

## SMART BIRDS, WEeping PROPHETS, AND DISOBEDIENT CITIZENS

Presented by

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In the Old Testament, we find two very sad books written by the prophet Jeremiah. First, there is the book that bears his name—the book of Jeremiah. Second, there is the book of Lamentations. Jeremiah was a prophet who had been chosen by God to preach to the Jews in order to try to get them to leave their wicked, sinful ways of life. From the time of Joshua and the judges hundreds of years before, the Jews had gone through numerous cycles of obeying God, then turning to idols, suffering as a result of their wickedness, and then crying for God’s help and turning back to Him. God had given them one chance after another—over many, many years—to follow Him “with all their hearts and minds” (Deuteronomy 6:4-6). But they ultimately refused to do so. By the time Jeremiah began preaching to the Jews, he already knew that God’s patience had worn thin. The message that God gave to Jeremiah to preach to the Jews was that if they did not repent, there would be great destruction and suffering in their land, and they and their children would be taken away as slaves to a foreign land for seventy years.

Jeremiah preached and preached to the Jewish people—for forty long, unproductive years. He tried many different ways to convince them of their need to return to God, but they continued to listen to false teachers who told them what they wanted to hear. The people viewed Jeremiah’s message as too hard, too sad, and too depressing. Instead of hearing about such things as obedience and dedication to God, they wanted to hear upbeat, happy sermons. They wanted to be told that their idol worship and their immoral ways of living were “OK,” and that surely God would not **really** destroy their nation or their great city of Jerusalem.

In Jeremiah 8:6, the prophet told the people that they were headed for destruction just as surely as “a horse rushes into battle.” Then in verse 7 he said, “Even the stork in the heavens knows her appointed times; and the turtledove and the swallow observe the time of their migration. But My people do not understand the judgment of the Lord.” Throughout the Bible, illustrations from nature often are employed to help us understand God’s message. Jeremiah’s use of the birds and “the time of their migration” was his way of telling the Jews that **even the animals were smarter than they were**. Birds have the ability to stay on course—even in stormy weather, in fog, or when they are headed toward unseen and faraway destination. And when the season changes again and it is time for them to go back the way they came, they start out with just as much preparation, just as much confidence, and just as much determination so that they can get back home safely. Jeremiah’s point in using examples like the stork, the turtledove, and the swallow was that God’s people should mimic the birds and carefully fly back to a place where it was safe—into the arms of their God!

Unfortunately, the Jews refused to listen to God's message. Jeremiah wept over their disobedience, but they still ignored and shunned him. As a result, Jerusalem was captured, the temple of God was destroyed, and the Jews were carried off into Babylonian captivity, **where they would remain for the next seventy years**. They eventually learned their lesson—but it was too little too late. Their horrible fate was sealed—all because they would not obey God.

Just as surely as the Jews in the Old Testament needed to listen to Jeremiah's message, we today need to listen to God's message, lest Satan carry us off into spiritual captivity. Just like the stork, the turtledove, and the swallow, we need to stay on course, knowing that if we do, we, too, will one day be able to return safely to our starting place—Heaven. Jesus Himself said:

“Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me. In My Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also” (John 14:1-3).

But Jesus also said, “If you love Me, keep my commandments!” (John 14:15). Heaven is a **prepared** place for **prepared** souls! The people in Jeremiah's day **could** have prepared. But they chose not to—and it cost them everything they had. The poor Jews weren't even as smart as the birds. It kind of makes you wonder: **Are we?**