

Dr. Gary Yates, Jeremiah, Lecture 4, Historical Settings, Domestic

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This is Dr. Gary Yates in his fourth presentation on the book of Jeremiah. This fourth session will focus on Israel's final kings and the relationship to the book of Jeremiah.

We're continuing in this session to look at the historical setting and background of Jeremiah's ministry.

One of the things that I think enhances my respect and admiration for Jeremiah is the way that he was faithful to God in a desperately horrible situation, dealing with a crisis that was bringing his own nation to an end, dealing personally with imprisonment, persecution, and all kinds of opposition. And in our last session, we looked at the international history and the background of Jeremiah's ministry. The Assyrians had passed off the scene, the Neo-Babylonian empire was coming into place, and God was going to use the Babylonians as his instrument of judgment.

We saw that the exile took place in three basic stages. In 605, Nebuchadnezzar took Daniel in the first wave of exiles away after he had taken control of Syria-Palestine. In 597, Nebuchadnezzar captured the city of Jerusalem a second time in response to Joachim's rebellion.

There was a second wave of exiles, and the prophet Ezekiel was included in that. The third wave of exile was when Jerusalem was destroyed in 587-586 BC.

The temple was burned down. It was one of the great theological crises that Israel experienced throughout the Old Testament. What I'd like to look at in this particular lesson is more of the domestic history and what was going on among the leadership of Jerusalem and Judah internally as they were responding to this crisis.

We talked a little bit last time about some of the kings, but we're going to look at that more specifically. And in the book of Jeremiah, we're going to focus on Jeremiah chapter 21 and chapter 22 that are important to this background particularly. Let's go back and again we're setting Jeremiah in his context.

Let's remember the covenant that God had with David as we look at the interaction that Jeremiah had with the kings of Judah, who were the last representatives of the line of David before God completely took them off the throne. We go back to our key passage in 2 Samuel 7. God made a covenant with David and with his sons that would come after him. There was an unconditional element to that covenant.

The unconditional promise is that God would raise up a son for David. That was Solomon. And beyond that time, the Lord would establish the throne of David, his dominion, and his throne forever and for all time. And in the Psalms, we have the royal Psalms that pray for and anticipate the time when the Davidic king will rule over all the nations.

We know that those promises are ultimately fulfilled in Jesus. But it's also important to remember that the Davidic covenant had a conditional element. If your son obeys me, I will bless him.

If he disobeys me, I will punish him with the stripes of men. And so, there was the possibility of either blessing or judgment for each individual Davidic king based on his response to God. Throughout the history of Israel and Judah, God had maintained his covenant commitment and his promise to the house of David, even at times when it looked like they deserved to be removed from the throne.

We could begin by looking at the life of David himself. God made this incredible promise to him, but David later sins with Bathsheba and brings all kinds of heartache, grief, suffering, and even death to his own children. And we might ask the question, does that mean the end of God's covenant promise to David? God still raises up a son for David.

And the son that he raised up, even from the wife Bathsheba that came out of this adulterous relationship, a later son, Solomon, would be the one who was the king of Israel to follow him. Solomon was blessed by God with incredible wisdom, but at the end of his life, because of his many marriages, he turned away from the Lord. The Lord had commanded the king that there were three things that he was not supposed to do.

He was not to accumulate wives. He was not to accumulate horses. He was not to accumulate gold and treasure.

Solomon violated all of those things. This could have been a time when God removed the Davidic throne and took away the Davidic promises, but God kept his promise and kept his covenant commitment to David. God ultimately punished the house of David by taking away a large portion of the kingdom.

The kingdom was divided into the ten northern tribes that followed another king and the two tribes in the south that remained loyal to David and his sons. But God kept his covenant commitment. In 1 Samuel 15, or I'm sorry, 1 Kings 15, we read about a grandson of Solomon named Abijah.

He did what was evil in the eyes of the Lord, but verse 4 of that chapter says that in spite of that, God left a lamp for David. God kept his covenant promises. Later on, we move to the time of a very godly king by the name of Jehoshaphat.

But Jehoshaphat makes one terrible decision. He enters into a marriage alliance with the house of Ahab. And you remember Ahab and Jezebel and how they had led Israel into apostasy.

Jehoshaphat married his son off to a daughter from that family. And ultimately, Athaliah, the daughter that's part of that arrangement and that alliance, actually attempts in becoming the ruler of Judah to wipe out the royal line. And as I'm teaching this story to my students, I asked them to imagine that the Davidic covenant is hanging by the thread of the life of one little baby.

As Athaliah is wiping out and killing and murdering her grandchildren to preserve her rule and dominion, a nurse gathers up one royal son, takes him away, and keeps him in hiding. And the answer to why that happened is God was keeping his promise to David. I imagine that story is almost a satanic attack on the royal messianic line.

God is not going to allow that line to be wiped out. Later on, we come in the Book of Kings to the story of Manasseh. And Manasseh ironically reigns longer than any of the kings in the line of David.

He reigns for 55 years. God allows him to be on the throne, but he is also the worst king in the Davidic line. God even says to him through one of the prophets that he did more evil than the kings that came before him that reigned in the land of Israel before the Israelites came there.

Manasseh filled Jerusalem with bloodshed, violence, and injustice. He offered his own child as a sacrifice to the gods. He was desperately wicked.

And in that passage in Kings, the Lord says, because of this incredible wickedness of Manasseh, I am going to wipe Jerusalem like a dish. Now this happened in the half century and before the time that Judah came to the throne. So, in all of these examples, David's sin, Solomon's apostasy, Abijam's weakness, Jehoshaphat's marriage alliance, and Manasseh's corruption, God still kept the Davidic line intact.

But remember that conditional element. If he is obedient, I will bless him. If he is disobedient, I will punish him with the stripes of men.

And maybe what was not even understood at the time when that original prophecy was given was that punishment could involve the removal of the kings of Judah from the throne and the removal of the Davidic line. That's exactly what happens in the of Jeremiah. It's not just the fall of Jerusalem.

It's not just the collapse of the nation of Judah, but it's also the removal of the Davidic king and the Davidic line. And we have this question in this ordeal, what's going to happen to God's covenant promises to David? There is going to be an emphasis in the book of Jeremiah on this conditional aspect of the covenant that the Lord has made with the house of David. There is going to be an emphasis on the fact that the only way that the Davidic line will continue, the only way it will survive, the only way that it can continue to enjoy the blessings of God is by being fruitful and faithful and obedient to God's commands.

And we see a couple of key passages in the book of Jeremiah that bring this out. I want to read from Jeremiah chapter 21, verses 11 to 14. Remember as we're reading this passage, keep in mind the context of the Davidic covenant, both the conditional and unconditional elements.

To the house of the king of Judah, you are to say this: Hear the word of the Lord, O house of David, thus says the Lord. Execute justice in the morning and deliver from the hand of the oppressor who has been robbed. Let my wrath go forth like fire and burn with none to quench it because of your evil deeds.

Behold, I am against you, O inhabitant of the valley, O rock of the plain, declares the Lord. You who say, who shall come down against us or shall enter into our habitations, I will punish you according to the fruits of your deeds. So the Lord warned the people of Israel or the people of Judah, I'm going to bless you or punish you on the basis of your deeds, but the Lord gives that same word to the house of David.

Execute justice in the morning. If you do what is just and right, I'll bless you. I'll allow your line to continue.

In Psalm 72, in a prayer for Solomon, the psalmist says that the reign of the king of David, when he executed justice, when he took care of the poor and the needy, it would bring prosperity on the land. It would be like the rain and dew that refreshed the land. Unfortunately, the kings in Jeremiah's day are going to be exactly the opposite of that ideal picture.

There's another emphasis on the conditional nature of the promises that God made to David, that if these kings were going to rule and reign during Jeremiah's time, if they were going to be blessed by God, then they have to be obedient to God's covenant commands. In verse 1, chapter 22, the Lord tells Jeremiah, go down to the house of the king of Judah and speak there this word and say to him, hear the word of the Lord, O king of Judah, who sits on the throne of David, you and your servants and your people who enter these gates. The message applies to the king as much as it does to the people.

Thus says the Lord, do justice and righteousness and deliver from the hand of the oppressor, him who has been robbed and do no wrong or violence to the resident alien, the fatherless and the widow, nor shed innocent blood in this place. And here's the conditional element. Verse 4: for if you will indeed obey the word, then there shall enter the gates of this house kings who shall sit on the throne of David, riding in chariots and on horses and their servants and their people.

But, verse 5, if you will not obey these words, I swear by myself, declares the Lord, that this house shall become a desolation. So, there's a real choice to be made by the kings that are reigning on the throne. If they obey, they will be blessed.

If they disobey, then there's the chance that God will bring curses on the house of David. The problem is that by this time in Judah's history, they have been preserved from so many scrapes. God has done so much to make sure that the Davidic line continues that they took God's promises to the house of David as an absolute guarantee.

God will take care of us no matter what. And yes, there are these important statements about obedience, but God will preserve us, and God will protect us no matter what. There's another passage again that's going to emphasize the same thing in Jeremiah chapter 17.

I'm just going to read a couple of verses there. Verse 24 says this to the people. But if you listen to me, declares the Lord, and bring no burden in by the gates of this city on the Sabbath day, but keep the Sabbath day holy and do no work on it, then there shall enter by the gates of this city kings and princes who sit on the throne of David, riding in chariots and horses, their officials, the men, et cetera.

Again, the power and the rule and the dominion of the Davidic line is not guaranteed by the covenant promises. There is a contingent element here that if they disobey God, they could be severely punished. And the message of Jeremiah is even to the point that God would remove them from the throne.

And that's exactly what happens in the lifetime in the ministry of Jeremiah. Jeremiah ministers during the time of five kings who reign on the throne of Judah. And what I think we can imagine here is that the house of David and all of its past history has finally reached a point of wickedness where God says that he's no longer going to allow them to remain on the throne.

They can no longer have the privilege of ruling over God's people. They can no longer have the position of being the vice-regents who execute God's rule on earth. So, let's take a look at these five kings.

We begin very positively. The first king that Jeremiah is going to minister to during his reign is Josiah, who reigned in Judah from 640 BC to 609 BC.

Jeremiah is called to be a prophet during the 27th year of Josiah's ministry. So, somewhere around the 13th year of Josiah's reign, 626 BC. So, the thing that is important to understand about Josiah is that Josiah is the last godly king in the nation of Judah.

He comes to the throne when he is eight years old. Imagine that. But he's directed by very godly advisors, priests, and people who help him and point him in the right direction.

Then, just a few years after Jeremiah begins his ministry, there is a scroll of the book of the law, the book of Deuteronomy or other parts of the law of Moses that are found when they are making repairs in the temple. And they read this scroll; they realize it's important, and they take the message to the king. The king tears his garment because he realizes how far Judah has wandered away from the laws of God and God's standards of justice and righteousness.

And because of that and the things that have happened even leading up to that, Josiah determines that he is going to lead the nation in a godly direction. And so we can imagine as Jeremiah begins his ministry, there are very few direct references to Josiah in the book of Jeremiah. But we can imagine that these two men were in harmony with each other.

Jeremiah is calling the people to come back to the Lord. He's extending that even to the tribes in the north, with the possibility that Josiah is going to bring Israel and Judah back together. There's real hope because Josiah leads a godly revival.

There's a renewal. The idols are removed. The sanctuary at the Valley of Hinnom that was dedicated to false gods is desecrated and burned, and that's turned into a dumping ground.

Josiah had a deep commitment in his life to obey God. In Jeremiah chapter 22, which is a message that's directed to these final kings of Judah who reigned during Jeremiah's time of ministry, he tells the kings that come after Josiah to learn to practice and execute justice as their father did. And so, Jeremiah and Josiah, we can imagine them working in harmony.

Things seem to be moving in a positive direction. The prophet is calling the people back to God. There's another prophet by the name of Zephaniah who is also preaching during this time.

It appears that he may have had some type of influence on Josiah, also causing these reforms to come about. And it looks as if things are going to move in a very positive direction. However, in the year 609 BC, Josiah makes a fateful decision.

And he makes it really a fatal decision as well. As positive as his rule has been, and imagine this man is 39 years old, he's still in the vitality of life, he makes a bad decision. He decides that he is going to become entangled in the international affairs that involve Egypt and Assyria fighting against Babylon.

Josiah believes that if the Assyrian empire can finally collapse, then his independence movement will be supported and helped by that. So, against God's counsel, he decides to fight against the Egyptians as they go to help the Assyrians in their battle with the Babylonians. As a result of that, Josiah was fatally wounded at Megiddo.

And in the prime of life, Judah lost its last godly king. And as we look at this story and as we see this, from this point forward, every one of the rulers that come after Josiah, his sons, and his brother, it's going to say about them, they did what was evil in the eyes of the Lord. So, the reforms that came about, the revival, the resurgence, Jeremiah in the beginning of his ministry thinking, it looks like there's going to be a positive turning to God, the response to Zephaniah in his ministry, the book of the law, all of those accomplishments, all of that's going to be turned around when Josiah is killed in battle.

It tells us in 2 Chronicles that Jeremiah, at the time of Josiah's death at Megiddo, he composed laments for the king. And there was a time of real mourning for people that are old enough to remember the Kennedy assassination and the death of a young president. I'm sure that's what it was like in Judah.

And on top of that, there was this godly leader that was removed from the throne. So, after the death of Josiah, the second king that is going to come to the throne during the time of Jeremiah's ministry, and he's just going to be there for a short while, is King Jehoahaz, who is also referred to by the name of Shalem. Shalem is the king who is placed on the throne immediately after the death of his father.

Remember, the Egyptians were the ones that killed Josiah in battle. When the Egyptians go back to Egypt after they have engaged in battle with the Assyrians and the Babylonians, they're going to come back through the land of Judah, and they are going to remove Jehoahaz from the throne, possibly because they feel that he's going to continue the policies of his father being supportive of Babylon, and they're going to put another brother on the throne in his place. What happens to Jehoahaz is he is taken away as a captive to Egypt.

So, after being on the throne for three months, the Egyptians take him off the throne and they put his brother, Jehoiakim, there in his place. The prophet Jeremiah has this

to say about Jehoahaz, Shalem. Remember in Kings, it tells us he did what was evil in the eyes of the Lord.

And we don't know exactly what that entails, but that pattern, that character, was established in his life before he came to the throne. There was nothing that happened in that short period that overturned that. And so, here's what Jeremiah says about Shalem or Jehoahaz.

Thus says the Lord concerning Shalem, the son of the king of Judah, who reigned there instead of Josiah, his father, and who went away from this place, he shall return here no more. But in the place where they have carried him captive, there shall he die, and he will never see this land again. So Jeremiah offers no hope that Jehoahaz is ever going to come back from the land of Egypt.

And he died there as a captive. We really don't know anything more about him. That's the end of his story.

And after three months, this man who did evil in the eyes of the Lord was removed and taken away. We think, well, maybe there's the possibility of another brother coming to the throne. There's Jehoiakim.

That maybe there's the possibility that Jehoiakim is going to be a godly king. Jehoiakim comes on the throne in 609. And he reigns until sometime in 597.

He was no longer on the throne when the Babylonians captured the city. So, for 12 years, Jehoiakim is going to reign over Judah during the time of Jeremiah's ministry. The unfortunate thing is, is that Kings is going to say the same thing about Jehoiakim that it says about Jehoahaz.

He did what was evil in the eyes of the Lord. Beyond that, Jehoiakim is going to make some very bad political decisions. Remember, he is placed on the throne by the Egyptians.

That's 609 BC. In 605 BC, the Babylonians are going to defeat the Egyptians at Carchemish and become the dominant power in the ancient Near East. Jehoiakim is going to go back and forth between allegiance to Egypt; they were the ones that put him on the throne in the first place and allegiance to Babylon.

And what's going to happen is, is that whenever it's really forced upon him, he's going to give his loyalty to Babylon. But he's always secretly in his heart, holding forth the possibility that maybe the Egyptians can help us and get us out of this situation with the Babylonians. And so, he's going to go back and forth, loyalty to Babylon, loyalty to Egypt.

In 602, this became such a problem that 2 Chronicles 36.6 says that the King of Babylon came to Jerusalem, put Jehoiakim in shackles, and arrested him. He had been an unfaithful vassal. But before he took him back to Babylon, Jehoiakim, for some reason, convinced him that he would remain loyal.

He has a come to Jesus moment here, where he understands, I need to be loyal to the Babylonians. And so, temporarily, he gives his loyalty to the Babylonians. They allow him to remain on the throne, but then in 598, 599, a short period after this, Jehoiakim again is looking for a way to get out from under the Babylonians.

That's going to lead to the second capture of the city of Jerusalem in 597. We read about that in 2 Kings chapter 24, verses 10 to 17. In our last lesson, we also saw that the capture of Jerusalem and the removal of the King of Judah from the throne is recorded in the Babylonian Chronicles as well.

So Jehoiakim did what was evil in the eyes of the Lord. Jehoiakim made some foolish and poor political decisions, but there are some other things that we learn in the book of Jeremiah that I think reflect for us the depths of how wicked this man was. And when I think of the book of Jeremiah, Jeremiah's leading antagonist was Jehoiakim the King.

The hostility between these two men is so great that there is never a place in the book where they have a single meeting with each other. Now throughout the Old Testament, we have all kinds of confrontations between kings and prophets. We have Elijah and Ahab.

We have Isaiah and Ahaz. In the book of Jeremiah, we have him consulting with Zedekiah later on, but there is never a single time where face-to-face Jehoiakim and Jeremiah meet with each other. And I think the reason is that that just wasn't going to happen because of the hostility between these two men.

Now here's what Jeremiah has to say about Jehoiakim in chapter 22, verses 13 to 17. I think this passage gives us some insight into the character of this man. What was he like as the leader of Judah? Remember, the first wave of exiles has already been taken away.

The threat and the possibility of more exile, the military crisis is very real. Here's what Jeremiah says about Jehoiakim, chapter 22, verse 13. Woe to him who builds his house by unrighteousness and his upper room by injustice, who makes his neighbor serve him for nothing and does not give him his wages, who says, I will build myself a great house with spacious upper rooms, who cuts out windows for it, paneling it with cedar and painting it with vermilion.

Do you think you're a king because you compete in cedar? Did not your father eat and drink and do justice and righteousness? That's Josiah. Then, it was well with him. He judged the cause of the poor and the needy.

Then it was well. Is this not to know me, declares the Lord? But you have eyes and hearts that are only for dishonest gain, for shedding innocent blood, and for practicing oppression and violence. So, Josiah had fulfilled the ideal of what a king was supposed to look like.

Psalm 72. He cares for the poor, he cares for the oppressed, he cares for the needy. That becomes like the rain and the dew that blesses the nation.

Jehoiakim, on the other hand, when there's this crisis, when people are struggling for food, for survival, for resources, Jehoiakim's doing a remodeling project at his temple. And he's making the temple bigger and better. He's paneling the walls. He's adding to his luxury and comfort.

Jeremiah says, is this the kind of response that God wants from Judah's leader? And the answer is obviously no. He has violated the principle. So, we get further insight.

It's not just a man who did evil in the eyes of the Lord. He's a man who's consumed by his own selfish interests. Babylon was going to come and oppress the people and put them in bondage and slavery.

Jehoiakim, really, in a sense, was acting like the Pharaoh had during the time of the Exodus because he was putting them in bondage and oppression to rebuild his own palace. Okay, so that's a little bit about the wickedness, the depravity of Jehoiakim. It doesn't stop there because Jehoiakim is also a man who absolutely hates the Word of God.

And there is a hostility toward the prophets of God in Jehoiakim's life that I think is as great as any other prophet that we see in the, or any other king that we see in the Old Testament. I think we've all had the reaction or the response sometimes when we've tried to share Christ with someone, of someone who becomes really angry and antagonistic toward that. That generally means we've touched a chord in their life.

We've touched a sensitive area. And I believe that's what happened in Jehoiakim's life. The Word of God confronted him.

And as a result of that, he often became very antagonistic and hostile when he heard it. We have the first example of this in Jeremiah chapter 26. And this particular incident appears to happen early in the reign of Jehoiakim, shortly after the time that he became king in 609.

It tells us in Jeremiah chapter 26 verse 20, that there was another prophet in Jerusalem and in Judah. We don't know much about him. His name is Uriah.

And Uriah, just like Jeremiah, was warning of the judgment that God was planning to bring. It says this, he prophesied against this city and against this land. And it says, in words like those of Jeremiah.

So, Uriah is a carbon copy of Jeremiah. And Jehoiakim hears this message becomes angry about this. And violently angry to the point that he's going to put this king to death.

Uriah, in fear for his life, flees to Egypt to do anything that he can to try to escape from this wicked king. Remember, he can't even be in the same room as Jeremiah. But ultimately, Jehoiakim uses his political connections with Egypt.

And it says in verse 22 Jehoiakim sent Egypt certain men. And these men that are his officers go down. In verse 23, they took Uriah from Egypt and brought him to King Jehoiakim, who struck him down with the sword and dumped his dead body into the burial place of the common people.

So, what's Jehoiakim's reaction to the word of God? Immediate anger, violent opposition, and persecution of the Lord's messenger. You remember in the New Testament where Jesus tells the people of Jerusalem as they're angry about his message, Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you kill the prophets. And from the blood of Abel in the book of Genesis to the blood of Zachariah in the book of Chronicles, you're guilty of the blood of the prophets.

Jehoiakim was a man who actually did that. We see all kinds of angry confrontations: Jezebel and Elijah, Ahab and Elijah, Ahaz and Isaiah. But there are very few times where we actually see a king putting a prophet to death.

We have that in Jehoiakim's life. Now, four years later, we're going to see another incident. In 605 BC, after Jeremiah has been preaching for more than 20 years, God commands him to write a scroll of his prophecies.

And because this is a pretty dangerous situation, Jeremiah stays in hiding. And Jeremiah's scribe, Baruch, takes that scroll. He transcribes the words of judgment.

He goes to the temple. He reads it. There are officials there who hear the message and realize this is serious.

We need to take it to the king. So, they take the scroll to the king. They gain a hearing.

They begin to read this. It says that the king is sitting in his comfortable upper apartment. The fireplace is going.

We go back to 22. We remember him remodeling his palace. And he's there.

And it says, as they read him the words of judgment, there's no fear. There's no response to God. There's no humility.

There's no repentance. It says, instead, as they read the words of the scroll to him, he took a knife, and he cut it out column by column, and he threw it in the fire. So that's Jehoiakim.

And that's the third king from 609 to 597. Now, we're going to look at the story of Jeremiah and the scroll and Jehoiakim in chapter 36 a little bit later. But I want to remind you again of Jehoiakim's father, Josiah.

In 2 Kings 22, the prophets and officials bring a scroll to the king that the king needs to hear. It's newly discovered. It's the law of God.

It's been forgotten for a while. But Josiah recognizes what it is. And it says, he humbled himself.

He tore his garments. He feared the Lord. He repented.

He responded. That passage provides a direct contrast to what we have in chapter 36. Jehoiakim does not fear the Lord.

Instead of tearing his garments, he cuts up the scroll. And instead of burning the idols and all the things, it says that he burns the word of God. Jehoiakim believed that by his royal authority and power, he could set aside the word of God.

He was going to find out otherwise. So, Jehoiakim reigns from 609 to 597. He is Jeremiah's leading antagonist.

And I really believe at the time that he destroyed the scroll that if he could have gotten his hands on Jeremiah if he could have gotten his hands on Jeremiah's scribe, Baruch, he would have done the same thing to them that he did to Uriah. There is a fourth king who succeeds Jehoiakim. His son, Jehoiachin, was actually on the throne in 597 at the time when the Babylonians captured the city.

And Jehoiachin is, he's 18 years old. His father has died just a few months previous to this. Some people suggest we don't know the circumstances of Jehoiachin's death.

Some people suggest that perhaps some of the people in Judah assassinated him or put him to death as a way of trying to appease the Babylonians. Maybe if we get rid of this rebellious king, the Babylonians will leave us alone. But Jehoiachin comes to the throne in 597.

He's 18 years old. But again, it tells us that he did what was evil in the eyes of the Lord. And that trait and that character, just like what Jehoiachin, that trait qualifies the kind of person he is.

And so, he's on the throne when Nebuchadnezzar and the Babylonians in 597, when they take the city. And I can't imagine the pressure and the fear and the things that Jehoiachin was going through. He's also known by the name of Coniah.

But when the Babylonians enter the city, when they take the city, Jehoiachin is taken away as a captive. He becomes a prisoner of the Babylonians and he's led away with the second wave of exiles that included Ezekiel and a large group of the people of Judah. He is also, just like Jehoiakim, going to spend the rest of his life in captivity.

Now there's a passage about Jehoiachin in this section that's addressed to the kings of Judah in Jeremiah chapter 22, and it's a message of judgment. And it's a message of judgment, again, based on the fact that Coniah or Jehoiachin did what was evil in the eyes of the Lord. Here's the passage.

Verse 24, as I live, declares the Lord, though Coniah or Jehoiachin, the son of Jehoiachin, the king of Judah, were the signet on my right hand, yet I would tear you off and give you into the hands of those who seek your life, into the hands of those whom you are afraid of, even into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon, and into the hand of the Chaldeans. I will hurl you and the mother who bore you into another country, where you were not born and there you will die. But to the land which they long to return, there they shall not return.

Is this man, Coniah, a despised, a broken pot, a vessel no one cares for? Why are he and his children hurled and cast into a land that they do not know? O land, land, land, hear the word of the Lord. Then, in verse 30 in chapter 22, the final word of judgment against Jehoiachin, the Lord says, write this man down as childless, a man who shall not succeed in his days, for none of his offspring shall succeed in sitting on the throne of David and ruling again in Judah. All right, there are a couple of images that are used here of Jehoiachin.

First of all, he's compared to a broken pot, a worthless piece of pottery, and pottery was very common and used for all sorts of things. When you were done with it, you simply tossed it aside. Jehoiachin is going to be like an everyday pot that's tossed aside.

He's going to be childless in the sense that none of his sons will succeed him. None of his sons will sit on the throne. Remember, God had said to David, I'll give you a son.

I'll preserve your line forever. That arrangement appears to be in jeopardy because Jehoiachin is not going to have a son to succeed him or to sit on the throne in his place. The other image that's used in this passage is that Jehoiachin is compared to the signet ring of God.

I want to take just a minute to explain what we mean by signet ring. The signet was the personal seal of the king that was used. The seal was impressed in clay as a way of providing the signature or authority.

It represented the person of the king himself. And the Lord is saying about the house of David, in the relationship that I've had with David, the Davidic kings, they have been my signet rings. I have adopted them.

I have chosen them. They are my human vice-regents. They execute justice for me.

They rule over the people of God. They are God's royal anointed vice regents. They represent God.

But the Lord is announcing with Jehoiachin, I am going to take that signet ring, I'm removing it from my hand, and I'm casting it aside. And so, the authority, the power, the blessing, all the things that have been associated with the house of David up to this time, God is taking those things away. And Jehoiachin is taken away, and he's left as a captive in Babylon for the rest of his life.

Now, when we come to Jeremiah chapter 52 verses 31 to 34, the last event, the last episode that's described in the book of Jeremiah, this is also the conclusion to 2 Kings chapter 25. It's the event we read about there. It tells us that in 560 BC, Jehoiachin went down; he was 18 years old.

He's been there for 37 years. He is released from prison in Babylon, and he's allowed to eat at the king's table. And during the time that Jehoiachin and his sons and his 18 year old man had been taken, most of the hopes that the people of Judah had for any kind of restoration were associated with Jehoiachin.

And so, he's an important person, even though he's a prisoner, even though he's no longer a king, even though he was 18 years old and only there for three months, he represents the hopes and the futures of the Davidic line. Well, in Jeremiah 52 and in 2 Kings 25, the last event in the book, this king is released from prison, and he's allowed to eat at the king's table. A Babylonian text, again, another extra-biblical source confirming what we read in the book of Jeremiah, is a ration text from this same period.

And it mentions that rations are given to Jehoiachin and to his sons. And so, it seems to go along with the story that he was treated favorably, treated well, allowed to eat at the king's table, and released in prison. What's significant about that? That's probably not a Bible story that we've thought about much.

The release of Jehoiachin from prison, we may not even really know who Jehoiachin is. What this represents, I think, both in Kings and Jeremiah, is that it's a very minimal thing, and it's a very small thing. But even the kindness that the king of Babylon showed to this member of the line of David at the end of his life is a reminder, it's a glimmer of hope, that God is not finished with the line of David.

We could imagine that the biblical writer could have simply said, Jehoiachin was taken away, he's a prisoner, he died there, end of the story. And there are not a lot of promising details about the restoration in 2 Kings. The story ends in a very depressing way.

But the last event that's mentioned is the release of Jehoiachin from prison. We don't get the story of the return of the people from exile. It almost looks like a TV show that ends before the final act is there.

But Kings was actually written before the return. And this one small act is a reminder that God is not finished with the house of David. So Jehoiachin is taken away in 597.

That was the second captivity. And then finally, for the last 11 years in Israel's and Judah's history, they are going to be ruled over by the last member of the Davidic line, and his name was Zedekiah. We talked about Zedekiah in the last video, but I want to review this and just talk about this for a few minutes.

He's installed on the throne by the Babylonians. The Babylonians do not destroy Jerusalem at this time in 597. They are convinced that Jerusalem can still be a viable province and place under their rule.

And so they install Zedekiah on the throne, another son of Josiah. But again, the assessment in Kings, he did what was evil in the eyes of the Lord. In Kings, what a king accomplishes politically or militarily or economically doesn't matter.

Ultimately, it's God's assessment. And that's true for all of us. But Zedekiah is a weak ruler.

He goes back and forth between submitting to Babylon and resisting Babylon. Jeremiah is telling him there is no way that you can survive. There's no way that the war effort can be successful.

You need to submit to Babylon. When the Babylonians finally invade in 588, and there's this 18-month, Jeremiah's message is surrender. It's the only way that you can avoid destruction.

As a result of that, Zedekiah's officers, who are encouraging the resistance, are going to continually oppose Jeremiah. They're going to have him put in prison. They're going to throw him in a cistern.

They do not want him circulating his message. And again, going back to that passage in chapter 38, Jeremiah is weakening the hands of our soldiers. He's telling us that we can't succeed.

So, we need to keep him out of sight. We need to keep him out of earshot of people. And Zedekiah goes along with that and keeps Jeremiah in prison.

And we see this sort of frustrating thing where there are numerous times, Jeremiah 21, Jeremiah 34, Jeremiah 37, Jeremiah 38, where Zedekiah is coming to Jeremiah saying, tell me what I should do. And the Lord tells him and he doesn't do it. Zedekiah says, pray for us that the Lord might do a marvelous work.

I think he's wanting God to step in and intervene and save him. But at the same time, he doesn't have the courage to obey and to follow God. And it's interesting to place Jehoiakim beside Zedekiah.

They're placed side by side in the prison. One disobeyed out of hostility and anger. One disobeyed out of weakness and fear.

But both of them ultimately did not listen to the word of the Lord. And as a result of that, the city of Babylon is captured or the city of Jerusalem is captured. Zedekiah tries to flee, but he's captured by the Babylonians.

His sons are executed. He is blinded. He's taken away, and he dies as a prisoner in Babylon because he disobeyed the word of the Lord and because he did not pay attention to what Jeremiah said.

For all intents and purposes, as we come to the end of this history, the survey of the last kings, it looks as if the Davidic line has come to an end, which makes all the more amazing that Jeremiah is going to say, in the future, there will be a righteous branch that comes from the line of David. Jeremiah 23, Jeremiah 33. Jeremiah chapter 30, when the Lord delivers the people from their yoke of bondage to Babylon, they will serve David, their king, because the Lord is going to restore the Davidic line.

And we will look later on at a prophet named Haggai who takes Jeremiah's prophecy about the signet ring and to the grandson of Jehoiachin says, you have now become

the Lord's signet ring. And the Lord takes that Davidic leader, puts the ring back on his finger, and restores them to power and authority. Ultimately, Zerubbabel never became a king, but he pointed forward to the one who would become a king and how the house of David would once again become God's signet ring.

We see the message of judgment against the house of David in Jeremiah's message. We also see the promises of hope, and that's essential and important for us to understand the context and historical background of Jeremiah's message.

This is Dr. Gary Yates in his fourth presentation on the book of Jeremiah. This fourth session will focus on Israel's final kings and the relationship to the book of Jeremiah.