

Jeremiah Introduction and Chapter 1 John Karmelich

1. Before I get into the topic of the Old Testament book of Jeremiah, let me ask everyone a question, how do you know if and when God is calling you to a specific project? How do you know if God desires we take on something for Him big or small, significant or insignificant? How can we tell if isn't our imagination? Let's face it, God doesn't literally reach down from heaven, give us a knock on our head and say, "go do this"? In Jeremiah's case, God made it clear to him of how He wanted to use him for an assignment that would be studied by multitudes for millenniums. The question I'm posing in this lesson is if we can tell if and when He's calling us to some specific project? If the God who made the world is telling us, "Go do this", what choice do we have? I suppose we can say no, but won't that lead to a life of misery if we refuse? If we desire to be used by an entity that made us in the first place, it is time to pay attention to figure out, what does He have to say to us. That's why we study what God has to say to Jeremiah to start his ministry.
 - a) Now please keep the question in mind, "OK, good for him, what does that mean for me?"
2. Now if that isn't a frightening way to open a bible study, I don't know what it. Imagine having to spend over 40 years of your life preaching God's judgment to people who should already trust in Him in the first place. Imagine for all that work, essentially you got no results. As best anyone is able to tell from reading this book, Jeremiah only got two converts in 40 years. We'll learn in this book he got thrown in prison for what he was taught, he was exiled to Egypt against his will and history records he was stoned to death for what he preached. Now if God told all of you this at a starting point in your life, "this is your future, deal with it", would you run away or would you be signing on the dotted line? The only reason Jeremiah even got famous is after almost all Israelites were kicked out of their homeland, then and only then was Jeremiah's book ever studied, as then it became a "best seller" among the Israelites in exile. Been studied by millions ever since then!
 - a) Unfortunately too many Christians have the false view that being a believer means God is going to cure all our diseases, never let us suffer any pain, and we'll go happily from one place to another being a witness for Him. If you think that, it simply means you've never read your bible or you've never believed Paul's promise that all Christians will suffer at the least for some level of persecution! (See 2nd Timothy 3:12).
 - b) OK still want to sign on the dotted line for this gig? Want to be rejected by your family or many people you know? Want to go around preaching a message nobody wants to hear? I would think if you haven't said no yet, you're seriously considering it! Ok why bother?
 - c) Time for the positive news: Eternity is a whole lot longer than this life! Doing what God's calls us to do not only gives us great eternal rewards but it is far and away the best way to live out life. Yes it means suffering in this life, but it's also full of joy as we are doing what the creator of the universe designed us to do, glorify Him with our lives! I've had far more joy as a believer than I ever did before I gave my life to Jesus. That is why "signing on the dotted line" (My lesson title if you haven't figured it out yet) is worth the time and trouble despite all the suffering we'll get for agreeing to live as God's designed us to live!
 - d) As to the specific calling God has for each of us, I'm going to save that thought for later in the lesson. As we learn about how and why God called Jeremiah in this lesson, I'd like for us to think about, "OK, good for Jeremiah! What does that have to do with me? What is it that God wants me to do?" A prayer of surrender of our lives to His is the essential start to a big question like that. That's what Jeremiah will do in this chapter. That's what we have to do in order to be used by God and yes Jeremiah effectively, "signed on the dotted line".
 - e) What if we already know what God wants us to do? What if we're already full of joy if we are using our lives to make a difference for Him? Obviously, please don't stop unless God makes it obvious what His change of plans are! If that's your story, consider this lesson as a reminder that we're called to make a difference for Jesus, and it is worth all the suffering we may get after we've signed on the "dotted line" to serve God for the rest of our lives.

3. OK enough about us, back to Jeremiah. Last time I checked, this is a study of his book. Except for the collection of Psalms, the book of Jeremiah may be the longest book in the bible if one adds all the original number of words. When the book was translated into Greek about 300BC, the Greek version was shorter as some of the repetition was removed. The point is Jeremiah isn't a straight narrative of starting here and ending there. It jumps around with different thoughts as if a person was in prison and trying to recall parts of their life. Our English version comes from the original Hebrew and not the "shortened" Greek version written a few centuries before Jesus. Which leads me to my favorite thing to do in a book introduction, "The who, what, when where's and why of a book". As I love to ask, "Who cares about some guy who lived thousands of years ago? What is my motivation to study this book?" As I go through these things, realize this book was "worthy to be in the bible" not for teaching history, but for how it applies to our lives today. Hopefully you'll see that after I get through some of the historical facts that explain the setting for this book. With that said, let's begin.
4. The first thing to grasp is that Jeremiah lived in a turbulent time in the Middle East. That's asking when in the history of the Middle East were things ever peaceful? Well as bad as things are now it was worse when Jeremiah was alive. Let me explain. There were several major empires trying to control the Middle East at that time. One was called the Assyrians. Their empire lasted for a period of about 700 years, but it was on its "last legs" when Jeremiah was alive. Then there is the "new kid on the block" the Babylonian Empire on the rise. Both those empires were based out of what is Iraq today. Then we have the Egyptians and other players such as one called the Medes, all trying to be the dominant players in that region. Israel was a small player surrounded by a bunch of "big boys". What's worse was that Israel went through its own civil war 100-200 years before Jeremiah and split into two countries. The smaller Israel's were in effect subject to those empires battling to dominate the Middle East. All this led to the destruction of all of Israel including God's temple that did exist at that time. The bottom line is what was left of Israel got destroyed. The survivors were scattered by the Babylonians around the year 587BC if memory is correct. Jeremiah witnessed all of this and the events are recorded here.
 - a) For those of you familiar with the bible, the last handful of chapters of 2nd Kings as well as a number of chapters in 2nd Chronicles explain life in Israel at that time mostly from a perspective of the leaders of Israel.
 - b) Jeremiah was not a political leader. He was a priest who came from a town about 3 miles away from Jerusalem. He was close enough to know what's going on in the capital, but I would argue he was far enough away to stand back and watch the corruption take place first hand there. My point is to understand Jeremiah's perspective, he was describing the corruption in "Southern" Israel right before its downfall. (The "North" died a long time earlier to the Assyrians). Jeremiah explains in detail why God allowed the land of Israel to be completely destroyed and His people relocated to other areas in the Middle East.
5. My most important goal in this lesson is for us to ponder, "OK, we get that an ancient empire that ruled in the Middle East over 2,500 years ago (The Babylonians) wiped Israel out back then. What does any of this have to do with my life today? Why should I care what Jeremiah preached about this destruction and how does it affect my life today? First it's to accept the idea that just as God's willingness to destroy his nation "back then", so He's willing to wipe us out if we're not a witness for Him today. My point is we shouldn't assume for example the United States will be a power in the world forever. I'd argue that as long as the United States is a great witness for God we will be a great society. When we collectively turn our back on God or His people, we will suffer the same fate as Israel suffered back then, guaranteed!
 - a) Bottom line, a failure to live as God desires, as Jeremiah will tell us in detail how that's to be done, is not only a danger to our own health, but a danger to our society. No we can't fix the world around us. What God does expect of us is to be a good witness for Him and only then can we lead people closer to Him! The goal of the Christian is to lead people to Him or closer to Him before whatever end does come and when!

6. Now that I've scared you half to death (if I haven't then you weren't paying attention!), it's time to return to Jeremiah. The main thing to grasp about Jeremiah as we start to study his book, is that's he's not always writing in chronological order, but simply stating facts about his life in Israel and more importantly, what it was that God wanted to communicate to them and us about how He is desiring us to live as a witness for Him. The rest is in effect, the details.
- a) Speaking of details, realize that Jeremiah's ministry covered at least 40 years. Some argue it was even longer. The point is we're not reading life over a one-week time span. We are embarking on Jeremiah's life long journey. It included struggling with the fact that though he was given messages from God Himself, no one cared what He had to say. It included a lot of rejection and persecution. He never got married, as God wanted him to focus on the message He wanted him to preach. Realize that God wasn't talking to Jeremiah "24/7". It is important to grasp that much of Jeremiah's time was to repeat God's message over and over again to anyone within ear shot, whether they wanted to hear it or not! Jeremiah was not a popular figure as he preached that people needed to repent from how they lived and change their views not only about God but about how they treat their fellow humans.
 - b) We'll get many chapters in this book dedicated to preaching about other nations since it'd be natural to wonder, "Yes, we're bad, but what about those guys over there?" Still most of the book does focus on Israel itself. It's His way of saying, "Yes they'll get what is coming to them, but you (those of us who believe God and fear His judgment) need to do in order to live as God desires us to live". That's not only most of Jeremiah that's also most of what the bible is preaching.
 - c) OK, enough of the big picture. Let's take a look at Chapter 1, and see what God desires us to see to start this book. This chapter focuses on how and why God called Jeremiah to be a witness to Him. It's not here to teach us ancient history of why God called him, but as the big reminder that we too are called to be a witness for Him. What I want to discuss as we go through this lesson is how to tell if we're called, what we're to do with that information and more importantly how to use our lives as a witness for God. That's why we're created in the first place. Therefore, let's just start on the Jeremiah text itself:
7. Chapter 1, Verse 1: The words of Jeremiah son of Hilkiah, one of the priests at Anathoth in the territory of Benjamin.
- a) The first verse of the book tells us a little about Jeremiah's background as to where he was from, his father's name and his occupation. The short version is he was a priest, not in the capital of Jerusalem but based out a town about three miles away. There's speculation on who is his father, and what is the lineage of Jeremiah. I could bore us with theories about his lineage, but the truth is all of that is speculation and none of it effects what God wants us to do as believers, so I'll let that go. What's important to grasp is God used Jeremiah as he was, a young man trained as a priest to deliver a series of messages for Him.
 - b) The meaning of Jeremiah's name is debated, but probably means, God is exalted!
 - c) If you don't know the land of Israel was divided up into 12 areas each given to one of the 12 tribes of Israel. By the time Jeremiah was alive, for example, not all Benjamins (one of the tribes) lived in their territory, as an example, but the territorial boundary still exists.
 - d) If you ever get the chance to visit Israel, this location still exists (in effect) and is an "Arab" town. It's a few miles northeast of Jerusalem and one could see the walls of the big city of Jeremiah from that town. OK, enough of that trivia, let's move on.
8. Verse 2: The word of the LORD came to him in the thirteenth year of the reign of Josiah son of Amon king of Judah, ³ and through the reign of Jehoiakim son of Josiah king of Judah, down to the fifth month of the eleventh year of Zedekiah son of Josiah king of Judah, when the people of Jerusalem went into exile.
- a) Here we have the scope of time that Jeremiah preached.
 - b) Short version is Jeremiah preached about 40 years from 627BC to 587BC.

- c) Don't worry God's not going to ask you to give dates as an entrance exam into heaven. I'm positive He's far more concerned about whether or not we accepted Jesus as our Lord and as God and what we did with that information.
 - d) I small fact to remember if one studies the Old Testament is there was a 70-year period of time when the nation of Israel literally didn't exist as they were in captivity. Jeremiah was known as the main prophet who was there when it happened and encouraged Israelites to repent and then to accept this fate. Much of this book will discuss that in detail.
 - e) Right now, we're only on Chapter 1, and the main focus of this book is how Jeremiah got a start as a prophet and yes, what that means for us.
 - f) I also stated in the introduction that the book of Jeremiah is not all in chronological order. Obviously that includes Chapter 1, as these verses give the scope of time he preached the messages God told him to preach until the captivity began.
 - i) By the way, there are a lot of neat little trivial things to learn about the actual time frame of Israel's captivity, but I'll save that as a teaser for future lessons. Let's just say it affects events that occurred in the last 100 years of world history!
 - g) By the way, the kings listed in these verses weren't the only kings during the 40-year time span that was Jeremiah's ministry. There were also a few other kings who only ruled for a very short time period. It's as if Jeremiah is saying I started when "this guy" was ruling. It ended when "that guy" ruled, which also was the time the remaining Israelites who didn't go into captivity already did go. Bottom line Jeremiah was around when things got really bad. He preached it was coming. He preached to Israelites to repent and turn to God. He also preached to accept the captivity, as God's not through with Israel as a nation!
 - h) Stop and think of the book of Jeremiah another way: When the Israelites were in captivity it had to be a time where they thought all hope of being a nation and "God's chosen" were over. Reading Jeremiah while in captivity had to be encouraging to realize that God's not through with them despite the fact they turned from Him!
 - i) OK John, what does any of this have to do with us? What's the mission of Christians? For us to preach that Jesus is God, repent of our sins, believe the good news of His forgiveness and use our lives as a witness for Him. In effect it's not much different from Jeremiah was called to do. A reason for us to study Jeremiah is what he was called to do is not different from what God calls us as believers to do! That's our first clue as to why we should "sign on the bottom line" to use our lives as a witness for Jesus.
 - j) In the meantime, we've got many more verses to go in Chapter 1, and yes we got 50 more chapters to go. (I will pick up the pace soon!)
9. Verse 4: The word of the LORD came to me, saying,⁵ "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I set you apart; I appointed you as a prophet to the nations."
- a) Before I say anything else, realize Verse 5 is written in poetry style. Apparently Jeremiah had a gift to write Hebrew poetry as I suspect that's how God dictated it to him!
 - b) So why would God's first words to Jeremiah be in effect that God's "pro-life"? To use what we Americans who oppose abortion call that movement! These verses do read like that!
 - c) The first point here is for Jeremiah to realize that God knew Jeremiah was going to use his life to be a prophet "before he was born". It's one of those things were if one accepts God's perfect knowledge of human history before it occurs, is then self-explanatory.
 - d) Could Jeremiah have chosen to say no and not "sign on the dotted line"? Of course. What God is saying is He knew what choice Jeremiah would make in life and he would accept it as a calling from God.
 - e) Here's the important part: Jeremiah was going to have an "unsuccessful" ministry as what he preached will be rejected by almost all Israelites until the captivity began which is after Jeremiah died. It's going to be discouraging to preach God's word over and over again, as Jeremiah would feel like a failure. God's encouragement was needed to make up for it!

- f) So how did God call Jeremiah anyway? Did a big arm whack him on the back of the head and a voice say, "Get going son, God's talking to you!" Was it a voice in his head saying all of this? How do we know when God's calling us to serve Him? Thought you'd never ask!
- i) First, if we've accepted Jesus as being God, dying for all sins we'll ever commit and Lord (in charge of our lives) we've been called whether we realize it or not!
 - ii) My rule on "calling" is what is it we can't stand not doing? What is it we love to do and how can we use that gift to make a difference for God? Yes it usually requires a lot of trial and error and often we have to do other things to get to our goal to do what we enjoy doing! The important thing is not to waste our lives doing only the stuff that won't matter for eternity. One wants to look back at life and realized we used it to make a difference for the God who created us! There's no better way to use the time God's given us.
 - iii) God may have "whacked Jeremiah on the back of head", we don't know. All we do know is He wants us to use our lives as a witness for Him. Our eternal rewards in heaven isn't based on how many people we saved. It's based on living as He wants us to live and using our lives as He desires! I love a good surrender prayer, which we tell God in effect, "My life is in Your hands. Lead me as You desire". Then we trust He is guiding us and make the best decisions we can based on whatever is "in front of us".
- g) Meanwhile we left God telling Jeremiah in effect, since I'm God and can't learn, I'm aware of your entire life's story before you were ever born!" Again, I'm convinced God told that to Jeremiah and to us as a reminder that He knows all things and He's very aware of how much time we have to live and how we'll use that time! Since we don't know all of that all we can do is make the best decisions we can based on the situation in front of us. What we read Jeremiah say next is how I most of us would react if God told us He wants to use our lives to make a difference for Him. Let's read on:
10. Verse 6: "Ah, Sovereign LORD," I said, "I do not know how to speak; I am only a child."
- a) First realize the Hebrew word for "child" can refer to a teenager or young adult. I've read and listened to a bunch of commentaries on this book. Most teachers argue that Jeremiah was between 16 and 20 at this time and that's a logical guess.
 - b) If you study your bible, it's a common thing for people to be scared when God first calls a person to ministry. Moses said he couldn't speak well in Exodus Chapter 4. I could site a few other examples, but let's just say being nervous about God calling us is a fear that we can all relate to! I still remember when I first gave my life to Jesus, I did not want anyone to know about it, and I kept quiet about it. I know people from Muslim backgrounds who if their family found out about their conversion, they'd be dead! My point is let God work on us on His timing to develop the boldness needed to make a difference for Him! If God is going to use our lives for a purpose for Him, that also means He'll give us the boldness to use our lives that way. It takes time and the journey is half the fun!
 - c) Keep in mind that as a teenager, Jeremiah was not a bible theologian yet. He was trained as a priest and lived in a small town. He did not feel worthy to go preach in Jerusalem to the "big boys". I've got news: None of us are worthy to be used by God! None of us are ever ready! If God's calling us to some specific task, don't you think He'll prepare us for that task? That's what God wants Jeremiah to grasp!
 - d) With that understood, let's look at God's response:
11. Verse 7: But the LORD said to me, "Do not say, 'I am only a child.' You must go to everyone I send you to and say whatever I command you. ⁸ Do not be afraid of them, for I am with you and will rescue you," declares the LORD.
- a) My loose translations: "Hey, it's God telling you to do this! Don't you realize I know what I'm doing picking you? If I'm commanding you to do something, it's going to be ok, as let us face it, I'm God and you're not, so deal with that, Jeremiah!"

- b) Picture Jeremiah say, 10 or 20 years later. No converts. People are rejecting what he has to say. I'm sure there were many times in Jeremiah's life where he questioned, "Hey God are You sure this is what You really want me to do?" Having a reassurance that He did call us had to be a great comfort to someone who'd suffer greatly for "signing on the dotted line".
 - i) OK John, where's my reassurance? God never "slapped me on the side of the head" to say in effect, "It's God, get going!" That's why I look to things like the things that we can't stand doing and our spiritual gifts to verify what God calls us to do. Like I said, if you've got a gift to do something and you're using that gift for His glory, I can assure you that you're being called just as much as Jeremiah was! Besides you and I have the written word of God organized in front of us as examples of how it is that God uses people.
 - ii) With that said, let's get back to Jeremiah himself!
12. Verse 9: Then the LORD reached out his hand and touched my mouth and said to me, "Now, I have put my words in your mouth. ¹⁰ See, today I appoint you over nations and kingdoms to uproot and tear down, to destroy and overthrow, to build and to plant."
- a) I always figure that if "God is God" He can manifest Himself anyway He wants at anytime He wants. As a Christian, I picture a pre-incarnate Jesus here putting "His hand" over the mouth of Jeremiah. Was it a literal hand or something Jeremiah imagined? Who knows! All we can know is what the text says. Jeremiah realized that God is calling him here and now to be a witness for Him.
 - b) That leads to the important question of these verses. God said Jeremiah is appointed over nations and kingdoms to tear down, destroy and plant. A little background will help here. Babylon is a city. For them to build an empire meant conquering other lands. It also meant they ask the conquered to "join them or die!" That means a lot of men signed on the dotted line to join armies to conquer other places! It means a lot of foreigners worked together in order to destroy Israel as well as a lot of other cities and nations in that region. As I said in the introduction this was a time of a great battle for control of the Middle East.
 - c) In the midst of this, God's saying, "People can do whatever they want, but I'm in charge. I will decide who wins and who loses! I God, through you Jeremiah will state future events so that people will know I'm God and they have to deal with it!" He uses Jeremiah by his writing to show that He's God and Jeremiah is His prophet! Many empires rose and fell at this time and Jeremiah will predict history before it occurs. That also including the rise of Israel "from the ashes", as they're still His chosen people!
 - d) Now for the important, "Why should I care message": Remember that 30% of the bible is on prophecy. That means one should spend 30% of their time focused on that topic! It is there for a reason and it's not to learn history! There is an old bible saying that prophecy is "patterns". That just means that God works in repeated patterns, and what did happen one way a long time ago will happen again. To state a famous proverb, "those who don't learn from history, repeat its mistakes!" Yes that applies here. A reason to learn all of this stuff, is yes repeatable lessons do occur that will affect our lives today as well as the future of the world!
 - e) Bottom line, these 51 chapters of Jeremiah will not only discuss the fall and rise of Israel as a nation, but also the fall of many nations in the area. It's a way to remind all of us that He knows all things and knows which nations will rise and fall. Again, we don't study this as to learn history. We study this to learn patterns that repeat all through history. I promise to make that more obvious when we get to all those examples through this book.
 - f) The verses do not mean that Jeremiah himself causes the rise and fall. It means that God's going to tell Jeremiah history before it occurs! So how do we know this book wasn't made after those events? Internal and external evidence. The book of Daniel, written while the Israelites were in captivity quote Jeremiah as to tell us that his book was already "in print" by the time the Babylonians had conquered Israel! We'll get to that fact later in this study!

13. Verse 11: The word of the LORD came to me: "What do you see, Jeremiah?" "I see the branch of an almond tree," I replied.
- a) Verse 11 begins the first of many visions given to Jeremiah by God in this book. One thing you'll notice is that Jeremiah will use images that the locals of his time could relate to. The land of Israel did have almond trees then and now. What's unique about almond tree is it is the first tree to blossom in the spring. In fact, it starts to blossom in the wintertime, but the nuts won't blossom until spring.
 - b) It's God's way of saying, "You know summer is coming, because the earliest fruit tree that you know blossoms first is starting the blossom process. It's also God's way of saying, it's not something that can be avoided. Just as the seasons definitely change, so the change is coming to Israel (based on the Southern Kingdom being conquered.) Let me state it again and that'll be it for this lesson: Israel split into two kingdoms several hundred years prior to the time of Jeremiah. The Northern one went into captivity by the Assyrians about 100-200 years prior to Jeremiah. Those Israelites were then scattered all over that empire! The point that God's going to make to Jeremiah is, "As sure as the almond trees are the first to blossom", so this destruction is coming to the South Kingdom. This will become clearer as we read a few more verses in this chapter.
 - c) We're getting all of this in Chapter 1 as if God's saying, "Yes, Jeremiah you're going to be a prophet for me and the message is not good news! Let's read some more and it'll verify all of this.
14. Verse 12: The LORD said to me, "You have seen correctly, for I am watching to see that my word is fulfilled."
- a) Remember this is the first version. God's working in "baby steps" with Jeremiah as to say, you're right so far! You're getting the hang of this prophesy stuff, so keep paying attention to what I'm teaching you. If you can do "this" you can do the rest!
 - i) For you newer Christians, God usually works with us in "baby steps". What I have seen in my life is most new Christians tend to get more "cute little miracles" so one learns to trust God more and more. My point is "baby steps" is not unique to bible prophets. I've seen many (but not all Christians) get this type of treatment as God is teaching people to trust Him more and more as they go through their lives!
 - b) Obviously, God doesn't want Jeremiah to preach to "plant more almond trees". It's only a test to see if Jeremiah gets used to how God wants to work through his life.
 - c) OK we get that. Does God give us visions? Yes, but I'm leery of them. I don't trust one if it contradicts God's word. In Acts 2:17, Peter quotes the Old Testament prophet Joel as he said that in the "last days" (Christian era, in the time frame of all of history). The quote is, "Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your young men will see visions, your old men will dream dreams". My point is just as Jeremiah got visions, so I'd argue that Christians do get "visions". I do believe the bible is a "closed book", but God still works through our dreams if for no other reason, "We won't interrupt Him when we're sleeping!" Again, I'm the first to argue not to trust them, especially if they contradict the bible, period!
 - i) I'm double leery of people who want to share their visions with me. I like to argue in such cases, "What, has God lost my phone number?" My point is if you've had a vision to say, "Go be a witness for God in this particular location, it may be legit. I will find that God verifies those things over time. If the details are "working out" it is a sign that God may be speaking to us that way like He did to Jeremiah!
 - ii) Meanwhile, it's time for Vision #2 for Jeremiah:
15. Verse 13: The word of the LORD came to me again: "What do you see?" "I see a boiling pot, tilting away from the north," I answered.
- a) Now that Jeremiah's got the hang of seeing visions. God throws #2 at him, it's a big pot on some sort of stove and it's tilting toward the south.

- b) Yes God's going to explain what that means in Verse 14. What we've got so far is grasping how He's chosen to work through Jeremiah with visions that anyone can relate to.
 - c) OK, I've beaten that point over our heads enough now. Let's explain what this one means!
16. Verse 14: The LORD said to me, "From the north disaster will be poured out on all who live in the land. ¹⁵ I am about to summon all the peoples of the northern kingdoms," declares the LORD. "Their kings will come and set up their thrones in the entrance of the gates of Jerusalem; they will come against all her surrounding walls and against all the towns of Judah.
- a) The first thing to realize is that God' not being literal. God's not telling Jeremiah to set up a big pot and have say, hot water spill to the ground from it. It is obviously a metaphor of the disaster that God has planned for Israel "coming soon".
 - b) One of the things that fascinates me is the word "Babylon" is not mentioned. Maybe God's not ready to reveal that specific bit of information yet. More likely the issue is the invasion is bigger than that one nation. After all, the text's describing kings (plural) setting up their thrones (think of a leader of an army) with their army.
 - c) OK, what's the deal John? Thought you'd never ask!
 - i) First, let's talk literal. Babylon is pretty much east of Israel. We're going to discuss that place a lot in this study of Jeremiah. For right now, just know it's east, but for them to attack Israel, it's best to go north and then attack Israel from that direction. It has to do with where the desert is, where food and the roads are. That's why the history of Israel's enemies have traditionally been attacks coming from the north. I am bringing that up here as notice Jeremiah's boiling pot is spilling from the north.
 - ii) So why not say it's "spilling to the south" or why doesn't God tell Jeremiah there is going to be an army attacking Jerusalem that way? Why this pot thing?
 - a) Part of it is to teach Jeremiah how to understand God's visions. Showing a big boiling pot is a much easier vision than say thousands of soldiers that'll attack Jerusalem.
 - b) In God's mind, all these foreign armies coming to attack "His people" must seem like a pot of hot liquid "boiling over" to do damage in their direction!
 - d) OK you get the idea by now. So why not directly say that the boiling pot represents a big army lead by Babylon? After all, they were a major player on the scene at that time. Yes, it could be because Jeremiah is young or inexperienced at regional politics at that time. I'd argue, no because he's going to talk a lot about Babylon later in this book.
 - e) What I'm getting at is the idea that prophesy is "patterns". For example, when Assyria did conquer the northern kingdom, they organized a large army that came from the north and destroyed the "North" one city at a time. The same will be true for Babylon. They' win by overwhelming the locals and starve out one city at a time!
 - f) Is it possible that Jeremiah was also seeing "way into the future" and the big battle that we know from Revelation? At that time another large army will attack Israel and yes again it will come from the north. All I'm saying is God didn't specify any group doing the attack so it could be a "multiple prophesy" in the making. As I learned many years ago, to see a prophecy is like seeing something far in the distance on top of a mountain. To see a thing that way, one may miss a large valley in-between what one is seeing. That "valley" may be multiple predictions all occurring in a similar way.
 - g) Then again, it just could be a prediction about the Babylon invasion itself. Jeremiah saw it many years before it occurred. Just like the almond tree blooming first means the seasons will change soon, so God's saying, "This is coming, bet the farm on it!"
 - h) Obviously both God and Jeremiah have a lot more to say about this. After all, this book is a total of 51 chapters (yes, the chapter breaks came millenniums later), but my point is he is just getting warmed up here. God's teaching Jeremiah how to interpret signs here. This is the reminder for us that God works in "baby steps" in our faith with Him.

17. Verse 16: I will pronounce my judgments on my people because of their wickedness in forsaking me, in burning incense to other gods and in worshipping what their hands have made.
- a) It's one thing to wonder what army is in focus here. The commentaries that I've read will discuss the Assyrians, the Babylonians and other groups. Because the text doesn't specify it's a classic debate question.
 - b) The related and more important question is why? As in why will God's people suffer for this attack? That's the far more important question than "Who's attacking!" The answer is in Verse 16. We'll get to that in a moment.
 - c) First we have a more important and relevant thing to discuss: Can this happen to us who are trusting in Jesus for our salvation? Of course. There are two separate issues at stake: One is our salvation, which is only dependant upon our trust in Jesus as God, paying for all our sins and believing He's in charge of our lives. The other issue is us being a witness for Him with our lives. Being a Christian does not guarantee we'll live to say 100! Most of the devout Christians through history have had to suffer greatly for their faith! The issue is about doing His will and living as a witness for Him. When we blow it as badly as these Israelites did back then, we too can and usually suffer a similar fate as a nation. I'm sure if the United States ever stopped "standing up for Israel", it'll mean disaster for our country. If we as Christians started killing and stealing in "Jesus name", I promise God in his own way will put a stop to it because His name is at stake even more than our crimes! But still some people get away with stuff? Of course and that's why there is judgment!
 - d) Believe it or not, all of this does lead me back to Jeremiah. What was the sin that God says that this invasion is necessary? They were worshipping other gods, ignoring Him as well as performing rituals to other false gods. We're not talking about some remote spot in the world, but in Jerusalem. Remember what God demanded of the Israelites: Obedience. It's the same thing God demands of us, obedience. Failure to be obedient means suffering on a corporate level just as the Israelites will get in this book.
 - e) If I had to summarize the entire book of Jeremiah in a few thoughts, it'd be that Israelites had gotten to a point of "beyond help" and God had to wipe them out from being a nation kind of like shooting a dead horse as there is nothing more merciful to do. However, God still has a problem in that He made an unconditional promise to the Israelite patriarchs of giving that land to their descendants. So how does God reconcile that problem? By letting Israel go in the "penalty box" for a while! That's a summary of Jeremiah's message to them as well as us Christians. We too can collectively go in the "penalty box" if we fail to live as a witness for Him.
 - i) But John, we're not united in one land like they were? Yes, but God can find other ways to punish us if we fail to be a witness for Him. I've seen pastors lose all their hard work of building a ministry because they turn from God! I've seen those who turned from years of work making a difference for God due to an affair or due to a lack of faith that "God is God" and start becoming interested in other things.
 - ii) My view of "once saved always saved", is a view from God's perspective. From the view of us who don't know all things, I don't ever want to mess with the gifts God has given me. Yes I take downtime and yes I do other things, but as sure as the fact I'm breathing, I'm positive that Jesus is God and He calls Christians to use the time He's given us to make a difference for Him.
 - iii) The other danger one can have is simply "going through the motions". Routine can be boring if done long enough. We can start to think we're doing fine if we just go through the motions of "Christianity" without really caring about others who's life God wants us to impact for the Gospel sake!
 - iv) This leads back to Jeremiah. The next five chapters (which we'll won't tackle until the lesson or two) will be ways that God called Jeremiah to be His witness. What we read of in Chapter 1 is how Jeremiah was called, just like we're called, period!

18. Verse 17: "Get yourself ready! Stand up and say to them whatever I command you. Do not be terrified by them, or I will terrify you before them." ¹⁸ Today I have made you a fortified city, an iron pillar and a bronze wall to stand against the whole land--against the kings of Judah, its officials, its priests and the people of the land. ¹⁹ They will fight against you but will not overcome you, for I am with you and will rescue you," declares the LORD.
- a) I am well aware that the hardest part of being a witness for Jesus is starting. To get up and be a witness for Him is hard and scary. We all want to be liked. Being rejected is hard for anyone to take. In Jeremiah's case, he will spend over 40 years preaching what God made clear for him to say, and essentially no one listened! How would you like to spend most of your life doing something for God and no one listened? What would motivate us to go do that? All I could think of, is I'd have to be convinced beyond a shadow of doubt that what I'm doing is God ordained! We do that by comparing it to His Word and what He expects of us as believers. Yes we can be creative. Still, I never want to go by "feelings" or a dream if it contradicts God's word in any way shape or form.
 - b) I've found that when God leads us, He generally "holds our hand" a lot in the beginning a lot of the time in a sense to prove that what we're doing is of Him. For example when this ministry started, I had people telling me I was wasting my time. Others were saying I had to publish this stuff and do it their way! God did a bunch of "cute little miracles" to prove to me that the path He had for me, was His desire. Do I have millions of followers after a lifetime of work? Of course not. I just know this is what God called me to do and made it obvious over time and has given me enough victories that despite all setbacks and despite the problems I've had to face in my life, this is exactly what God's called me to do! All I'm saying is you may be called to do something that seems insignificant or what others see as a major role! The issue is all about being loyal to what God's called us to do, no matter what, and stick to it until we're positive God's calling us to change. Yes what we're called to do often requires trial and error. Learning is a part of life. Still, what God starts won't ever be a waste of time and that's the point with Jeremiah.
 - c) You may recall from earlier in the chapter, Jeremiah started complaining that he's way too young to be used by God. His response is here in these final verses of Chapter 1. What we see God say in response to Jeremiah's complaint is, "Don't worry about how others will be reacting to your message. I'm going to make you "tough as iron" and give you an ability to deal with the critics, naysayers, and those who claim we're just plain wrong! Whatever it is God's called us to do, also means He'll give us the training, ability and strength to do what is His will! One of the reasons the Holy Spirit exists, is to give us the power as well as the courage to do what is His will? My point is if you're too scared to take on a project for God, welcome to the club! We all get that way at times! God never leads where He is not also providing the ability to perform His desire.
 - i) OK we get all of that. How do I know what I should be doing? Try things. If you don't feel lead to do anything in particular, ask people what your gifts are! What's the needs around one's house, church or community? It's the age old, "we'll never know until we try". Here God's encouraging Jeremiah to "try".
 - ii) Obviously history tells us that Jeremiah accepted that call. What we forget is how much he got rejected for that calling. It was mainly after he died that God used all that he wrote in a powerful and meaningful way!
 - iii) The point for you and me is we're to trust God with the results. If we're using our lives to make a difference for Jesus "because we can't stand not doing it" then we're to let go of the results as that's "God's business". Does that mean we can't advertise what we do? Of course not. It just means we let go of the results as since we're one of His, we work for Him and the results are in His hands. It's the trust that there is a next life that should motive us to use our lives to make that difference for Him as it did Jeremiah here in this book. That's the point here!

- d) All that leads back to what Jeremiah had to deal with. Since God was going to use him in a great way, God warns him what he's going to face. God mentions the fact that the kings, the priests and the laypeople will all ignore Him. Jeremiah gets reassured that he will win in the end despite all of this. I'm positive at this point in his life, Jeremiah had no idea that it's going to be a difficult road ahead of him. We're going to read in this book of him being thrown in prison. We're going to read of an Israel king literally burning the words that he wrote! We'll read of attempts to kill Jeremiah and being forced to live in Egypt against his will! My point is the road is going to be difficult for Jeremiah and he doesn't know it yet!
 - e) OK, too bad for Jeremiah. What does that have to do with me? Why doesn't God speak in an audible way to us and tell us our future before it occurs? Mainly because we're not able to handle that information! If He told us what's going to happen to our lives before we're "getting going" we couldn't handle it.
 - i) More importantly the bible "models for us" how it's to be done. God told Jeremiah so He wouldn't have to tell millions of more people "face to face" what He desires of us to do. God never "slapped me on the head" and said go do this. It was a big matter of trial and error and trusting in where I believe God was leading me. Is my ministry as big as others? No and that's not my problem. As sure as I'm breathing I'm doing what God called me to do and I'm not going to stop until I get that "slap on the head" saying now it's time to do this.
 - ii) One is never too young to start (assuming one's past say the early school years!). I never tell anyone to disobey their parents if they're living under authority of their parents and aren't on their own yet. At the same time, our trust in God must come before all of our other relationships and do what He calls us to do. For seniors, I've known of older people called by God to large ministries who didn't start until they were middle age or older. If that's true why don't I wait till I'm older? The answer is why waste the most valuable thing God's given us, our time! Nobody knows the day when our lives end. All we can do is use them as we believe God is leading us to go make a difference for Him.
 - iii) That's God's calling to Jeremiah and His calling to us!
 - f) One final thought about these verses and I'll wrap it up. The text says God will rescue and protect Jeremiah from all those bad things. If that's true, why did God allow Jeremiah to go to prison or be dragged into exile? Where was God then? The answer's Jeremiah did accomplish all that God asked him to do. He lived out a full life and ministered as a major spokesman for God for many years! God never promises life will be easy if we're called to be one of His. He promises to work through us as long as He wants to and in the way He intends to use us. Our job is to figure it out often by trial and error and also by doing just what we love to do in a way that glorifies God. That's what living the Christian life is all about! I can't think of a greater reason to live than to be used by the God of the universe! All we have to do is ask how we're to be used and He will guide us.
 - g) Speaking of His guidance, time for the closing prayer!
19. Heavenly Father, we don't know the reason why you've separated us for You. We're just grateful that You've called us and want to spend forever with us! Help us never to waste the greatest gift you've given us, our time and our resources! Make it obvious to us, how it is You desire to use us as a witness for You. Lead us down the path You desire, as difficult as it may be, so that we'll be able to glorify You in this life as well as the next one. We ask this in Jesus name, Amen!