is flagrantly ignoring God and worshipping other false gods "right under his nose" so to speak!
  - b) That's why the emphasis here is on idols (statues) made to other gods all over Israel. That isn't the half of it. In order to show loyalty to these false gods, they'd sacrifice their babies to them. It was a way of proving, "We love you (false god) so much, we're willing to give up our children to trust you'll bless us with far more than that!" Yes the rituals for serving those false gods involved "free cheap sex" so getting rid of the babies was an issue. Notice nothing's changed in history in that regards! In fact a fairly recent archeology discovery is a large pile of baby skulls dating back to this time era! My point is what the Israelites were doing then was bad. At the least for the sake of saving the lives of more children, God had to bring this practice to an end, and that's another reason the Babylonian captivity was the necessary and proper thing for God to do here!
  - c) Jeremiah makes reference to the specific place where these ritual killings took place. This reference to the "Valley of Ben Hinnom" is a large valley near Jerusalem where the babies were actually killed. Apparently there were so many fires there to burn them, it became so bad that God said in the future that place would be known as "Valley of Slaughter". I'll get to what that means when we get to the next verse.
  - d) Realize that in the New Testament, that place is known as Gahanna which became a word associated with hell, due to the fires that burned there going back to these days! God is in effect getting revenge for the innocent children who were killed for these rituals.
  - e) Meanwhile Jeremiah is still "dishing it out". Let's continue:



15. Verse 33: Then the carcasses of this people will become food for the birds of the air and the beasts of the earth, and there will be no one to frighten them away. <sup>34</sup> I will bring an end to the sounds of joy and gladness and to the voices of bride and bridegroom in the towns of Judah and the streets of Jerusalem, for the land will become desolate.
- a) Way back when I started this lesson, I talked briefly about the fact that when Babylon did conquer Israel, one of the ways they'd "rub it in" was to take the bones of the leading men of that city and prophets and spread them out in public. As I said in my intro, "It is a way for foreigners to "rub it in their face" how superior their gods are to the Israelite gods!" It's like saying you think you're god is so special, well, look at those who claim to be prophets as their bones lie scattered in the sun. Yes it's horrid stuff, but it makes a dramatic point of what was to come and validate that Jeremiah was a prophet of God!
  - b) One of the things to grasp about that invasion is it's a lot more than the Babylonians being the conquerors and telling the Israelites we're now in charge, deal with it. Israel as a land became effectively empty for awhile! This was the Babylonians sending a message to any nation that thought their god was superior to their gods, that "our gods are the best, as we can tell by watching the results of this war and the survivors being carried into slavery.
  - c) By the way, if you didn't know the head general for the Babylonians, was Nebuchadnezzar who became the king after that invasion was completed. He was the head guy during the time of Daniel!
  - d) OK then, one tough chapter in the books, one more to go. Let's keep moving shall we?
16. Chapter 8, Verse 1: " `At that time, declares the LORD, the bones of the kings and officials of Judah, the bones of the priests and prophets, and the bones of the people of Jerusalem will be removed from their graves. <sup>2</sup> They will be exposed to the sun and the moon and all the stars of the heavens, which they have loved and served and which they have followed and consulted and worshiped. They will not be gathered up or buried, but will be like refuse lying on the ground. <sup>3</sup> Wherever I banish them, all the survivors of this evil nation will prefer death to life, declares the LORD Almighty.'
- a) Apparently Jeremiah's not tired about talking about dead bones being scattered all over the ground! Here he gets specific about who's bones got scattered! The text specifies the kings, officials (government big shots), priests and prophets! So did that mean the bones of say King David got scattered? Who knows! There is a gravesite for him in Israel today but the true answer after millenniums is, who knows! All we know is Jeremiah predicts of bones being removed from their graves. Was it possible the Babylonians were looking for valuables buried in the graves? Sure. The main purpose for Jeremiah to write all of this is to verify him as a prophet! Let's face it, I'm sure Jewish readers living in Babylon after all of this took place must have thought, "OK, that guy really was a prophet of God. Let's see what else he had to say since he's speaking on God's behalf!
  - b) Even for those who survived this slaughter, realize from Verse 3, the survivors will think the dead ones are the "lucky one's". Let me explain that: The Babylonians were known as very cruel to those they captured. They made their captors walk for hundreds of miles as they connected the prisoners via "fish hooks" in their mouths to keep them moving! Know that too this day, Iraq has a significant Jewish population from this event! We are getting a lot of gruesome details not to gross us out, but to show how literal Jeremiah was told by God what would happen for disobedience!
  - c) With that said, the rest of the chapter switches back to "poetry style" versus narrative! We don't know if Jeremiah dictated it like this, or if it was compiled by someone else this way. Personally I don't care that much. The reason it switches to poetry is Jeremiah is giving us poetic arguments about what's going to happen to God's land! Don't forget Jeremiah was a priest and Jewish. He cared about those he served. He cared about his people and also cared about the land of Israel! Therefore, the poetry is here for us to realize how much all of this is hurting Jeremiah to have to preach this. OK then, let's continue:

17. Verse 4: "Say to them, `This is what the LORD says: " `When men fall down, do they not get up? When a man turns away, does he not return? <sup>5</sup> Why then have these people turned away? Why does Jerusalem always turn away? They cling to deceit; they refuse to return.
- a) One has to read Verses 4 and 5 as contradictions making a point. When a person who has the ability to walk falls down, assuming nothing is broken, they get back up? If we travel somewhere, assuming we're not moving, don't we naturally return? Jeremiah is giving us simple analogies to make his next point of Verse 5: His contradicting point is simply that the Israelites collectively have turned from what they were called to do be a living witness for the God who separated them in the first place!
  - b) One of the things we must remember is that we were separated for a purpose. It's not just to be saved. It's to use our lives as a witness for Jesus. Jeremiah's point is collectively the people living in Israel at that time have forgotten that and they've gotten to a point where God has to take "drastic measures". Were they worse than say people living when Judges were big in Israel? Who knows! We just know that God has a limit to His tolerance. We wouldn't want to push that limit as it's bad for our health to put it mildly!
18. Verse 6: I have listened attentively, but they do not say what is right. No one repents of his wickedness, saying, "What have I done?" Each pursues his own course like a horse charging into battle. <sup>7</sup> Even the stork in the sky knows her appointed seasons, and the dove, the swift and the thrush observe the time of their migration. But my people do not know the requirements of the LORD.
- a) One of the things to grasp about God is He's always willing to forgive, no matter how bad we've sinned or how many times we've messed up! Yes we'll still suffer in this life for the sins we've committed, but that's a separate issue from eternal salvation. However, what it is we must remember is realizing we're saved is just "day one". Then we're called to live as a witness for Jesus the rest of our lives.
  - b) The problem with the Israelites of Jeremiah's day is they didn't "walk the walk or talk the talk". I'm sure many of them went through the motions of going to synagogue each week but refused to change their lifestyle to be a witness for Him. With all that said, we read in Verse 6 that God listens to what we say. To quote a pastor I once I heard, "God doesn't say a lot but He's a great listener!" Then Jeremiah gives examples of animals that instinctively know what to do, but compares that to His people ignoring those instincts and doing only what they feel like doing at that moment! He compares His people to horses charging into battle (the idea of willfully choosing to sin and ignoring God) like a horse charging! Then a few birds are mentioned who are built with the instinct to know when it's time to fly for the "season" north or south.
  - c) The point is we should know better, but still ignore God. Yes we all make mistakes. What most of us fail to do is rely upon His power to live the life He calls us to live! It starts with a desire to want to please God, and then, not by willpower, but by surrender to His will, I argue we take the logical next step and do what's right. Am I perfect at it? Of course not! I just know from studying my bible and living life, here is what appears to be the logical thing to do next and that's what God expects of us. Obviously worshipping other gods is a big "no no". Even the simpler things like taking steps to avoid areas we know are weak areas of our life is a big step in the right direction.
  - d) OK, Jeremiah is on a role and I interrupted. We're almost through for the lesson!
19. Verse 8: " `How can you say, "We are wise, for we have the law of the LORD," when actually the lying pen of the scribes has handled it falsely? <sup>9</sup> The wise will be put to shame; they will be dismayed and trapped. Since they have rejected the word of the LORD, what kind of wisdom do they have?
- a) My loose translation: There are no excuses for willfully choosing to ignore God! The ones Jeremiah was preaching to were making excuses for their behavior! Let's be honest, we'll say anything to get us out of trouble and that's the excuses we're reading here!

- b) It's one thing to go through the "church motions" weekly. It's another when God holds us accountable for what we know about Him. In these verses, Jeremiah is addressing leaders who were in charge of copying God's word. Jeremiah accuses them of lying about what is written there. Why would people lie to those who can't read it for themselves? In order to get away with the sins mentioned in this lesson! Bottom line, is Jeremiah is telling them of how they'll be put to shame for their action. OK, enough guilt there, let's move on.
20. Verse 10: Therefore I will give their wives to other men and their fields to new owners. From the least to the greatest, all are greedy for gain; prophets and priests alike, all practice deceit.
- a) I will be the first to admit, this verse seems sexist as if it's saying that the women belong to their husbands. I think that misses the point. Jeremiah is speaking to men at this point. It is saying to married men in effect, "All you have will be lost. That includes your wives as well as the farms you work at." Remember that Israel was mainly an agricultural society. Also remember that most marriages were arranged and men usually married young. The other norm for that society was to have lots of children as more "farm hands".
- b) That leads to the next criticism here. Jeremiah's saying that all people including those who are called to be priests and prophets are more interested in profit than helping people. It's not a sin or a crime to want to make a profit. The "sin" is to ignore people's needs because one only cares about profit. What God desires of us is to work in unison to be a witness to His existence and make a difference in the world around us for Him. OK, how do I do that and still provide for myself financially? "Balance" like anything else in life. The criticism's based on a lack of balance. Of only caring about profit and not caring about people! That sin is as old as mankind! The problem is that they (we) are supposed to be God's chosen. I would argue that God isn't against profit. He simply wants us to be a witness for Him as we go through life. When we see "needs" we're to do our best to help. The sin here has to do with ignoring helping people in need and only being concerned about profit. OK then, I've beaten that point to death, let's move on.
21. Verse 11: They dress the wound of my people as though it were not serious. "Peace, peace," they say, when there is no peace. <sup>12</sup> 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 they are punished, says the LORD.
- a) The sin/crime here is about "ignoring the problem". The idea of Verse 11 is a leader who is saying, "Go home be at peace, don't worry about it, when in reality they should tell the people listening to them that they need to change their ways for God to be pleasing with them. So are you saying the leaders need to convict more? My church does plenty of that right now! I'd argue that the function of any good teacher is to help people grow, by what they teach. Conviction is one method. Explaining His grace is another. Practicing what it is they preach is equally as essential. That's what Jeremiah is complaining about in Verse twelve. The idea of not "personally buying what they're peddling!" In effect it's the same thing that Jesus was saying about the religious leaders of his day. Jesus said they followed all sorts of ridiculous picky rules and missed the bigger picture of simply trusting God as well as doing good for others.
- b) Anyway, it's much more than saying "you're messing up". The lecture being given is that it is approaching "too late" as God's people are being so self-centered and so self-righteous they are ignoring what He's called them to do. OK, you get that by now, let's move on!
22. Verse 13: "I will take away their harvest, declares the LORD. There will be no grapes on the vine. There will be no figs on the tree, and their leaves will wither. What I have given them will be taken from them. "
- a) I stated on this page that Israel was mainly an agricultural society. That includes growing fruit from vines and trees. Therefore, God's saying "He's going to punish Israelites where it really hurts, "in the wallet". Because as a society they got to concerned with greed, it is a fair punishment for only caring about themselves here!

23. Verse 14: "Why are we sitting here? Gather together! Let us flee to the fortified cities and perish there! For the LORD our God has doomed us to perish and given us poisoned water to drink, because we have sinned against him. <sup>15</sup> We hoped for peace but no good has come, for a time of healing but there was only terror.
- a) Jeremiah returns to predicting the future here. He's predicting how the Israelites will run to inside the city walls for protection. Notice those same Israelites realize it's God who is to blame for punishment. It's as if they'll realize when it's too late, that God is seeking His revenge for what they're guilty of doing! That's sort of how I picture a lot of people facing God on judgment day. They know they've ignored Him all their lives and deserve what it is He's doing to them. So did the Israelites really die off this way? I'm sure it happened.
  - b) So what if we're saved by God's grace. Do we have to worry about this? Only in the sense that we need to realize He still expects us to be a witness for Him. I've been pounding that point the whole lesson, so we can finish what's left here as you get that by now!
24. Verse 16: The snorting of the enemy's horses is heard from Dan; at the neighing of their stallions the whole land trembles. They have come to devour the land and everything in it, the city and all who live there."
- a) A quick Israel geography lesson is needed here. The land of Israel was divided in twelve sections, one after each of the twelve tribes. The territory for the tribe of Dan is to this day in the most northern part of Israel. While the territory was wiped out when the Assyrians destroyed the Northern Kingdom about 100 years earlier, the point is this is meant to be a warning as the invasion's coming from the north across what's called "The Golan Heights" today. The point is Babylon is sending a large army lead by men on horses to invade what is left of Israel as a nation from that location. The related point is all that's there is about to be completely wiped out. The point for you and me is of course, that God can and would take away our ministry opportunities if we fail to be a witness for Him.
25. Verse 17: "See, I will send venomous snakes among you, vipers that cannot be charmed, and they will bite you," declares the LORD.
- a) I don't know if this meant literal snakes became a problem in Israel when the invaders did come or is it referring to the Babylonian army as they attacked. Either view is possible to make. The bigger picture is "really bad news is coming time to deal with it". All of this is a way to validate Jeremiah as a prophet and as a warning that God isn't to be messed with in terms of us being a witness for Him. If you get that, you got this lesson. OK, we're near the finish line. Let's keep moving.
26. Verse 18: O my Comforter in sorrow, my heart is faint within me. <sup>19</sup> Listen to the cry of my people from a land far away: "Is the LORD not in Zion? Is her King no longer there?" "Why have they provoked me to anger with their images, with their worthless foreign idols?"
- a) Historically Jeremiah's nickname has been "the weeping prophet". Here we get a taste as to why that is. It shows that Jeremiah wasn't preaching this gleefully as to say, "You have really messed up and now you're going to suffer!" Instead, picture a man trying to warn a nation that he's part of! He's trying to remind people God is God and we're only harming ourselves when we turn from that fact about life! He's summing up this part of what will be a four chapter lecture by saying, "Are all of you nuts? Don't you realize how much you are killing yourself in terms of lifestyle here and now as well as eternal punishment? Get your act together, this is not good!"
27. Verse 20: "The harvest is past, the summer has ended, and we are not saved." <sup>21</sup> Since my people are crushed, I am crushed; I mourn, and horror grips me. <sup>22</sup> Is there no balm in Gilead? Is there no physician there? Why then is there no healing for the wound of my people?
- a) This is the "too late" plea to end the chapter. "Apparently the town of Gilead was known as a source for producing a healing balm. The main point here is the Israelites simply are refusing to change their lifestyle in spite the danger. The obvious warning to us, is for us to change before it's too late. That's in effect what Jeremiah is preaching in this book.

28. OK, twelve pages of horrid torture. I'm the first to admit, this is tough stuff. It's part of the bible as God is using the "carrot and stick" approach to get people to turn to Him as I'm fond of saying. I'll end with the key point of why God separated us in the first place, to be a witness for Him. To turn from that calling means that God is going to do "everything possible" to draw us back to His care and support but He requires obedience. Turning from Him is painful in this life as well as an issue as far as eternal consequences. The letter is to the believer, more than the unbeliever. It is a big warning that God's not to be messed with. With that said, that's enough for one lesson. Yes, a big thanks for putting up with my rants through all of this. Let me close in prayer now:
29. Heavenly Father, this is "tough sledding". It's hard to read of how You've punished people You have called to be a witness for You. Help us to read this and realize it applies just as much to us today as it did to Israelites of that day. Help us to draw upon Your power so we can use our lives to be a living witness for You. Guide us to make a difference for You and make it obvious how it is that You desire we make that difference. We pray in Jesus name, Amen!