

INTRODUCTION

During the spring semester, we did an inductive study of portions of the writing of John. During this fall, we will try another method of Bible study--the topical approach. We will be studying selected passages from the book of Jeremiah.

It takes some serious study to really get to know Jeremiah. The book is not always an upper. It is important to stay with him long enough to get to know him because at some time in life you are bound to find yourself in some Jeremiah-like spot. What sort of spot is this?

You may be a go-between and find yourself misunderstood.

You may be given a job you don't want to do.

You may be frustrated in doing God's will—nothing of eternal value seems to be happening.

Like Jeremiah, you may find yourself questioning a God who seems like He called you sometime in the distant past. Now you feel like you're pounding your head against a brick wall; the future seems no better. Sound familiar? Why would we want to study someone who has problems just like us? Because in Jeremiah we can find some answers. As we look at Jeremiah's problems, we can learn how to more effectively deal with the problems in our own lives.

At first, the book of Jeremiah may seem a bit disorganized. This is one reason that a topical study is an effective tool in discovering this book.

Despite the seeming lack of organization of the book, we really know more about Jeremiah than any other Old Testament prophet with the possible exception of Daniel. Much of what we know of Daniel is from outside observations. With Jeremiah, we are looking at the soul of the man. Where we found Daniel in the lion's den, we find Jeremiah in a slimy cistern, oozing in deeper and deeper. Can you identify with this?

Jeremiah didn't interpret any dreams; we never see him rewarded with honor or prestige. Instead, we see him under house arrest, dictating a manuscript to a disenchanted secretary. Then, we see the manuscript being shredded and burned by the king. If you have ever felt like you were under house arrest and couldn't get your message out, you will identify with Jeremiah.

A lot of Jeremiah's prayers weren't answered; he wrestled with doubts; he received no promotions or commendations and wasn't invited to royal festivities. Can you relate to this? Jeremiah is human, just like we are. And he got a job that he didn't want.

Have you ever felt like God was asking you to do a job for which you weren't gifted?
Jeremiah felt the same way!

Jeremiah was a poet but God called him to be a prophet. He could have been a sensitive worship leader, writing folksongs for all of Judah to sing. But God called him to a ministry of thunderstorms instead of gentle spring rains. Do you know how this feels? Have you ever felt miscast?

Carson describes Jeremiah as "shy and sensitive, honest and human, somewhat impatient and impulsive, given to times of elation and dejection, courageous and confident, yet torn by a sense of inadequacy and an inner conflict between natural inclination and a sense of divine vocation." Since we can all relate to this description, let's plunge in and see what else we can learn about Jeremiah.

Jeremiah was born about 646 B. C . and raised in Anathoth, about three miles (an hour's walk) northeast of Jerusalem. Priests and Levites had been commuting between the Jerusalem temple and Anathoth since Joshua's time.

Read Joshua 21:18 and record your findings: _____

Anathoth was a gossip mecca. Abiathar, the priest who counseled King David lived there. Also read 1 Samuel 22:20-23 to learn more: _____

In Jeremiah's time, there were more priests than jobs at the temple. Phoenician and Assyrian deities were worshipped in the temple at least as often as Jehovah God and the king had appointed special priests to be certain that foreign deities got equal time. Some of the priests had set up shrines in Anathoth to bring religion closer to the people. Jehovah was worshipped at these shrines as were other gods.

Jeremiah's father was Hilkiah, a priest. We don't know whether he served in Jerusalem or Anathoth. Theoretically, Hilkiah and his family should have been supported by the tithes of Jewish temple worshipers, but times were so bad that we don't know if this happened.

Anathoth was only about four miles south of Judah's northern frontier and in that time, trouble usually came from the north. Egypt to the south, Edom to the east and Phoenicia to the west weren't exactly friendly either. Times were bad for Judah.

There was crime in the streets of Jerusalem--homosexuals in the temple; corruption in the palace; babies offered on pagan altars. Priests were disgruntled and unemployed; some were so discouraged that they openly compromised with idolatry. Many were sympathetic to the local shrines. This is time in which Jeremiah lived. Does it sound familiar?

Manasseh was king when Jeremiah was born. He was a horrendous king, bloody and pagan. Hitler and Attila the Hun had nothing on Manasseh. Jeremiah would have been a small boy when Manasseh died and Amon, Manasseh's son, took over the throne. He would probably have been a carbon copy of his father, but he was assassinated two years after his inauguration. Amon's 8-year-old son, Josiah, became king in 639 B.C. Jeremiah would have been only a year or two younger than Josiah.

Read 2 Chronicles 34:3 and record your findings: _____

Here we learn that when Josiah was 16, he "began to seek after the God of David" and things started to change. Assyria's powerful king died and paved the way for Josiah to assert political and religious clout. When Josiah was about 20, he decided that if Jehovah was good enough for him, He was good enough for everyone. He began to throw out the pagan altars. He didn't do it overnight, but he got started. This was probably enough to make Jeremiah want to write some worship songs, but while he was still composing melodies in his head, God intervened with some other plans!

This was the start of Mission Impossible. The confrontation was one-to-one. Just God and Jeremiah. Jeremiah was at a decided disadvantage! Like Saul/Paul and Zaccheus, God singled him out. And God got Jeremiah's attention. Because Jeremiah was already on good speaking terms with God, no visions or angels accompanied the call. God told Jeremiah that he had guaranteed employment--before Jeremiah was even born, God had prepared a job for life. God knew that Jeremiah would be born and he knew that when Jeremiah was born, he would want to play on God's team. So what's the problem? Jeremiah didn't care for the position God asked him to play.

We like to know that we're chosen--it's even better to be prechosen. But we have our own ideas about what position we are best suited to play. We thank God for choosing us, but complain about our specific jobs.

Read Proverbs 16:4 and record what you learn about God: _____

To put it another way, "God has a wonderful plan for your life." Jeremiah wasn't crazy about God's plan.

A prophet? In Judah? For the nations? I'd rather be a peace ambassador in Iraq! So what did Jeremiah do?

Read Jeremiah 1:1-6 and record Jeremiah's response: _____

Jeremiah has made the fatal mistake! He has admitted God's sovereignty!

Jeremiah's response wasn't all that original. Moses had already tried it out years earlier.
Read Exodus 4:1,10 _____

Gideon thought he was too insignificant to be used--and he wasn't sure whether he really saw an angel or his cousin was playing a trick on him. Read Judges 6:15, 17 _____

Isaiah thought he was too sinful to serve a Holy God. Read Isaiah 6:5 _____

Jeremiah thought he was too young. At about 20, he would have been a child by Hebrew customs. But God often chooses the young and the unlikely. (so that no one may boast before Him. 1 Corinthians 1:29). God didn't deny that Jeremiah was young. He didn't deny that Moses couldn't speak, that Gideon was insignificant, or that Isaiah was sinful.

Jeremiah had hardly finished with his excuses when God touched his mouth.

Read Jeremiah 1:6-9. _____

Now, read Hebrews 4:12 _____

The Word of God is alive and powerful. The Word of God is not simply a sound--it makes things happen. God said "Let there be light" and "there WAS light." "By the word of the Lord the heavens were made...He spoke and IT WAS DONE."(Psalm 33: 6,9)
"He sent His Word and healed them" (Psalm107:20). God's Word will accomplish what God wants. (Isaiah 55:11).

Therefore, it is significant that "the Word of the Lord" occurs so frequently in Jeremiah's prophecy. Out of 97 times that the phrase appears in the Old Testament, 49 times are in Jeremiah.

When Jeremiah says "The Word of the Lord came to me" we might translate "The Word of the Lord became an active reality with me." Have you ever had God's Word speak to you in the same way?

Jeremiah himself had a hard time expressing what was taking place. It was almost indescribable.

He says the Word burned inside him like fire in his bones. (Jeremiah 20:9). He couldn't contain it.

He speaks of eating God's Word (15:16).

Sometimes it caused him pain (38:6,9)

Sometimes God spoke to him after prayer but it wasn't something that Jeremiah controlled--rather it was something that controlled him. And once the Word was spoken, it almost had a life of its own. God commissioned Jeremiah by saying:

"I have set you this day over nations and over kingdoms to pluck up and to break down, to destroy and to overthrow, to build and to plant" Jeremiah 1:10

During the mid 1960's, the "**God is Dead**" movement received a lot of publicity. In Jeremiah's time, the campaign would have probably been "**God is asleep**". Morality was declining, the kings were wicked, and there had been few miracles in reigns of Manasseh and Amon.

But, God called Jeremiah's attention to the almond branch (1:11). It was called "saqed" which means "the waker" because it was the first tree to bloom in the spring. God called Jeremiah's attention to the fact that he was awake and soon a spiritual spring would come. (1:12) God was guaranteeing Jeremiah that His words would be fulfilled because He would make it happen. As we go through our day-to-day routines, it is sometimes easy to forget that God is awake and in control of His Word and His children. The first thing we can learn from Jeremiah is that God is awake--we are the ones who sleep.

Read the story of the wide-mouthed cooking pot in 1:13. Notice how God made the application.

What is the promise in 1:17-19? _____

How does it compare to the promise to Joshua, "Be strong and of good courage" and to the Ephesians, "Put on the whole armor of God"? _____

Jeremiah was obviously in for a battle. The whole world would erupt against him. But God told Jeremiah that he would stand because, "I am with you to deliver you" (1:19)

Apparently, many people thought that God's word could be stopped if the prophet could be killed. Jezebel thought so with Elijah (I Kings 19:2) The prophets created an uproar because they were possessed by the Word of God. Years later, Martin Luther stood before the Diet of Worms and was asked to retract his heretical writings. He answered, "I am bound by the Scriptures I have quoted and my conscience is captive to the Word of God. I cannot and will not retract anything." Jeremiah was also captive to the Word--he could and would not retract anything.

About five years after Jeremiah's call--when he was about 25--something remarkable happened in Judah. Josiah was in his mid twenties and his reform had been going for five years or so. Pagan worship had infiltrated the temple in Jerusalem and Josiah started housecleaning. In the process, the workmen found the ancient scroll of the law--possibly the Book of Deuteronomy.

From Jeremiah, we can learn that it is easy to lose God's Word in the clutter of living. When the scroll was brought to Josiah and he read the Word, he realized how far short his reforms fell from meeting God's requirements. He tore his robes and sought God's forgiveness.

FROM JEREMIAH, WE CAN LEARN THAT THE WORD IS POWERFUL. The king was bowing before it. The problem is that we keep it too much a secret! Have you lost the Word in the clutter of living? A. T.de B. Wilmot makes some suggestions for getting into the Word and letting the Word get into you:

- 1. READ THE BIBLE itself.** Commentaries are good, but no book substitutes for the Bible.
- 2. READ IT WITH PRAYER.**
- 3. READ EVERY DAY--**try reading different parts.
- 4. READ WITH YOUR FULL CONCENTRATION.** Choose your best time of day.
- 5. BELIEVE WHAT THE BIBLE SAYS AND ADMIT ITS TRUTH.**
- 6. READ WITHOUT PREJUDICE.** Don't force your preconceived ideas onto God's Word.
- 7. TAKE WHAT YOU READ INTO YOUR HEART.** James talks about the man who saw himself in the mirror, knew something was wrong, but walked away. (James 1:23,24) Don't be like that.
- 8. MEMORIZE WHAT YOU READ--**at least a verse or two, and assimilate it into your lifestyle.
- 9. LET THE WORD CONTROL YOUR LIFE,** your thinking and acting.
- 10. BE PREPARED TO MAKE SACRIFICES.** If you are serious about letting God's Word control you, you must be willing to live on God's terms and not your own.

SERMON #1: THE ADULTERY

This week, we will be looking at Jeremiah's first sermon in Jeremiah 2:1 - 3:5. We will see that we have to consciously cultivate our relationship with the Lord. We can't let down or we won't finish strong. Consider this paraphrase of Jeremiah 2:1-13:

I remember when you said, "I do." I remember how you said you loved Me at our wedding; I remember our honeymoon, how you went with Me to a place you did not know. I brought you out of a wilderness into a garden, out of a desert into a paradise, out of a hovel of poverty into a mansion of plenty...but you have polluted My land; you have defiled everything I have lovingly given you. I even provided you with a fountain of sparkling pure water, but you walked away from it. Instead you dug for yourself a cistern in the sand. (broken cistern)

In this section, the marriage analogy sharply contrasts God's love for his people with their love for other gods and reveals Judah's faithlessness. Jeremiah condemned Judah (he sometimes called Judah "Jerusalem," the name of its capital city) for seeking security in worthless, changeable things rather than the unchangeable God. We may be tempted to seek security from possessions, people, or our own abilities, but these will fail us. There is no lasting security apart from the eternal God.

We appreciate a friend who remains true to his or her commitment, and we are disappointed with someone who fails to keep a promise. God was pleased when his people obeyed initially, but he became angry with them when they refused to keep their commitment. Temptations distract us from God. Think about your original commitment to obey God, and ask yourself if you are remaining truly devoted.

Read Deuteronomy 26:1-11 and compare with Jeremiah 2:3. _____

The firstfruits, or the first part, of the harvest were set aside for God. That's how Israel was dedicated to him in years gone by. Israel had been as eager to please God as if she were his young bride, a holy, devoted people. This contrasted greatly with the situation in Jeremiah's time.

The united nation of Israel included both the "house of Israel" and the "house of Jacob" (Judah). Jeremiah knew Israel's history well. The prophets recited history to the people for several reasons:

- (1) to remind them of God's faithfulness;**
- (2) to make sure the people wouldn't forget (they didn't have Bibles to read);**

- (3) to emphasize God's love for them;**
(4) to remind the people that there was a time when they were close to God. We should learn from history so we can build on the successes and avoid repeating the failures of others.

Baal was the chief male god of the Canaanite religion. "Baals" (Jeremiah 2:23) refers to the fact that Baal was worshipped in many centers in Canaanite practice. Baal was the god of fertility. Worship of Baal included animal sacrifice and sacred prostitution (male and female) in the high places. Jezebel, the wife of King Ahab, introduced Baal worship into the northern kingdom, and eventually it spread to Judah. The sexual orientation of this worship was a constant temptation to the Israelites, who were called to be holy.

God was saying that even pagan nations like Kittim (Cyprus, in the west) and Kedar (the home of Arab tribes living in the desert east of Palestine) remained loyal to their national gods. But Israel had abandoned the one and only God for a completely worthless object of worship.

Read Jeremiah 2:13: _____

Who would set aside a sparkling spring of water for a cistern, a pit that collected rainwater? God told the Israelites they were doing that very thing when they turned from him, the spring of living water, to the worship of idols. Not only that, but the cisterns they chose were broken and empty. The people had built religious systems in which to store truth, but those systems were worthless. Why should we cling to the broken promises of unstable "cisterns" (money, power, religious systems, or whatever transitory thing we are putting in place of God) when God promises to constantly refresh us with himself, the living water?

Read John 4:10 and record what you learn: _____

Memphis was near modern Cairo's present location in lower Egypt, and Tahpanhes was in northeastern Egypt. Jeremiah could be speaking of Pharaoh Shishak's previous invasion of Judah in 926 B.C. (1 Kings 14:25), or he may have been predicting Pharaoh Neco's invasion in 609 B.C. when King Josiah of Judah would be killed (2 Kings 23:29-30). Jeremiah's point is that the people brought this on themselves by rebelling against God.

In Jeremiah 2:22, we learn that the stain of sin is more than skin-deep. Israel had stains that could not be washed out, even with the strongest cleansers. Spiritual cleansing must reach deep into the heart-and this is a job that God alone can do. We cannot ignore the effects of sin and hope they will go away. Your sin has caused a deep stain that God can and will remove if you are willing to let him cleanse you.

Read the following verses and record what you learn:

Isaiah 1:18 _____

Ezekiel 36:25 _____

The people are compared to animals who search for mates in mating season. Unrestrained, they rush for power, money, alliances with foreign powers, and other gods. The idols did not seek the people; the people sought the idols and then ran wildly after them. Then they became so comfortable in their sin that they could not think of giving it up. Their only shame was in getting caught. If we desire something so much that we'll do anything to get it, this is a sign that we are addicted to it and out of tune with God.

Being a prophet in Jeremiah's day was risky business. Prophets had to criticize the policies of evil kings, and this made them appear to be traitors. The kings hated the prophets for standing against their policies, and the people often hated the prophets for preaching against their idolatrous life-styles. (See Acts 7:52.)

Forgetting can be dangerous, whether it is intentional or an oversight. Israel forgot God by focusing its affections on the allurements of the world. The more we focus on the pleasures of the world, the easier it becomes to forget God's care, his love, his dependability, his guidance, and most of all, God himself. What pleases you most? Have you been forgetting God lately?

God is not against alliances or working partnerships, but he is against people trusting others for the help that should come from him. This was the problem in Jeremiah's time. After the days of David and Solomon, Israel fell apart because the leaders turned to other nations and gods instead of the true God. They played power politics, thinking that their strong neighbors could protect them. But Judah would soon learn that its alliance with Egypt would be just as disappointing as its former alliance with Assyria. Read the following verses and record what you learn:

2 Kings 16:8-9 _____

Isaiah 7:13-25 _____

As we begin the third chapter, read Jeremiah 3:1-5: _____

This law, found in Deuteronomy 24:1-4, says that a divorced woman who remarries can never be reunited with her first husband. Judah "divorced" God and "married" other gods. God had every right to permanently disown his wayward people, but in his mercy he was willing to take them back again.

"Like a nomad in the desert" means, as an Arab thief might hide and wait to plunder a passing caravan, Judah ran to idolatry. It was a national preoccupation.

In spite of their great sin, the people of Israel continued to talk like they were God's children. The only way they could do this was to minimize their sin. When we know we've done something wrong, we want to downplay the error and relieve some of the guilt we feel. As we minimize our sinfulness, we naturally shy away from making changes, and so we keep on sinning. But if we view every wrong attitude and action as a serious offense against God, we will begin to understand what living for God is all about. Is there any sin in your life that you've written off as too small to worry about? God says that we must confess and turn away from every sin.

SERMON #2: THE HARD HEART

Jeremiah's second sermon is recorded in Jeremiah 3:6 - 6:30. Between the fifth and sixth verses of chapter three, it appears that the discovery of the scroll of the law by King Josiah's workman took place.

The northern kingdom, Israel, had fallen to Assyria, and its people had been taken into captivity. The tragic lesson of their fall should have caused the southern kingdom, Judah, to return to God, but Judah paid no attention. Jeremiah urged Judah to return to God to avoid certain disaster. This message came between 627 and 621 B.C., during Josiah's reign. Although Josiah obeyed God's commands, his example apparently did not penetrate the hearts of the people. If the people refused to repent, God said he would destroy the nation because of the evils of Josiah's grandfather, King Manasseh (2 Kings 23:25-27).

Jeremiah 3:11-13 tells us that, although Israel had not even tried to look as if it were obeying God, Judah maintained the appearance of right faith without a true heart. Believing the right doctrines without heartfelt commitment is like offering sacrifices without true repentance. Judah's false repentance brought Jeremiah's words of condemnation. To live without faith is hopeless; to express sorrow without change is treacherous and unfaithful. Being sorry for sin is not enough. Repentance demands a change of mind and heart that results in changed behavior.

By this time, the northern kingdom, Israel, was in captivity, being punished for its sins.

The people of Judah undoubtedly looked down on these northern neighbors for their blatant heresy and degraded morals. Even so, Jeremiah promised the remnant of Israel God's blessings if they would turn to him. Judah, still secure in its own mind, should have turned to God after seeing the destruction of Israel. But the people of Judah refused, so Jeremiah startled them by telling about God's promise to Israel's remnant if they would repent.

God promised to give his people leaders ("shepherds" after his own heart) who would follow him, filled with knowledge (wisdom) and understanding. God saw Israel's lack of direction, so he promised to provide the right kind of leadership. We look to and trust our leaders for guidance and direction. But if they do not follow God, they will lead us astray. Pray for God-honoring leaders in our nations, communities, and churches-those who will be good examples and bring us God's wisdom.

In the days of Solomon's reign over a united Israel, the people had a beautiful temple where they worshipped God. The temple housed the ark of the covenant, the symbol of God's presence with the people. The ark held the tablets of the Ten Commandments (see Exodus 25:10-22). Those days with the ark wouldn't be missed in the future kingdom because God's presence by the Holy Spirit would be there personally among his people.

Jeremiah predicted a day when the nation would be reunited, true worship would be reinstated, and sin would be seen for what it is. Our world glorifies the thrill that comes from wealth, competition, and sexual pleasure, and it ignores the sin that is so often associated with these thrills.

It is sad that so few see sin as it really is--a deception.

Most people can't see this until they are destroyed by the sin they pursue. The advantage of believing God's Word is that we don't have to learn by hard experience the destructive results of sin.

Jeremiah told the people to break up the hardness of their hearts as a plow breaks up unplowed ground-soil that has not been tilled for a season. Good kings like Josiah had tried to turn the people back to God, but the people had continued to worship their idols in secret. Their hearts had become hardened to God's will. Jeremiah said the people needed to remove the sin that hardened their hearts before the good seed of God's commands could take root. Likewise we must remove our heart-hardening sin if we expect God's word to take root and grow in our lives.

The disaster from the north would come from Babylon when Nabopolassar and Nebuchadnezzar II would attack. For more information, read 2 Chronicles 36: _____

Jeremiah, deeply moved by God's words, expressed his sorrow and confusion to God. Jeremiah was intercessor for the people. These people had false expectations because of the past promises of blessings, their blindness to their own sin, and the false prophets who kept telling them that all was well.

Disaster was announced first from Dan and then on to the hills of Ephraim because Dan was located at the northern border of Israel. Thus the Danites would be the first to see the approaching armies as they invaded from the north. No one would be able to stop the armies because they would be coming as punishment for the people's sin.

Jeremiah was anguished by the sure devastation of the coming judgment. This judgment would continue until the people turned from their sin and listened to God. Although this prophecy refers to the future destruction by Babylon, it could also describe the judgment of all sinners at the end of the world.

Judah was skilled in doing evil and did not know how to do good. Right living is more than simply avoiding sin. It requires decision and discipline. We must develop skills in right living because our behavior attracts attention to our God. We should pursue excellence in Christian living with as much effort as we pursue excellence at work.

God warned that destruction was certain, but he promised that the faithful remnant would be spared. God is committed to preserving those who are faithful to him.

Jerusalem was the capital city and center of worship for Judah, but God challenged anyone to find one honest and truthful person in the entire city. God was willing to spare the city if one upright person could be found (he made a similar statement about Sodom; see Genesis 18:32). Think how significant your testimony may be in your city or community. You may represent the only witness for God to many people. Are you faithful to that opportunity?

Nothing but truth is acceptable to God. When we pray, sing, speak, or serve, nothing closes the door of God's acceptance more than hypocrisy, lying, or pretense. God sees through us and refuses to listen. To be close to God, be honest with him.

Even the leaders who knew God's laws and understood his words of judgment had rejected him. They were supposed to teach and guide the people, but instead they led them into sin. Jeremiah observed the poor and foolish (ignorant)-those who were uninformed of God's ways-and realized they were not learning God's laws from their leaders. Thus God's search in Jerusalem was complete. There were no true followers in any level of society.

Babylon was indeed an ancient nation. The old Babylonian empire had lasted from about 1900 B.C. to 1550 B.C., and earlier kingdoms had been on her soil as early as 3000 B.C. Babylon in Jeremiah's day would shortly rebel against Assyrian domination, form its own army, conquer Assyria, and become the next dominant world power.

Have you spoken to someone, only to realize that the person hasn't heard a word you were saying?

Jeremiah told the people that their eyes and ears did them no good because they refused to see or hear God's message.

The people of Judah and Israel were foolishly deaf when God promised blessings for obedience and destruction for disobedience. When God speaks through his Word or his messengers, we harm ourselves if we fail to listen. God's message will never change us unless we listen to it.

What is your attitude when you come into God's presence? We should come with fear and trembling (that is, awe and respect) because God sets the boundaries of the roaring seas and establishes the rains and harvests. God had to strip away all the benefits that Judah and Israel had grown to respect more than him, with the hope that the people would turn back to God. Don't wait until God removes your cherished resources before committing yourself to him as you should.

People and nations who please God treat the fatherless (orphans) justly and care for the poor. Wicked men in Israel treated the defenseless unjustly, which displeased God greatly. Some defenseless people-orphans, the poor, the homeless, and the lonely-are within your reach. What action can you take to help at least one of them?

The Lord warned Jeremiah's own tribe of Benjamin to flee, not to the security of the great walled city of Jerusalem because it would be under siege, but toward Tekoa, a town about 12 miles south of Jerusalem. The warning smoke signal was lit at Beth Hakkerem, halfway between Jerusalem and Bethlehem.

The northern kingdom, Israel, had fallen to Assyria, and its people had been taken into captivity. The tragic lesson of their fall should have caused the southern kingdom, Judah, to return to God, but Judah paid no attention. Jeremiah urged Judah to return to God to avoid certain disaster. This message came between 627 and 621 B.C., during Josiah's reign. Although Josiah obeyed God's commands, his example apparently did not penetrate the hearts of the people. If the people refused to repent, God said he would destroy the nation because of the evils of Josiah's grandfather, King Manasseh (2 Kings 23:25-27).

The shepherds were the leaders of Babylon's armies, and their flocks were their troops.

The remnant mentioned here is not to be confused with the righteous remnant. This remnant is those left after the first wave of destruction. Like a grape-gatherer, Babylon wouldn't be satisfied until every person was taken. Babylonians invaded Judah three times until they destroyed the nation and its temple completely (2 Kings 24-25).

The people became angry and closed their ears. They wanted no part of God's commands because living for God did not appear very exciting. As in Jeremiah's day, people today dislike God's demand for disciplined living. As unsettling as people's responses might be, we must continue to share God's word. Our responsibility is to present God's word; their responsibility is to accept it. We must not let what people want to hear determine what we say.

"Ignore it and maybe it will go away!" Sound familiar? This was Israel's response to Jeremiah's warnings. They kept listening to predictions of peace because they did not like Jeremiah's condemnation of their sin. But denying the truth never changes it; what God says always happens. Sin is never removed by denying its existence. We must confess to God that we have sinned and ask him to forgive us.

The right path for living is ancient and has been marked out by God. But the people refused to take God's path, going their own way instead. We face the same decision today, going God's old but true way, or following a new path of our own choosing. Don't be misled. The only way to find peace and "rest for your souls" is to walk on God's path.

Sheba, located in southwest Arabia, was a center of trade in incense and spices used in pagan religious rituals.

Metal is purified by fire. As it is heated, impurities are burned away and only the pure metal remains. As God tested the people of Judah, however, he could find no purity in their lives. They continued in their sinful ways. Do you see impurities in your life that should be burned away? Confess these to God and allow him to purify you as he sees fit. Take time right now

to reflect on the areas of your life that he has already refined; then thank him for what he is doing.

A COVENANT

As we begin chapter 11, we find God making a covenant with Jeremiah and understand that his responsibility was now to begin to preach to the people about the covenant promise they had made. We find a new theme appearing in what Jeremiah said. Read chapter 11 and record the new theme here: _____

Jeremiah 11:1-13:27 concerns the broken covenant, and a rebuke for those who returned to idols after Josiah's reform. Jeremiah's rebuke prompted a threat against his life by his own countrymen. As Jeremiah suffered, he pondered the prosperity of the wicked. As he brought these words to a close, he used a ruined linen belt and filled wineskins as object lessons of God's coming judgment.

Look at verse 17 again. What command do you see? _____

At first glance this command is shocking-God tells Jeremiah not to pray, and says he won't listen to the people if they pray. A time comes when God must dispense justice. Sin brings its own bitter reward. If the people were unrepentant and continued in their sin, neither their prayers nor Jeremiah's would prevent God's judgment. Their only hope was repentance-sorrow for sin, turning from it, and turning to God. How can we keep praying for God's help if we haven't committed our lives to him? God's blessings come when we are committed to him, not when we selfishly hang on to our sinful ways.

The situation was almost more than Jeremiah could stand! Reread 4:19 and 4:22 and record the state of Jeremiah's emotions: _____

The people had gotten off to a promising start, but there was no revival. It is easy to start a race strongly; it is quite another to finish it honorably. To understand how this works, consider the following New Testament parallels:

Demas seems to have been a protégé of Paul. (Philemon 24) During Paul's first imprisonment, he was fortunate to have Demas with him. Demas started the race well. But when he is mentioned again, Paul says that Demas had forsaken him. Read 2 Timothy 4:9-10 and record the problem:

Demas is said to have fallen in love with the present world. Paul urged believers to run the race looking to Jesus. Demas had started looking in the wrong place. There is no indication that Demas denied the faith or rejected the doctrines of Scripture. He simply became enamored with the present age. He no longer viewed things with an eternal perspective.

The church at Ephesus described in Revelation 2:4 had the same problem. To them, Jesus said, "I have this against you, that you have left your first love." Earlier the Christians in Ephesus had been known for their love, not only for God but for each other. Paul had written to them commending them for their "love for all the saints." (Ephesians 1:15) A generation had passed and love was no longer a characteristic. Something was wrong. Something extremely important had been lost.

To Jeremiah's surprise, the people of Anathoth, his hometown, were plotting to kill him. They wanted to silence Jeremiah's message for several reasons:

- (1) **economic**--his condemnation of idol worship would hurt the business of the idol-makers;
- (2) **religious**--the message of doom and gloom made the people feel depressed and guilty;
- (3) **political**--he openly rebuked their hypocritical politics; and
- (4) **personal**--the people hated him for showing them that they were wrong.

Jeremiah had two options: run and hide, or call on God. Jeremiah called, and God answered. Like Jeremiah, we can either run and hide when we face threats because of our faithfulness to God, or we can call on God for help. Hiding compromises our message; calling on God lets him reinforce it.

Jeremiah didn't have the patience of Job nor did he have the patience of God. But what he lacked in patience, he made up for in perseverance! It would have been easy for Jeremiah to say, "I can't take it any more. This is tearing me apart. It doesn't do me any good to preach. No one listens. I think I've done my job. I've completed a preaching tour of the land and I accomplished nothing. So now, let me go back to Anathoth. Lord let me quit."

Jeremiah's work was unproductive and unpleasant, and it wasn't done! It's not how you start; it's how you finish.

How did your race start?

How are you doing in the stretch?

I'VE NEVER LIKED OBJECT LESSONS

Many people have asked, "Why does the way of the wicked prosper?"

Read the following verses and record what you learn:

Job 21:4-21 _____

Habakkuk 1:1-4 _____

Jeremiah knew that God's justice would ultimately come, but he was impatient because he wanted justice to come quickly. God didn't give a doctrinal answer; instead he gave a challenge. If Jeremiah couldn't handle this, how would he handle the injustices ahead?

It is natural for us to demand fair play and cry for justice against those who take advantage of others. But when we call for justice, we must realize that we ourselves would be in big trouble if God gave each of us what we truly deserve.

Life was extremely difficult for Jeremiah despite his love for and obedience to God. When he called to God for relief, God's reply in effect was, "If you think this is bad, how are you going to cope when it gets really tough?"

Not all of God's answers to prayer are nice or easy to handle. Any Christian who has experienced war, bereavement, or a serious illness knows this. But we are to be committed to God even when the going gets tough and when his answers to our prayers don't bring immediate relief.

Read Jeremiah 13, 14, 15, and 16. Today we will discuss the lessons from these chapters. Record the important points as you read: _____

As chapter 13 begins, we see the imagery of a linen belt. A linen belt was one of the more intimate pieces of clothing, clinging close to the body. It was like underwear. Jeremiah's action showed how God would ruin Judah just as Jeremiah had ruined the linen belt.

Actions speak louder than words. Jeremiah often used vivid object lessons to arouse the people's curiosity and get his point across. This lesson of the linen belt illustrated Judah's destiny. Although the people had once been close to God, their pride had made them useless. Proud people may look important, but God says their pride makes them good for nothing, completely useless. Pride rots our hearts until we lose our usefulness to God.

While it is good to respect our country and our church, our loyalties always carry a hidden danger--arrogance. When is pride harmful? When it causes us to

- (1) look down on others;**
- (2) be selfish with our resources;**
- (3) force our solutions on others' problems;**
- (4) think God is blessing us because of our own merits;**
- (5) be content with our plans rather than seeking God's plans.**

Read Jeremiah 13:18 carefully. The king was Jehoiachin, and the queen mother was Nehushta. The king's father, Jehoiakim, had surrendered to Nebuchadnezzar but later rebelled. During Jehoiachin's reign, Nebuchadnezzar's armies besieged Jerusalem, and both Jehoiachin and Nehushta surrendered. Jehoiachin was sent to Babylon and imprisoned. Read 2 Kings 24:1-12 and record what you learn: _____

Jeremiah's prophecy came true.

The Negev region is the dry wasteland stretching south from Beersheba. The towns in this area would be closed to any refugees fleeing the invading army.

Not even the threat of captivity could move the people to repent. The people had become so accustomed to doing evil that they had lost their ability to change. God never rejects those who sincerely turn to him. God is warning them to repent before it becomes impossible to change. We must never put off until tomorrow those changes God wants us to make. Our attitudes and patterns for living can become so set that we will lose all desire to change and will no longer fear the consequences.

Loneliness and aloneness are not the same thing. You can be alone and not be lonely and you can be surrounded by people and be the loneliest person alive. Aloneness relates to external circumstances; loneliness relates to internal feelings. It is healthy for us to have times when we are alone, but we should not be lonely. Too much aloneness can often bring on loneliness. When God created Adam, He said, "it is not good for the man to be alone." The best cure for loneliness is love. Those who know how to give and receive love can more easily overcome the assault of loneliness. This week we will see Jeremiah as a lonely person and will look at the steps that he took to remedy the situation.

Remember that Anathoth was home to many priests, some of them displaced from temple service. Abiathar, the priest who counseled David had been banished to Anathoth when he sided with Abasalom in his revolt against David. Thereafter, many disenfranchised priests set up shop in Anathoth. Jeremiah's message was very unpopular with these priests since it had the potential to make them unemployed. Jeremiah was regarded as a traitor in his hometown. The people were in such a rage that they plotted to kill Jeremiah.

We are not sure when Jeremiah learned of the plot; however, 12:6 tells us that his relatives spoke "fair words" to him when he arrived. But soon, he realized that he was being threatened. The message was clear enough: stop prophesying or else. (11:21)

This was hard for Jeremiah to face because these were people with whom he had grown up--even his brothers and cousins were involved. (12:6) Not only was he not welcome, he was threatened with murder by the very people he had considered family and friends. Discuss this situation in comparison with Jesus' situation when he returned to Nazareth.

Read Luke 4:16-30 and record what you learn: _____

Imagine the emotions that Jeremiah was feeling. If he stopped preaching he would face the wrath of God. He if didn't, he would face possible death. He decided to leave Anathoth. Jeremiah asks the same question that we heard earlier from Job, "why are the wicked allowed to prosper?" It would have made Jeremiah's job easier if God would have zapped someone with lightning every now and again. But the bad guys were living in ease and Jeremiah, who was doing God's will, was the outcast. God's response to Jeremiah's questioning was to tell him that things were going to get worse! This probably cheered him right up!

Somewhere in the middle of all of this cheer, God gave Jeremiah the next bit of information, found in Jeremiah 16:1-9. Read this section and record what you learn: _____

"You shall not take a wife and you shall not have children. For a Hebrew man, worth was measured by the number of his children. Before you cast stones, remember that we have other equally erroneous ways of measuring a man's worth. (job, salary, home, education, etc.)

Why couldn't Jeremiah ever get married? Because his life was to be an object lesson for Israel. Children born during the coming 30 years would be subjected to death, disease, famine and pestilence. Further, God told Jeremiah that he could not participate in the festivities of the Israelites. He couldn't go to parties, weddings, banquets or even funerals.

Because Judah would soon be suffering God's wrath and unable to celebrate anything, Jeremiah, as the object lesson, had to forgo good times as well.

Think about Jeremiah's situation. He was a sensitive person. He was friendless, run out of his hometown, hated by family and neighbors, forbidden to marry and have children and forbidden to attend any social events. No wonder Jeremiah said, "Woe is me!" (15:10-18) Jeremiah is really lonely. But more is involved. He is also uncertain. He has served God faithfully and now wonders whether the effort was worth the trouble.

Have you ever been confused and distressed and cried out to God as Jeremiah does?

Isn't it amazing how God lets us vent our frustration in this way? It surely shows that God responds to honest, heart-felt prayers.

But God's response is even more amazing. He tells Jeremiah to repent! What?! God must be kidding! After all, Jeremiah had been going around telling everyone else to repent. They had treated Jeremiah in an abominable way. But God isn't saying that they were right and Jeremiah was wrong. God is saying that Jeremiah needs an attitude adjustment even though the others were wrong.

Jeremiah's loneliness had given him "I" trouble.

Read Jeremiah 15:15-18 and count the number of times that he uses "I". _____

18 times! He is feeling really sorry for himself and his personal concerns have become more important to him than his commission from God. Sometimes when we are feeling sorry for ourselves, we need God to jolt us more than we need God's sympathy, even though we may have legitimately been mistreated. God tells Jeremiah that if he will repent, He will restore him to his place of service.

**Guess what! Jeremiah may not have felt like being restored.
Have you ever felt like this?**

God was calling Jeremiah to a greater commitment.

James Leo Green puts it this way: "When a servant of God is in the throes of doubt and distress the real question becomes, will he run away or will he stick and struggle through?" "

Sometimes we commit ourselves to God without really realizing what is involved in following the Lord. Then we respond inappropriately. Eventually, Jeremiah responded appropriately. Read his words in 16:19. Jeremiah was aware of his own weakness, but more aware of God's strength. Certainly he was still lonely and without intimate friends. In Lamentations 1:1-2, Jeremiah said, "How lonely sits the city that was full of people...she weeps bitterly in the night, tears on her cheeks." Even Jeremiah's loneliness was an object lesson and a foreshadowing of what would happen to Jerusalem. Jeremiah knew what loneliness was all

about. Loneliness may be shown in a domineering spirit, a biting tongue, or a hypercritical attitude. It may be seen as a sense of worthlessness as a lonely person chastises himself. What are the steps to cure loneliness?

Recognize who God is. He is omnipotent and loving.

Accept what God has given you.

See the snares of loneliness and don't get wrapped up in self.

Take positive action to help you cope and restore a life of service to God.

Get busy, even if it doesn't seem like significant service. Try to understand yourself and your loneliness. Begin learning to communicate with others on a deeper level. Discover the gifts that God has given to you for service. Find others who are needier than yourself and minister to them. When Jeremiah took these steps, he quit being "poor" Jeremiah in his own mind; he was "rich" because he had God.

- I. God's Judgment on His Rebellious People (1:1-45:5)
 - A. The Call of Jeremiah (1:1-19)
 - B. Jeremiah Delivers God's Message of Judgment (2:1-10:25)
 - [1.] Israel Forsakes God (2:1-3:5)
 - [2.] Unfaithful Israel (3:6-4:4)
 - [3.] Prediction of Disaster from the North (4:5-31)
 - [4.] Not One is Upright (5:1-31)
 - [5.] Jerusalem Under Siege (6:1-30)
 - [6.] False Religion Worthless (7:1-8:3)
 - [7.] Sin and Punishment (8:4-9:26)
 - [8.] God and Idols (10:1-25)
 - C. Jeremiah Persists Despite Persecution (11:1-28:17)
 - [1.] Jeremiah Dramatizes God's Displeasure (11:1-13:27)
 - [2.] Drought, Famine, Sword (14:1-15:21)
 - [3.] Day of Disaster (16:1-17:27)
 - [4.] At the Potter's House (18:1-19:15)
 - [5.] Jeremiah and Pashhur (20:1-18)
 - [6.] God Rejects Zedekiah's Request (21:1-14)
 - [7.] Judgment Against Evil Kings (22:1-30)
 - [8.] The Righteous Branch (23:1-40)
 - [9.] Two Baskets of Figs (24:1-10)
 - [10.] Seventy Years of Captivity (25:1-38)
 - [11.] Jeremiah is Threatened with Death (26:1-24)
 - [12.] Judah Will Serve Nebuchadnezzar (27:1-22)
 - [13.] The False Prophet, Hananiah (28:1-17)
 - D. Restoration is Promised (29:1-33:26)
 - [1.] A Letter to the Exiles (29:1-32)
 - [2.] Restoration of Israel (30:1-31:40)
 - [3.] Jeremiah Buys a Field (32:1-44)
 - [4.] Promise of Restoration (33:1-26)
 - E. Jeremiah's Message in Judah's Last Days (34:1-45:5)
 - [1.] A Warning to Zedekiah (34:1-35:19)
 - [2.] Jehoiakim Burns Jeremiah's Scroll (36:1-32)
 - [3.] Jeremiah in Prison (37:1-38:28)
 - [4.] The Fall of Jerusalem (39:1-40:6)
 - [5.] A Remnant Flees to Egypt (40:7-45:5)
- II. God's Judgment on Israel's Enemies (46:1-51:64)
 - A. Judgment on Egypt (46:1-28)
 - B. Judgment on the Philistines (47:1-7)
 - C. Judgment on Moab (48:1-47)
 - D. Judgment on Various Nations (49:1-39)
 - [1.] Judgment on the Ammonites (49:1-6)
 - [2.] Judgment on Edom (49:7-22)
 - [3.] Judgment on Damascus (49:23-27)
 - [4.] Judgment on Kedar and Hazor (49:28-33)
 - [5.] Judgment on Elam (49:34-39)
 - E. Judgment on Babylon (50:1-51:64)
- III. The Account of the Fall of Jerusalem (52:1-34)

WHAT SECURITY?

Stop for a moment to think about what makes you feel secure. When we think on a personal level, we think of a job, home, family, good health, and other things like this. When we think on a national level we think about our military ability and moral stamina. Sometimes we find great security in the church and our friends there. But our ultimate security should be in God.

If we get things mixed up, He sometimes shakes up our security a bit.

So is it always wrong to feel insecure? What would Jeremiah have thought about this?

609 B.C. was a pretty secure time for Judah. Apart from Jeremiah preaching his alarm, things were looking up. The kingdom of Assyria, which had been taking tribute from Judah for more than 200 years, had greatly declined. Around the same time that Jeremiah was called to be a prophet, Ashurbanipal, the Assyrian king had died. Assyria had descended rapidly and in 612 Nineveh fell to the Babylonians.

The great rejoicing over this was one of the reasons that the people didn't listen to Jeremiah. Yet, Jeremiah kept talking about the danger to the north when it was obvious to the people that this 200-year-old threat was finally gone. It was safer to the north than it had been for years.

Judah was feeling secure. Everything was going their way--a temple, a defeated enemy, and a good king. Josiah himself was feeling good about the way things were going and wanted to bring the nation back to its former glory under David and Solomon.

Josiah was a godly king, but he only seemed to see what was on the surface. Jeremiah never found favor with Josiah--perhaps because Josiah couldn't see what Jeremiah was talking about.

But in 609 B.C., Josiah got in the way of the Egyptian army that was marching north to Assyria and in the process was shot with an arrow and died. He was only 37 and his reign--the return to God, at least on the surface--was cut short after only 30 years. This would have been bad enough, but the Egyptians were now disgusted about tiny Judah making an effort to stand in their way.

When Josiah's son, Jehoahaz succeeded his father, the Egyptians deposed him after only three months. Another son, Jehoiakim, was allowed to be installed as king only after he promised to pay heavy taxes to the Egyptians. Surprisingly, things were soon "back to normal" in Judah.

Jehoiakim was trying to make the people forget what had happened by launching grandiose building projects, and in the process forgot to mention the increase in taxes that were going to be necessary for the Egyptian tribute and to fund his programs. Still, there was a feeling in Judah that God just wouldn't let Jerusalem fall.

Shortly after Jehoiakin became king, Jeremiah began preaching again. Again, he seemed like the wrong man in the wrong place with the wrong message. Hadn't he been preaching about danger from the north? And when there had been this bit of trouble and Josiah's death, hadn't the problem come from the south? Jeremiah's story picks up in two different places. We see this third sermon in Chapter 7 and we see the response in chapter 26. The time was probably early in 608 B.C. and Jeremiah would have been in his late thirties. One of the main problems was that Jeremiah was not the only prophet in Judah. The other prophets were more popular with the people and with the king than Jeremiah was. The others were also more favored by the priests, which hurt Jeremiah since he was from a priestly tribe. Jeremiah clearly calls the others false prophets; to the people, they made good sense. The other prophets said that God had chosen Jerusalem and that there was an everlasting kingdom promised to David. Jeremiah couldn't argue with these things. But the other prophets said that God would never allow Jerusalem to fall. Although this made sense, God told Jeremiah that it just wasn't so.

The false prophets reminded the people about the historical account of Hezekiah when Jerusalem was surrounded by Assyrians and God miraculously protected Jerusalem. The false prophets were inside the temple assuring the people that they were secure. Jeremiah was outside at a temple gate telling the people that they weren't.

Jeremiah was telling the people that without a clean heart the temple wasn't going to do them any good. But the people saw the temple as almost a good luck charm and they were only going through motions when they went there. This was enough for the priests and false prophets.

Jeremiah told the people that their imported incense and cane made the temple stink; temple sacrifices weren't as important as obedience. But the people didn't seem to care. They seemed to feel that God didn't care either as long as they kept coming to the temple and presenting their sacrifices. Jeremiah delivered a message that was heresy to the people: When the tabernacle was first set up in the Promised Land it was located in Shiloh. Just as Shiloh was demolished, Jerusalem would also be laid waste. The people started chanting, "the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord" but they didn't really know the Lord at all.

There are several parallels between how the people of Judah viewed their temple and how many today view their churches. Read Jeremiah 7 and record as many

parallels as you can: _____

- (1) ***They didn't make the temple part of their daily living.*** We go to beautiful churches well-prepared for worship, but often we don't take the presence of God with us through the week.
- (2) ***The image of the temple became more important than the substance of faith.*** The image of going to church and belonging to a group can become more important than a life changed for God.
- (3) ***The people used their temple as a sanctuary.*** Many use religious affiliation as a hideout, thinking it will protect them from evil and problems.

Jesus used the words from Jeremiah 7:11 in clearing the temple. Read the following passages and record what you learn:

Mark 11:17 _____

Luke 19:46 _____

This passage applied to the evil in the temple in Jesus' day as well as in Jeremiah's. God's tabernacle had been at Shiloh, but Shiloh had been abandoned (Psalm 78:60; Jeremiah 26:6). If God did not preserve Shiloh because the tabernacle was there, why would he preserve Jerusalem because of the temple?

Chapters 8-10 contain various sermons preached by Jeremiah--none of which were ever heeded. But Jesus quoted Jeremiah in Matthew 21:13.

Some of the sermons in chapter 8 -10 are among Jeremiah's most well known:

Jeremiah 8:11 Peace, Peace they say when there is no peace.

Jeremiah 8:20: The harvest is passed, the summer has ended, and we are not saved.

Jeremiah 8:22: Is there no balm in Gilead? Is there no physician there?

Jeremiah 9:1: Oh that my head were waters, and mine eyes a fountain of tears that I might weep day and night for the slain of the daughter of my people.

Jeremiah 10:23 Oh Lord, I know that the way of man is not in himself: it is not in man that walks to direct his steps.

Clearly, Jeremiah knew that the people's sense of security was falsely based. Even Josiah's discovery of the Word could not avert the coming disaster. God's Word must be DONE not merely POSSESSED .

Jeremiah summarizes all of his messages in 9:23-24. Read this and comment on Jeremiah's perspective. _____

The main point is the false sense of security that wisdom, riches and power can give us. The people of Judah didn't like Jeremiah because he was shredding their security blankets.

One day after completing a sermon, the crowd turned rowdy and converged on him. (26:8) The priests and prophets and the people took him and his life was in danger. They were angry about his Shiloh statement.

Compare this to what happened to Jesus in John 2:19. _____

Both Jeremiah and Jesus were called blasphemers. The authorities arrested Jeremiah before the people could kill him, charged him with blaspheming the city and temple of God, declared him a false prophet and dictated that he should die. Of course, Jeremiah was entitled to a defense, so they asked Jeremiah to represent himself. Read what he said in 26:12-24. Jeremiah had escaped near death. But what he had said was right. The people were putting their security in the wrong place.

Psalm 20:7 says "Some trust in chariots and some in horses". In our day what do we trust in? _____

We call ourselves Bible-believing, but are we Bible-practicing and Bible-reading? What if Jeremiah came to the front door of our church and preached as he did at the gate of the temple? Would we call him a false prophet and heretic?

The Gallup Poll says that 81% of Americans claim to be religious; 95% believe in God; almost every household has a Bible; 92% claim church affiliation. However, only 1 in five say that religion is the most important factor in his/her life. The most interesting finding in the survey was that those who were deeply committed to God were happier, had better family relationships, were more tolerant of people from other races and religions and were more involved in helping the poor, sick and elderly. Rate yourself. _____

Tribute paid by Israel & Judah to Assyria (capital-Nineveh)

812	722	640	627	626-620	619	619-617	616-615	612	609	608
	North Kingdom falls	Josiah becomes king at age 7	Jeremiah becomes prophet at age 7	"broken cistern" Sermon #1	law "found" in temple	"Remember the Covenant" Sermon #2	Object lesson--struggle with God	Nineveh falls	Josiah killed	Jeremiah begins to preach "the Temple stinks" Sermon #3
					Josiah renews covenant				Jehoahaz king-3 months	Jehoiakim king (tribute to Egypt)

A POT OF CLAY

The parables in Jeremiah 18 and 19 were probably written during the end of Josiah's reign or the early years of Jehoiakim's reign, and illustrate God's sovereignty over the nation. God has power over the clay (Judah), and he continues to work with it to make it a useful vessel. But Judah must soon repent, or the clay will harden the wrong way. Then it will be worth nothing and will be broken and destroyed.

As the potter molded or shaped a clay pot on the potter's wheel, defects often appeared. The potter had power over the clay, to permit the defects to remain or to reshape the pot. Likewise, God had power to reshape the nation to conform to his purposes.

Our strategy should not be to become mindless and passive—one aspect of clay—but to be willing and receptive to God's impact on us. As we yield to God, he begins reshaping us into valuable vessels.

Our society admires assertiveness, independence, and defiance of authority. In a relationship with God these qualities become stubbornness, self-importance, and refusal to listen or change. Left unchecked, stubbornness becomes a way of life hostile to God.

This last message reflected the prophet's growing awareness that Judah *had* made her choice. Whatever God warned or commanded, only one response could be expected. "But they will reply, 'It's no use. We will continue with our own plans; each of us will follow the stubbornness of his evil heart' " (Jeremiah 18:12).

Watching a potter shape a clay pot on his wheel, Jeremiah saw the vessel spoiled—and the clay remade into another vessel. Unresponsive Israel had not obeyed: now it must become a formless lump which later *will* respond to the potter's hand. Taking a pottery bowl, Jeremiah was sent to confront the leaders and inhabitants of Jerusalem. He broke the jar before them and informed them that God had determined to break the city in just the same way, for it too was beyond repair.

When the chief priest heard of Jeremiah's words, he had the prophet beaten and put in stocks as a humiliating punishment. Eventually released, Jeremiah defiantly announced destruction of both the city and priest.

Yet the last verses of Jeremiah 20 help us realize how much the prophet himself suffered in his rejection. Very probably these words also reflect his deep despair, for the godly King Josiah had recently been killed in battle. When Josiah fell, Jeremiah's hope was also destroyed. The full realization that he must live through the last days of the surviving

kingdom, prophesying warnings to a people who would not listen, must have come home with stunning force.

No wonder the mourning prophet's feelings burst out in agonized expression:

Cursed be the day I was born! May the day my mother bore me not be blessed! Cursed be the man who brought my father the news, who made him very glad, saying, "A child is born to you—a son!" May that man be like the towns the Lord overthrew without pity. May he hear wailing in the morning, a battle cry at noon. For he did not kill me in the womb, with my mother as my grave, her womb enlarged forever. Why did I ever come out of the womb to see trouble and sorrow and to end my days in shame?

Jeremiah 20:14-18

Jeremiah's words and actions challenged the people's social and moral behavior. He had openly spoken against the king, the officials, the priests and prophets, the scribes, and the wise (Jeremiah 4:9; Jeremiah 8:8-9). He wasn't afraid to give unpopular criticism. The people could either obey him or silence him. They chose the latter. They did not think they needed Jeremiah; their false prophets told them what they wanted to hear.

How do you respond to criticism? Listen carefully—God may be trying to tell you something.

The Valley of Ben Hinnom was the garbage dump of Jerusalem and the place where children were sacrificed to the god Molech. It is also mentioned in Jeremiah 7:31-32. Topheth was located in the valley and means "fireplace" and was probably where children were burned as sacrifices.

The horrible carnage that Jeremiah predicted happened twice, in 586 B.C. during the Babylonian invasion under Nebuchadnezzar, and in A.D. 70 when Titus destroyed Jerusalem. During the Babylonian siege, food became so scarce that people became cannibals, even eating their own children.

Read the following verses and record what you learn:

Leviticus 26:29 _____

Deuteronomy 28:53-57 _____

2 Kings 6:28-29 _____

Lamentations 2:20

Lamentations 4:10

DUST DWELLING

Last week, we ended by looking at the clay pot being made by the potter and the clay pot that Jeremiah broke as an object lesson for the elders of the priests. (Jeremiah 18 and 19).

"Awake and sing, you that dwell in dust, for your dew is as the dew of herbs." Isaiah 26:19

Many of us have felt like dust-dwellers and this verse gives us hope. Who is a dust dweller?

- 1. Those who feel forsaken by God .**
- 2. Those who have lost the power of locating God in prayer**
- 3. Those whose ideals are behind them and withered**
- 3. Those who are passing through difficult physical and financial times.**
- 5. Those who are caught in a job or situation they cannot change**

Each of us has felt this way at sometime in some area, but Jeremiah seemed to experience all of them at once. After Jeremiah showed the priests that God would break Jerusalem, Jeremiah returned to the temple to preach the same message, but he wasn't exactly greeted with thunderous applause. The people did listen, but considered what Jeremiah was saying to verge on treason. The year was about 606 B. C. Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon was making a drive against Egypt to establish world dominance and Judah was in the way.

Pashur, the chief of temple police, decided that he should take care of Jeremiah. He ordered Jeremiah beaten (40 lashes were allowed under Mosaic law). Jeremiah should get the message and the people wouldn't take him seriously again. Then, Pashur placed the prophet in stocks, a torture device used specifically for false prophets.

Read the following verses and record what you learn:

2 Chronicles 16:10 _____

Jeremiah 29:26 _____

The word for stocks comes from a Hebrew word for distort and it didn't take Jeremiah long to understand why! His feet, hands and neck were held so that his body was contorted and almost doubled up. Spending an entire night in this position after a brutal lashing was inhumane punishment. But worst of all, it was the punishment for false prophets.

This was carried out at the northern gate of the upper temple court, one of the most conspicuous places in the city. The area was swarming with people who were no doubt laughing at Jeremiah in much the way that people mocked Jesus on the cross; "He saved others, but Himself He cannot save" (Matthew 27:42) When morning came, Pashur the overseer came and released him. Pashur was through with Jeremiah but Jeremiah wasn't through with Pashur!

"From now on," Jeremiah said, "the Lord calls you not Pashur, but 'terror all around'". Besides giving Pashur a new name, Jeremiah also identified the nation's new nemesis for the first time. Previously, he had called them the enemy from the north. Now he identified them as **Babylon**. Pashur and his family would be taken into captivity, Jeremiah predicted and he would die there. That would prove who was really a false prophet!

Skeptics might argue that anyone, at this point, could figure out that Babylon was the enemy. Babylon had defeated the Assyrians and were taking on the Egyptians. But to identify Pashur specifically must have shaken those who heard the prophecy. Within the next decade, Pashur was taken captive.

Read Jeremiah 29:24-28 for details _____

Jeremiah was discouraged. He was really honest with God.

Read his lament in 20:7-18. _____

These are not expressions of overcoming faith, love and joy like you would expect from a major prophet. He sounds more like us. It appears that Jeremiah tried to start out being joyful, but the joy turned to despair. Jeremiah's message had been one of such terror and destruction that he had been known by the nickname he gave Pashur, "terror-on-every-side." The inner conflict was almost too much for Jeremiah to bear and his feelings bubbled to the surface, even when he was down in the depths.

Despite his depression, he kept returning to some promises from God because he knew that God would keep his word.

God had promised to be with him and deliver him (1:8) so Jeremiah said, "the Lord is with me like a mighty warrior: (20:11)

Jeremiah knew that God was just and righteous. Sometimes Jeremiah viewed God as almost an adversary and yet God was the only true friend he had. This was Jeremiah's confusion but it was also his consolation. It was for this reason that he could still see a crack of light in the darkness. Nothing else emits a glimmer. Apart from God there is no hope. Compare Jeremiah's state to Isaiah 50:10: _____

This isn't easy. Trusting God in the darkness takes faith, but it is by faith that we walk. We prefer walking in the light. You may not realize it, but God is nearer to you when you are low than when you are lofty. The Lord never forsakes us, so in a technical sense He is always with us. But it is when we most need His care that He stoops the lowest to help us. Not only is God very close at such times--whether we feel it or not--but we are very close to being something God can use. **God did not make us out of rocks, but out of dust.**

What happened to poor, depressed, discouraged Jeremiah? How did God get him out of his blue funk? God allowed some needy people to cross his path--the Rechabites. In some ways, this was a perfect match. No one else had much association with the Rechabites, and they were too new in town to realize that nobody had much association with Jeremiah either. They were some of the few good neighbors that Judah ever had. They were about the only nomadic tribes to show God's people any kindness.

During the years after Moses, they even began worshipping Jehovah. During the time of Elijah (about 850 B.C.) they were dismayed by the corruption in the northern and southern kingdoms. They took a vow not to drink wine, live in houses, or plant seed from that time on. Two hundred years had passed since that promise, but the Rechabites continued to wander through the wilderness chasing their sheep, goats, camels and whatever else nomads usually chase.

Now, Nebuchadnezzar started his drive into the area, so the Rechabites had come to Jerusalem for safety. Much to the consternation of the Jews, they had pitched their tents in the city streets and were keeping animals outside the walls. The Jews knew that they meant no harm, but they were smelly nomads and weren't blood brothers. It was an awkward situation. The Jews couldn't kick the Rechabites out but still didn't want to make them feel too comfortable. And, their presence indicated that Jeremiah might have been right about Babylon and the danger from the north.

Jeremiah befriended the Rechabites and invited them to enter the temple. Certain side rooms of the temple were available for the Levites and Jeremiah had one or two priests that he could talk into letting him use a room.

Jeremiah escorted the Rechabites into a private room. As they entered, they saw bowls of wine and cups. As a good host, Jeremiah invited them to drink. Though it was a prophet

who had given the invitation and though they were in the hallowed temple of the Jews, they refused, adhering to their vow made 250 years earlier. It was an object lesson for the children of Israel. The Rechabites weren't even true sons of Israel, but they remained faithful to their promises to God.

On the other hand, the true sons had forgotten their promises and disaster was on the way.

There was also a personal message for Jeremiah. He had thought of himself as abused, unappreciated and ineffective. He had wondered why he had been born. He had wondered why God had called him to such an impossible task. Rather than answering directly, God gave him the example of the Rechabites, who had lived with an impossible vow for 250 years, who had lived a lifestyle out of keeping with the worldly society of Israel, who had been lowly and despised for generation after generation and yet remained faithful to Jehovah.

Maybe it's not a complete answer, but God showed that others in even more difficult circumstances than Jeremiah's had stood the test and he could stand it too, it he continued to live faithfully one day at a time.

Late in life, Jeremiah caught a loftier glimpse of faithfulness. It was the faithfulness of God Himself.

Jeremiah was learning the value of experiencing God's renewable daily mercies. He describes this in Lamentations.

Read Lamentations 3:24,26 and record what you learn: _____

He didn't say, "It is easy," but he said, "it is good." **Can you identify with Jeremiah?!?**

ARE WE HAVING FUN YET?

One of the classic lines of all Christian literature occurs in Pilgrim's Progress when Pliable and Christian are wading through the Slough of Despond. Christian had talked Pliable into joining him on the pilgrimage and Pliable is skeptical that the two of them will ever arrive anywhere. After a while in the slough, Christian is beginning to wonder also. When they seem to only go deeper and deeper, Pliable looks up at Christian and asks, "Is this the happiness you spoke to me of?"

Like Pliable, we may feel frustrated and trapped by circumstances over which we have no control. We may feel mired in and only go in deeper when we try to get out. A biblical character that we can associate with Pliable's experience is not Jeremiah, but his contemporary, Baruch.

Baruch was probably a secretary or official aide to an elder in Jerusalem who went with Jeremiah on the sight-seeing tour through the Valley of Hinnom and witnessed the "pottery" sermon. Apparently, Baruch was sympathetic to what Jeremiah was saying and in 605 B.C., about a year after Jeremiah's deepest despair, he joins Jeremiah as a teammate.

Baruch may have known that Jeremiah's oral ministry was hampered because of the opposition of the temple leaders. Perhaps he had volunteered his services to help the prophet extend his ministry by putting his words down in writing. However it happened, it was certainly a courageous move on Baruch's part. He was probably from a noble family with a good education and a good job. His grandfather was the governor of Jerusalem and his brother was also civically prominent. Baruch ben Neriah probably would have enjoyed the same upward mobility.

In 1978, scholars identified two biblical names from the same passage in scripture. The names were found on seal inscriptions and according to an archaeologist at Jerusalem's Hebrew University, this was the first time that such a discovery has been made. The two seals, made of clay, sealed papyrus documents housed in the official archives. The names were Jerahmeel (Jeremiah 36:26) and Baruch. One seal says, "Belonging to Baruch, son of Neriah, the scribe." The other seal says, "belonging to Jerahmeel, the king's son" which is exactly what Jeremiah calls him. Also mentioned in the seals is Seraiah (51:59) who is referred to as the brother of Baruch. These archeological findings verify that Baruch gave up a promising governmental position to become Jeremiah's scribe. The name Baruch means blessedness or happiness.

There is something very ironic about "Happy" Baruch being teamed with "Weeping" Jeremiah!

On the political front, things were heating up. Nebuchadnezzar's Babylonian troops had defeated the Egyptian forces in the battle of Carchemish on the Euphrates. To secure trade routes in and out of Egypt, Nebuchadnezzar began a systematic decimation of smaller nations and cities along the way. This would inevitably include Judah and Jerusalem, its capital. In about 605 B.C. Nebuchadnezzar had visited Jerusalem on a "friendly visit", and when he left, he took captive with him some of Jerusalem's brightest youth including a young man named Daniel.

Read Daniel 1:1-6 and record what you learn: _____

The chapters we are studying today, 25, 36, and 45, take place in the two years that followed this event.

Chapter 25 focuses on the fact that the people have not listened and will become a desolate wasteland. This message had been preached before, but this time he added the information that the captivity would be **70 years**. Nebuchadnezzar deported residents in three stages: 605 B.C., 598 B.C. and 586 B.C. The ending of the captivity was in 536 B.C. and Zerubbabel's rebuilt temple was completed in 516 B.C.

Although we don't know exactly how the authorities responded to this fourth sermon, we do know that as chapter 36 begins, Jeremiah is "confined." In this condition, Jeremiah couldn't proclaim the message orally, but then Baruch, a scribe, came on the scene. He was to Jeremiah as Luke would be to Paul and John Mark would be to Peter--the writer of the message.

Baruch took dictation day after day. Since Jeremiah had been preaching God's word for about 22 years, it would have taken some time to condense the message into a concise scroll. From Baruch's perspective, the working conditions would have been bad; possibilities for advancement non-existent; fringe-benefits--nil!

But Baruch finished the scroll. Then, Jeremiah instructed Baruch to go to the temple and read the Word to the people. Perhaps the thinking was that Baruch was from a prominent family and would be more credible.

This probably exceeded Baruch's job description! It was one thing to associate with Jeremiah in privacy, but another to be his spokesman in the temple courtyard. Baruch's friends would be there, and his career would be forever ruined if he went to the courtyard and spoke Jeremiah's words there.

Chronologically, chapter 45 of Jeremiah fits between verses 7 and 8 of chapter 36. It is here that Baruch says something similar to what Pliable said in the Slough of Despond. Baruch

actually says something more like, "Woe is me, Lord, for You have added insult to injury." (45:3) Baruch hasn't been hanging out with Jeremiah very long and already he no longer sounds like Mr. Happy! He had made a tremendous personal sacrifice when he began writing for Jeremiah, but he probably still had some hopes for a personal future. Those plans were in jeopardy if he went to the temple courtyard with Jeremiah's scroll. It would mean the end for Baruch. He would be laughed at like Jeremiah and maybe even imprisoned, beaten, and mobbed like Jeremiah had been. Baruch was a good man, but he was still looking out for Number One.

In Baruch, we see a good example of mixed motives. Good works and righteous deeds can easily be tinged with selfishness. Sometimes only God can sort them out, but it helps to honestly confront the human mixture that accounts for much of our religious activity. Honestly ask yourself why you go to church, lead a Bible study, read the Bible, send notes, etc. Be honest with your answers. Do you have any mixed motives?

Chapter 45 contains God's response to Baruch's dilemma. The answer is threefold and applies to us today:

1. God hurts more (and before) you do. Read Hebrews 4:15 and record what you learn:
-
-

2. We live in an age of "looking out for Numero Uno". God says, "Are you seeking great things for yourself? Seek them not." We do not know what things Baruch was seeking, but we know what things WE are seeking. Seek them not!

3. God will be with us. 45:5 carries with it the meaning that we will be in war and it won't be easy, but God will be with us.

Notice that God always tells it like it is. He doesn't oversell.

Moses gave up palace life in Egypt to lead his people out of bondage in Egypt. On Sinai, God didn't promise a new palace, but promised to go with Moses. (Exodus 33:14). When

Jesus left his disciples, He didn't tell them everything would be sweetness and light. Read John 16:33 and record Jesus' words: _____

To put it simply, we must yield our will and our self-serving service to put God's purpose first. For Baruch, it meant going to the temple to read the scroll.

The time was 604 B.C. Word had arrived that Nebuchadnezzar had sacked a Philistine stronghold only 35 miles away and the people were so terrified in Jerusalem that they had called a fast. In that environment, Baruch walked in with his scroll. He used a friend's apartment overlooking the temple court with the permission of the owner's son. When the son heard what Baruch was reading, he went to get his father--who quickly adjourned the palace meeting he was attending and came back to get Baruch and the scroll and bring them both to the palace ASAP.

Baruch was treated well and asked to read the scroll from beginning to end. The officials must have been impressed by the accuracy of Jeremiah's earlier prophecies. Their first recorded reaction is fear, and then the sure knowledge that the king would have to know about the scroll.

Baruch was urged to take Jeremiah and find a safe hiding place before the king could get a look at it. As the scroll was read by the king, he cut it into strips and fed it into the fire. Strip by strip the precious manuscript was incinerated. Josiah had trembled when God's word was read, but Jehoiakim, his son, had no such fear.

The Bible says that God hid Baruch and Jeremiah (36:26). When the Lord hides you, you are not findable! But, they got a report of what had transpired with the scroll. They had lost something very precious. They didn't have a photocopy! A manuscript that should have been prized because it proclaimed God's word had literally gone up in smoke.

Baruch must have been in despair, hiding out who knows where with moody Jeremiah as his partner. He is a wanted man, wondering if he can ever again function as a scribe and wondering how God could allow months of his finest talents to be burned--probably wondering if God would ever use anything else that he possessed. Baruch was beginning to understand what God had meant when he said, "Are you seeking great things for yourself? Seek them not."

Sometimes even service of God can be self-gratifying. We are more interested in becoming self-fulfilled than we are in offering selfless worship. We forget that God doesn't need to use us. We cannot add anything to His greatness--he is self-sufficient. Like Baruch and Paul, we have to learn to count our family ties, talents and pride as loss.

**But remember--although Jehoiakim sent a posse
after them, they could not be found!**

We don't know where they were hiding, but we know what they were doing! God told them to take another scroll and start writing.

Chapter 36 ends with the words, "Baruch...wrote therein from the mouth of Jeremiah all the words of the book which Jehoiakim, king of Judah had burned in the fire; and there were added besides unto them many like words." It was important for these discouraged men to begin serving God again.

Especially notice the last words, "there were added besides unto them many like words."
This is typical of God's Word. You can't get rid of it by throwing it in a fire!

How many times have you wondered if your work is worth the effort?

How many times does your scroll have to be thrown into the fire before you give up?
How many times can you face repeated rejection and false accusations from people who should be on your team?

Remember that God has his eye on the ultimate victory.

"In the world you have tribulation, but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world." John 16:33

LOOKING OUT FROM HIDING

We left Jeremiah and Baruch in hiding when we completed the lesson last week. There, they were painstakingly recreating the scroll (with additional information) that Jehoiakim had burned. We don't know how long they stayed in hiding, but we can make some good guesses. The only travel referred to in the Book of Jeremiah that doesn't have a distinct time frame is a trip that is discussed in Jeremiah 13. Some commentators feel that Jeremiah and Baruch took this trip while they were evading Jehoiakim's posse.

Read Jeremiah 13:46-49 and record what you learn: _____

Some scholars believe that Jeremiah traveled to the Euphrates River, at least 350 miles away from Jerusalem. The trip was to bury a waistcloth and later to dig it up again. There is much discussion about whether the trip was literal or not and whether Jeremiah really went to the Euphrates River. If it was literal, and the Euphrates, Jeremiah walked two round trips of a total of more than 1400 miles.

The word translated Euphrates is Perath or the Hebrew letters PRH. It is possible that Jeremiah was not referring to the River Euphrates (he doesn't actually say river) but to another place near his hometown of Anathoth. This was the Wadi Farah which corresponds to the Hebrew "Parath." This Wadi must have been familiar to Jeremiah and the surroundings meet the biblical description, but whether this is where they were is uncertain.

If this was the hiding place, Jeremiah and Baruch may have been able to slip in and out of Jerusalem for supplies. The point of the story in chapter 13 is this: Just as an undergarment is close to a person, so Judah had been close to God. The waistcloth was of linen, a material associated with the priesthood and Israel was a "kingdom of priests." (Exodus 19:6) They were to be a people, a name, a praise, and a glory. (Jeremiah 13:11) Instead, the nation was going into exile to Perath, which stood for the Euphrates, where the Lord would "spoil the pride of Judah" as the waistcloth itself had been spoiled. (13:9).

You may have noticed the realistic way in which God dealt with Jeremiah. Ezekiel had visions of a wheel within a wheel in the air. Isaiah saw the Lord high and lifted up with His glory filling the temple. Jeremiah learned from pottery, broken jars, cisterns and waistcloths. God can ordain the commonplace. The ordinary in our lives is not to be despised because it is mundane.

Hiding places usually begin romantically but become rapidly boring. When Elijah was fed by ravens at the Brook Cherith the novelty wore off. For the Israelites, even manna lost its charm. Hiding places certainly have limitations, but they are excellent for putting things into proper perspective. In the hubbub of daily life, we often concern ourselves with just coping.

In a hiding place, we can get a broader view. Petty details lose significance and become inconsequential.

While he was in hiding, Jeremiah probably dictated some of the prophecies regarding the nations in chapters 46-49. These prophecies tell of the future of Moab, Amrnon, Philistia and Egypt.

He also had clearer insight into the integrity of King Jehoiakim which is expressed in Jeremiah 22:13-23. In Jerusalem, Jeremiah had been a participant; in hiding, he was an observer. What did he see?

1. King Jehoiakim trembling under Nebuchadnezzar's attack and becoming the slave of Babylon. (2 Kings 24:1) King Jehoiakim mending fences with Egypt.
2. Jeremiah saw Jehoiakim as foolish and what he was doing as dangerous. Most of all, Jeremiah saw that righteousness, wisdom, and respect had no part in Jehoiakim's personality. This leads Jeremiah to repeatedly emphasize the importance of righteousness in chapters 21-24.

Helping the struggler, the down-and-out and the person forgotten by society is the mark of righteousness and the characteristic of good leadership.

Look at the leaders you know. Are they doing this?

Jeremiah says, "Rescue from the hand of his oppressor the one who has been robbed." (Jeremiah 21:12) "Deal justly and fairly. . .do not ill-treat or do violence to the alien, the orphan, or the widow; do not shed innocent blood in this place." (Jeremiah 22:3)

Our society is built on lobbies. Jeremiah says that the righteous leader is the one who cares for those who have no pressure group to lobby for them.

The politics of power infects the church as well. Decisions are made on the strength of those who can influence the right people; those who have no one to care are forgotten. What if the majority doesn't care about aliens, orphans, and widows? What if the majority feels that the church would be happier and grow faster without them?

Jeremiah is saying that instead of aiding the underprivileged, Jehoiakim was pressing them into slavery. South of Jerusalem, near Bethlehem, Jehoiakim was building a personal fortress at Ramat Rachel. It was expensively constructed with cedar and bright colors. But Jeremiah says that it is not the quantity of cedar you have or the brightness of your red paint that makes you a great leader. **What counts is whether you are just and fair.**

Sadly enough, evangelicals today resemble Jehoiakim in more ways than one. More concern is placed on material possessions than eternal things. Too often there is more concern with lands and mortgages than in reaching the unsaved and helping the sick and homeless.

Just as Jehoiakim ignored Nebuchadnezzar while working on his grand palace, we today are absorbed with selfish concerns and care little for others. We think of ourselves rather than thinking of the poor and underprivileged and forgotten.

The church had a similar preoccupation a hundred years ago. There became a glamour attached to the "foreign field." It is easier to acknowledge the poor and underprivileged when they are thousands of miles away than when they are on your doorstep. William and Catherine Booth launched the Salvation Army in response.

Times haven't changed all that much. It is still too easy to push the poor into projects and forget them. We don't think about neglect of the poor as being a sin (at least not a major one). We have our own lists of sin which make other people's worse than ours.

Read Romans 1:29-30 and record what you learn: _____

Paul combines gossip with murder and Jeremiah puts neglect of the poor as a sin of the highest magnitude.

Jeremiah may have remained in hiding with Baruch for the rest of Jehoiakim's reign. Jehoiakim died at age 36, unloved and not even honored by a decent burial. It was as Jeremiah had prophesied he would die.

His son, Jehoiachin, became king in 597 B.C. but paid the price for his father's double cross of Nebuchadnezzar. He was carted off to Babylon after reigning only three months. Shortly later, Nebuchadnezzar also ransacked the city of Jerusalem and the temple.

Read 2 Kings 24:13-14 for a description of what happened then. _____

Only the poorest people of the land were left. Jeremiah and Baruch were among the poorest.

Baruch from a noble family and Jeremiah from a priestly family would surely have been taken into exile if they had not been in hiding. Nebuchadnezzar installed on the throne Mattaniah who promptly changed his name to "Zedekiah" which means "Jehovah my Righteousness." Judah certainly needed righteousness now. It was a good time for

Jeremiah to come out of the hiding place. Chapters 22 and 23 are probably an assembled presentation of Jeremiah's prior sermons given as an inauguration sermon for the new king. Jeremiah saw that there was no righteousness in Zedekiah, but God gave him the hope of the Messiah who would be "Jehovah Tsidkenu," "The Lord our Righteousness".

Jeremiah learned that human righteousness does not exist. Even priests and kings fall short of God's demands for perfection. We cannot meet God's standards. We cannot share God's righteousness.

Jeremiah probably didn't understand all of the theological ramifications of what he prophesied, but when he spoke of the Messiah as the righteous branch and called Him the Lord our Righteousness. When he uses the same phrase to refer to His people (Jeremiah 33:16) you realize that he had an amazing grasp of what we call New Testament truth.

Biblical righteousness has five parts:

1. Righteousness in actions
2. Righteousness in relationships
3. Righteousness in character
4. Righteousness imparted by the risen Lord
5. Righteousness imparted by the indwelling Holy Spirit

As we end our study for today, read the following verses and record what you learn:

2 Corinthians 5:17 _____

Galatians 2:20 _____

Romans 6:18 _____

2 Corinthians 5:21 _____

The truth of righteousness is summarized here.

Donald Barnhouse said that if you look through a piece of red glass, everything is red; through blue glass, everything is blue; through yellow glass, everything is yellow. When God looks at us, He sees us through Jesus Christ and we look like Jesus. We are clothed in his righteousness. Christ is made unto us righteousness! (I Corinthians 1:30)

JEREMIAH AS A KINSMAN REDEEMER

As we begin this section, our question is this: Is anything too hard for God? We would readily answer, "of course nothing is too difficult for God!" The question is still a good one for two reasons:

First, it's a question that scripture asks a couple of times.

Second, it's a question that God asks us when we are going through trials and when our faith is strained to the breaking point.

Way back in Genesis 18, God asked the question of Abraham, who at 100 years of age had just been told that his 90 year old wife, Sarah, would have a child. Sarah heard and laughed. She thought she only laughed to herself, but God responded with the big question.

Now, it is about 589 B.C. Jeremiah is around 57 years old. He has been a prophet for 35 years and has seen no miracle. He's seen trash sites, broken pots, rotten waistclothes, and no miracles.

Zedekiah, whom we discussed last week, has been ruling for 8 years. At 29 he is still inept and has foolish advisors. Zedekiah was easily swayed by public opinion and knows that many people in Judah consider Jehoiachin, who is in exile, to be the legitimate king. Therefore, Zedekiah is trying hard to get people to like him.

He had thought of a heroic rebellion about five years earlier, but Nebuchadnezzar had heard of it and he quickly sent envoys to Nebuchadnezzar to assure him of his loyalty. Later, he went to Babylon himself (Jeremiah 51 :59) to say the same in person. Now, about four years after that trip, Zedekiah is summoning his courage again.

A new pharaoh (Hophra) has come to power in Egypt and begins wooing Zedekiah as well as neighbors, Tyre and Ammon, to become his allies. In response, Nebuchadnezzar begins moving into Palestine. The fortified cities in Judah and Philistia fall one by one. The conquest was rather gruesome if archaeological records serve correctly. By January 588 B.C., the Babylonian army ringed Jerusalem, blockading it so that food could not be brought in from the countryside.

Zedekiah knew he was in deep trouble and Egypt wasn't coming to help him out.

FINALLY someone asked Jeremiah what he thought!

(Jeremiah 21:2) Zedekiah knew that his cabinet members wouldn't care for the idea of contacting a prophet, but he was desperate. This puts Jeremiah in a rather difficult

situation. These are his people; Jerusalem is where he lives. He has predicted its destruction and advised the people to leave. He could have fled himself. In Babylon, he might have been treated as a hero. But, just as Elijah suffered through the three-year drought he predicted, Jeremiah chose to suffer the hunger and deprivation of the Babylonian blockade.

It is from this position that Zedekiah comes to ask for help from the prophet. Of course, he must know history. In the ninth century B.C. , Elisha was asked for help and the nation was spared. Some 150 years later, Hezekiah asked Isaiah for help and the nation was spared. Now, 115 years have passed and Zedekiah is hoping history will repeat itself if he goes to Jeremiah.

Jeremiah is in a sticky situation. He knows what God has said. He knows that God is faithful to His word. So, Jeremiah elects to simply tell the truth. "God Himself will join forces with the Babylonians and will fight against Jerusalem with an outstretched hand and a strong arm." He advises Zedekiah, in short, to surrender. What agony this must have caused Jeremiah.

As the siege grew more intense, people in Jerusalem verged on mass starvation. It was then that Jeremiah received another word from God: Jerusalem will be taken and burned; Zedekiah will be carried into exile.

In the spring, a small ray of hope emerged. Hophra belatedly sent his army to Palestine; it diverted Nebuchadnezzar temporarily. Some Jews believed that a miracle was happening but Jeremiah knew better. Using the brief respite, Jeremiah headed to Anathoth where a family gathering was happening. A relative had died and the family was checking out the estate which was to be divided among them. However, at the city gate, he was arrested and charged with desertion. He had been telling the people to surrender for so long that the soldiers were convinced that Jeremiah was intending to do it himself. He was beaten and imprisoned beneath the house of the country's secretary of state.

The dungeon had insects and rodents; there was no bed; food was dropped in from above. Jeremiah was getting sick and could hardly stand up. Above ground, Babylon had returned and again blockaded the city. Some food had been brought in but the prospects were not good. Zedekiah, realizing that he was in deep trouble, arranged a secret meeting with Jeremiah. Zedekiah was hoping that Jeremiah would have some new word from the Lord. But Jeremiah simply told him that he would soon be delivered to Babylon.

If only some compromise were available, Jeremiah might have been released. But Jeremiah cannot compromise the word of the Lord. Before leaving the king, Jeremiah asked Zedekiah what he thinks of his false prophets now. Then Jeremiah suggests that the least the king could do was provide a better prison for a true prophet! Surprisingly, Zedekiah obliged and sent Jeremiah to the court prison where there was fresh air and bread to eat as long as the supplies held out.

This new prison had a whole different set of problems: having not much else to do, the soldiers mocked Jeremiah who was emaciated and looked many years older than he was. At this point, the story jumps to Jeremiah 32 and 33.

Jeremiah's cousin Hanamel comes and brings Jeremiah up-to-date on the family gathering. Since Hanamel needs money, he asks Jeremiah to redeem his property in Anathoth. Why should Jeremiah do this? His family has turned against him and the land is worthless. But God has directed Jeremiah to buy it and he does so. Jeremiah signed the deed, placing one copy, sealed before witnesses, in a jar for safekeeping and keeping one working copy also stored.

Read Jeremiah 32:7-12 and record the events: _____

There was a law known as the law of Kinsman Redeemer in Israel. It is summarized below.

WHY ONE NEEDS A REDEEMER

1. Had become enslaved – kinsman redeemer paid the price to redeem the enslaved relative
2. Had lost control of land – kinsman redeemer paid the price to redeem the land
3. Family murder – kinsman redeemer served as the judicial executioner of the murderer
4. Had produced no heirs – kinsman redeemer married the one without heirs and produced heirs

WHO COULD SERVE AS A GA'AL

The nearest blood relative who: (Leviticus 25:48)

1. Was willing to pay the price (would use his own resources to pay the price)
2. Was able to pay the price (was qualified i.e. sufficient resources and not himself a slave: Ruth 4:6)

MANKIND (ADAM) NEEDED A REDEEMER

1. After the fall, mankind was enslaved to sin (John 8:34: Jesus answered them, "truly, truly I say to you, everyone who commits sin is the slave of sin.")
2. Mankind had lost dominion of the earth (John 12:31 "Now judgment is upon this world; now the ruler of this world shall be cast out")
3. Mankind had been murdered (John 8:44 "You are of your father the devil, and you want to do the desires of your father. He was a murderer from the beginning...")
4. Because of sin, there were no heirs for the kingdom (Romans 4:14 For if those who are of the Law are heirs, faith is made void and the promise is nullified.)

HOW JESUS REDEEMED US

1. We had no eligible kinsman to redeem mankind because no one was able (i.e. not himself enslaved to sin) Sin entered through being a descendant from Adam's seed)
2. Jesus became eligible for us by meeting the requirements:
 - a. He became a blood relative (Hebrews 2:14 Since then the children share in flesh and blood, He Himself likewise also partook of the same)

- b. He was able because he wasn't born of Adam's seed and therefore was not born enslaved to sin
- c. He was willing

JESUS' ACTIONS FOR US

- 1. Redeemed any of enslaved mankind who choose His redemption
- 2. Will redeem the land over which Satan took control (Earth)
- 3. Will include the judicial execution of our murderer (Rev. 20:10, 14)
- 4. Will include marriage to those who had produced no heirs, making them His bride (the church)

EXAMPLES OF REDEMPTION

Ruth and Boaz (he redeemed the land and married her) Ruth 4:1-13
 Jeremiah 32:10-14 (he redeemed the land and put the deed in a jar of clay)
 Articles redeemed were "sealed" as a mark of ownership and authenticity. Only the rightful purchaser could break the seal, which was both placed and broken before witnesses.

REDEMPTION TERMINOLOGY

- 1. 2 Corinthians 4:7 But we have this treasure in earthen vessels (referring to saved spirits in fleshly bodies)
- 2. Ephesians 1:13 In Him, you also after listening to the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation, having also believed, you were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise
- 3. Revelation 19:9 And he said to me, "write, 'blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb.'" And He said to me, "these are true words of God."

Jeremiah was asked by God to serve as the redeemer for his family land. He had the "right of redemption." Much imagery from the New Testament comes from the covenant imagery of the Kinsman Redeemer. Jeremiah put the sealed deed for his treasure in a jar of clay so that it would last a long time. The New Testament tells us that we have this treasure (a spirit sealed by the Holy Spirit) in a jar of clay.

Read Ephesians 1 and record what you learn here: _____

JEREMIAH MUST BE CRAZY!

When a redemption was made, the Hebrew custom always made it a really big deal. It was practically a spectator sport. The redeemer was cheered at the completion of the transaction. But, we can imagine who was getting the cheers when Jeremiah redeemed his family land! They thought Jeremiah was crazy!

Jeremiah knew that he was doing what God had asked of him. But he may not have known why. So, he decided to ask God.

Read Jeremiah 32:17-25 and summarize Jeremiah's prayer: _____

I know that you are the creator, the all-powerful, the loving god, the just God, the wise God, the omniscient God, the God who works in history. But frankly, God, I don't know how you're going to get Yourself out of this one!

God's answer to the prayer is found in Jeremiah 32:27. But then He tells Jeremiah what He is going to do. Note all of the "I wills" in Jeremiah 32:28-35. Record them here:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____
7. _____
8. _____

9. _____

10. _____

Then God gives Jeremiah the punch line: **FIELDS WILL BE BOUGHT AGAIN, FIELDS THAT ARE NOW DESOLATE AND IN THE HANDS OF THE BABYLONIANS.**

God's message is clear. The restoration will not be man's doing, but God's. Read Ephesians 3:20 and record what you learn: _____

❖ **HERE, OF COURSE, IS THE ISSUE:** Our big question is not, "can God do it," but "will God do it."

The most difficult of all of the "I wills" is number 5. Jeremiah has bemoaned the heart wickedness of the people in 17:9. Somehow God was going to have to do something about the heart problem. Jeremiah recognized that the covenant under which the Jews lived was external. What was needed was an internal new covenant.

The old covenant had been based on "thou shalt and thou shalt not." The new covenant would be based on God's "I wills!"

Forgiveness and restoration were not enough. God's law would have to be written on the heart, not memorized in the head. Jeremiah was really beginning to understand God's plan as it was revealed to him piece by piece over the years. Some commentators call Jeremiah 31:31-34 the Gospel Before the Gospel. It is the summary of Jeremiah's experience and spiritual pilgrimage.

Read Jeremiah 31:31-34 and think about how Jeremiah's understanding has been fulfilled in us: _____

Jeremiah affirmed that the future relationship between God and man would be based on individual response as well as God's irresistible grace. Jeremiah has found a profound secret that other prophets did not understand.

❖ **Isaiah knew about the holiness of God.**

- ❖ **Amos knew about the justice of God.**
- ❖ **Daniel and others knew about the omnipotence of God.**
- ❖ **But God revealed to Jeremiah His love, the secret piece of the puzzle.**

God is holy. He hates sin. He is just. He must punish sin. If that is all there is to it, we would be in a hopeless situation. Babylon, or whoever God chooses to use as agents of punishment is inevitable. There is no other solution in light of God's holiness and character.

Adding omnipotence to holiness and justice only compounds the problems because now we have a God with the strength to carry out what His holiness and justice dictate. But, add the love of God into the equation and there is a solution!

God must punish sin, but He chose to take the punishment Himself! He can become our righteousness, and this is what Jesus did for us when He served as our Kinsman Redeemer. God's love was added to a bleak, hopeless puzzle and that one piece created the solution and brought life and hope to us.

Those who have Jesus not only have God's righteousness applied to their lives, but also receive a new heart on which God's laws are engraved. The Holy Spirit becomes a permanent resident within them and makes what otherwise would have been impossible a practical reality.

Jeremiah was in prison; the Babylonians were at the gates. But there was Good News! The people would return from exile and there was a glorious New Covenant coming—an everlasting covenant.

**Some prisons are made of bricks and steel,
but the real prisons are prisons of the soul.**

Jeremiah had been released from that prison! Where do you stand?

Is anything too difficult for God?

IS LIFE CHEAP?

Feodor Dostoevski wrote, "If there is no God, all things are permissible. R. C. Sproul wrote of a man who told him, "How we treat people is a matter of ethics. Ethics are determined by our philosophy. Our philosophy reflects our theology. So respecting people is really a theological matter."

Your relationship with God and your relationships with other people are related. Jesus called attention to this when He gave two great commandments:

1 . You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.

and

2. You shall love your neighbor as yourself. Matthew 22:37,39

We live in a culture that teaches us that life is short and we only go around once, so we had better grab everything we can get for ourselves as it goes by. We call it looking out for Number One.

That necessarily produces a distrust of other people who are probably looking out for Number One themselves, and might grab something that we wanted as it goes by! On the surface, our culture is separated from Jeremiah's by 2600 years and 10,000 miles. But our cultures aren't as far removed as you might think.

Last week, we left Jeremiah in his improved imprisonment. The siege of Jerusalem had resumed after a brief respite. But to understand some of the current problem we need to go back a few months to the first Babylonian siege.

King Zedekiah and the town powers had decided to free the Jewish slaves. At first this looks good, but the king's motives were really less than noble on second look. Slaves had to be fed and bread was getting scarce and expensive. Further, if the Babylonians stormed the walls, slaves wouldn't have as much motivation to fight as free men. Militarily it was smart to free the slaves. Besides, it was against God's law to hold Jewish slaves and Zedekiah may have wanted some brownie points from God. It paid to get all the help possible!

Looking back to the laws of Moses, slavery was permitted under special circumstances, but only short term. A Hebrew man could sell himself to pay a debt, but he was only enslaved until he paid off the debt or until the Sabbath year--whichever came first. The law's limitations had been long forgotten and slavery was a permanent institution. God's provision to keep life from being seen as cheap had been ignored.

Last week, we saw that the blockade on Jerusalem was lifted for a while while Nebuchadnezzar chased the Egyptians for a while. When the pressure let up, Zedekiah had revoked his "noble" Emancipation Proclamation. The slaves were rounded up and life returned to the way it had been before.

Needless to say, Jeremiah had something to say about this.

Read Jeremiah 34:15-17. Record what you learn: _____

The ancient world was full of slaves and in Rome, at the time, there were an estimated 400,000 slaves. Jerusalem was supposed to be different. Judah should have been reminded that they had once been slaves themselves in Egypt. Therefore, the law stipulated that Jewish slaves be released in the sabbatical year and all other slaves in the Year of Jubilee (50th year). Unlike Roman law, Hebrew law protected the slave. A master who put to death a slave was punished and an ill-treated slave was to receive freedom.

Human life is precious because God created it. This concept permeates both the Old and New Testament. Read, for example, Paul's exhortation in Galatians 3:28. Of course, this does not obliterate distinctions in society. If you go to work or class tomorrow, you still have to report to the boss or the instructor, even if he is a Christian. But employees and students and bosses and instructors are all created in God's image and must be treated as respected persons.

Needless to say, the nobility were less than impressed with Jeremiah's words. Even from prison, Jeremiah could create a stir.

Besides all of this, Jeremiah kept encouraging the people to surrender and apparently some of the soldiers were beginning to listen to him! (38:4). Writings discovered in the archeological excavation of Lachish may bear this out. Jeremiah's witness, like Paul's, was felt even when he was imprisoned. God calls us to be faithful where we are, even in the darkest of circumstances. There may be an opportunity to witness, even to the guards! Irate because Jeremiah wouldn't shut up, the nobility went to the Zedekiah and requested Jeremiah's death. Zedekiah washed his hands of the whole matter (38:5). Sound like anyone else you have heard of?

Read Matthew 27:24 and record what you learn: _____

Popularity was important to Zedekiah.

The nobles were a bit leery of killing Jeremiah outright because he might turn out to REALLY be a prophet so they imprisoned him in a cistern. We discussed cisterns earlier.

Recall what you know about them. _____

The Bible says, simply, "Jeremiah sank down into the mud." (38:6) This is only the physical aspect; image the emotional and psychological stress on Jeremiah.

As a bit of an aside, some Bible scholars feel that Psalm 69 may have been composed by Jeremiah while he was in the cistern and added to the Psalms written by David. It closely resembles Lamentations 3.

Read Psalm 69 and record what you learn: _____

ONE STEP FORWARD, TWO STEPS BACK

For Jeremiah, it seemed to be one step forward and two steps back. He would get out of one mess just in time to speak his way into another. While Jeremiah was fervently beseeching God for deliverance, an unlikely rescuer came forward.

He was Ebed-Melech, an Ethiopian slave. Ebed-Melech complained to Zedekiah about Jeremiah's plight. It was **very unusual** for prisoners to come out of cisterns alive.

Read Genesis 37:28-29 and record the account of another person thrown in a cistern:

Archeologists unearthed a cistern in Gezer than had 12 skeletons!

It was dangerous for Ebed-Melech to make a public case, but once he did, Zedekiah had to do something. Some people thought that Jeremiah might possibly be a prophet and it wasn't good policy to kill him. The king ordered Jeremiah removed from the cistern as if he had nothing to do with him being there in the first place.

Ebed-Melech recruited helpers and got rags and clothes to lift Jeremiah out. Ropes would have cut the flesh of the starving prophet so Ebed-Melech protected him in the rescue operation.

Besides what we do, how we do it is important. Ebed-Melech wasn't only thinking about the rescue, but he was thinking about the value of life. We don't know why Ebed-Melech put his life on the line for Jeremiah, but we can guess.

1 . He may have appreciated Jeremiah's blast at the king for his flip-flop position on slavery.

2. Jeremiah 39:15-18 addresses Ebed-Melech and it appears that he had put his trust in Jehovah. Read this section and record what you learn: _____

Zedekiah was thwarted. The nobles would be back on his case. If only Jeremiah would make some concessions. Zedekiah decided to have another private meeting with the prophet, at a place where they were not likely to be seen. Hoping that Jeremiah would be grateful for his rescue, Zedekiah thought he might soften his message. What do you think?

Jeremiah had been a prophet for almost 40 years and where had it gotten him? Nobody listened; nobody repented. But Jeremiah held steadfast. After the meeting, he was returned to the court of the guard which probably seemed like a luxury prison after the cistern. He remained there until Jerusalem fell to the Babylonians.

In July, 587 B.C., Jerusalem fell. The siege had started 18 months earlier and the city had faced increasing hardships. During the final months, many people were starving. Read Jeremiah 52 to get the whole picture. Record what you learn here: _____

The Book of Lamentations was written as Jeremiah surveyed the streets of the city after emerging from prison when Jerusalem fell.

Life had been cheap in Jerusalem and it was getting cheaper. Babies had been sacrificed to Molech; slaves had been kept, contrary to God's law; in the extreme crisis, mothers had eaten their own children.

Life is cheap and getting cheaper in our day as well. Discuss the ways in which this is so. (violence, drugs, abortion, euthanasia.) _____

Using people to accomplish our purposes cheapens life also. People are a consumer product--if they can't be used they are discarded. If they can be used, they are discarded as soon as their value is finished. Even churches are guilty of this. People may be seen in terms of what they can do for the church and discarded when they are deemed not useful any longer.

Zedekiah was a people-user. He saw people as useful if they could benefit him. He was totally self-centered. Ebed-Melech was people-sensitive. He was aware of needs before they were voiced to him. This is the way every Christian should be. We should never allow life to be cheapened. The Bible says that life is precious and has infinite meaning. It is a gift from God and no one should disparage a gift that God has given.

As we end our study for this week, read Deuteronomy 30:19 and record what you learn here: _____

NEVER GIVE UP! NEVER, NEVER GIVE UP!

Today, we are completing our study of Jeremiah and his 40 years of prophecy. Jeremiah is now about 60 years old and has been preaching without the people repenting. Jerusalem, as he had prophesied, had been demolished.

What was left ahead for Jeremiah? He probably didn't even want to get up in the morning! His prophecy from God had concluded with the destruction of Jerusalem. At age 60, you are a bit old to start an entire new job. Jerusalem was a shambles; the cherished buildings were strewn brick by brick. Permanence had lost its meaning.

From Jeremiah we can learn that even in times of desolation, God can be honored by our faithfulness. When we are in a state of shock, numbed by trauma, stumbling, reeling, hardly knowing where we are going, God will take our hands and lead us.

Sometime during this period, Jeremiah wrote these words:

"He has besieged me and surrounded me with bitterness and hardship. He has made me dwell in darkness like those long dead. . .I have been deprived of peace. I have forgotten what prosperity is. . .Yet this I call to mind and therefore I have hope. . .I say to myself, 'The Lord is my portion; therefore I will wait for Him'. . .It is good to wait quietly for the salvation of the Lord." (Lamentations 3:5, 6, 17, 21, 24, 26.) What a guy!

Earlier in his life, Jeremiah had been impatient with the Lord. He had learned much. After ministering faithfully for 40 years, he was still willing to wait because he knew that God was there and even in the midst of chaos, God had something planned for him.

"They tried to end my life in a pit and threw stones at me; the waters closed over my head and I thought I was about to be cut off. I called on Your name, Oh Lord, from the depths of the pit. You heard my plea: 'do not close your ears to my cry for relief.' You came near when I called You, and You said, 'do not fear.' Oh Lord, You took up my case; You redeemed my life." (Lamentations 3:53-58)

What happened to Zedekiah? After the Babylonians stormed Jerusalem in July 587 B.C., we can piece together a story from five different passages of scripture.

Read these passages and record your account:

Jeremiah 39; 40; 52: _____

2 Kings 25 _____

When Zedekiah saw the Babylonian soldiers storming the city, he hid until evening and escaped into the darkness, probably through a secret exit by the royal garden near the Pool of Siloam. He followed the Jericho Road through the Judean Wilderness into the Jordan Valley. Jeremiah had once spoken about the jungle growth of the Jordan Valley (Jeremiah 12:5). Wild animals made it dangerous, but Zedekiah was willing to take the risk rather than fall into Nebuchadnezzar's hands.

Before Zedekiah could get to Jericho, he was captured and taken in chains about 150 miles north to Riblah for a military trial. There, Nebuchadnezzar declared him, as well as his sons, guilty of treason. Zedekiah watched his sons be executed. It was the last thing that he saw before his eyes were poked out and he was taken in chains to Babylon. Jeremiah had prophesied from Jerusalem that Zedekiah would see Nebuchadnezzar and then be taken to Babylon. (34:2-3)

Ezekiel had prophesied from Babylon that Zedekiah would die in Babylon without ever seeing it. (Ezekiel 12:10-13) Both prophecies were fulfilled.

But, what happened to Jeremiah? The Babylonians, including Nebuchadnezzar himself, were aware of Jeremiah's prophecies. They even knew that he was in prison during their siege. When the city was invaded, word was passed to the troops and Jeremiah was released. We don't know what happened next, but apparently Jeremiah went to find Baruch and Ebed-Melech, his only two friends.

As he edged his way through the streets, he was seized by other Babylonian soldiers. Before long, he found himself in chains, herded, with many others to Ramah, about five miles north of Jerusalem. There, Nebuchadnezzar's commander, Nebuzaradan, had set up headquarters. His title was "chief of the butchers. "

The Babylonian strategy was to deport the rich, wise and powerful to Babylon where they could be rehabilitated, brainwashed and watched. They left the poor in the country to tend the fields. Of course, Jeremiah knew this from the two prior deportations in 605 B.C. (Daniel was taken) and 597 (Ezekiel was taken).

At Ramah, Jeremiah came face to face with Nebuzaradan, who realized a mistake had been made. Nebuzaradan made a remarkable confession to Jeremiah that it was God who had destroyed Jerusalem because the people had sinned against the Lord and did not obey His voice. (40:3)

In appreciation of Jeremiah's prophecies urging the people to surrender, the general gave Jeremiah two choices:

- 1 . Return to Babylon and spend his retirement years in ease and honor.
2. Stay in Judah in the rubble and unrest.

Jeremiah chose to stay in Judah. Josephus says that Jeremiah told the general that he would "gladly live in the ruins of the country and in the miserable remains of it."

Nebuzaradan gave him supplies and sent him to Mizpah where a new governor was setting up his administration. Jerusalem was so demolished that it wasn't fit for a government seat. Gedaliah, the new governor, was a good man. His grandfather, Shaphan, had served as Josiah's secretary and carried the newly discovered scroll of the law to the king. Gedaliah's father had offered protection to Jeremiah when the prophet was almost lynched outside the temple. Jeremiah was no doubt pleased with the choice of Gedaliah as governor. In fact, many scholars believe that Jeremiah was instrumental in getting Gedaliah the job.

Gedaliah ruled well and got dissident factions together. Slowly, the Jews who had fled to neighboring lands returned. Some had been hiding in caves, others in the hills or Jordan Valley where they made guerrilla attacks on Babylonian forces. Gedaliah succeeded in pacifying them.

In fact, things were going so well that Gedaliah soon thought he had no enemies. His main problem may have been naiveté. Although he had heard that Ishmael, a guerrilla commander was plotting to assassinate him, he didn't believe it. One day, he invited Ishmael to dinner and before the evening ended, Ishmael had killed Gedaliah in cold blood.

His men killed Gedaliah's aides and his Babylonian bodyguards. (41 :1-3). Ishmael wanted to take away with him as much food and weaponry as he could, so he and his men terrorized the local citizens to gather supplies. He also killed 70 pilgrims who happened through Mizpah on their way to worship at the ruins of the Temple in Jerusalem. (41:4-8) Realizing that he could waste no more time, he took Jeremiah, Baruch and the princesses, along with others, captive and headed for Ammon, his ally.

The year was about 583 B.C. and Jeremiah was close to 65 years old. He hardly needed a forced march with a bloody assassin. Before they had gone very far, Johanan, a military leader loyal to Gedaliah, caught up with them. After another battle and more bloodshed. Ishmael and eight of his men escaped to Ammon, but Jeremiah and the captives were rescued. (41:11-15)

Johanan was now in charge, but he didn't know what to do! When Nebuchadnezzar found out that Gedaliah was slain, there was bound to be reprisals and Johanan feared for his life. His first reaction was to flee to Egypt, so he gathered the band, including Jeremiah and Baruch and perhaps a hundred others, and they went south. When they reached Bethlehem. they stopped to talk things over and decided to ask Jeremiah to pray to God for divine direction (41:16-42:3). They asked the prophet for the Word of the Lord, so Jeremiah prayed and asked for the Lord's answer.

Of course, the people wanted the Lord to say "go". They had to wait quite a while, no doubt with growing impatience. After ten days, the response came from God. "Remain in the land and God will take care of you. If you go to Egypt, you will suffer from war, famine, and disease. Do not go to Egypt." (Jeremiah 42:9-22)

The people didn't receive the message and told Jeremiah that he was lying. They thought that Baruch might have given him the message out of concern for Jeremiah's age and health. Johanan's mind was made up and the people agreed with him. They headed south toward Egypt and Jeremiah and Baruch were forced to go along. Jeremiah knew that whenever the Israelites had ventured to Egypt, they had gotten into trouble. Jeremiah was an unwilling resident in Egypt, but he was still preaching!

He had a two point sermon. Read Jeremiah 42 and 44 and record his points:

1. _____
2. _____

First, he kept pointing out that there was no safety in Egypt. Safety is not found in places, but in God's will. To emphasize the point, he buried large stones in the pavement and declared that Nebuchadnezzar would come and put his throne on those stones. (42:9-13). Fifteen years later. Nebuchadnezzar did invade Egypt as Jeremiah predicted.

Second, Jeremiah preached that idolatry in Egypt was no better than idolatry in Jerusalem. Having seen the judgment of God on Jerusalem because of apostasy, how could anyone think of worshipping idols in Egypt? More surprising was the people's reply. They said that during the times of worst idolatry in Israel, there was relative peace and tranquillity. Only after Josiah's time had Babylon risen up and given them trouble. "We will continue to burn sacrifices to the Queen of Heaven," they said. (44:15-17)

"Go ahead and you will see what happens, " Jeremiah said. The result would be the virtual annihilation of all the Jewish refugees in Egypt. With those words, the spoken ministry of Jeremiah ended. The year was probably 579 or 580 B.C. and Jeremiah was between 65 and 70 years old. He had been preaching for 45 years with very few visible results. Even in Egypt the people didn't listen.

But, Jeremiah could look beyond exile and see a glorious homecoming ahead. Jeremiah knew that Jehovah was not a local deity. The people might be in Babylon or Egypt, but God was with them.

Jeremiah lived out a personal awareness of God's presence daily. Scripture doesn't record the death of Jeremiah. Early Christian tradition says that he was stoned to death in Egypt. Jewish rabbis say that when Nebuchadnezzar invaded Egypt in 568 B.C. he took Jeremiah

and Baruch back to Babylon. There is even one account that Jeremiah and Baruch were able to flee Egypt and return to Judah. No one knows.

What matters is that Jeremiah was God's man until his death.

HE NEVER GAVE UP! HE NEVER, NEVER GAVE UP!