

Jeremiah Chapters 9-10 John Karmelich

1. I believe God laid the following lesson title on me as I prepared today to write this lesson: "Crime and punishment". As I said in the last lesson, these chapters wrap up a four-chapter sermon that Jeremiah gives his fellow Israelites on why God's judgment's coming down hard and will happen "now" (soon after Jeremiah preached it). As my regulars know, I've beaten to death that point in the five lessons I've written so far on Jeremiah. The more important question is why should we'd be focused on that? What's in it for us? So glad you asked!
 - a) Think about why all this is part of the bible. It's not to learn ancient history of how all of those Israelites were killed thousands of years ago. All of this in effect is to remind us that there is a punishment for ignoring how God calls us to live. Yes there are hints of eternal punishment in this section and we'll get to that. What's far more important is the fact that God holds us accountable for our lives. The good news of being saved is we'll be living in heaven forever. The "bad news" is that God effectively says to us, "I didn't pick you so you can go do whatever you want and ignore Me! I picked you (that's all of us who are called) so we can glorify God with our lives! That simply means He expects us to be living as His witness to the world around us. In effect, we're all "Jeremiah's". Just as God called him to be a witness to the Israelites of His day and how they're messing up, God expects us to be living "differently enough" so that we're His witnesses to the world around us.
 - b) So does that mean I have to quit my job, wear a sandwich board saying, "Jesus is coming" for the rest of my life? For 99.9% of us, no! It does mean that God expects us to be a living witness for Him no matter what He's called us to do. It means the purpose of live is for us to glorify God with our lives. That's why we were made in the first place. That's living the Christian life is supposed to be like. Does it mean we're to be perfect? Of course not. Will God still love us when we mess up? Of course! He wants our lives to be a witness for Him in all that we do. To quote one of my mentors, "Going shopping, take Jesus with you". We are always "on the clock" for Jesus in that sense. That's why we're saved in the first place!
 - c) All of that leads me back to Jeremiah. God called him to be tough on the Israelites living in his day. This is God saying in effect, "You refuse to live as I desire? Well what choice do I have left but to punish you all. I expect those I call to be a witness for Me and yes it also means there is suffering for a failure to do so! No that doesn't mean He will wipe out our homes tomorrow. It does mean a failure to live as a witness for Him has consequences. If you get that, you get Jeremiah. Obviously there's a lot more the book than that, but that is the key point. He's telling the Israelites, judgment is coming down hard as there's nothing left God can do to "get your attention". That why when generations of people read this, it is a stern warning to not mess with God, period, period period!
2. OK enough lecturing for one page. Let's get into the specifics of these two chapters since we're in the neighborhood. Let's start by remembering again we're reading a four-chapter speech. I then want you to remember Chapters 9 and 10 are the end of that speech and there were no breaks in the original text. The point is we're just "picking up" Jeremiah in mid-thought as we read this!
 - a) With all that understand, Chapter 9 opens up with Jeremiah complaining. In effect he tells the Israelites, I'm not crazy about doing this. I'd rather not have to preach all of this horrid news. I'm one of you and I get no joy about preaching about all this destruction! God has called me to be a witness to a "lost and dying world" and whether you want to admit it or not, "you've brought this on yourself". I'm just the unfortunate messenger who God called to state all of this.
 - b) Anyway, after two verses of "woe is me" by Jeremiah, he knows he's got get back to doing what God called him to do, which is to preach on Israel's "crime and punishment" The rest of these two chapters pretty much focus on what they did wrong and why they must pay for acting the way their acting. So bear with me as I describe the details!

3. By the time we get to Verse 3 of Chapter 9, Jeremiah is already laying it on thick! He warms up by saying effect the Israelites go from one sin to the other and refuse to repent or acknowledge God's in charge of their lives. One of the important aspects to learn about life is there is a "too far" when it comes to God. The issue isn't salvation, it's messing up so badly we lose our opportunity to be a witness for Him. That's what I preached on "Page 1" and that's what Jeremiah preaches for this section of the text. Let me continue:
- a) Jeremiah goes on to tell the Israelites that they can't even trust each other! Everyone is acting like a "deceiver". For example people may say, "May God bless you" as you pass by but no one is truly committed to following Him. Of course I'm not preaching on acting in a perfect way. I'm just saying if we claim to be followers of Jesus, our lives should show it as we go through our lives. OK, deviated. Let me continue.
 - b) By Verse 7 God's saying through Jeremiah in effect, "I've had enough of this" it's time that I "applied the hand of punishment to the seat of understanding" as the quote goes about giving a child a spanking. In effect that's what God's doing on a grand scale. The nation's gotten so corrupt, God is in effect saying there's nothing else I can do.
 - c) By Verse 10 Jeremiah is announcing just how desolate Israel will become. Both archeology and history records that the land of Israel was literally desolate for 70 years when all those who survived that siege were literally taken hundreds of miles away.
 - d) After a few more verses describing how thorough and necessary the judgment will be, at that point Jeremiah uses an illustration common in the Middle East event to Jesus day. It's the idea of professional mourners at a funeral. It's an ancient Middle East custom to hire a bunch of women who would moan at funerals. The idea is the destruction would be such a thorough thing, "we might as well bring out the band" to announce it!
 - e) Then there's a few more verses at the end of Chapter 9 on how complete the destruction of the nation of Israel will be. Then Jeremiah expands it to imply the eternal judgment for all people. Jeremiah mentions other nations in the area of Israel as if to say, "it isn't just Israel I'm judging but all people". Grant it, those other nations were also conquered by Babylon, but I suspect there's a hint of eternal judgment as well. The reason to mention the other places is to say in effect, "God's in charge of the whole world and those nearby nations are aware that the Israelites were convinced their god is "God of Gods". With Babylon wiping out those other nations it further validates God as "the" God as well as Jeremiah!
 - f) Chapter 10 gets into more warnings to the Israelites to not live like other nations. It starts with what reads in English like a Christmas tree. Obviously I have no trouble with having such trees as long as they are not worshipped as idols! What Jeremiah is referring to is the fact that such statues were created by men and then worshipped as representing the gods they worshipped. It's God' way of saying, "Get back to making Me god, and not the idols!"
 - i) Another obvious is "idols" are alive and well today, although they're not made out of wood or stone. Watch where people spend their spare income or spare time as that's where the idols exist.
 - g) Then Jeremiah wraps up this speech by stating effectively who God is, what He's done in the past and why Israel should be worshipping Him. Remember that judgment is certain at this time. Jeremiah's warning them to accept it and understand why it has to come!
4. OK John, this is all horrid stuff. Why should I think about it? Will a foreign army be knocking on my door tomorrow? Probably not. However, what we must remember is God judges our actions "here and now". Because we're called to be His witnesses to the world, He expects us to act like it, or we too can suffer the loss of opportunities to be a witness for Him or worse. Personally, it's not worth the risk of finding out. I figure that if God exists and He demands obedience, what right do I have to question Him? Either He's in charge or He isn't. The bible's full of internal and external ways to prove it's the word of God. I hit that acceptance a long time ago. Therefore, I figure I just want to play it safe and be obedient to Him. That's the essence of Jeremiah's message on "Crime and Punishment". The rest is the details. Speaking of which, let's get started.

5. Chapter 9, Verse 1: Oh, that my head were a spring of water and my eyes a fountain of tears! I would weep day and night for the slain of my people.² Oh, that I had in the desert a lodging place for travelers, so that I might leave my people and go away from them; for they are all adulterers, a crowd of unfaithful people.
- a) One has to admit, Jeremiah starts off in a bad mood! It gets more depressing from here so get used to it! All of this isn't here to depress us! It's to make us realize believers do suffer if we fail to live as God desires. If you get that, you get Jeremiah. The rest is the details, so let's get started on them. If that's all God wanted to tell us, this would be much shorter!
 - b) As I stated near the end Chapter 8, Jeremiah is famous for being a "weeping prophet". It's just a nickname he got because there are a lot of references like Verse 1, where he feels bad for having to do this. Let's be honest, if God called us to preach "doom and destruction" to everything we know and love and we get rejected for preaching it, we too might be asking God, "Excuse me you think you got the right person for this job?" God's response in effect is, "I called you, your rewards are eternal, now go use the spiritual gifts I've given you to make a difference in the world around you!" Yes, that's what God calls us to do as well!
 - c) With that understood, Verse 1 essentially says Jeremiah cried a lot because he grasped the destruction was coming for everything he knew and loved. There's nothing Jeremiah can do about it except do what God called him to do and accept the reality. This leads anyone to ask, "If all of this is going to happen and no one is going to change, why bother?" That's because Jeremiah's audience is much bigger than those he's preaching to! It's also to all of us who study our bible! It's the reminder that there are consequences for refusing to trust in God's guidance for our lives and failing to live as He demands. I'm speaking to all of us Christians saved by grace. The natural question is "Saved to do what"? Being saved is just the beginning of a relationship with Him. We're called to use our life to make a difference for Him. OK, I've pounded that point over our heads enough, let's discuss Verse 2.
 - d) Verse 2 is essentially saying, "I wish I didn't have to do this. I wish I could travel to a place where I could live in peace and not have the burden of announcing the punishment that I was called to preach. I don't know one Christian who hasn't thought that at some point in his or her life. To use my ministry as an example, do I want to get up early in the morning to preach about God's judgment on believers? Hardly! I do this only because I can't stand not doing it. I do it because the "Weight of God" calling me to type, so I pound away at it!
 - e) Jeremiah ends Verse 2 with an insult to the Israelites. It mentions adultery. Keep in mind in Hebrew thought adultery and turning from God are synonyms. That's because adultery is cheating on our spouse. Idolatry is cheating on our relationship with God. The point is that all of us can say at times, "We're not putting our hearts where our mouth is". It's why Jeremiah can make us feel guilty with writing from 2,500 years ago! Yes of course, we are forgiven of our sins. The issue is, are we aware of our sins and have we turned from them as we claim we use our lives as a witness for Jesus? That's the underlying question here!
 - f) With that understood Jeremiah is just getting warmed up with his accusations. That's why I titled this lesson "Crime and punishment". OK, then, back to the crimes!
6. Verse 3: "They make ready their tongue like a bow, to shoot lies; it is not by truth that they triumph in the land. They go from one sin to another; they do not acknowledge me," declares the LORD.
- a) So what lies is Jeremiah talking about? If I had to guess it is to make claims that we have not abandoned God. It's like saying, "Hey we still go to synagogue every Saturday, we're still working the fire pit at the tabernacle and doing the rituals, how dare you make all of those accusations against us?" Let's face it, we Christians can easily say the same thing. I can just hear us saying, "We worship God, we do church every Sunday. We write checks for different causes. How dare you (Jeremiah) accuse us of not loving God? We know we are not perfect, but why preach all this hard judgment just because we do other things all week after doing our "Christian duties" on say, Sunday?"

- b) Rituals are simply ways of showing one loves God. However, if our hearts aren't in it, it's then those rituals don't mean anything. Stop and consider why God bothered to create us in the first place? What's in it for Him? The answer is He's full of love and desires to share that love with us. What He desires in return is for us to honor Him as God and draw close to Him on a daily basis. I'm not talking about thinking of God "24/7". I'm saying we need to realize we're "on the clock" for Jesus every day. Our actions must follow every day. I'm willing to bet based on reading all of Jeremiah that the Israelites back then were just going through the "church motions" but not truly committed to Him. If that stings, welcome to the club! It stings me too as my actions don't always match my words. The secret is for us to be dependant upon His power to obey Him. When we ask His Spirit to guide our lives, only then can we live as He desires. So how do we do that? We pray for His guidance, we study His word to consider how to live and then make the best decisions we can given all of that! That's what God desires of us as a witness for Him.
- c) Just read Verse 3 again. I think it ties well. OK, enough guilt there. Let's try Verse 4:
7. Verse 4: "Beware of your friends; do not trust your brothers. For every brother is a deceiver, and every friend a slanderer. ⁵ Friend deceives friend, and no one speaks the truth. They have taught their tongues to lie; they weary themselves with sinning. ⁶ You live in the midst of deception; in their deceit they refuse to acknowledge me," declares the LORD.
- a) Keep in mind that Jeremiah isn't some stranger sent a million miles away to go preach the message of "Repent or die". He's preaching among his own extended family. I don't know if the text is talking about his literal brothers. Most likely it's talking about fellow Israelites to whom Jeremiah was called to preach. "Deceiving and slandering" is referring to what is preached in the first few verses. God is saying through Jeremiah "don't trust those around you because people claim their following me, but their lives and their actions is proof that they are lying. Were there other sins? Of course! Once one makes the decision to do their own will, the world is full of "substitutes" for the true God.
- b) Let me try this concept another way. God gives us a set of rules to live by as if to say, this is the best way to live out life. God allows the world to offer alternatives so people can see the damage done by those alternatives. The bible is very "practical" in its demands. God's not interested in punishing us. What He wants is for us to live the best way we can as we use our lives as a witness for Him. In effect Babylon offers every other option. I'd argue it is the root of all religion, practice and ideas counter to what God wants. The "Babel tower" in Genesis 11 is "one and the same" with this Babylon in terms of location as well the idea of offering alternatives to how God wants us to live. This leads us back to the text. What Jeremiah is accusing the Israelites of, is ignoring how God wants us to live every day and not just "go through the rituals in order to get God off our back" so to speak.
- c) OK enough of the crimes. Time to switch gears and talk about the punishment!
8. Verse 7: Therefore this is what the LORD Almighty says: "See, I will refine and test them, for what else can I do because of the sin of my people? ⁸ Their tongue is a deadly arrow; it speaks with deceit. With his mouth each speaks cordially to his neighbor, but in his heart he sets a trap for him. ⁹ Should I not punish them for this?" declares the LORD. "Should I not avenge myself on such a nation as this?"
- a) A good question to ponder is why did the judgment come down so hard at that time? Are those Israelites any worse than any other believers? Why is the hammer coming down so hard at this time? Can't one look at just about any moment in history as to say, "That did it, time to wipe them out as I'm all out of options!"
- i) Part of the answer is to show all serious bible readers from that time onward, that God isn't to be messed with. He can "bring down the hammer" at any time and at any place. The nation of Israel was wiped out twice in history and yet came back to be a nation! God's also allowed churches and ministries to "die" when we fail to be a witness for Him as well. The threat is a part of history.

- ii) Well why doesn't God punish the world then for their sins? What do you think an eternal judgment is all about? What do you think the big "Revelation show" will be for? That judgment is coming down. However, I'd argue the people God cares the most for, are those who are committed to being His witnesses as we'll be with Him forever! God's harder on believers in the sense He disciplines those He loves as to make us collectively a better witness for Him.
 - b) Every time I think I deviate too much from the text, I look back at it and realize, "I'm right on target" here. What I'm preaching in effect is the same thing God is. He's coming down hard on that generation to say, "I've had enough of people claiming to be My followers as they turn their backs on me the rest of the week". Realize at the time Jeremiah was writing the worship of the false god "Baal" and all that goes with it was rampant. That includes a lot of baby sacrifices. Yes it's existed all through Israelites history to date, but God has to have a limit to His patience and He needs to "bring the hammer down" hard at times if for no other reason than to prove He's not to be messed with.
 - c) Bottom line, God is saying it's "judgment time", deal with it as bad as it will be!
9. Verse 10: I will weep and wail for the mountains and take up a lament concerning the desert pastures. They are desolate and untraveled, and the lowing of cattle is not heard. The birds of the air have fled and the animals are gone. ¹¹ "I will make Jerusalem a heap of ruins, a haunt of jackals; and I will lay waste the towns of Judah so no one can live there."
- a) I've stated many times that I've always found it strange that the God who created all that we can comprehend, looks at the land of Israel and says in effect, "That's mine don't mess with it!" It's not just the people who inhabit it or visit it.
 - b) I mention that because in these verses, Jeremiah doesn't lament for the Israelites but only for the land, and the animals that roam there. The point is God intended for His land to be inhabitant by "His People". Jeremiah is lamenting the fact Israel as a land will only be a place for wild animals to inhabit after the invasion. Historical and archeological evidence both indicate that when the Babylonians successfully attacked Israel they turned all of the cities there into wastelands. Jerusalem and the other Israelite cities of that time literal did become as Jeremiah describes here as a "heap of ruins" where only wild animals roamed.
 - c) Birds and Israel is an interesting side topic. A lot of birds migrate over the land of Israel. It is noticeable if one travels there. However, if there is nothing on the ground worth the effort to eat or attack, I guarantee such birds would and do change their migration pattern as they travel. The point is simply that Jeremiah successfully predicted what happened to Israel at that time. So how do we know this wasn't written after it occurred? Even if that did happen, ask yourself, why would Israelites accept him as a prophet if he stated all this after it occurred. Either way, it's proof that God isn't to be messed with and punishment's a natural consequence for ignoring who we're called to serve. That's the key point!
 - d) Speaking of trying to understand why all this happened, I present Verse 12:
10. Verse 12: What man is wise enough to understand this? Who has been instructed by the LORD and can explain it? Why has the land been ruined and laid waste like a desert that no one can cross? ¹³ The LORD said, "It is because they have forsaken my law, which I set before them; they have not obeyed me or followed my law. ¹⁴ Instead, they have followed the stubbornness of their hearts; they have followed the Baals, as their fathers taught them." ¹⁵ Therefore, this is what the LORD Almighty, the God of Israel, says: "See, I will make this people eat bitter food and drink poisoned water. ¹⁶ I will scatter them among nations that neither they nor their fathers have known, and I will pursue them with the sword until I have destroyed them."
- a) The essential question is why did those Israelites turn their back on God? What got them to turn to the false god (Baal) and reject God? In that sense Jeremiah's pondering life from God's perspective. It's like asking, "What did God do wrong? Why did all those Israelites turn from God? Given all the Israelite history of how He got them to that land and wiped out all their enemies, what would motivate them to turn from Him?"

- b) A similar question can be asked of Christians. What motivates us to sin in spite of the fact we know what's the right thing to do? Let's be honest, sin is tempting, period. No matter how long we've been a believer, temptation is well, tempting. Why? Because the God we worship is not visible. The benefits of sin are often visible all around us! So if we know of the right thing to do, how can we avoid such temptation? For starters, whenever moments like those come, He promises there will always be a way to escape if we're willing to look for it. (See 1st Corinthians 10:13). I'm a big believer in prayer when a temptation situation comes. For example if a married man is being tempted by the site of a beautiful woman, I was correctly taught, to start praying for her. Then he sees her as a child of God as opposed to someone they're sexually attracted to. The temptation to say steal something is another example of something we're less likely to do if we pray for the owner of a thing!
 - i) What about if one is trying to diet. That's a big topic all to itself. My point is simply that we can resist temptation a whole lot better if we start praying for the situation that we know is wrong. I'm not saying we can be perfect. I'm just saying prayer is a great way to deal with many types of temptation when they comes.
 - c) Anyway, the Israelites were tempted by the "cheap sex" that goes with Baal worship. They were also tempted because that system also promises financial success. The Israelites can see other nations around them getting these things by worshipping these gods and they'd be thinking, "Hey I want some of that!" Just like we may see somebody get something say on a television show or a movie and be tempted to turn from what we know is wrong.
 - d) As I said, this lesson is about crime and punishment. Yes often the punishment will come naturally based on what sin we choose to commit. However, God's point is He needed to make it obvious it's bigger than that! What I mean is sin is more than individual suffering, it's the idea of turning from how God wants us to live will corrupt the world around us. We're supposed to be His witness to the world. When we fail to do so, we're ignoring how God calls us to live. I'm not saying we have to be perfect all the time. The point is if we want to avoid this type of significant punishment, it begins with living with an attitude of the fact we're always "on the clock" for Jesus.
 - e) Speaking of punishment, let's get back to the text. God says the specific punishment is the Israelites will be scattered to places where they have never been. As I've stated before, the Babylonians prevented rebellion by scattering their conquered all over their empire. What is even scarier is the one's who didn't survive for relocation, were killed and also suffered by eating bad food and bad water. The point is if the sword didn't kill them, disease from bad food and drink did! Yes this is all horrid stuff to think about. The lesson for us is that punishment from God must be avoided and that's the "stick" incentive to live as He wants us to live. With that said, Jeremiah does change the topic a little. Let me explain.
11. Verse 17: This is what the LORD Almighty says: "Consider now! Call for the wailing women to come; send for the most skillful of them.¹⁸ Let them come quickly and wail over us till our eyes overflow with tears and water streams from our eyelids.
- a) There is an ancient practice in the Middle East that still exists to this day to hire women to be "professional mourners" at funerals. There were women who did this for a living. It's used as an illustration here. It's not about being literal. It's the idea that there'll be lots of death in Israel. It's God's way of saying, "It's going to be really bad and the "professionals" are being called in to show how bad it's going to be. It even implies encouragement. It is like the idea that laughter is contagious, so would lots of people crying over the dead. All of it is simply a way of Jeremiah expressing, "Here's how bad the punishment will be!"
12. Verse 19: The sound of wailing is heard from Zion: `How ruined we are! How great is our shame! We must leave our land because our houses are in ruins.' "²⁰ Now, O women, hear the word of the LORD; open your ears to the words of his mouth. Teach your daughters how to wail; teach one another a lament.
- a) Well, we get a few more verses on the "wailing women": Let me explain.

- b) Apparently Jeremiah's request isn't that the moaning women just say "harmless chants". It is a request to repeat specific things. God is telling Jeremiah that everything they value or cherish is about to be destroyed. Therefore Jeremiah's saying, "Teach others how to wail, it will be needed "far and wide" for everything you know will be ruined".
 - c) Keep in mind Jeremiah isn't organizing a woman's "chanting club". He's trying to explain in terms the Israelites of his day would understand, just how bad the damage will be. It is a custom even today as it was back then to have professional wailers at funerals. What he is saying in effect is the destruction will be so bad, that profession will have to grow a lot!
 - d) OK, I've beaten that point to death. Remember Jeremiah is well aware of the fact that God told him that his message would be unpopular and he'd be rejected. Still, when God tells us to do something in effect what choice do we have? I wonder if Jeremiah knew that his writings would end up being inspiration to millions for millenniums. Again, we're back to the idea that God holds us accountable for what we know about Him, we will suffer if we fail to be a witness for Him. I've pounded that point to death too, so let's move on.
13. Verse 21: Death has climbed in through our windows and has entered our fortresses; it has cut off the children from the streets and the young men from the public squares. ²² Say, "This is what the LORD declares: `The dead bodies of men will lie like refuse on the open field, like cut grain behind the reaper, with no one to gather them.' "
- a) There's a famous joke that says one day God announced that the world will soon come to an end. Then the New York Times put on their banner headline, "World to end tomorrow, women and children to suffer the most!" I admit that joke popped in my head as I read of these verses. Jeremiah's point is that it won't just be soldiers dying for Israel. Everyone is going to suffer, despite age or sex. From children to the elderly. From what I know of my history, this was brutal. The Babylonians not only destroyed every thing of value but also killed a lot of people so they wouldn't have to drag them a 1,000 miles into captivity! One of my mentors once met a man from Iraq (The city of Babylon is in Iraq today). The man I am referring to, asked the Iraq man, what's the most unique thing about your people? His response, "We're the most brutal people on planet earth". I don't know how true it is, but as I read about what they did as far as killing everything in site, I'm starting to believe it!
 - b) OK, that's horrid to think about. What's the point? Let's read on and find out!
14. Verse 23: This is what the LORD says: "Let not the wise man boast of his wisdom or the strong man boast of his strength or the rich man boast of his riches, ²⁴ but let him who boasts boast about this: that he understands and knows me, that I am the LORD, who exercises kindness, justice and righteousness on earth, for in these I delight," declares the LORD.
- a) This is God saying, you want something to be proud of? Forget riches, or being strong. I am impressed by those who put their trust in Me and "act on it". Want to know why it is I am doing all of this horrid stuff? Look in the mirror! Failing to be a witness for Me is one big "wasted life" and I need to make an example out of you so that future generations will know that I'm never to be messed with, period! Yes, that group of Israelites had to suffer terribly for turning to God. So have millions who've been martyred for believing the true and living God throughout the millenniums. If we are going to live forever, what matters is that we use our lives for what matters, as a living witness for Jesus. That's why God did make us in the first place.
 - b) Verse 24 is in essence examples of how God expects us to live as a witness for Him. What I suspect many of you are thinking, "I know some really kind people who fit Verse 24 but they don't believe Jesus is God. How is that fair? The short answer is no one is perfect. It is a matter of believing Jesus died for all our sins then out of gratitude we live that way as opposed to trying to prove our worth to God. OK, I'm preaching to the choir again, but it was necessary to point that out!
 - c) With that said, there is only one verse left in Chapter 25 and then one more chapter in this speech which I'll crank out over the rest of the lesson. We're almost there, hang in there!

15. Verse 25: "The days are coming," declares the LORD, "when I will punish all who are circumcised only in the flesh-- ²⁶ Egypt, Judah, Edom, Ammon, Moab and all who live in the desert in distant places. For all these nations are really uncircumcised, and even the whole house of Israel is uncircumcised in heart."
- a) The nations mentioned outside of Egypt are all part of what is Jordan today. Apparently it was common practice in that day for the physical act of circumcision to be also done by residents of those countries. God's saying in effect "so what?" Physical acts, is not what saves people! Trusting in the true God is. Acting on what we know about Him is how we are expected to live. In a sense, these verses are hints of eternal judgment for all people!
 - b) These verses are here in the sense of asking, "Wait a second God, we're messing up, but is not our neighbors even worse? That's why God's saying, "Don't worry about that, as bad as you're messing up, they'll be eternally judged based on the fact they have knowledge of Me for "being in the neighborhood" but not acting on it!
 - c) In the "literal" sense, all these nations were also defeated by the Babylonians so this is His way of saying just because a nation "knows about God" doesn't make them exempt from a judgment by God just because they haven't committed their lives to Him. All this means is again, God holds us accountable for what we know about Him and how we reacted to the information we have about him. OK, Chapter 10.
16. Chapter 10, Verse 1: Hear what the LORD says to you, O house of Israel. ² This is what the LORD says: "Do not learn the ways of the nations or be terrified by signs in the sky, though the nations are terrified by them.
- a) Remember that when the Israelites turned to worshipping Baal (an extensive system) or if they got into astrology, realize those beliefs were common in the ancient world. Realize if you didn't know that the names of most of the planets are based on ancient gods. All that I'm saying is believers in false gods can make arguments like, "Look Baal has provided the blessings of lots of nations around you. Or argue, paying attention to the position of stars is "more than a coincidence" of how we should act at any given moment! My point is the arguments for false gods are powerful at first glance. It's only when you study evidence of God's existence is that argument is far greater than those other arguments.
 - i) I was taught many years ago, how we validate the Bible as the "word of God" is to consider what's in the back of every bible. It is a bunch of Maps. That fact became an acronym for how to validate the bible. M is for manuscripts. A is for archeology P is for Prophecy and S is for Statistics. Each is a major topic within itself. (If you Google those topics, you'll discover all sorts of validation for the bible! All that I'm saying is all these topics give great proof to validate the bible as God's word.
 - ii) Anyway, now that you understand how to find the truth, it is great ammunition to take on what's false like multi-god systems like Baal and worshipping the stars!
17. Verse 3: For the customs of the peoples are worthless; they cut a tree out of the forest, and a craftsman shapes it with his chisel. ⁴ They adorn it with silver and gold; they fasten it with hammer and nails so it will not totter.
- a) One has to admit, these verses read a lot like Christmas trees. They're great for making a Christian friend feel guilty for having one. The truth is these verses got nothing to do with such trees. These verses were written about 600 years before Jesus, so that's not it. They're explaining the types of idols that were prominent in Israel at that time. The short version is that to honor the gods they worshipped, they fashioned wood and embellished it with a bunch of silver and gold. Yes the idols had bases like Christmas trees so they won't totter on the ground. So why would people worship what they created? Because they believe it was what was needed to honor the gods they worshipped. How is that different from the way that statues are common in Hindu worship or even little Mary or Jesus statues in lots of Christian cultures. This is why God says in effect, "You know better. You're well aware that it was Me that got you to this land and yet you're worshipping other gods!"

- b) Before we laugh at them, think how much lip service even the most devout Christians say to God. There's a term pastors and church staff use called "pew potatoes". It refers to the Christians who show up most Sundays but never really commit their lives to Jesus or use their lives to make a difference for Him. Even if you say, "That's not me", again remember why you were created in the first place, to glorify God with your lives. That fact alone is a reminder of what we should be committed to on a daily basis. Once we think that way, all we need to do is "what's logical" given the facts in front of us and make decisions in life as to not violate basic biblical principals. That's how God calls us to live.
 - c) Anyway, I'm not here to condemn Christmas trees which if Google is correct, its based on a German tradition from the 16th century. The issue in these verses is about things done to honor false gods. OK then, let's move on.
18. Verse 5: Like a scarecrow in a melon patch, their idols cannot speak; they must be carried because they cannot walk. Do not fear them; they can do no harm nor can they do any good." ⁶ No one is like you, O LORD; you are great, and your name is mighty in power. ⁷ Who should not revere you, O King of the nations? This is your due. Among all the wise men of the nations and in all their kingdoms, there is no one like you.
- a) From Verses 5 through Verse 16 we're going to do some "back and forth". It's a poetic way of saying things like, "Here's what the true God is good for" versus here's what false one's are not good for". The reason to state all of this is because Jeremiah's close to wrapping up his "four chapter speech". It's in effect his closing argument. He's talking about what a big waste of time it is to go after false gods versus the benefits of truly committing our lives to the true and living God. OK, that's the big picture. Time for the details.
 - b) Jeremiah starts with the obvious that those idols are not really gods themselves. Given the fact they got to be carried means they aren't really useful for anything but to take up space to have one. It's arguing what a waste of time that is compared to what God can do for us. Jeremiah then builds an argument for God because at the least it's what the Israelites were called to do. He's to be respected because He is God, period. No greater source of wisdom is available to us than the bible itself. That's why many spend much of their lives studying it (myself included)! The bad side of knowing one's bible is we're now accountable for what we know. The positive side is it gives us great wisdom when it comes to decisions that'll affect our lives and the lives of those around us.
 - c) That is in effect is Jeremiah's point here, that no one compares to God, period.
 - d) Meanwhile, Jeremiah needs to put down the idols some more!
19. Verse 8: They are all senseless and foolish; they are taught by worthless wooden idols. ⁹ Hammered silver is brought from Tarshish and gold from Uphaz. What the craftsman and goldsmith have made is then dressed in blue and purple-- all made by skilled workers.
- a) My paraphrase, "No matter how fancy you dress up these statues, they're still statues. You can cover them with the finest silver and gold and have skilled workers assigned to them. In the end they are still statues. Even if they only represent what they worshipped, it's still only statues". I think God's just as upset that by the fact He's being ignored by the fact that the Israelites are worshipping these statues.
 - b) By the way, if I had to guess, I bet there were some cute miracles that occurred when these statues were worshipped. God allows Satan "some power" to show the alternative is much better. So whether or not people feel blessed by having thing to represent what they think of as their God, the true God is always there wanting us to turn back to Him alone!
 - c) A technical note before we move on. The exact locations of Tarshish and Uphaz have been a long debate. Some scholars argue Tarshish is Spain or England. Uphaz is probably what we call Yemen today (Arabian peninsula) but it's debated. Think of it as the furthest point in the world from Israel and the fact they went "that far" to make their idols specials. This is God's way of saying you go to all that trouble for an idol but none for me? It's reminds me of the classic joke that we'll root for our favorite team, but Jesus, won't clap at all!

20. Verse 10: But the LORD is the true God; he is the living God, the eternal King. When he is angry, the earth trembles; the nations cannot endure his wrath. ¹¹ "Tell them this: `These gods, who did not make the heavens and the earth, will perish from the earth and from under the heavens.' " ¹² But God made the earth by his power; he founded the world by his wisdom and stretched out the heavens by his understanding. ¹³ When he thunders, the waters in the heavens roar; he makes clouds rise from the ends of the earth. He sends lightning with the rain and brings out the wind from his storehouses.
- a) As I stated on the previous page, this section goes back and forth comparing how special God is to what a waste of time idols are. With that said, let's discuss a few specifics.
 - b) Verse 11 says that when God gets angry "everybody knows it". That doesn't mean that all the storms we see are God "ticked off". My view is God is always perfectly angry as sin as He is always perfectly loving to us. Given all of that what does Jeremiah mean that when God gets angry "it's obvious". It could have referred to the flood or any great miracle that we associate with Israel. It could also refer to judgment day. That leads right to Verse 11.
 - i) First a word about eternal judgment. Wouldn't say, 100,000 years be enough for a murder or something of that nature? The point isn't how much we sinned. It's the fact we're dealing with a perfect God and we're imperfect creatures. When we do refuse to accept God's own payment for forgiveness we're insulting Him to no end by saying in effect "He's not good enough for us". As to those who die young or if one has never heard of Jesus I trust in a God who judges fairly.
 - c) Anyway before I got on that rant, I made the point that Jeremiah was probably thinking of thinking of God's judgment. I say that because Verse 11 speaks of His judgment. The key point of that verse is all the "so called" gods will perish. Don't believe me? How much do we see of Baal worship today? All the ancient gods of Egypt, Babylon and all the Middle East are long gone. That's the point. Even Islam, Buddhism etc. will go the same way one day! We must accept that as well!
 - d) Verses 12 and 13 get back to nature. It's as if they're saying, "You want to see God's power at work? Watch a thunderstorm! All the horrid weather's beyond our ability to duplicate in any way shape or form. It's too hard to fathom that the world just "naturally" creates all that bad weather. So why does God allow such horrid things to occur? Don't know. I just know it's ultimately for His glory, even for those who suffer through such things! OK, we should move on as I suspect we get the flavor of this!
21. Verse 14: Everyone is senseless and without knowledge; every goldsmith is shamed by his idols. His images are a fraud; they have no breath in them. ¹⁵ They are worthless, the objects of mockery; when their judgment comes, they will perish.
- a) These are the final two verses of Jeremiah's speech focusing on idols. Whether or not the original text was in this order is in effect not relevant. What is important is God wants us to grasp how dangerous it is to our health and the health of a society when turning from the true God to worthless things causes damage that can't be undone easily!
 - b) So after a few comments taking about the care that goes into making these things, what it coming down to, is in effect "all of this is a waste of time". Keep in mind Jeremiah said all of this to an audience that was "waste deep" in this stuff. From what scholars gather here, he got the most rejection from his society based on this speech! As hard as it is for people to hear the truth of God's judgment, sometimes it's necessary to preach it! To quote Walter Martin (A famous 20th Century preacher), "If they won't listen to Jesus, give them Moses!" What that means if people won't accept the good news of salvation, then they need to be aware of the bad news of God's judgment. That's what we're reading here.
 - c) The text give the impression that the worthless idols are the one's being judged. What that means in reality is the people who worship them will suffer. If you think idols don't exist today, stop and realize all the people who worship movie or sports stars. Or they think I did it "My way". All of that mocks the true and living God who created all things!

22. Verse 16: He who is the Portion of Jacob is not like these, for he is the Maker of all things, including Israel, the tribe of his inheritance-- the LORD Almighty is his name.¹⁷ Gather up your belongings to leave the land, you who live under siege.¹⁸ For this is what the LORD says: "At this time I will hurl out those who live in this land; I will bring distress on them so that they may be captured."
- a) At this point the focus is on the true God and the fact that punishment is coming! This is the "it's too late now" conclusion of the speech. As I like to preach, there is a "too late with God" in terms of our witness for Him. We don't know when anyone hits that point where there is no return, but I'm positive it exists and don't ever want to approach that level.
 - b) The idea of saying "He's the maker of all things including Israel" is the emphasis that He is the God over everything, but at the same time, He separates something for Himself, that's why we get the Israel reference.
 - c) With those facts stated, Jeremiah then gets to the main point here: Get out. Get out while you can, because everything you see around here will be destroyed or taken into captivity by this invading army. It's hard to imagine that type of threat. Unfortunately it has been a big part of history from time immortal. Bottom line, judgment is coming deal with it!
 - d) The point for you and me is we as Christians will be judged by how we used the time God has given us. We too face judgment. It's not about condemnation for us, but rewards or a the lack their of! OK, almost there, let's keep going.
23. Verse 19: Woe to me because of my injury! My wound is incurable! Yet I said to myself, "This is my sickness, and I must endure it."²⁰ My tent is destroyed; all its ropes are snapped. My sons are gone from me and are no more; no one is left now to pitch my tent or to set up my shelter.²¹ The shepherds are senseless and do not inquire of the LORD; so they do not prosper and all their flock is scattered.
- a) For those who don't know Jeremiah wrote two bible books. After this one is a short one to lament the fall of Israel. We get a preview of it here, as Jeremiah in effect is done with this speech to warn people of the judgment to come. He's now talking about the land of Israel after all of that. In effect it's seeing the land of Israel empty from God's perspective. This is here to tell us that God's not happy He had to do all of this. God gets no joy from all of this punishment He's dishing out! Jeremiah is focusing on the lack of shepherds and all of the portable shelters that go with watching sheep? Why? Because as most of us realize by now, "Sheep" are a metaphor for people. If you don't know, sheep are very dumb animals, which is why they're used to represent people. That's why Jeremiah is making the point of saying there is a lack of sheep and places for shepherds. The concern is not about sheep, it is about a lack of people gathered together to seek God together. That's why the emphasis is on the "flock being scattered". Hope that's obvious by now!
24. Verse 22: Listen! The report is coming-- a great commotion from the land of the north! It will make the towns of Judah desolate, a haunt of jackals.²³ I know, O LORD, that a man's life is not his own; it is not for man to direct his steps.²⁴ Correct me, LORD, but only with justice-- not in your anger, lest you reduce me to nothing.²⁵ Pour out your wrath on the nations that do not acknowledge you, on the peoples who do not call on your name. For they have devoured Jacob; they have devoured him completely and destroyed his homeland.
- a) Here we mercifully finish the chapter. The last few verses are not about Israel themselves, but about the nation God uses to judge Israel (Babylon). Then Jeremiah asks the question, what about all the nations who don't know about God? The underlying question is why's this judgment coming on "little Israel" when other nations are much worse? The answer is God holds those of us who know Him to a much higher standard. God cares to much for those He's separated to not be a good witness for Him. That's why He has and always will be tougher on believers than He is on nonbelievers. Still Jeremiah's asking what any of us would be pondering. The question of "Why me? Why now? Yes we're bad, but we're not nearly as bad as those guys! Why are we getting all this wrath?"

- b) The answer is we still have over forty more chapters to go in Jeremiah to explain it. As I stated the "short version" is God holds believers to a higher standard. The failure of us to be a good witness for Him, means a loss of our ability to be a witness for Him.
 - c) What if you say, I don't do idols. I go to church every Sunday and I do things around my church and my community to make a difference for Him. First, that's great I'm not saying any of that is wrong! What I'm saying is God desires a personal relationship with Him as much if not more than any and all service we do for Him. As one of (late) mentors taught me, "Never be so busy going about the King's business that we forget to make time for the king!" (I heard it from Chuck Missler. Don't know where he got it.) That saying inspires me to stick to my bible reading daily and I never get tired of it for that reason! Therefore my closing prayer to my fellow believers has to be to stick close to God so we never have to face either personal or corporate judgment for failing to be a witness for Him.
25. Heavenly Father, First, we express our gratitude for our salvation. No matter how much we mess up; we can have peace knowing You still want an eternal relationship with us based in our belief that Jesus is God, paid for our sins and is in charge of our lives. With that fact stated, may we not fail to use our lives as a witness for Him. May we be spared from Your punishments by using our lives as a witness for You. May the Spirit guide our lives as we rely upon His power so we do use our lives as a witness for You. We pray in Jesus name, Amen!