

# The Fiery Bones

Jeremiah 20:9

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Text

Jeremiah 6:1-30

Topic

God appoints Jeremiah an assayer to test Judah  
just as you would precious metals

Title

*“Need I Assay More?”*

## Introduction

I downloaded a free App called, “How Do Others See You?” After answering about ten questions I was labelled “Well-Balanced.” The App told me (and I proudly quote), “People think you’re the perfect friend. They love you. They consider you are a funny and lovely person. You mix the right ingredients for an ideal friend.”

I was feeling pretty good until I came across a research paper ominously titled, “Flawed Self-Assessment.” It stated,

Research... suggests that self-assessments of... character are often flawed in substantive and systematic ways. People’s self-views hold only a tenuous to modest relationship with their actual behavior... On average, people... overestimate the likelihood that they will engage in desirable behaviors and achieve favorable outcomes... and reach judgments with too much confidence.

The researchers (from Cornell, Stanford, and the University of Iowa) concluded, “All told, this review suggests that there is striking continuity in the errors that people make when assessing themselves, whether in the laboratory or the real world.”

I was searching for assessment information because chapter six of the Book of Jeremiah is about assessing.

Technically, it is about assessing by *assaying*. Look at verse twenty-seven.

Jeremiah 6:27 "I have set you as an **assayer** and a **fortress** among My people, That you may know and test their way.

The word "fortress" is a poor translation. The Hebrew word so translated means *cutting* (e.g., *separating*) and matches up better with the work of an "assayer" - which is to assess the quality of precious metals by separating what is pure from the impurities using various means.

- First God gave the people a chance to assay themselves.
- Then He told Jeremiah to give them His assessment.

**We** are likewise told in the Bible to assay ourselves. For example, in First Corinthians 11:28 the apostle Paul said "a man ought to **examine** himself before he" partakes of the Lord's Supper. In Galatians 6:4 we are encouraged to "each one **examine** his own work..."

We know, too, that the Lord, at His appearing, will assay our lives.

Revelation 22:12 "And behold, I am coming quickly, and My reward is with Me, to give to every one according to his work.

Like a good assayer, the Lord will put our lives and works to the fire so that only what is precious (pure) will remain to enter Heaven.

1 Corinthians 3:13 each one's work will become clear; for the Day will declare it, because it will be revealed by fire; and the fire will test each one's work, of what sort it is...

1 Corinthians 3:15 If anyone's work is burned, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire.

Hard as it may be, we are to constantly examine ourselves in anticipation of the Lord's final exam.

I'll organize my thoughts around two questions: #1 When Was Your Last Assessment Of The Way You Are On?, and #2 What Is God's Loving Assessment Of The Way You Are On?

#1 When Was Your Last Assessment  
Of The Way You Are On?  
(v1-26)

Our verses are the finale of Jeremiah's second sermon to the nation of Judah. God, in His love for them, continues to encourage their repentance. He enjoins them (in verse sixteen) to "Stand in the ways and see, And ask for the old paths, Where the good way is, And walk in it; Then you will find rest for your souls." In other words, compare the way you are on with the way you should be going as a believer. Examine yourself; assay your walk.

As we work through these verses, we will be looking for some hints as to how we might assay ourselves.

Jeremiah 6:1 "O you children of Benjamin, Gather yourselves to flee from the midst of Jerusalem! Blow the trumpet in Tekoa, And set up a signal-fire in Beth Haccerem; For disaster appears out of the north, And great destruction.

God warned them as if the invasion was imminent. *It was forty years away!* No one would be able to say God had not given ample time to repent.

Jeremiah 6:2 I have likened the daughter of Zion To a lovely and delicate woman.

Many Bible translators suggest that instead of "delicate woman," the Hebrew words are better rendered "land" or "pasture," and think that the Jewish nation is being compared to pleasant and delightful lands and pastures, which are inviting to shepherds to come and pitch their tents about them. It seems likely from what follows in verse three.

Jeremiah 6:3 The shepherds with their flocks shall come to her. They shall pitch their tents against her all around. Each one shall pasture in his own place."

Don't let this tranquil imagery fool you. It means that where cities once thrived, pastures have replaced them and shepherds with their flocks

occupy them. It anticipates Judah has been overthrown and the people removed.

Jeremiah 6:4 "Prepare war against her; Arise, and let us go up at noon. Woe to us, for the day goes away, For the shadows of the evening are lengthening.

Jeremiah 6:5 Arise, and let us go by night, And let us destroy her palaces."

A night attack was particularly terrifying. Jeremiah was thus painting the worst possible picture for them of what was coming.

Jeremiah 6:6 For thus has the LORD of hosts said: "Cut down trees, And build a mound against Jerusalem. This is the city to be punished. She is full of oppression in her midst.

Jeremiah 6:7 As a fountain wells up with water, So she wells up with her wickedness. Violence and plundering are heard in her. Before Me continually are grief and wounds.

Jeremiah 6:8 Be instructed, O Jerusalem, Lest My soul depart from you; Lest I make you desolate, A land not inhabited."

Jeremiah 6:9 Thus says the LORD of hosts: "They shall thoroughly glean as a vine the remnant of Israel; As a grape-gatherer, put your hand back into the branches."

The "remnant of Israel" is another way of identifying the nation of Judah. The ten northern tribes had already been carried off captive by the Assyrians. Only the two southern tribes, that comprised Judah, a "remnant," were left. Judah would not be spared.

Jeremiah 6:10 To whom shall I speak and give warning, That they may hear? Indeed their ear is uncircumcised, And they cannot give heed. Behold, the word of the LORD is a reproach to them; They have no delight in it.

Jeremiah 6:11 Therefore I am full of the fury of the LORD. I am weary of holding it in. "I will pour it out on the children outside, And on the assembly of young men together; For even the husband shall be taken with the wife, The aged with him who is full of days.

Jeremiah 6:12 And their houses shall be turned over to others, Fields and wives together; For I will stretch out My hand Against the inhabitants of the land," says the LORD.

Jeremiah 6:13 "Because from the least of them even to the greatest of them, Everyone is given to covetousness; And from the prophet even to the priest, Everyone deals falsely.

"Everyone" was at fault. The people couldn't blame the leaders, nor the leaders blame the people.

This is our first significant tip regarding self-examination. Blame-shifting is no help to you, spiritually speaking. You and I are responsible for our own actions and reactions despite the difficulties of our lives.

Jeremiah 6:14 They have also healed the hurt of My people slightly, Saying, 'Peace, peace!' When there is no peace.

Jeremiah 6:15 Were they ashamed when they had committed abomination? No! They were not at all ashamed; Nor did they know how to blush. Therefore they shall fall among those who fall; At the time I punish them, They shall be cast down," says the LORD.

Tip number two: We need to maintain a sensitivity to things God calls 'sin.' It's not easy because the world systematically erodes holiness in favor of sin. We tend, as believers, to remain 'holier' than the world by comparison and think we're doing OK. But have we moved away from the Lord? Have we relaxed our standards, having been influenced by the world?

Let's skip verse sixteen for a moment.

Jeremiah 6:17 Also, I set watchmen over you, saying, 'Listen to the sound of the trumpet!' But they said, 'We will not listen.'

Jeremiah 6:18 Therefore hear, you nations, And know, O congregation, what is among them.

Jeremiah 6:19 Hear, O earth! Behold, I will certainly bring calamity on this people - The fruit of their thoughts, Because they have not heeded My words Nor My law, but rejected it.

Judah clung to the false hope that God would not allow His city and His Temple to be destroyed. They had lost sight of the spiritual and were trusting in the material.

Another tip for you: The phrase "the fruit of their thoughts" means that how they were behaving was the result of what they had been thinking about. Only you know what it is you think about. Is it godly?

Jeremiah 6:20 For what purpose to Me Comes frankincense from Sheba, And sweet cane from a far country? Your burnt offerings are not acceptable, Nor your sacrifices sweet to Me."

The people were still worshipping God in the Temple. In fact, they were bringing very costly gifts. But God was not interested in ritual; He wanted relationship.

Jeremiah 6:21 Therefore thus says the LORD: "Behold, I will lay stumbling blocks before this people, And the fathers and the sons together shall fall on them. The neighbor and his friend shall perish."

Jeremiah 6:22 Thus says the LORD: "Behold, a people comes from the north country, And a great nation will be raised from the farthest parts of the earth.

Jeremiah 6:23 They will lay hold on bow and spear; They are cruel and have no mercy; Their voice roars like the sea; And they ride on horses, As men of war set in array against you, O daughter of Zion."

Jeremiah 6:24 We have heard the report of it; Our hands grow feeble. Anguish has taken hold of us, Pain as of a woman in labor.

Jeremiah 6:25 Do not go out into the field, Nor walk by the way. Because of the sword of the enemy, Fear is on every side.

Jeremiah 6:26 O daughter of my people, Dress in sackcloth And roll about in ashes! Make mourning as for an only son, most bitter lamentation; For the plunderer will suddenly come upon us.

They are once again warned of an imminent invasion though it was decades away. They ought to act quickly to repent.

That's another great tip for self-examination. Act upon the things the Lord reveals. Act quickly; don't let time pass to dull your sensitivities.

Let's summarize this section by returning to verse sixteen.

Jeremiah 6:16 Thus says the LORD: "Stand in the ways and see, And ask for the old paths, where the good way is, And walk in it; Then you will find rest for your souls. But they said, 'We will not walk in it.'

Here their situation was described as a journey they were on which required a choice of paths. It's sort of an Old Testament way of saying that there is a narrow gate that leads to eternal life but a broad path that leads to destruction (Matthew 7).

God saved you and set you on His path. As we journey homeward, we find there is a broad way we can choose or refuse. It's a day-by-day thing; sometimes moment-by-moment. Three tools for assaying myself, to see which path I'm on, are (1) What am I thinking about?, (2) Have I become

desensitized to things I once called sin?, and (3) Am I shifting the blame for my actions and attitudes to my circumstances or to other people?

Then, do I act on what God has revealed? Make any adjustments or changes?

Act quickly. "Ask for the old paths, where the good way is, and walk in it; then you will find rest for your souls."

## #2 What Is God's Loving Assessment Of The Way You Are On? (v27-30)

Sermon number two closes with God's assessment of Judah.

Jeremiah 6:27 "I have set you as an assayer and a fortress among My people, That you may know and test their way.

Remember, "fortress" is a poor translation. It's more like Jeremiah was an assayer and one of the techniques he would employ was to "cut," or to *separate*, what was pure from the dross.

Here is a description of an assayer's work.

An assayer separates metals or other components from dross materials by solution, flotation process, or other liquid processes, or by dry methods, such as application of heat [in furnaces] to form slags of lead, borax, and other impurities. Residues may be weighed on a balance to determine any proportion of precious metals or other components.

The illustration we most normally use is that of the gold or silver being heated over a flame in a crucible to separate that which is pure from the impurities.

What was the result of Jeremiah's assay?

Jeremiah 6:28 They are all stubborn rebels, walking as slanderers. They are bronze and iron, They are all corrupters;

Jeremiah 6:29 The bellows blow fiercely, The lead is consumed by the fire; The smelter refines in vain, For the wicked are not drawn off.

Jeremiah 6:30 People will call them rejected silver, Because the LORD has rejected them."

Ever have the experience of finding out something you thought was real and valuable was actually a worthless imitation?

God was having that experience, drawing that conclusion. His people looked like worshippers. They even brought costly incense. But a thorough examination found that they were false.

I called this a "loving assessment." Where's the love?

Well, for one thing, God assesses us in order that we might realize where we are at and return to Him. He doesn't simply point out our faults; He is testing our faith, to purify it, to strengthen it.

In Psalm 26:2 we read,

Psalms 26:2 Examine me, O LORD, and prove me; Try my mind and my heart.

The psalmist used three words - "examine; prove; try." Especially the words "examine" and "try" are those that would be used of an assayer working with metals.

"Prove" has a connotation of smelling. How do you smell - to the Lord? Are you an aroma of sweet incense? The sixth century Jews were offering costly incense but they, themselves, smelled awful.

Self-examination is good and necessary. God also conducts His own assay.

How does God examine us? One big way is by testing us through various trials and difficulties. That's why the New Testament refers to them as "fiery trials" (First Peter 4:12). As He turns up the heat, the impurities rise to the surface so He can skim them away, leaving that which is pure.

I found the website of a for-real silversmith. He said,



... It is true that if a silversmith sees his reflection in a crucible of molten silver that is ready to 'pour.' Normally, charcoal or flux is added over the silver to absorb any oxygen away from the silver. When the impurities have been absorbed, and the silversmith can see his reflection (and providing the metal hasn't been overheated), it's ready to pour.

We can (and should!) conduct our own assay, using some of the tips we discovered. With the Lord's help, with His Word before us and His Spirit within us, I think we can approach an accurate assessment.

To aid our assessment, God puts us into, and takes us through, various trials. He shows us what is really in our hearts - not to point out our faults, but to reveal our faith.

Taken together, our assay and God's assay can keep us on "the old paths, where the good way is, [to] walk in it; [to] find rest for [our] souls."

One important assessment we haven't mentioned: Are you certain you are a believer in Jesus Christ?