

JEREMIAH

Please turn in your Bibles this evening to Jeremiah chapter 23 as we continue our study through the Word of God. Let me set the stage for what we will be looking at this evening. I am sure I don't have to tell you that we have seen Jeremiah speak over and over again of the coming judgment against the Southern Kingdom of Judah because they had turned from the Lord and refuse to turn back to Him, repent of their sins! It is a pretty dark period of time but as we will see this evening, there is a light at the end of the tunnel or there is a silver lining to this black and menacing cloud.

We saw back in Jeremiah chapter 21 last week that God is rebuking the last King of the Southern Kingdom of Judah, Zedekiah. God was indicting him for his wickedness.

Then in Jeremiah chapter 22 we saw God indicting the three last Kings in the Southern Kingdom of Judah before the reign of Zedekiah. He came against Jehoahaz, also known as Shallum. He came against Jehoiakim and finally against Jehoiachin, who is also called Coniah, or Jeconiah.

In fact, God places a blood curse on Coniah, that none of his children will ever sit on the throne of David; it will be like he was childless. And we dealt with how God got around that blood curse so the Messiah could be born in the royal line with the right to sit on the throne of David, having the legal right but without the blood curse affecting Him.

Now this evening, as we look at Jeremiah chapter 23 we will see that God is indicting the shepherds of His people, the leaders, both civil and religious. They were to be leading the people, watching over them, and instead of leading the people to the Lord they were leading the people into idolatry. And thus, God is coming against these wicked leaders. You might call this section, “Pastor, what big teeth you have!” because these false shepherds were leading the people away from God, they, in a sense were devouring them. Then we will get to the silver lining you might say, the light of God will break through this darkness and rebellion.

With that as our background, let’s begin reading in Jeremiah chapter 23 beginning in verse 1 and let’s see what the Lord has for us as we study through His Word.

JEREMIAH 23

VERSES 1-2

1. The political leaders were to watch over the people, they were to guide them, protect them and they were to lead them in the ways of God. Now you may be thinking, “Hey, they were not the religious leaders, so why was this something that they should have been doing?” Because we all are to be leading people in the ways of God and for these leaders, they were looked up to and their behavior, their example, their words were followed by the common people

One glaring example is seen with former President Bill Clinton and his affair or sexual sin with Monica Lewinski. One of the cries is that we should not care what he does in his private life, it does not hurt anyone. It is his business what he does and not ours!

It sounds good, not really but some feel that way, until you look at what happened after this event. Remember what he said, “I did not have sexual relations with that woman!” No, he had oral sex with her and what our President did was then followed by our children. One of the biggest problems in the Junior High School here in town was oral sex because these kids did not see that as sex, the President said so!

Now because they were not watching over the people, caring for them, God was going to bring judgment upon them for the evil that they had done. Now I also see this applying to the religious leaders, because they too have a responsibility to watch over the people, to lead them in the things of God and notice what the Lord says here about them, **“Woe to the shepherds who destroy and scatter the sheep of My pasture!”**

2. Look at America today and look at our political leaders, they are not leading people down the right path, they are not leading people in the things of God. And when you look at our religious leaders, the ones that are the most prominent, the most popular are the ones who are teaching heresy! They may use the Word of God to make a point but it is a point that is taken out of context and then they run with it.

Many in the Emerging church movement, as well as the Seeker Friendly and Purpose Driven movements are moving away from the foundational truths found in God’s Word and they are presenting a social gospel that will help people live for the short time they will have on this earth but they have not prepared them for eternity, they are not ready to meet their Maker! And God will hold these shepherds responsible for leading these people astray and scattering them!

A leader, be they political or religious needs to love the people, care for the people, do what is right for the people and show them the things of God! You see, we do have a famine in this land as Amos 8:11 tells us and it is not a famine of bread or a thirst for water but of hearing the words of the Lord!

Now some like to argue that the Word of God is not enough. It doesn't stimulate people enough. Hogwash! In Ephesus Paul taught for 2 years at the school of Tyrannus. And some of the text implies that he taught "from the fifth hour to the tenth." That means from eleven o'clock in the morning till four in the afternoon, the hottest part of the day. That means when everyone else was trying to keep cool by resting during those hot hours Paul used that time to teach the Word of God, to feed the sheep. You see, a pastor who is not feeding his flock the Word of God is not doing what he was primarily called for. I can't understand that.

Thus, as sheep are spiritually malnourished they are susceptible to disease you might say, the false doctrines that are blowing through the church they will catch and we see that happening today. We need to feed the people with the truths that are found in God's Word so that as the lies of the Devil are spoken, they will be exposed as counterfeit because the sheep have the Word of God as a part of their lives and they will not be susceptible to these false doctrines that are all around them!

3. Now notice as we read on what God is going to do and how He is going to send the Good Shepherd to lead His people as well as shepherds who have a heart for God and His Word. Let's read on and see what Jeremiah has to say.

VERSES 3-6

1. As I read this regarding God regathering His people to their land I see a near term fulfillment and a long term fulfillment. First of all the near term fulfillment is seen with their return from Babylon and God used men like Ezra, Zerubbabel, Nehemiah to lead the people in the ways of God, to shepherd God's people.

I think the long term fulfillment is when God regathers them at the end of the Tribulation Period from the four corners of the earth and He brings them back into the land of Israel once again! And in the Kingdom Age God will set up shepherds who will lead His people in the ways of God.

2. What will they feed upon? They will feed upon the Word of God! Remember what Jesus said in John 6:63, **"It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing. The words that I speak to you are spirit, and they are life."** It is the Word of God that nourishes us, sustains us, helps us to be healthy and strong because it is the Word of God that tells us what is right, it tells us what is wrong, it tells us how to get right when we have gone astray and it tells us how to stay on course!

I see some that come to church when it is convenient for them, when they feel like it and I wonder how much they are taking in the Word of God. Some feel, "I have been through the Bible, I have heard teaching on that already, I don't need to hear it again!" Think about that for a minute. That is like saying, "I had dinner last night I don't need dinner again tonight!" That would be foolish and so too is it foolish not to take in a diet of the Word of God in your life. You can fill your life with all kinds of good books, even Christian books but it is the Word of God that is living and powerful and able to change lives. Let us not forget that!

3. Now there is another shepherd you might say that we are introduced to here, this branch of righteousness. If you remember from the last message the Lord gave to Jeconiah in the last part of Jeremiah chapter 22, He placed a blood curse on the royal line. The tree, in a sense, was cut down. No descendants of Jeconiah would ever sit upon the throne!

I don't know how the people felt about this but it should have caused them to mourn. Why is that? Because what the Lord was saying is that the Messiah could not come because of this blood curse on the line of Jeconiah, a descendant of David! And we saw how God brought forth the Messiah from the lineage of David but not from the line of Jeconiah. You see, Mary's lineage was from Solomon's other son, Nathan and there was not a curse upon that line, only on Solomon's. And you can study the genealogy of Jesus in Matthew and see that from His step-father Joseph, who was a descendant of Jeconiah he had the right to the throne but the blood curse was not passed on to Jesus. And in Luke we see the lineage of Mary and the blood curse was not passed on to her like I have said!

And as dark as this period of time was for the Southern Kingdom of Judah, God does give them hope here. He does that by saying that this stump, the remains of this root that was cut down, will shoot forth a branch and from that branch the Messiah will come and save His people!

And he will be known or called, *YAHWEH-TSIDKENU* or *THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS!* And truly isn't that what we see in Jesus? Of course it is. Paul said back in Philippians 3:8-9, "Yet indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in Him, not having my own righteousness, which is from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith."

And notice what the Lord will do when He returns, He will execute justice in the land, righteousness will fill the land and Israel will be saved and dwell in safety!

4. There is one more point I would like to make here. We see in Jeremiah 23:5 that the Lord will "... raise to David a Branch of righteousness..." Jeremiah is speaking of a Son, for Jesus was a Son of David, which points to Him being *King* for through the lineage of David was the throne passed down!

In Zechariah 3:8 we are told, "... For behold, I am bringing forth My Servant the BRANCH." Zechariah is speaking of the Messiah being a *Servant!*

Also, in Zechariah 6:12 we are told, "... 'Behold, the Man whose name is the BRANCH!' ..." Here we see Zechariah speak of the Messiah being a *Man!*

And lastly, in Isaiah 4:2 we are told, "In that day the Branch of the Lord shall be beautiful and glorious ..." In other words, this is speaking that the Messiah will be Almighty God, He is a *Branch of the Lord!*

What I love about this is that when you come to the New Testament that is how Jesus is presented. In Matthew we see Jesus as the King of kings! In Mark we see Jesus presented as the suffering servant, the One who came not to be served but to serve. In Luke we see Jesus presented as the Son of Man, His humanity. And lastly, in John we see Jesus presented as the Son of God or Almighty God!

Because of what our Lord has done, paid in full the penalty for our sins, we can enjoy the Kingdom here and now because He is reigning in our hearts and lives, He is in us. It is His righteousness that has been imputed into our lives by faith. But never forget that one day He will rule and reign literally on the throne of David for 1,000 years – He is ***THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS!***

VERSES 7-8

1. When we think about the Exodus it is something that we are amazed by and the same for the Jewish people. How God brought some 2 to 3 million people out of their bondage in Egypt and into the Promise Land. But here we see that there is coming a time when they will no longer be saying, “Remember several hundred years ago how the Lord delivered us from Egypt?” Why is that? Because God is going to do something new, He is going to bring them back from their bondage in Babylon! “Look at what God has done now!” is the idea. That is the near term fulfillment.

The long term fulfillment is seen when God brings the Jewish people home again at the end of the Tribulation Period as I have said. Remember what Jesus said in Matthew 24:31 as He was speaking to His disciples, who were Jews, **“And He will send His angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they will gather together His elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.”**

Now we do see that the Jews are back in the land of Israel today. It was back in 1948 that they became a nation once again. But that is not the complete fulfillment of what the Scriptures are saying. One day they will say, “Look at how the Lord delivered us from the Antichrist during the Tribulation Period!”

2. Now Jeremiah is going to speak forth his feelings and as we read this put yourself in his shoes or sandals. Here is a man broken over what he sees and there is no heart of repentance among his people! I think if we truly love people we will be broken over what we see happening in our nation and in our world. D. A. Carson wrote these words regarding Francis Schaeffer, something we should consider because if we truly do love people it will be seen in our brokenness over where they are going. Carson wrote,

One of the reasons for Francis Schaeffer’s influence was his ability to present his analysis of the culture with a tear in his eye. Whether or not one agrees at every point with his analysis, and regardless of how severe his judgments were, one could not responsibly doubt his compassion, his genuine love for men and women.

Too many of his would-be successors simply sound like angry people. Our times call for Christian leaders who will articulate the truth boldly, courageously, humbly, knowledgeably, in a contemporary fashion, with prophetic fire – and with profound compassion. One cannot imagine how the kind of gospel set forth in the Bible could be effectively communicated in any other way.

- D. A. Carson, *The Gagging of God: Christianity Confronts Pluralism*, pp. 439-440

Listen to the heart of Jeremiah and may we have that kind of love for people.

VERSES 9-11

1. Why is Jeremiah so overwhelmed by what he is seeing? He tells us the reasons and you can understand why he is so down. The prophets, the religious leaders were leading people away from God and it took all his strength away. He was weakened by all he was seeing. You see, as these false prophets spoke the people were just listening to their lies and they were rejecting the truth of God. And he is so broken over this he begins to stagger, it is hard for him, he is overwhelmed. Jeremiah had a love for the Lord and His Word that drove him forward to speak what he believed. And he had a love for his people and this was just too much! Don't you feel the same about our nation, about the people who refuse to turn to God and the false teachers that are leading them away from God?

2. And Jeremiah speaks of what this wickedness has brought upon the land, it is dry, it is barren all because they turned from the Lord and towards wickedness. This “**land that was filled with adulterers**” carries with it the idea of both physical and spiritual adulterers!

And those who were responsible for this were the priests, the leaders. They were bringing into the Temple idolatry, wickedness. We see that even today where the church brings in the teachings of this world instead of the truths of God's Word. The outcome of that wickedness is abortion is right, homosexuality is good, gay marriages should be allowed, and-so-on. The leaders were the ones to guard against these things and in Judah and in our nation today they are the ones who are promoting these things!

VERSES 12-15

1. You can't walk in darkness and not slip, not stumble and the Lord is telling His leaders that if you don't walk in the light look out, it is a slippery slope down into the pit! And He wants them to look at the Northern Kingdom of Israel as an object lesson of what happens when you turn from the Lord.

You see, around 100 years earlier the Northern Kingdom of Israel was taken into captivity by the Assyrians for their idolatry, their wickedness. The tragedy here is that the Southern Kingdom of Judah didn't learn those lessons and they too were carried off captive by the Babylonians.

And things had gotten so bad; the prophets who were to lead the people to God were now encouraging them to do evil. It was so bad that God likened the Southern Kingdom of Judah to Sodom and Gomorrah! That is bad!

VERSES 16-17

1. I wish more Christians would take heed to these words and not listen to the false teachers, these worthless shepherds that are not teaching the people the Word of God. What they are doing instead is giving to them the philosophies of the world and to make it sound holy, they said things like, *“Thus says the Lord . . .”* or *“God spoke to me . . .”*

How can we know if something is of God or not? How can we know if what someone is saying or teaching is of God or not? We don't have to guess because God is telling us here that if their words are not found in My Word, they are not from Me, I don't care what the prophets are saying! There are a lot of people today going around and supposedly speaking for God things God has never said. Be careful!

Remember what Paul said in Colossians 2:8-10, **“Beware lest anyone cheat you through philosophy and empty deceit, according to the tradition of men, according to the basic principles of the world, and not according to Christ. For in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily; and you are complete in Him, who is the head of all principality and power.”** We are complete in Him, the Word and not apart from Him. May we not be taken in by the latest fad, this popular teacher or that one! May we not be taken in by the philosophy of this world because it is empty! May we not be taken in by man's traditions! May we apply all that we do to the Word of God to see if it is right or wrong, if we should do it or avoid it!

2. Now the message that the false prophets had sounded great, it sounded good, the only problem was that it was not true! They were telling the people that God will give them peace and prosperity and that is exactly what they wanted to hear! They told the people what they wanted to hear, a positive message instead of what they needed to hear.

Paul warned young Timothy to, **“Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables.”** II Timothy 4:2-4. They may not want to hear the message but they need to hear the message so be ready to share the message of God from the Word of God!

Remember what we were told in Isaiah 57:21, **“‘There is no peace,’ Says my God, ‘for the wicked.’”** Thus, as Jeremiah tells us, **“They have also healed the hurt of My people slightly, Saying, ‘Peace, peace!’ When there is no peace.”** Jeremiah 6:14. The warning is there if only people would listen!

VERSES 18-22

1. They were claiming they stood before God and received His Word, and obviously they were not because what they said was a contradiction to what God was saying through Jeremiah. He was not speaking of peace and prosperity but the coming judgment because of their wickedness.

And because of their actions judgment was coming upon them and not peace like the false prophets were saying. But make no mistake about it these guys continued to run to and fro promoting their lies, leading people into wickedness.

A true prophet of God will lead the people towards a holy life, a righteousness that is not found in them but imputed to them by Jesus Christ. All other righteousness is like filthy rags, it is wickedness, it leads people away from the truth. And as you come to Christ your life is transformed, you are Spirit led and your desire is to live a holy life obeying the Lord not out of the Law but out of love for Him!

2. And notice how in verse 22 the Lord holds these leaders accountable for where the people were going, for what they were doing. If these false prophets actually gave the people the Word of God they would have turned from their wickedness but instead, wicked doctrine leads to wicked lives!

VERSES 23-24

1. In other words, “What’s a matter you?” Why do we think we can fool God or hide our sin from Him? God is omnipresent, that is His presence fills the universe. You can’t hide from Him. He sees all you are doing and knows what you are going to do before you even do it. For some reason they developed the mentality that God was far off, He was not actively involved in people’s lives. That was totally wrong! Our God is actively involved in our lives, He cares that much for us and all He asks of us is to love Him. In Judah that was not the case. They had no fear of God and because of that they refused to see His coming judgment because of their wickedness.

2. Listen to the rebuke the Lord has for these false prophets as we read on.

VERSES 25-29

1. In Deuteronomy 13:1-5 listen to what the Lord expected out of His prophets and if it did not come to pass what was to happen to them. We are told, **“If there arises among you a prophet or a dreamer of dreams, and he gives you a sign or a wonder, and the sign or the wonder comes to pass, of which he spoke to you, saying, ‘Let us go after other gods’ - which you have not known – ‘and let us serve them,’ you shall not listen to the words of that prophet or that dreamer of dreams, for the Lord your God is testing you to know whether you love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul. You shall walk after the Lord your God and fear Him, and keep His commandments and obey His voice; you shall serve Him and hold fast to Him. But that prophet or that dreamer of dreams shall be put to death, because he has spoken in order to turn you away from the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt and redeemed you from the house of bondage, to entice you from the way in which the Lord your God commanded you to walk. So you shall put away the evil from your midst.”**

But the leaders were not following the Lord or His Word and thus, they listened to these false prophets who spoke of peace and prosperity but that never came, only judgment! And I get the idea that the Word of God was not enough for them, they needed dreams and visions, which lead the people away from the true God to worship Baal.

Now God does give us dreams and visions but that is not the primary source of our diet, it is the Word of God! I think so many people are so confused about God because of all these wild dreams, visions, and-so-on that are not found in the Word of God and they are drawing people away from the Lord.

And for those who think dreams and visions supersede the Word of God, think again. Look at verses 28 and 29 of Jeremiah chapter 23 again, **“The prophet who has a dream, let him tell a dream; And he who has My word, let him speak My word faithfully. What is the chaff to the wheat?” says the Lord. ‘Is not My word like a fire?’ says the Lord, ‘And like a hammer that breaks the rock in pieces?’”**

These dreams and vision are like chaff when compared to the Word, the wheat which gives to us the bread of life! God’s Word is a fire that will burn up all the lies! And God’s Word is like a hammer breaking apart the hardness of man’s heart! God is saying don’t listen to those dreamers but feed upon His Word!

VERSES 30-32

1. This is very important. If you teach the Word of God, if you share the Word of God with others, make sure God has said it, don’t misrepresent Him. Let me give you some examples of false teachers and notice how they put down the Word of God or change doctrine that they don’t like. First of all listen carefully to what Tony Campolo has to say regarding some issues.

“On the other hand, we are hard-pressed to find any biblical basis for condemning deep love commitments between homosexual Christians as long as those commitments are not expressed in sexual intercourse.” [The Bible does condemn homosexuality as a sin!]

“. . . we want to see God at work converting society, converting the systems, so that there aren’t the racist overtones, the economic injustices, the polluting of the atmosphere.” [I thought Jesus came to save us from our sins and in receiving Him as Lord and Savior of our lives what God is doing on the inside overflows in our actions, the things we do and say!]

“I learn about Jesus from other religions. They speak to me about Christ, as well.” [No they do not, at least not the Jesus of the Bible!]

“I’m not convinced that Jesus only lives in Christians.” [If you are not a Christian then you are at war with God and thus, why would God live in you?]

Brian McLaren tells us,

“I don’t believe making disciples must equal making adherents to the Christian religion. It may be advisable in many (not all!) circumstances to help people become followers of Jesus and remain within their Buddhist, Hindu or Jewish contexts . . .” [Then why would Jesus say that He is the only way to the Father?]

Jim Wallis, who spoke at Life Fest a few years back said,

“Christianity will be impotent to lead a conversation on sexuality and gender if we do not bodily integrate our current understandings of humanity with our theology. This will require us to not only draw new conclusions about sexuality but will force us to consider new ways of being sexual.” [So it is no longer what the Bible says but what our current thoughts on a subject that matter. We have to change the Bible to fit with what we want.]

“As more Christians become influenced by liberation theology, finding themselves increasingly rejecting the values of institutions of capitalism, they will also be drawn to the Marxist analysis and praxis that is so central to the social justice movement.” [Yes, he spoke at Life Fest, go figure?]

Tony Jones has the nerve to say,

“Some people today may find it compelling that some Great Cosmic Transaction took place on that day 1,980 years ago, that God’s wrath burned against his son instead of me. I find that version of atonement theory neither intellectually compelling, spiritually compelling, nor in keeping with the biblical narrative.” [Not sure what Bible he is reading but without the shedding of blood there is no remission of sins!]

Dave Fiorazo wrote regarding this mess that we are in with these false teachers,

False teachers have been around since the early church days. The major issue with the emergent church is that it rejects the authority of the word of God. These teachings were not accepted by evangelical Christians overnight. This is 2010. We can trace the advancement of the emergent church to the late 80's and 90's, when people began talking about how to modernize and re-create church to be more attractive to the unchurched. But going back to the hippy flower-power days of the 1960's, the new fad was all about peace, love, free sex, and rebelling against authority. Absolute truth and Biblical standards were questioned and labeled as too rigid, leading some to moral relativism. Moral Relativism is an ethical judgment. It is the claim that no ethical system is better than another, and rests on the belief that values are subjective. . . .

According to Time Magazine (so take this with a grain of salt), Brian McLaren is one of the 25 most influential people in the evangelical church. This makes me believe our culture is confused about what 'evangelical' means. It is a serious issue because his teachings seem to reject the sacrifice of Jesus Christ and the work on the cross, and dilutes what the Bible says about Heaven and eternal life.

McLaren is changing Biblical doctrine to fit his own 'We Are the World' type of theology, which stomps out the reality of Hell and the fact that Jesus became our substitute on the cross in order to redeem us. He doubts the reliability of the Bible and I'm confused as to why he is not more of a red flag to Christians. . . .

Many of today's youth have been raised in a culture (and sadly in some churches) where feelings and sensitivity matter but sound doctrine and the truth of God's word aren't a priority. This invites the justification of sinful behaviors and tolerance for sin. Our culture has redefined the word 'tolerance' to mean love, unconditional grace, warm fuzzies, and the acceptance of not only the sinner but the sin as well. When the Holy Spirit isn't invited, by the preaching of Scripture, to come in and work in our hearts, there can be no conviction. Without revelation of sin and conviction, there can be no repentance leading to forgiveness. We shouldn't be surprised that many young Christians have their spiritual foundations built on the sand. . . .

Since not enough Christians know the dangers and the extent of the emergent church movement and their radical teachings, we need to promote awareness of these deceptions. We need to dig deeper in to the Word of God than ever before and know it so well that if we hear a counterfeit message, we'll recognize it immediately! We need to talk to our Pastors and Christian friends. You have a choice to make and I encourage you to get out of your comfort zone and take a stand for Christ. The spiritual battle rages all around us and the enemy is on our doorstep. Satan has been at work at a church near you spreading his deceptions. The good news is that we are on to his schemes. Mature believers know that the emergent church teachings are contrary to the gospel of Christ. So suit up in the full armor of God and pray for discernment. Revelation 3:11 says, "Behold, I am coming quickly! Hold fast what you have, that no one may take your crown." Light dispels the darkness, so share the truth, stand your ground, and shine your light!

- http://www.goodfight.org/a_t_emergent_church.html

It is very said when we see teachers leading people away from God. How many people are claiming promises of God that God has never said? Many teachers are reckless in what they teach people, things that are not found in God's Word. And God says if you follow after those that are teaching these lies you will not profit from them. They are worthless in regards to your spiritual growth and in the end you will be left empty. A heavy warning and yet, who is listening?

VERSES 33-40

1. First of all the word "**oracle**" means "to lift, carry, take." In other words, the "**oracle of the Lord**" was a phrase used to speak of a prophet who spoke the difficult, the heavy words of God, the judgment of God that was coming.

Jeremiah, as he spoke the Words of God he was broken because he knew what was coming upon his own people for their wickedness. We too should have a heart like that. Not to gloat of the destruction of the wicked as we speak forth the judgments of God, but mourn over their hard hearts.

2. And when you are speaking forth the truths of God found in the Word of God the false prophets will mock you just as they were doing with Jeremiah. They rejected the idea that judgment was coming. And as much as they thought they were speaking for God, we see that God indicts them for their actions, pointing to them being the recipient of the coming judgment.

3. I don't understand the nerve of some to mock and put down the Word of God. Paul reminds us in Galatians 6:6-8, "**Let him who is taught the word share in all good things with him who teaches. Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap. For he who sows to his flesh will of the flesh reap corruption, but he who sows to the Spirit will of the Spirit reap everlasting life.**" God is punishing them for mocking the Word of God. May we heed that warning!

4. What is interesting to me is that when they finally recognize the judgment of God, as they are surrounded by the Babylonians, they are going to be interested in what God was saying. They will not mock the Word of God now. They are looking for a way out of this judgment, but it is too little, too late! And God is not going to speak to them.

5. Because of their actions, because of their mocking of the Lord and His Word, God was going to bring this heavy judgment upon them. I am always amazed at people that mock the Word of God as I have said!

And even worse are those teachers who mock God's Word. They have no fear of God. And yet they should. Revelation 22:18-19 says, "**For I testify to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: If anyone adds to these things, God will add to him the plagues that are written in this book; and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part from the Book of Life, from the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book.**" A good incentive not to add to or take away from God's Word! God is not mocked!

JEREMIAH 24**VERSE 1**

1. In 605 B. C. King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon succeeded his father on the throne. Then in 606 B. C. the Babylonians made their first assault upon the Southern Kingdom of Judah, taking Daniel and some of the other nobles, intelligent people with them. Now Nebuchadnezzar, King of Babylon replaces Jeconiah with Zedekiah as a vassal king in Judah, taking Jeconiah to Babylon with him. It is after this that God gave to Jeremiah this vision.

VERSE 2

1. In this vision that the Lord gave to Jeremiah he sees two baskets of figs. The first basket has good figs, like those that ripen early. Supposedly these figs are the best tasting and ripen in July, while the major portion of the figs are not ready till September. The other basket has bad figs; they are so disgusting you can't even eat them. What in the world is Jeremiah seeing? We are going to find out.

VERSES 3-7

1. God is chastening His people for their sin and those that obey what He is telling them to do will be blessed, the good figs you might say. Yes they will be taken away to Babylon for their sin, that is the punishment but God is doing this for their own good, not their hurt! You see, as the judgment ends, after 70 years of captivity, they will be able to return home again. Keep in mind that this was not the faithful remnant, they had rebelled against the Lord but the Lord was doing this to teach them lessons of faith, this judgment was a wake-up call to them!

2. It is as Paul tells us in Hebrews 12:5-1, **“And you have forgotten the exhortation which speaks to you as to sons: ‘My son, do not despise the chastening of the Lord, Nor be discouraged when you are rebuked by Him; For whom the Lord loves He chastens, And scourges every son whom He receives.’ If you endure chastening, God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom a father does not chasten? But if you are without chastening, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate and not sons. Furthermore, we have had human fathers who corrected us, and we paid them respect. Shall we not much more readily be in subjection to the Father of spirits and live? For they indeed for a few days chastened us as seemed best to them, but He for our profit, that we may be partakers of His holiness. Now no chastening seems to be joyful for the present, but painful; nevertheless, afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.”**

First of all God does not chasten us as punishment. Why is that? The answer is simple; it is because our sins have already been paid in full by Jesus. Thus, God chastens us for correction and because we are His children. You don’t discipline your neighbor’s children, even though you may want to, but you do discipline your own children because they are yours! That is the idea here. Now, if you can sin, do as you please without any consequences from God, without chastening, then you are not a child of God!

And let’s face it, how often did with agree when our parents disciplined us? Not too often I bet. But when I got older I saw the wisdom in what they were doing, that their desire was not to hurt me but to help me to grow. That is our heavenly Father and His chastening is perfect, just what we need even though we may not like it!

It is as Peter admonishes us in I Peter 1:13-16, **“Therefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and rest your hope fully upon the grace that is to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ; as obedient children, not conforming yourselves to the former lusts, as in your ignorance; but as He who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, because it is written, ‘Be holy, for I am holy.’”**

God is working in us, purging that dross from our lives, the garbage that is in there and in the end we will look back and see the wisdom of His actions in our lives! Praise the Lord He is working in us, even though we might not like it now, in the end, we will see it is worth it. It is as Paul said when God is done working in II Corinthians 3:18, **“But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord.”**

Listen to these statements regarding chastening and what we should gain from them. We are told first of all from Leslie Weatherhead:

Like all men I love and prefer the sunny uplands of experience, where health, happiness, and success abound, but I have learned far more about God and life and myself in the darkness of fear and failure than I have ever learned in the sunshine. There are such things as the treasures of darkness. The darkness, thank God, passes. But what one learns in the darkness one possesses forever. “The trying things,” says Bishop Fenelon, “which you fancy come between God and you, will prove means of unity with Him, if you bear them humbly. Those things that overwhelm us and upset our pride, do more good than all that which excites and inspirits us.”

- Leslie Weatherhead

And listen to what C. H. Spurgeon had to say. We are told:

I am afraid that all the grace I have got out of my comfortable and easy times and happy hours might almost lie on a penny. But the good that I have received from my sorrows and pains and grief's is altogether incalculable. What do I not owe to the hammer and the anvil, the fire and the file? Affliction is the best bit of furniture in my house.

- C. H. Spurgeon

God loves us too much to leave us where we are at so He is working in us to make us more like Him!

VERSES 8-10

1. God is saying that the bad figs, those who have turned from Him, they are going to be destroyed, wiped out for their idolatry. Wherever they try to hide, they will find trouble. There is no escape for them. You see, instead of surrendering to the Babylonians they were going to fight against them and in the end, they would lose!

2. Now some may wonder, "But how could the Babylonian captivity be good for these people?" First of all they couldn't worship God with all the religious ceremony like they could in Jerusalem. The Temple was a long way off and in the end it would be destroyed by the Babylonians. How can that be good? It caused them to get into the Word of God in Babylon. They began to dig into it. In fact this is where the Synagogues got their start. And when they returned home, to the land of Israel, they brought what they learned back with them.

You see, they divided the Torah, the first 5 books of Moses, Genesis through Deuteronomy, into 52 readings. Thus, over a years' time they would cover the Law of God. This captivity actually strengthened the people of God, it purified them. No longer as a nation did they fall into full blown idolatry. They learned their lessons. You see, God always has good in mind for His people, He has a plan, He has a purpose to what He is doing, even though we might not understand it. As Paul said in Romans 8:28, "**And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose.**"