

## Dr. Gary Yates, Jeremiah, Lecture 3

### Historical Settings, International

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This is Dr. Gary Yates in his third presentation on the book of Jeremiah. The focus of this third session will be on the Historical Settings that play the background for the book of Jeremiah, particularly Israel's relationship with Babylon.

One of the important things for understanding any biblical book is to understand the historical setting and context of that book. In many ways it gives us the playing field of how God is interacting with people, what the message is all about. And I think it's especially important as we're studying the prophets in Jeremiah to understand what was the situation in Jeremiah's life and what historical circumstances were going on.

It's critical to understanding his message. Many times when people are studying the Bible today, we begin with a very pragmatic question. We want to know, what does the text mean to me? But it's more important to begin with the foundational question that really is prior to that, what does the text mean? It is important to understand that it is the historical context in which that message is delivered.

Many people, when they talk about their favorite verses in the Bible or maybe their life verses, point to Jeremiah 29:11. I know the plans I have for you, plans to prosper you and to give you a future. But many people don't really understand what that verse is all about because they don't understand the historical context. They think that it's a general promise that God is going to make them prosperous and successful, that everything in their life is going to turn out exactly as they want.

But Jeremiah 29 was actually written for the exiles in Babylon. Jeremiah was giving this promise to these people but also telling them that they were going to live in exile for 70 years. So, prosperity for them did not involve everything turning out the way they wanted.

It involved 70 years of judgment. And the things that would happen that were for their good would ultimately be the restoration of their children and generations down the line. So, it's important to understand the historical context.

There's been a recent study on the book of Isaiah that has taken a verse out of the book of Isaiah and viewed that as a passage that is unfolding the judgment of America. Again, those kinds of treatments of biblical prophecy are very popular. They tend to sell books and videos, but they ignore historical context.

So, we have to understand Jeremiah in light of the Babylonian crisis and the fact that God had raised up the Babylonians to bring judgment against the people of Judah. In

a sense, what was going to happen was that God was going to tear down the old world of Israel through this judgment, but God was going to raise up something in the future that would provide hope. So, Jeremiah and the Babylonian crisis, the international background of Jeremiah's message and ministry, that's going to be the focus of our session in this hour.

I want to go back to Deuteronomy 28. Deuteronomy 28 again lays out the covenant curses and the covenant blessings that Israel would experience if they kept God's laws and God's commandments. Here was one of the curses that God had warned against them.

He says, "...the Lord will bring a nation against you from far away, from the end of the earth, swooping down like an eagle, a nation whose language you do not understand, a hard-faced nation who shall not respect the old or show mercy to the young. It shall eat the offspring of your cattle, the fruit of your ground until you are destroyed. It will not leave you grain or wine or oil, the increase of your herds or the young of your flock until you are caused to perish." It goes on to say in this passage that Israel would even be reduced to cannibalism as they tried to deal with the horrors of war and siege.

Also, part of those curses involved the threat of exile, that they would be driven out of the promised land and taken away. Verse 64 says, "...and the Lord will scatter you among all peoples from one end of the earth to the other, and there you shall serve other gods, of wood and of stone, which neither you nor your fathers have known. And among these nations, you shall find no respite, and there will be no resting place for the sole of your foot, but the Lord will give you there a trembling heart and failing eyes and a languishing soul.

Your life shall hang in doubt before you, night and day shall be dread, and you will have no assurance of life. In the morning you shall say, if only it were evening, and in the evening you say, if only it were morning, because of the dread that your heart shall feel and the sights that your eyes shall see. And the Lord will bring you back in ships to Egypt, a journey that I promise that you should never take again."

So, God warned them that if they were disobedient, he would drive them out of the promised land, salvation history would be reversed, and they would end up going back to Egypt.

In Jeremiah's day, that's exactly what's going on. Before the time of Jeremiah, the Lord raised up the first wave of writing prophets, the classical prophets, to announce to the people of Israel and Judah that God was prepared to send them into exile. The nation that God was using to do this were the Assyrians.

The Assyrians ultimately took the northern kingdom of Israel away into exile in 722 BC, and they caused tremendous suffering and oppression for the southern kingdom of Judah as well. The prophets in the Old Testament remind us that this was not just a military crisis or a political event. It was also primarily a spiritual crisis. The Lord was raising up these nations.

The Lord was directing these movements of troops as judgment against the people for their disobedience. So God, first of all, raised up the imperial power of Assyria, and the prophet Isaiah says that Assyria was the rod of God's anger. They were executing God's judgment.

Paul Gilchrist says that Israel's apostasy was the catalyst of Assyrian imperialism. It wasn't just a political event, it wasn't just a military crisis. God was orchestrating the affairs of these nations and these armies and their movements to ultimately accomplish His purposes.

Someone has said that one of the greatest comforts from reading the prophets is coming to an understanding that God is in control of the international scene. If God directed, controlled, superintended what happened to kings and nations and their armies and their movements in the ancient Near East, then the same thing is true as we look at the international scene today. God's power has not diminished.

There has not been a transfer of power. God has not given that over to humans. God controls the events that are in the world, and God was using these nations to bring judgment on the people of Israel and Judah.

In Jeremiah's day, we begin to have a transfer from the Assyrians to the Babylonians. The Babylonians are Assyria's rival in the southern part of Mesopotamia. There was always conflict between them.

In the same year that Jeremiah was called a prophet, 626 BC, the 13th year of Josiah, a man named Nabopolassar became king of Babylon. Three years later, in 623, he declared Babylon's independence and was actually able to accomplish it by driving the Assyrians out of Babylon. As a result of this, he established the Neo-Babylonian empire.

Nabopolassar was the father of Nebuchadnezzar. In the early stages of his ministry, Jeremiah warned the people that God was preparing to send an enemy from the north. And in the book of Jeremiah, that enemy is not specifically identified as Babylon until we get to Jeremiah chapter 20.

Now, we don't know. Did Jeremiah know the identity of this army? Did he know the nation that was going to attack Israel? We don't know, but we can see that at the very beginning of his ministry, God was preparing the Neo-Babylonian empire for the

role that it was going to play in biblical history. Jeremiah will later say that Babylon was the hammer of the entire earth. Well, God was the one who was using them as his tool to accomplish his purposes.

So, as Nabopolassar established his empire, and we see the decline and the fall of the Assyrian empire, in 614, the Babylonians and the Medes joined together and defeated the Assyrians brought about the fall of their capital, Ashur. In 612, the next Assyrian center to fall to the Babylonians and the Medes was Nineveh. It was the city where Jeremiah had prophesied, and it was the city where Nahum prophesied that God would bring judgment against them because of the cruelty of the Assyrians.

Finally, in 609, the final blow to the Assyrians took place at Haran. And Judah's king, Josiah, had actually been killed at Megiddo that year as he was trying to stop the Egyptians from marching north to help prop up the Assyrian empire. Josiah believed that the Babylonian empire and their rise was going to enable him to finally bring about Judah's independence.

And so, he supported the rise of this new empire. He was killed trying to stop the Egyptians, but the Egyptians were actually unable to help the Assyrians and Babylon defeated. And really that was the end of the Assyrian empire.

Finally, in 605, the decisive battle that established Babylon as the dominant power in the ancient Near East took place in Syria to the north of Israel at a place called Carchemish. When Nebuchadnezzar's son, Nebuchadnezzar, his armies defeated the Egyptians and whatever may have been left of the Assyrians at that time, from that point forward, all of Syria-Palestine was going to come under Neo-Babylonian control. After he won this victory and pushed the Egyptians back to their homeland, Nebuchadnezzar came south and basically took control of all of Hattiland or Syria-Palestine.

He took away in 605 BC the first group of Judean exiles. He came to Jerusalem. Those exiles included Daniel and a small group of wealthy, influential, and young people that would be taken away from Judah, trained in the language, theology, culture, beliefs, practices of the Babylonians, and then sent back to rule over their people.

That was the first wave of the Babylonian exile. While he was in Syria-Palestine in 605, Nebuchadnezzar also received news that his father had died, and so he had to rush back to Mesopotamia, to Babylon, to assert his control over the throne. The first wave of exiles in Judah was taken away at that time as well.

From this point forward, basically, what would happen every year is that Nebuchadnezzar and his troops would march west into Syria-Palestine, and they would collect and they would gather tribute. Judah was now a vassal of Babylon. They would answer to Babylon.

And before the time that Babylon had taken control, the Assyrians had been the dominant power, but now Judah would have to pay tribute and give their loyalties to Babylon. The second wave of the deportation, the second wave of exile took place in 597 BC. And during this time, between 605 and 597, particularly a king of Judah by the name of Jehoiakim had wavered back and forth between giving his loyalties to Egypt or to Babylon.

And Jehoiakim, in some sense, was hoping that he could play the Egyptians off against the Babylonians. And he was constantly weighing the alternative and the possibility of rebellion against Babylon. Well, Nebuchadnezzar finally tired of this in 602 BC. He took Jehoiakim into shackles and bonds.

He took him back. He was prepared to take him back to Babylon as a prisoner. Jehoiakim affirmed his loyalty to Babylon and he released him and allowed him to remain on the throne.

In 598, he rebelled again and Nebuchadnezzar and the troops in his army marched to Judah to take care of this problem. Before they actually took the city of Jerusalem, Jehoiakim was dead. He may have been killed by his own people.

There was a new king on the throne by the name of Jehoiakim, but Nebuchadnezzar and his troops took the city of Jerusalem at this time. And they took the second wave of exiles back to Babylon. He took the king off the throne, Jehoiakim, only 18 years old, had only been on the throne for three months.

He took him back as a prisoner. There was a larger wave of exiles that were also part of this deportation. And the most famous of those exiles was the prophet Ezekiel.

And four or five years later, after Ezekiel had been taken away in exile, he was called by God to be a prophet to the exiles that were in Babylon. Jeremiah was the voice of God and the prophet of God to the people who were still in the land dealing with these various waves of deportation. How do we respond to this? How do we respond to the Babylonians? What is God doing in the midst of this? Ezekiel and Daniel would be prophetic voices to the people who were living in exile during this time.

But that was the deportation of 597. One of the interesting things from extra-biblical history is that the actual Babylonian capture of the city of Jerusalem is attested for us in the Babylonian chronicles themselves. The Babylonian chronicles give us the key events of Nebuchadnezzar's reign, where he went, where he marched, where he took his troops, and the tribute he received.

In the accounts for the years 598 and 597, we have a record of the capture of the city of Jerusalem. The Babylonian account says this: In the month of Kislev, which is

December 598, the king of Babylonia mobilized his troops and marched to the west. He encamped against the city of Judah, Jerusalem.

On the 2nd of Adar, which is March 16th, 597, he captured the city and seized its king. He appointed a king of his choice there. He took its heavy tribute and carried it off to Babylon.

So, the account that we read in the Babylonian chronicles is exactly the same as what we read in the biblical record. And you can read the stories of that in 2nd Kings chapter 24 verses 10 to 17. In the book of Jeremiah, we have a narrative of the capture of Jerusalem by the Babylonians in 597 BC.

The final appendix to the book of Jeremiah is another account that is very similar to 2nd Kings 25, which again gives us the story of the capture of Jerusalem. This was a central event. Now, when Nebuchadnezzar captured the city the second time, he did not destroy the city.

He did not bring an end to the government in Judah. In fact, what he did was he placed another Judean king from the line of David on the throne, and that king's name was Zedekiah. Zedekiah would become the final king of Judah.

And Zedekiah was basically set up by the Babylonians as their puppet. He was to give his loyalty to the Babylonians. He was to pay tribute to the Babylonians.

He was to make sure that there was not to be military or armed resistance. In other words, he was there to protect the interests of the Babylonians. The problem is that as Zedekiah became king, he began to listen to his advisors, to military officers that were encouraging him to rebel and to resist Babylonian hegemony.

Jeremiah was telling Zedekiah that the only way that you could survive this is to submit to the Babylonians, pay tribute to them, and recognize that at this time in our history, God has raised up the Babylonians as an instrument of judgment. In the earlier days of Jeremiah's ministry, Jeremiah had told the people that they could repent and be spared from judgment, or they could continue in their sinful ways and be destroyed. They had a chance early in Jeremiah's ministry to avoid domination by another nation.

But at this point in time, after the conquest of Jerusalem in 597, Jeremiah told the king, the only option you have is surrender to Babylon or be destroyed. We learn both from Kings and Jeremiah and Chronicles as we read about Zedekiah that he was a very weak ruler. And ultimately, he made the decision to rebel against Babylon, the same mistake that Jehoiakim had made that had led to the second invasion of Babylon.

He made the mistake of rebelling against the Babylonians, and the Babylonians were going to return to Jerusalem again. So, Nebuchadnezzar brings his troops, there's going to be an invasion, there's going to be a major onslaught of the land of Judah by the Babylonians, and Jeremiah again advises the king. And we see Zedekiah as this weak ruler who is constantly bringing Jeremiah in for a conference, constantly consulting and seeking advice from Jeremiah, or asking Jeremiah, what should I do, or will you pray for us that God will deliver us? And Jeremiah is consistently going to tell him to surrender or be destroyed.

When the Babylonian army begins to capture the cities of Judah, and we come to a point where there are only three cities that are left, Azekah, Lachish, and Jerusalem, Jeremiah continues to say, surrender or be destroyed. On the other hand, there are military officers and military advisors who absolutely hate Jeremiah because they continue to advise armed resistance against the Babylonians. They are going to say, look, Jeremiah is weakening the hands of our soldiers, and they're going to do everything that they can to keep Jeremiah confined in prison, away from the people, where he cannot influence them with the message that they basically view as treason.

Zedekiah is going to go back and forth: do I listen to Jeremiah, or do I listen to my military officers? He asked Jeremiah to pray for him, he asked Jeremiah to advise him, and then he sent him back to prison. On one occasion, the military officers are so angry at Jeremiah that they throw him in a cistern and leave him there to die. Zedekiah allows this to happen until another officer convinces him that we need to get the prophet out of the cistern. So, Zedekiah is a man who is incredibly torn between these two options, and ultimately, he makes the choice to rebel and to resist.

The Babylonians, this time, are going to take Jerusalem again, and again, this is the capture of Jerusalem that we have in Jeremiah 39 and Jeremiah 52. And after they capture the city, they are going to come back a month later, and they are going to knock down its walls, they're going to destroy the temple, they're going to burn the city with fire. Zedekiah tried, by night, to flee away with his family when the Babylonians captured the city.

He did not get far. He was captured in the plains of Jericho, he was taken to Riblah in Syria, and he ultimately was taken back to Babylon as a prisoner. His sons were executed in front of him, and the last thing that Zedekiah saw was the murder or the execution of his sons, and then the Babylonians gouged out his eyes and took him as a prisoner.

So that's the crisis that God raises Jeremiah up for. In the beginning of the crisis, you have an option. You can repent, you can come back to God, you can be restored to Him, you can change your ways, and if you do that, you can avoid the judgment.

This invasion, this army that is waiting to attack you, God will relent from sending that. There's a real chance for them to repent. Their decisions, their choices, and their responses to God are going to matter.

But once the rebellion and the resistance set in, once in 598, Jehoiakim decided to rebel and resist the Babylonian rule. The choice from that point until the time that the city is destroyed in 586 is going to be one of either submit or be destroyed. Sadly, the king of Judah and the final leaders in the land made the choice not to listen to God, not to listen to the prophet, and to continue the resistance and the rebellion. We have another extra-biblical document that helps us to understand some of the historical context and setting of what it must have been like to live in Judah during this time.

And those documents are called the Lachish letters. And the military commander in the city of Lachish, which was in Judah about 25 miles away from Jerusalem, it was a fortress city designed to protect Jerusalem from enemy invasion, and the commander that's in Jerusalem. And they are dealing with the problem of this army that's beginning to put pressure on both Lachish and Jerusalem.

The cities of Jerusalem are falling one by one. There's a mention in these letters of a prophet who is talking to the people. We don't know if it's Jeremiah or not.

There is a mention of the name of the commander at Lachish, his name is Joash. There are references about the king sending men down to Egypt, and it has a striking parallel with how Jehoiakim is going to send men down to Egypt to bring about the murder of the prophet Uriah. There is a complaint in one of the letters that there are military officers who are weakening the hands of the troops, which is exactly the same thing that is said about Jeremiah in chapter 38.

And then in chapter 34, verse 7 in Jeremiah, there's a mention that the only three cities of Judah that are left standing are Lachish, Azekah, and Jerusalem. In one of the Lachish letters, the commander is going to say, the light, the signal fire indicating the security of Azekah, that our troops are still there. The signal fire is no longer burning.

And so, we can imagine the possibility that the city of Azekah that is still standing in Jeremiah 34 has actually fallen in that particular letter. The vice continued to squeeze on the city of Jerusalem, and ultimately, the city was captured and destroyed. After the city of Jerusalem was captured, the Babylonians released Jeremiah from prison.

So, the captivity of Jerusalem and the exile of actually brought about Jeremiah's freedom. And the Babylonians gave Jeremiah two choices. They said that he could accompany them to Babylon, but what they advised and recommended him to do



was to stay in the land and to be an assistant and to help Gedaliah, who was a man in Judah that had been appointed by the Babylonians as the governor of the land.

Ultimately, Jeremiah made the choice to stay in the land with the poor people that were there. And I think, in some sense, that reflects Jeremiah's heart for ministry, his love for the people. For Jeremiah, it would have been easier to go to Babylon.

The Babylonians knew that he had basically preached a favorable message about them. He was encouraging surrender. They would have treated him favorably.

But Jeremiah made the choice that he felt would be better for the people themselves to remain with the poor people in the land, to minister there, and to help and encourage Gedaliah. Gedaliah was part of a family that was supportive of Jeremiah. And he told the people, as the governor of Judah, the same thing that Jeremiah had said.

He said, settle down, serve the Babylonians, submit to their authority, and God will watch over you and take care of you. And as we see things beginning to happen after the fall of Jerusalem in Jeremiah chapter 39, that's basically what happens. The refugees begin to come back to the land.

They begin to harvest the crops. Good things are happening, but there's another rebellion. There's another resistance led by a man named Ishmael, who was part of the family of David.

And in this rebellion, Gedaliah was assassinated. As a result of this, in 582 BC, there is a fourth deportation where more citizens, more people from Judah, are taken away to Babylon. So, the Babylonian exile is not just one event.

There's a deportation in 605. There's a larger wave of exiles in 597. There's the destruction of Judah and Jerusalem in 586.

More exiles are taken away. And then even after Judah has basically become a Babylonian province, there's a fourth deportation in 582. Now, as a result of the assassination of Gedaliah, Jeremiah himself is ultimately kidnapped and taken away to Egypt.

He's taken there by a group of Judean military officers. One of them is named Johanan. He's the leader of this group.

They believe that the best course of action is to flee from Jerusalem to somehow get away from the Babylonian reprisals that are going to come for the assassination of Gedaliah. So, Jeremiah is taken away. And the final context of Jeremiah's ministry, as best we can tell, is that Jeremiah spends the rest of his ministry as a refugee in Egypt.

And he's preaching there. And along with his scribe and his assistant Baruch, he's ministering to the people. And they're continuing in their worship of idols, their rebellion against God.

And Jeremiah is preaching to them and calling them back to the covenant and reminding them, look, this catastrophe, this disaster, all of these things have happened because of God's judgment and the covenant curses. As I read this whole story of what happened to Judah during the time of Jeremiah, I'm reminded of the principle of sowing and reaping in Galatians chapter 6. Galatians says that whatever we sow, we will also reap. And we definitely see that in the history of Israel and Judah.

The book of Hosea says Israel sowed the wind and reaped the whirlwind. The whirlwind was going to be these military disasters, first the Assyrian army and then the Babylonians. God took his covenant very seriously.

God has planted the concept of sowing and reaping into the creation itself. It's part of the way that God has designed the world to operate. But God had also planted that concept into the covenant that the Lord had established.

The covenant curse that you will experience if you disobey God is military defeat and disaster. And that happened to Israel. In 722, it happened to Jerusalem in 587.

That's the historical context of Jeremiah's ministry. That's the international scene. Those are the kinds of things that Jeremiah is having to deal with.

God raised him up in the final days of Judah. And maybe at the most desperate time in Israel's entire history. That's the context of Jeremiah's ministry.

Now, as a result of that, what I would like to conclude this lesson by focusing in on is what specifically did Jeremiah say about the Babylonians? What was Jeremiah's perspective on the Babylonian crisis? And as Walter Brueggemann reminds us, Jeremiah does not just give us a political perspective. He gives us a theo-political perspective because God is the one who is in control of this situation.

And God is the one who is bringing this judgment against the people of Judah. So, here's a couple of things about Jeremiah's perspective on the Babylonian crisis. Number one, Jeremiah is going to tell the leaders and the people of Judah that God is fighting with the Babylonians.

I want you to think about what that must have heard or what that must have sounded like to his own countrymen. Our enemy, God, is fighting with them. And so in Jeremiah 21, verses 3 to 7, here's what Jeremiah has to say.

Thus says the Lord, I will strike down the inhabitants of this city, both man and beast. Verse 7, afterward declares the Lord, I will give Zedekiah king of Judah and his servants and the people in this city who survived the pestilence into the hands of Nebuchadnezzar. One of the things that you should hear in that passage is the repeated occurrence of the first-person pronoun.

It's not just the Babylonians that are fighting against Israel. It's the Lord himself. God is sovereign over this situation.

God is moving these armies as chess pieces to accomplish his purposes. Remember, in Isaiah chapter 10, Assyria is the club or the rod of God's anger. Later on, when God raises up Cyrus in Isaiah 45, it's going to say that Cyrus is the Lord's shepherd.

It even says that he is God's anointed one, his Messiah. That doesn't mean that Cyrus had a personal relationship with the Lord. It simply means God was using these kings to accomplish his purposes.

Now, when Jeremiah envisions Nebuchadnezzar fighting against the city of Jerusalem, what he's also doing is that he's taking the holy war traditions of Israel. He's turning them upside down. We have all kinds of stories in the Old Testament of where God would fight battles on behalf of his people.

God defeated the Egyptians and brought them down at the Exodus. That's holy war. God had enabled Israel to begin the conquest of the promised land by bringing down the walls of Jericho, winning that battle.

There are times when David goes into battle, and David can hear the sound of the troops of the armies of the Lord moving in the trees above him. Jehoshaphat goes into battle one time and God gives him the unusual command that he's to allow the Lord to fight the battle. And all Israel is to do is to sing the enemy to death.

God fights Israel's battles for them. But in this situation, God is on the other side. I imagine if you're a baseball fan, this would be like your favorite player has become a free agent.

He's no longer playing for the Red Sox. He's playing for the hated Yankees. And God has put on another uniform.

God is fighting against someone else. You can imagine why Jeremiah was not a terribly popular man with the military officials that were in the land of Judah. There's a second thing that Jeremiah says.

In Jeremiah chapter 25 verse 9 and in Jeremiah chapter 27 verse 6, Jeremiah is going to say that Nebuchadnezzar is God's servant. That term is used in many other places to talk about people like Moses or David or the prophets throughout the history of the Old Testament. God was working through the Davidic kings.

They were his vice regents. They were his servants. They were his sons.

But now God is working through a foreign king. And Nebuchadnezzar, not David, has become God's servant. Again, it's very similar to what Isaiah says about Cyrus.

Cyrus is my shepherd. Cyrus is my anointed one. Nebuchadnezzar is God's servant.

And as a result of that, God is going to give Judah and the other nations into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar. There's a place in chapter 27 where God says that he has given both nations and even the animals of the earth into the hands of Nebuchadnezzar. Nebuchadnezzar has become like a second Adam.

And he is the one who is going to rule over the earth temporarily. Number three is a third thing that Jeremiah says. Chapter 25, verses 11 and 12, and chapter 29, verse 10, the exile will last for 70 years.

And there's some discussion and debate about this. And is this a literal number? Is it a... I think it is more of just a round figure. But what it symbolizes is that it symbolizes an entire lifetime.

The people who are taken away into exile will not, in most cases, be the ones who are brought back from exile. They're going to be taken down to Babylon. They'll live.

They'll die. It will be their children. It will be the next generation.

It's very similar to what happened in the wilderness during the days of the Exodus. The generation that comes out of Egypt is not going to be the generation that goes into the land. In the same way, the generation that's taken away into exile is not going to be the generation that returns.

The reason this is especially significant is that there are prophets all around Judah in 597. When the second wave of exiles had been taken away, and their message was, in a very short period of time, God was going to bring back the exiles. The vessels of the temple that Nebuchadnezzar took away when he captured Jerusalem in 597, in a short time, those things are going to be brought back to Jerusalem.

Jeremiah's message was that's not going to happen in a short time. Hananiah, the prophet, says that in two years, this disaster is going to come to an end. Now, if you were living in Judah between 597 and 586, which prophet would you prefer to hear?

The prophet who said, we're going to experience 70 years of disaster, or the prophet who said, this will all be over in two years.

The leaders and the people bought the lie of the false prophets who were saying, look, this is only a short time. Jeremiah says, no, this is going to be a long time. Number four, Jeremiah is going to say that it is futile to resist Babylon or to continue the armed resistance against them.

You will not be successful. You will not be able to fight them off. Israel's problem, Judah's problem, was not a military problem.

It was a spiritual problem. And even if somehow they had been able to hold off or to thwart the Babylonians, if somehow they could have convinced the Egyptians to wage war on the Babylonians, none of those military options were ever going to work. And so this is why the military commanders are angry.

This is why in Jeremiah chapter 38, they come to the king, and they say this. Now, listen to what Jeremiah is saying. He is saying that he who stays in this city shall die by the sword, by famine, and by pestilence.

But he who goes out to the Chaldeans shall live. He shall have his life as a prize of war, and he shall live. So, in their minds and in their eyes, Jeremiah is a traitor because Jeremiah is saying surrender to the Babylonians.

And I remember during the Vietnam War, people looked at Jane Fonda and referred to her as Hanoi Jane because they thought that she was saying things that comforted the enemy. In many ways, that's exactly what the military officers in Jeremiah's day thought about him. Jeremiah says it's futile to continue the resistance against Babylon.

In chapter 27, there is a political conference in Jerusalem that took place in the years 593 to 592. Again, it's between the second deportation and the last deportation. And in this political conference, the nations that have surrounded Judah, they come to meet with King Zedekiah.

And they are planning their strategy for how to coexist together, how to align together so that they can stand and withstand the Babylonian crisis. Jeremiah comes to that crisis, comes to that conference wearing a wooden animal yoke. Saying you are going to be placed under the yoke of Babylon.

There's nothing you can do about it. Don't listen to your prophets who are encouraging your rebellion. This coalition that you're forming may seem like a viable political option, but it's not going to work.

It is hopeless to resist. If you surrender, you'll be spared. If not, you'll be destroyed.

There's a fifth idea and a fifth message that Jeremiah is going to convey about the Babylonian crisis. He tells the people that the hope for Israel's future lies with the exiles in Babylon, not with the Jews who remain in the land. Again, let's go back to the military crisis.

Let's go back to the time between deportation number two in 597 and the third deportation, the final exile in 586. I'm sure it was very easy for the people who were still living in the land to think this way. We were not taken away into a foreign country.

We were not deported into exile. We are still here in the promised land. Somehow, we've survived all of this.

Therefore, we must be God's favored remnant. God's blessed us. God's left us in the land.

The people who have been taken away in exile have experienced God's judgment. God's against them. God has favored us.

Well, in Jeremiah chapter 24, Jeremiah comes to the people, and he's going to take those ideas and, again, basically turn them upside down. Jeremiah says I saw a vision of a bowl of figs. There was a bowl of good figs, fruitful.

There's a future, and there's a hope. There's a bowl of bad figs that are so contaminated and rotten that they can't be eaten. And what Jeremiah says is that the good figs are the exiles that were taken away into Babylon.

The hope for Israel's future lies with them. The bad figs that are too rotten to even be eaten are the people that remain in the land, and they are going to be the target of more judgment. And God ultimately brings that about with the fall of Jerusalem in 586.

Now, the point of that was not, those people that were taken away into exile they're pretty good people. They lived righteous lives. That's not the point at all.

All of the nation had sinned and fallen away from God. But what the vision conveyed was the fact that whatever hope there is for restoration in the future, whatever life is left in the land of Judah, it's not with the people that are in Jerusalem. It's not in the people that are left in the land.

God is ultimately going to restore his people by restoring the exiles and bringing them back to their homeland. Jeremiah 24 goes on to say that will happen when they

turn to the Lord and when they seek him with a whole heart. But they're the future, not the people that are still there.

Finally, Jeremiah's last perspective on this is that Jeremiah says that after God has used Babylon to punish Israel, God would punish Babylon for the sins that they had committed as well. One of the really important chapters in the book of Jeremiah, it's really a hinge chapter. It ends the first part of the book and leads into the second part of the book, is God's message about Babylon in Jeremiah chapter 25.

In Jeremiah, chapter 25, verses 12 to 14, the Lord says this, beginning in verse 11: The whole land shall become a ruin and a waste, and these nations shall serve the king of Babylon seventy years. Then, after these seventy years are completed, I will punish the king of Babylon and the nation, the land of the Chaldeans, for their iniquity, declares the Lord, making their land an everlasting waste. I will bring upon that land all of the words that I have uttered against it.

Everything is written in this book, which Jeremiah prophesied against all the nations. So the Lord is going to use Babylon to judge Israel, but ultimately, God is going to judge Babylon as well. Nebuchadnezzar temporarily is God's servant, but in the future, God is going to judge the king of Babylon for his sins.

God tells the exiles, pray for the peace of Babylon. Temporarily, I'm working through that nation, that city, but ultimately God's judgment is going to fall on them as well. Jeremiah performs a sign act in the second half of chapter 25.

He holds up a cup of wine, and this cup of wine represents the judgment of God. All the nations of the earth are going to stagger under its intoxicating power. The Lord says, first of all, Jerusalem, Judah, the cities, the nations, they're all going to drink this.

But then it says at the end of verse 26, and after them, the king of Babylon shall drink as well. When we go to the last chapters of the book of Jeremiah, chapter 50 and chapter 51, the message there is a judgment speech against Babylon, where God is going to judge them in the same way that he's judged Judah. One of the interesting things about that section of the book of Jeremiah is that many of the same prophetic oracles that are spoken against Jerusalem are taken and reapplied and directed against Babylon.

There was an enemy from the north that was going to come against Judah. There is an enemy from the north that is going to come against Babylon. So, as we're thinking about Jeremiah, as we're studying this book, this is the playing field.

This is the historical background. There is an incredible crisis going on. The nation of Judah is in its final days.

Jeremiah is warning them of the judgment that's coming, but it's also Jeremiah's message. It's his perspective on this that God has given to him that is also going to give them hope. There is no hope of withstanding Babylon, but out of this, the exiles will become good figs.

After 70 years, God is going to bring them back to the land, and that message of hope is ultimately going to sustain them and help them, and that's how God will bring about the renewal and the restoration of his people.

This is Dr. Gary Yates in his third presentation on the book of Jeremiah. The focus of this third session will be on the Historical Settings that play the background for the book of Jeremiah, particularly Israel's relationship with Babylon.