

Dr. Elaine Phillips, OT History, Lit., and Theology, Lecture 32

© 2011, Dr. Elaine Phillips and Ted Hildebrandt

This is Dr. Elaine Phillips in her Old Testament Literature and Theology course, Lecture number 32.

Well good morning! You're so quiet this morning. That might be because only about half of you are here. Do you know that there's supposed to be 44 people in this class, and by just quick eyeball count gave me about 23, so that's kind of an interesting statistic. It does happen in the springtime, and it also happens on the day after an exam, I know that.

But at any rate, I have some very important news that's going to be on the next screen up here, so please be your brother's and sister's keepers and tell them about what I'm going to say next because I'm not posting this on e-mail. This is dependent on folks coming to class, so you know, you might want to draw them in.

At any rate, here's the exam statistics. Basically well done after a tiny little curve, and you'll see that. Carrie's putting the exams back in the boxes, actually as we speak right now. She's not going to have a review session this week; obviously we've just had an exam. But let me encourage you to take advantage of the review sessions before the final exam. That will be a pretty wise thing to do, I would suggest you. If I remember correctly, the exam in this class is, I believe, the first exam day, which is going to be a Friday. So you'll kinda get it all over and done with, and then worry about the other things.

That actually brings me to my next set of announcements. The day before the first exam day, which is this exam, is reading day. And those of you who have to do the make-up exams, this is the time schedule. So if you are doing one of those make-up exams, if you've missed one of them, write this down! Please don't email me on May 6th and say, "Where's the exam going to be, and what time is it? Oh no! I have to work!" That doesn't cut it very well. So that's important for those of you who still have an exam to do.

The second part of this is, brilliantly gold and orange, if you have, for some reason or other, gotten an exam grade that was lower than you would like, on one of your exams; you know, that first one that just doesn't quite do what you wanted it to do. You have the option, and it's totally optional, of re-taking it in essay format. It will be administered the same time as the make-up exams, that is on May 7th, 4-6, Jenks 112. You can do that but you do need to let me know. There are study questions posted for all of these exams. Prepare all of them, I chose which ones you will answer. There is usually for each exam somewhere between 5 and 8 questions that I have you answer out of that whole bank of questions that are posted there for those of you who may want to take advantage of that. You know--I just have to say this, don't do it unless you know that you're going to study really hard because otherwise it's a waste of my time in terms of preparing the exam for you, and then reading it, and it's a waste of yours too actually.

Matt, you look like you might have an announcement? – Yes, you did. – Good, good. – Great, thanks Matt. That's good. And by the way, I trust you've saved all your old exams because as Matt just said, and as I've said before, your final exam comes from your old tests, with of course the exception of the last unit that I won't have tested you on. But save those old tests and go over them. There's no changes I just pull out the questions straight out of those, it's my spring gift to you. So if you know your old exams, you're fine! And all of the keys are posted so you can do pretty well on that.

The other thing is, please, I know some of you worked really hard studying that list of prophetic material that I had on blackboard. Go back over that, ok? Because the prophet material is going to show up on the final exam as well, so make sure that you know the answers to those: "Which prophet did this? And which prophet did that? And which prophet was this? And so forth and so on..." That will help you immensely.

Are there any questions on all this? Yes, Rebecca. – For each unit. – Yes. Each unit, there's a set of probably about 12-15 questions that you prepare and then from those I chose somewhere between 5 and 8, as I said. But they're all on Blackboard. You can have a look at it and see which ones are there, ok? Any other questions on all this business and housekeeping. Ok. We need to sing!

Wonderful psalm! There's lots of really splendid things, and this is just one little slice of a verse out of it. So let me encourage you to go back and read the whole thing and kind of meditate on it. Let's pray together as we start.

Tender and merciful Father, as we begin this week together, we want to be mindful that we have so much to be thankful for. So please help us in the midst of our stresses and weariness and perhaps just being discouraged by lots of things. Father, help us to fix our eyes on Jesus to have a profound sense of gratitude for all that you have done for us through Christ. We're thankful to be alive this morning. We are thankful for health. We're thankful for the beauty outside. We're thankful that we're here in such a place of serenity. Lord you've given us so many gifts on us, and so we pray that we would have a spirit of thankfulness. We are thankful for your word, and we do pray earnestly that you would teach us throughout this day. Please help us all to learn, and learn in ways that would prepare us to be your servants. Where we need to have pride chipped away, we ask for that. Where we need to have encouragement, we would pray for that as well. So correct us, and train us in righteousness. We ask in Christ's name with thanksgiving. Amen.

Well we're going to do the prophets that are associated with the time period, which is of course a horrible time period for Judah and Jerusalem; right before the fall of Jerusalem to Babylon and particularly Nebuchadnezzar. We've been through this period in terms of the history, but let me tell you that as we move into Jeremiah, it's going to be one of the saddest prophets that we read, I would suggest.

Before we do that, however, just to review a little bit, I've discovered that over the weekend lots of things get forgotten. I do too. So, you know, here's a couple questions to wrap up those loose ends from the exam that you took.

What superpower was a major threat during the prophetic ministries of Isaiah and Micah? – I might be hearing it, but I'm not sure. Superpower? It starts with an "A." Assyria. Yes, Assyria. Good!

Next question. Which good king did Isaiah serve as an advisor? Hezekiah, splendid!

Which king initiated a reform during which the Torah was found? Josiah. This is really important for us today as we move into Jeremiah and the prophecies of Jeremiah.

Alright, and one more; approximately how many years passed between that event, and in other words the reform, the finding of the Torah, etc. and the fall of Jerusalem to the Babylonians? – Got any ballpark figures here that we can kind of think of? –Ah, you’re thinking of the Northern Kingdom in 722. Right. The Southern Kingdom falls in 586, so when’s this reformation under Josiah approximately? That’s nasty one because it’s not a date that I asked you to know. But think about 40 years ahead of time, ok? In the vicinity of 620. Josiah becomes king in 627 and the reformation slowly unfolds, it doesn’t happen with a great big fell swoop. We learn that it’s a process here. So we’re talking about a generation in between this event under Josiah, where the Law is found, the Torah is found, wonderful reformation, and then the complete dissolution of the Southern Kingdom by 587. And of course, that’s what Jeremiah is living through, and so that’s what we need to be talking about.

We’re going to talk also about Habakkuk, Obadiah, and Zephaniah. But I’m sorry to say they’re going to get short shrift cause Jeremiah is such a monumentally important prophet of this period. Just to remind you of a verse that I hope you know by now, Jeremiah 23 is a chapter that in its whole scope addresses false prophets. Of course, there are some stinging and horrible things to say about false prophets, and I’m going to come back to that in a moment. But in the midst of that, God says, speaking through Jeremiah “Let the one who has my word speak faithfully. Is not my word like a fire, like a hammer that breaks a rock in pieces?”

Now, of course, Jeremiah’s calling as we’re going to see, and as you’ve read, was to speak this word faithfully in a context that was not at all receptive. If we thought Isaiah had it bad, or Micah, if you’ve read Jeremiah you see how utterly, utterly devastating that whole situation was. Again, I think I’ve said this before, but imagine yourself being a prophet in Kabul, Afghanistan where things are completely falling apart at this point. Or go to Islamabad where you know within the last week, and within 65 miles of the capital, you’ve got the Taliban. And up to that point they were just encroaching, and encroaching,

and encroaching. Just think of one of those kinds of circumstances and then imagine yourself trying to be a prophet of the Lord in a context where most everybody is not at all interested in what you have to say and as a matter of fact, in Jeremiah's case, is out to get you. And we'll talk a little bit more about that.

So it's not an easy or facile thing that we say when we quote this verse, "Let the one who has my word speak it faithfully." Alright, let's see what we've got here. Political circumstances to start with, let me simply read for you, "The words of Jeremiah, son of Hilkiah..." That's going to be important. In fact, let's stop right now. Who's Hilkiah? – I think I heard it. Yes, Chris? – Priest, good. Yeah, he's the priest who's responsible for finding the Torah isn't he? And that's going to be an important thing when we start identifying Jeremiah.

Well let me keep reading, "One of the priests of Anathoth, etc." Verse 2, "The word of the LORD came to him in the thirteenth year of Josiah's reign, son of Amon king of Judah, and through the reign of Jehoiakim son of Josiah king of Judah, down to the fifth month of the eleventh year of Zedekiah, son of Josiah king of Judah, when the people of Jerusalem went into exile." So here we've got it! All the way down from the thirteenth reign on Josiah right on down to the fall of Jerusalem. And one of the things, and these are the intervening kings, and you're going to read each one of these kings names, but one of the things you need to keep in mind, as I note for you.

As you're reading the book of Jeremiah, it doesn't start and one point chronologically and then just systematically chronologically works its way through. You'll have prophecies that are given to, for example, Zedekiah and then later on we'll skip back to Jehoiachin, and then to Jehoiakim. So always look for the king's name if there is an oracle that Jeremiah is giving. Look for the king's name and the context of it, and the something year of so-and-so, or "the Lord spoke through Jeremiah to Zedekiah..." or something like that. And then you can get some sense of exactly when this was taking place. But it's helpful to have those names kind of in the back of your minds. This is your favorite broken record for the morning- don't lose sight of the history. Because that's what covenant enforcing mediators are doing; they're drawing all

these events into the umbrella under the covenant stipulations, but the historical events make a lot of sense.

The Babylonians, we know this already, we know Nebuchadnezzar is our key person, but keep in mind that as you have the Babylonian pincer coming closer and closer and closer. They have swung in from the West, that's the way they're attacking, coming down the coastal plane and then going up through the Shephelah. Geography strikes again! And there you've got this very poignant reference in Jeremiah 34:6-7, and you can look it up, where it says; "only Lachish and Azekah of all the fortified cities are left." That's how bad things are, and so the juggernaut is basically just moving up and going to get to Jerusalem fairly shortly.

One of the things we also need to keep in mind, and this is going to be especially important when we move on into Ezekiel and Daniel as well. So hang onto this little datum right here for our Ezekiel and Daniel study. Nebuchadnezzar didn't just come once and grab everybody and leave. There are waves of exiles that he takes away. And I've noted here that he first takes a wave of exiles in 605. And then there's another wave of exiles that are taken off in 597. And then finally another bunch go away in 587.

Now one of the reasons this is important is because, not only the one I've got up there, when Jeremiah is writing this letter in chapter 29 to people in Babylon, that's because there's already a community there. These people have been taken by Nebuchadnezzar forcibly. They've been resettled in Babylon. Jeremiah is writing that letter to those folks in Babylon and interestingly enough, he says, "Settle down. Buy homes! Find places to live. Pray for the country that you're living in, because you're going to be there for a while!" But the other thing to keep in mind is that both Ezekiel and Daniel were taken off early as well, alright? They are going to go in these early waves of exiles. So actually they're there, both Ezekiel and Daniel are in Babylon while Jeremiah's back in Jerusalem prophesying. Does that make sense? Are we ok with that? I mean we have to be, it's the way it is, but do you understand it? Alright.

Just to keep in mind that even though Egypt is not really all that powerful at this point, it's Babylon that's really controlling things. They are still to the Israelites, or I

should say Judahites, people living in the small kingdom that's left of Judah, they are what I am calling a tempting alternative. It's always kind of tempting to when you're facing some big force, make alliances with somebody else do what you can feel like you're going to withstand them. That's what's going on with this attempted alliance with Egypt. Jeremiah's going to say, "Don't do it!" In fact, he's going to say, "Babylon's coming, you're going to have to live with this." But there's a whole wing of people politically in Jerusalem who want to make an alliance with Egypt and therefore stand off against Babylon. So those are sort of the political circumstances in a very simple nutshell at this point.

Here's our map; just reminding ourselves of maps. It looks like the same as the Assyrian control map, except now it's Babylonian. And here's our neo-Babylonian Empire, and notice by the time we have Jeremiah and the people being taken down into Egypt; because that's what happens at the end of the book, we find out that there's a whole bunch of folks that weren't taken off into exile to Babylon following those red arrows. They head on down into Egypt and they grab Jeremiah and take him along with them. But the Babylonians even have their control extended down that far as well, alright? So it's a huge empire, doesn't last long. It's going to be overthrown by the Persians as we're gonna see at the end of this week.

Ok, let's talk about Jeremiah first. As I read for you a moment ago, he says, "...son of Hilkiah..." and that's not just a ho-hum fact. One of the things you see in this book is a profound concern for covenant. Yes, all the prophets are covenant enforcement mediators, we've said that and I keep hammering it home, and you've written an essay question on it. But Jeremiah has a remarkable, deep, profound concern for covenant. You see it over and over and over again, and it's not an accident because I would suggest that when this says, "...son of Hilkiah...", that's the Hilkiah who found the Torah, and therefore Jeremiah is really aware of what's going on in terms of these covenant stipulations that Israel has broken. He knows what the consequences are. Maybe other people do too if they've had their ears open, but Jeremiah really does. So it's important

that he's the son of Hilkiah. Keep that in mind in terms of the strong covenant emphasis in this book.

We've looked at this call before, but in chapter 1:5 let's just notice this again, "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you," the Lord says to Jeremiah, "before you were born I set you apart, I appointed you as a prophet to the nations." And it goes on and talks about Jeremiah having the word of the Lord. In verse 9 when God touches his mouth and says, "I have put my words in your mouth. Today I appoint you over nations and kingdoms to uproot and tear down, to destroy and overthrow, to build and plant." And as I think I said when we talked about this overarching introduction to prophets, and we used Jeremiah's calling as one of the illustrations. Jeremiah indeed does have a whole extensive section at the end of his book on nations: Babylon, Moab, Edom, Philistia, etc. So he's got prophecies to the nations as well, but of course the first two-thirds of the book are to Judah and Jerusalem because of what they're about to endure.

Here's the tough part, and again, not new. We saw this with Isaiah when we read chapter 6 and the call of Isaiah, but you see it in Jeremiah's context and let me read it for you because he's got to deal with everybody, and it's everybody who thinks they're good folk. Let me read, "'Don't be terrified by them, or I will terrify you. Today I have made you a fortified city, an iron pillar and a bronze wall to stand against the whole land—against the kings of Judah, its officials, its priests and the people of the land. They'll fight against you but will not overcome you, for I am with you and will rescue you,' says the LORD." Now the only thing that's not in this list are the prophets, and yet we certainly see Jeremiah has to engage false prophets over and over and over again. So he's got a rough calling here. It's not just a few renegades who aren't very happy with him; it's the people of the land. Here's where we're going to spend a little time, we're going to come to rest at this point, do some reading, because we want to illustrate each one of these little categories that I just read to you.

I should say this by the way, you know, we're doing Jeremiah in forty-five minutes, we should really be spending an entire semester on this. Every chapter of Jeremiah has something that you can really grab hold of and preach. For those of you

who want to be preachers, or teachers, or whatever, Jeremiah has got a wealth of very compelling information. And we can understand why given the circumstances under which he's prophesying because what he has to say speaks to a world that's really torn apart and uncertain and scared and overwhelmed by false prophets of one ilk or another. So kind of keep Jeremiah in mind.

My little list that I read to you at the end of chapter one mentioned kings, and we have a number of times when Jeremiah goes head to head with kings. You know, it's as if you were to come to the president's office and say something. It's a scary business! Now let's look at the particularly interesting one in chapter 36. There's a number of these, don't think that the two that I've got listed up here are the only ones, but chapter 36 is particularly compelling. If you've got your Bible, I'm going to read a little bit from this because this is the situation. We won't read, don't worry, we're not going to read all thirty-two verses, but this is the situation where Jeremiah is writing the material on a scroll. He sends Baruch with it. Baruch happens to be his scribe, ok?

So Baruch goes and reads the scroll in public, and of course, on the scroll are the words of the Lord, and some of the officials hear about this. It makes them a little unnerved, so they call Baruch and they say, "How'd you come to write all this stuff? Did Jeremiah dictate it?" I am in verse 18 for those of you trying to follow. Baruch says, "yes, he did. And I wrote all his words in ink on a scroll." And the officials say, "You and Jeremiah, you better go hide." Alright? They know that what's been written here is not going to go over well with the political establishment.

So anyway, they take the scroll and they bring it in before the king. Now I'm in verse 22, "it was the ninth month and the king was sitting in the winter apartment, with a fire burning in the firepot in front of him." The ninth month means it's cold. It's like December. Nobody even caught my "like." I'm so disappointed.

It's December-ish, you know that doesn't necessarily mean December in Boston, but in Jerusalem it can be chilly, damp, cool. So he's got a firepot in front of him, and here's the interesting thing; whenever three or four columns of the scroll were read, the king cut them off with the scribe's knife and pitched them into the firepot until the entire

scroll was burned in the fire. The king and all his attendants who heard all these words showed no fear, nor did they tear their clothes.

After the king burned the scroll containing the words that Baruch had written, Jeremiah's dictation, the word of the Lord came back to Jeremiah, "take another scroll and write all the words that were on the first one." You know the king is just a brazen and stupid man to think he could burn the words of the Lord and get rid of them that way. First of all, it's an absolute affront to God, and secondly, that didn't make him go away. You know, sometimes we think that we can make God go away by just getting rid of some things that are God-things. It doesn't work that way, and the words come right back again, ok? Jeremiah has another set of oracles from the Lord, it's the same stuff. Shouldn't say another set, because it's the same words, and they're there again to convict the people and to convict the king. So an interesting illustration, again there are other places where the kings are opposed to Jeremiah, but this is one of the most astonishingly horrible ones.

We still have to do the false prophets, which is probably the biggest issue because Jeremiah is constantly confronting people who are presuming to speak in the Lord's name. That's the problem. These people aren't false prophets in saying, "Well, let's just go worship these most gross, horrible, heinous things." They're speaking falsely in the Lord's name. Read chapter 23 and what they're doing is prophesying, "Peace." Now why is that a problem? If you have a whole bevy of false prophets coming along saying, "Hey, don't worry folks! We're going to have peace, we're gonna make peace. We can negotiate our way. We can, we don't have to fight! It's going to be peace."

What's the problem? Rebecca? Yes, because the covenant had said, "If you are disobedient to what the Lord says, you're not going to have peace. You're going to have agricultural distress, and no rain, and famine, and drought, but you're also gonna have attacks from enemies." And so to prophesy peace in the face of blatant disregard of God's covenant stipulations was a ridiculous thing to do, a heinous thing to do. But, you know, they were the majority voice. They were the consensus. It all sounded good. Jeremiah says in chapter 7, if I can find it here, "Don't trust in their deceptive words, and then just

go running to the temple and saying, ‘this is the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord.’” In other words, “We’ve got the Lord’s presence here and no problem.” Verse 5, “If you really change your ways and your actions and deal with each other justly, if you don’t oppress the alien, the fatherless and the widow and you don’t shed innocent blood in this place and if you don’t follow other gods, then I’ll let you live here. But look, you’re trusting in deceptive words that are worthless. Will you steal and murder, commit adultery and perjury, burn incense to Baal and follow other gods you haven’t known and then come and stand before me in this house which bears my name and say, ‘We’re safe, we’re safe to do these things.’ Has this house which bears my name become a den of robbers to you?”

Jesus is going to cite that passage in conjunction with Isaiah 56 which we mentioned last Wednesday when he’s cleansing the temple. But Isaiah is using it to say, “You all are being flagrantly disobedient to all the stipulations of the covenant. You think this temple’s going to last? You think you can stand here and say ‘we’re safe’? Get serious.” At any rate, he was contending with false prophets who were saying, “No problem, it’s going to be peaceful.”

Now in chapter 20, one of them named Passhur actually has him put in stocks. You know stocks for us are, well they’re tourist attractions because we go to places like Williamsburg and we pose in the stocks and get our picture taken. But imagine what it’s like to sit in one of those things for the entire day where it’s hot, dry and humiliating because your bodily functions don’t stop, and you’re in public, alright? Jeremiah’s put in stocks in very public places. We also have this most interesting incident in chapter 28 which again, I’m gonna read a little bit of.

In chapter 27 Jeremiah has put on a yoke and I’m going to come back to that later when I talk about the symbolic actions that Jeremiah engaged in. But he’s put on a yoke. It’s heavy, it’s uncomfortable, he’s wearing it on his shoulders so as to make a point about the yoke of the king of Babylon being put on them. But along comes a guy named Hananiah, one of the false prophets who says in the presence of all the priests and all the people, “This is what the Lord Almighty, God of Israel says,” Hananiah is presuming to

speak for Yahweh. “I will break the yoke of the king of Babylon. Within two years I’m going to bring back everything that has been taken away to Babylon already. I’ll break the yoke of the king of Babylon.” He says it twice.

Jeremiah is standing there, the yoke has been broken, and he says, “Amen! May the Lord do it!” I am in verse 6. “May the Lord fulfill the words you have prophesied. Nevertheless, listen to what I have to say, in you’re hearing and in your hearing of all the people. From early times the prophets who preceded you and me have prophesied war, disaster, and plague, but the prophet who prophecies peace will be recognized as one truly sent by the Lord only if his prediction comes true.” Now what’s interesting is that the yoke has been broken, Jeremiah goes away. So in the eyes of the people, he’s been publically humiliated yet again. Only in private does he go to Hananiah.

Verse 13, “Go,” and this is the Lord speaking to Jeremiah, “Go and tell Hananiah, ‘You have broken a wooden yoke, in its place you’re going to get a yoke of iron. This is what the Lord Almighty, the God of Israel says, ‘I’m gonna put an iron yoke on the necks of all these nations.’” And then verse 18, “Listen Hananiah, the Lord has not sent you, therefore this is what the Lord says, ‘I’m about to remove you from the face of the earth. This very year, you’re going to die because you’ve preached rebellion against the Lord.’” And in the seventh month of the same year Hananiah died. But notice that’s not a public vindication of Jeremiah; seems to have been a private conversation. It’s fascinating.

Alright, at any rate, in that context as well, go back and look at chapter 23 which is the whole chapter devoted to the pervasive presence of false prophets that are always there. We need to move on to the people who also are vexed with him, even folks from his home town are saying, “Let’s get rid of him! Let’s get rid of him!” There is even a plot to assassinate him as a matter of fact. The Lord makes him aware of it. I’ll just quickly note at the end of chapter 11:21, “This is what the Lord says about the men of Anathoth who are seeking your life saying, ‘Don’t prophesy in the name of the Lord.’” Ok and Jeremiah has that plot revealed to him.

Well, we could spend a lot of time reading Jeremiah’s feelings. If you have ever tried to stand up for what’s right in a context where most people aren’t very keen about it,

and don't think for a moment that doesn't happen at Gordon College, it does, maybe you have a tiny slice of how Jeremiah felt. Notice our last gold thing here, I'm going to come back to chapter 4 in a moment, but in chapter 25:3, "For 23 years from the thirteenth year of Josiah, "son of Amon, king of Judah, until this very day, the word of the Lord has come to me, and I have spoken to you again and again but you haven't listened."

Can you imagine preaching for 23 years and seeing absolutely no effect whatsoever? Can you imagine teaching a class for 23 years and having nobody listen? Nobody. That's how Jeremiah feels. The people just don't care. And then of course it gets even more tragic when you back up to chapter 4 where Jeremiah's heart's absolutely broken, in fact as you read chapter 4 it's really interesting. It's Jeremiah's words and the Lord's oracles seem to kind of fuse together at this point. It's the Lord speaking, it's also Jeremiah speaking. "Your own conduct," I'm in verse 18 of chapter 4, "Your own conduct and actions that have brought this upon you. This is your punishment. How bitter it is, it pierces to the heart. Oh my anguish, my anguish," and the Hebrew there is, "My inner guts, my inner guts." You know? So those things that just, when you get nervous or scared or whatever, your stomach gets really upset for some of us anyway, that's the word that's being used here. They're just churning inside him. So anguish is the emotional word that we would use to describe that. "I writhe in pain! Oh, the agony of my heart! My heart pounds within me. I can't keep silent! I've heard the sound of the trumpet; I've heard a battle cry. Disaster follows disaster, the whole land lies in ruins, in an instant my tents are destroyed, my shelter in a moment. My people are fools, they don't know me. They're senseless children, they've no understanding. They are skilled in doing evil, but they don't know good. I looked at the earth, it was formless and empty, at the heavens, and their light was gone. I looked at the mountains, and they were quaking and the hills were swaying. I looked and there were no people. Every bird in the sky had flown away. I looked and the fruitful land was a desert." And it goes on in that vein and Jeremiah is most distressed. In fact, in chapter 20 that we're not going to read, he bemoans the day that he was born. Why did it come to this that he has to be in this particular position? It's a tragic role to fill. Well, even so, he continues to do it, and

before we get on to the images that he uses, I have to give you a little map because one of them has to do with that.

Yes, Rebecca? – Right. – In other words, why are the false prophets preaching peace instead of reality? – It's a good question. Why is it more profitable to preach peace? Probably because the message is much more happy. I mean, look, the same kind of context, and I know I'm probably jumping outside of where I ought to be at this point, but most pastors in churches, and maybe I shouldn't say most, many pastors in churches don't preach difficult messages. They don't preach the messages that need to be preached, they preach the ones the people wanna hear. And then you have sort of a selective reading and studying of the Bible in those contexts and I'm suggesting that the prophets are doing the same things. It's not just that they're getting benefits from the king, although that might be, but this is what the people want to hear. And you know you're popular if you preach what people want to hear. It's when you start the things that really hurt and make folks angry and whatever, that's when life gets a little more difficult like Jeremiah's. But yes, that's a good question.

We need to have a sense for one of Jeremiah's symbolic actions and I think you probably know which one it is if you've read the text of the geography of Jerusalem again. So we have the City of David, by Jeremiah's time the walls of Jerusalem are encompassing this whole Western hill area, alright? We've gotten the temple right up in here, and we have in addition to the Kidron Valley, the Hinnom Valley right in here. And when chapter 7 talks about the desecration, the horrible things, the slaughter, in fact they call it the "Valley of Slaughter" because you have something called the Topheth, which is where they offered sacrifices to Molech, a foreign god. And part of that process was passing your children, your sons and daughters through the fire. All sorts of dreadful things are going on there. In the intervening centuries, the Hinnom Valley becomes a place of burning and garbage and refuse. And it seems like it was already that, to an extent, when you have all this heinous stuff going on with these sacrifices at the Topheth in the Valley of Henum.

Now I've just made a note of the fact that in Hebrew, to say Valley of Hinnom was to say Ge-hinnom. And all you need to do is bring that across into Greek which happens in the gospels and you get "Gehenna." You probably went over this in your New Testament classes. So when Jesus is talking about Gehenna in the gospels, he is using a reference to a place that they would know very well as a place of smoldering and stench and all sorts of distressing things. That's the imagery there.

Well with that in mind, we have to head off to some of the imagery because one of them has to do with this valley. One of the things I said when I was talking about the various media that the prophets employed was to remind you that people back then are just like people today. If I stood up here with all sorts of visual aids, I could have a whole passel of them, right? That you make life really interesting in class, and pastors who have tons of children's sermons aids, yes, it's fascinating stuff. That's what the prophets are doing because the prophets get the attention of the people and Jeremiah is among those.

So I'm just going to list some of the more interesting ones. Jeremiah is commanded by the Lord to buy a linen belt and bind it around his waist, and then take it off and go bury it where it's wet and moist, near a spring, and then go find it later. And of course, at the end of this whole description we have God's interpretation of it. Just like that belt was bound around Jeremiah's waist, which is symbolic of actually the binding of the people to the Lord around the loins, you know, really important locations. But the people of the Lord, because of their disobedience were no longer the people of the Lord and so that belt would be taken off and they would be wasted as well. Interesting puns there; bind around your waist, and they're wasted.

Second one, he goes to the potter's house. How many of you have done pottery with a wheel? Ok, so you know as you're making that wheel go around, you know this vessel just rises up if you know what you're doing. It's great! It's as your wheel is going around, those sides of clay just come up under the hands of an accomplished potter. But then, as Jeremiah's watching, the potter sees a flaw in the pot and it's the potter's prerogative to squash that pot and start all over again, ok? And that's what the Lord tells

Jeremiah. God is the potter, and when his people show some very heart flaws, God can push them down, destroy them, start over again.

Chapter 19 is the one we're referring to in terms of the Hinnom Valley. This is an interesting one as well. "Go buy a clay jar from a potter." Perhaps you've heard me say this before, but clay jars are the plastic bags in antiquity, ok? They're for storing everything. But unlike plastic bags that unfortunately never biodegrade, clay jars do, so you know you break a pot, you just throw it over into the trash heap because eventually it's going to disintegrate. So the Hinnom Valley is the garbage dump. "Go buy a clay jar from the potter. Take some of the elders of the people and the priests. Go out to the Valley of Ben-Hinnom near the entrance of the potsherd gate and there proclaim the words that I'm going to say to you." And then there's a condemnation again of their idolatry and the fact that God's going to ruin them. And then it says in verse 10, "Then break the jar while those with you are watching and say to them, 'This is what the Lord Almighty says, I will smash this nation and this city just as this potter's jar smashed and cannot be repaired. They will bury the dead in Topheth until there's no more room.'" Ok? So another dramatic image.

Jeremiah's also supposed to be looking at a basket of figs and there's an interpretation along with that. A couple baskets of figs, I should say. Good figs! Here's where some of his message begins to be perceived as treasonous. What's good about going to Babylon and doing it willingly? That's the major enemy and yet in this vision the Lord shows him those who go to Babylon, that's what God wants at this point, alright? The Babylonians are the ones who are remaining in Jerusalem under Zedekiah who's the final king who's pretty much of a disaster himself.

We've already talked about the yoke illustration so I won't spend any more time on that. By the way, there's so many other chapters intervening here that I just don't have time to do. I hope you'll go back and take a course in Jeremiah sometime, ok? But wearing the yoke is symbolic that Nebuchadnezzar's going to come and put that yoke on the people. That's important stuff. And not just Judah; Edom, Moab, Ammon,

surrounding nations, Tyre and Sidon for that matter. Those are Jeremiah's symbolic images. Alright?

Content, what do you think goes in here? You don't even have to look at the screen. What do you know is going to be Jeremiah's message? You all have been disobedient and there's consequences, right? That's what it's going to be, but of course that's not all. First of all, he has seen the tragedy of breaking the covenant over and over and over again, and again just remember how important covenant is to Jeremiah. Not only in terms of its being broken, but it's going to be important also in terms of restoration which we're going to see a little bit later on.

The difficult part of course is, and the part that is conveyed through his symbolic actions is the breaking idea and God will break them because they have broken the covenant. It's measure for measure consequences here, exile and judgment, no surprise here. Verse 11 of chapter 25, "This whole land will become a desolate wasteland and these nations," not only Judah, "these nations will serve the King of Babylon for seventy years." Hang on to that seventy years. By the way, you know I know you're all furiously copying all those references that I got on the next part. Hang on to that for a minute, you don't need to copy all of those, I'm just trying to make a point with that, alright? But listen to the seventy years first. Daniel is going to refer to this. In fact, in the book of Daniel it actually says, "As the word of Jeremiah said, seventy years." So hang on to it. Daniel's got a sense of Jeremiah's authoritative words. Isn't that interesting? Early on here, we don't have to wait until the fourth century AD to have a canon that's established, that's what some people say. Daniel already has a sense that what Jeremiah says are authoritative words from the Lord and he mentions the seventy years.

Now, the other thing is, still in chapter 25 the Lord says, "Take from my hand this cup filled with the wine of my wrath." What an image! "...the cup filled with the wine of my wrath, and make all the nations to whom I send you drink it. When they drink it they will stagger and go mad because of the sword I will send among them." In other words, God's just judgment and punishment is coming; it's his wrath. That's the image, that's

the image we need to have in our minds when we read and hear about Jesus' prayer in Gethsemane.

Now I'm guessing you went over this in New Testament, so I don't need to go at it at length, but it's not just any old cup that Jesus is asking to have removed from him in that prayer in Gethsemane. It's this cup that is referred to here, the cup of God's wrath; wrath poured out against human sin and the necessary punishment. And it's not just a odd, unique reference in Jeremiah. That's why I've got all those passages listed there, again, you don't need to write them all down, but it's a pervasive picture. That's how God's wrath was portrayed and it's graphic. Those of you who know people who suffer from alcoholism, and probably most of us do, know that that's a substance that can wreak absolute devastation and havoc not only on individual lives, that's bad enough, but on whole networks of families. So when you think of the cup of God's wrath, if you need an association, think of that, ok? It wreaks devastation and havoc.

Well we also have some promises, as we would expect. The Lord promises that they will indeed after those seventy years come back, but in the meantime he says, "Stay where you are." Let me read for you chapter 29:10-14, "When the seventy years are completed for Babylon, I'm going to come, I'll fulfill my gracious promise to bring you back to this place. I know the plans I have for you." Does that sound familiar? "Plans to prosper you, not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future." Notice this is articulated to God's people who are going to be in Babylon in captivity. I know the verse gets sort of accommodated and we all take it for ourselves, but notice the original context here. "Then you will call upon me and come and pray to me. I'll listen to you. You're going to seek me and find me, when you seek me with all your heart." What a marvelous promise. God will be found by people if they're truly seeking him with all their hearts. That of course, is the challenge, "...when you seek me with all your heart." Those of you who like music are well aware that Mendelsohn's "Elijah" starts off with a tenor aria from this very passage, interesting isn't it? Those of you who don't like music, consider that a footnote.

Chapter 31, moving ahead a little bit. Again covenant not just broken covenants but now a new covenant. And let me read for you particularly verses 33 and following. “This is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel. I will put my Law in their minds and I’m going to write it on their hearts.” Doesn’t that sound a little like something you know? “I’ll put my Law in their minds, I’ll write my Torah on their hearts.” Not going to be on stone tablets anymore. It’s going to be on our hearts. “I will be their God and they will be my people. That sounds like Hosea. “No longer will person teach his neighbor, or his man his brother saying, ‘Know the Lord,’ because they’ll all know me. I’ll forgive their wickedness, and remember their sins no longer. He who appointed the Lord, who appointed the sun to shine by day, and decrees the moon and stars by night, who stirs up the sea so that its waves roar, the Lord Almighty is his name. Only if these decrees,” in other words the natural laws; sun shining by day, moon by night, all the natural processes working, “...only if those vanish from my sight will the descendants of Israel cease to be a nation before me.” So it’s a tremendous promise given in the most devastating of circumstances, devastating circumstances for Jeremiah.

There are lots of other things that you could read in Jeremiah, but we need to move on to a few little bits of information. We’ve already said that Baruch is his scribe, not a problem there. We also note that he’s had prophecies he gives for other nations, and then finally, the book of Lamentations it is ascribed to Jeremiah. Not surprisingly if you’ve read Lamentations, this is a poem, actually a series of five poems, about how horrible it is to live through the absolute destruction of a people, the destruction of a temple, and the absence of God in their midst. Again we’ve no idea what this is like. We’ve no idea, and even if we think we do we get it from television where we see so much of devastation going on in other parts of the world. We really don’t connect with that. We need to read Lamentations and see how heart-wrenching this whole thing was.

Interestingly enough, as I note for you, chapters 1-4 are acrostic poems. What does that mean? -- Yes, starts with the first letter of the Hebrew alphabet in the first verse and works it all the way through and they’re very orderly. Interestingly even though he’s describing devastation, they’re very orderly as they go along working from ‘*aleph*’ all the

way through *tav*. The last chapter is not an acrostic, and it's not nearly so expansive on each of these verses. In fact, the verses are about half the size and that is describing the utter, utter devastation.

Now, in the midst of that, however, how many of you know what's in chapter 3:21-26? You all know this, I'm sure you do. I know I'm being Southern today, I've no idea why. Maybe it's to wake you up, possibly. You do know this, or you do like know this, because you sing it now and then. Let me try this on you, I'm not going to sing it. Yet, "I call this to mind and therefore I have hope; because of the Lord's great love we are not consumed for his compassion's never fail. They are new every morning, great is your faithfulness." Did you ever sing, or don't you sing that anymore? Does anybody sing, "Great is Thy Faithfulness" anymore? Or is that completely gone and buried in a generation bygone? It's a wonderful hymn! The title, the first line, drawn straight from this, alright? "You're compassions never fail, they're new every morning. Great is thy faithfulness. The Lord is good to those whose hope is in him, to the one who seeks him. It is good to wait quietly for the salvation of the Lord." Again, uttered in the midst of the world falling apart around Jeremiah. That's what he can say, and it's in the center of chapter 3 which means it's in the center of the book of Lamentations. That's the center, even though all the rest of this description is devastation.

Ok, we need to carry on. Habakkuk is not a minor prophet even though he's small and we're not treating him with much respect because we're going way too fast, but here's what I want you to see about Habakkuk. This is an oracle that is framed by a complaint in the first part of it in chapter 1, and a prayer in the end in chapter 3, alright? The interesting thing is that the questions are questions that are major issues for people who are struggling with their faith. We often think of Job, you know why is it the evil prospers, etc. etc. Habakkuk is a little microcosm of this, and he starts asking, "Dear Lord, why is it that I look around me in Judah, God's people, and I see evil? It's everywhere, it's flagrant, it's rampant. What's going on?" And God's answer.

Well God's answer if the second sub-bullet here, "Babylonians are going to take care of it." That's not much encouragement, and Habakkuk is a little vexed, "Yet the

Babylonians are worse than we are!” How can God use somebody who is so vile? That’s in essence what Habakkuk is saying. He’s questioning God’s justice, he’s concerned about it, he’s wondering how this works; and then the Lord responds, and of course I am somewhere in Obadiah right now, and not Habakkuk which comes after Nahum, and before Zephaniah.

The Lord’s response, “Write down the revelation, make it plain on tablets.” It’s not coming right away though, ok? It’s not coming right away. “See, he” in other words the enemy, “is puffed up, but the righteous will live by faithfulness.” In other words, God is saying, “Patience Habakkuk, patience. And in the meantime, live faithfully.” That’s the essence of what’s going on, alright? And then he goes on to describe in the rest of this how the evil that is just so troubling to Habakkuk is really going to self-destruct. Now it takes a long time, but in the meantime, we who are the just live in faithfulness. Not just faith, belief, but faithfulness, obedient belief, alright?

Then finally in chapter 3, as I note for you, God’s appearing in judgment first of all, in a remarkable statement at the end. I’m calling it “the prophet’s faith” here. Let me read this to you, “Though the fig tree doesn’t bud, no grapes on the vines, all of crop fails, fields produce no food,” are you hearing what that means? “We’re going to starve!” because it means there is nothing that will sustain us physically, that’s what the prophet is saying, Though all that’s true get ready. The next time you complain about food, get ready. “Yet I will rejoice in the Lord and I will be joyful in God, my savior, the sovereign Lord is my strength. He makes my feet like the feet of the deer, he enables me to go on the heights.” Ok? Like Jeremiah, Habakkuk’s world is falling apart around him, and he’s facing the prospect of salvation; and yet he says, “I’ll rejoice in the Lord.” That’s a pretty remarkable lesson, right? Well that’s the lesson. Let’s go on.

Obadiah, who does Obadiah prophesy against? It starts with “E”--Edom. General idea that Obadiah is prophesying just about the same time as Jeremiah, and the reason for that is that as we read Obadiah we have some verbal parallels about grapes and gleaning and pickings that show up in Jeremiah 49:9, which is also a prophecy against Edom. So they seem to be functioning at just about the same time. His message is, well it’s a one-

chapter book, pronounces doom on Edom even though Edom thinks they are secure, and I'll show you a picture in a moment. Dwelling in the clefts of the rock, yet their time's coming. At the same time there's also a prophesy about the Day of the Lord. Where have we encountered Day of the Lord before as a concept? Joel, good, and Amos as well. Amos chapter 5, and especially Joel with our locust plague; same thing here, but as with all prophets, it is a prophecy of restoration for Israel. In fact, as you read the end of the book of Obadiah, it is really remarkable from a geographical standpoint. It's showing that God's people are going to expand from the Negev across into Edom, from Judah out into the Shephelah, from Benjamin over into Gilead. Got to have your geography in mind to realize what that means for God's people. Their boundaries are going to be expanded again, restoration politically, interestingly, or at least figured that way.

Here's our little picture of the cleft in the rock. This is a site, an antiquity site called "Selah," and Selah means "rock." And you know, you get a sense in terms of the roughness there and why that would be a fairly secure, place to live.

Alright, in the two minutes I have left we're gonna do Zephaniah. Isn't that awful? We could spend a whole day here, but here's what we need to do with Zephaniah. If you look carefully, not just on the screen in front of you, but in the text when you get around to it, this prophet is in the line of the king. He's in the royal line, isn't that fascinating? Son of Hezekiah. At any rate, Zephaniah has two things to say that I want to emphasize. The first is the Day of the Lord--end of chapter 1. Just listen and put yourself back in wherever, you name the place, Kabul, Baghdad: "The great Day of the Lord is coming, it's a day of wrath, a day of distress and anguish, a day of trouble and ruin, a day of darkness and gloom, a day of clouds and blackness, a day of trumpet and battle cry--in the fire of his jealousy, the whole world will be consumed, for he [God] will make a sudden end of all who live in the earth." That's a little bit depressing in case you hadn't figured that out. And yet, as with all the other prophets, we have in chapter 3 a remarkable statement. Verse 14, "Sing, O Daughter of Zion, shout aloud, O Israel, be glad and rejoice with all your heart, O Daughter of Jerusalem! The Lord has taken away your punishment. On that day, they will say to Jerusalem, 'don't fear, Zion, don't let your

hands hang limp.’’ Now listen careful if you haven’t got the rest, just listen to this verse and go away with it today.

Here’s the next one. This is verse 17 chapter 3, “The Lord your God is with you. He’s mighty to save; He takes great delight in you. He’ll quiet you with his love and he is going to rejoice over you with singing.” Usually we think of, you now, we’re gonna worship the Lord, we’re going to sing to God. This passage is saying God rejoices over us with shouts of singing, “loud singing” is the Hebrew word, not just a little murmur here and there. Take that with you, you’re going to chapel today right? God is rejoicing over you too.

Transcribed by Conor Krupke
Rough edited by Ted Hildebrandt