

## **Dr. Gary Yates, Jeremiah, Lecture 8, Jeremiah 2-3, The Marriage Metaphor, God and Israel**

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This is Dr. Gary Yates in his instruction on the book of Jeremiah. This is session 8, Jeremiah 2-3, The Marriage Metaphor, God and Israel.

Our focus in the lesson today is Jeremiah chapter two, and we're going to be looking at the topic of Jeremiah's indictment of God's unfaithful wife.

In our lesson in chapter one, last time, we saw that the passage there is not just the call of Jeremiah and the beginning of Jeremiah's ministry. In many ways, it's a programmatic introduction to the book as a whole. We have Jeremiah as a prophet to the nations.

He is a messenger of judgment and salvation. He's tearing down and building up. He becomes a living expression of God's word.

God has put his words into his mouth. There's an enemy from the north, that theme of the Babylonians of what God is doing through them. The Lord is going to make Jeremiah like bronze walls in a fortified city because there's going to be conflict throughout his ministry.

Jeremiah is presented in that opening chapter as a prophet like Moses. Moses says, Lord, send someone else. I don't know how to speak.

Jeremiah says, Lord God, you're calling me to be a prophet. I'm but a child. I don't know how to speak.

So, the themes that are going to work themselves through the book of Jeremiah are found in chapter one. In a sense, Jeremiah chapter two, verses one through four, gives us the first unit of Jeremiah's actual messages. In many ways, they are going to introduce themes that, again, I believe, work themselves through the entire book.

Jeremiah chapter two is going to look at the fragmenting of God's relationship with Israel. That relationship is like a marriage. The covenant is like a marriage and that relationship is broken.

The remainder of the book of Jeremiah, and particularly the message of hope that's in chapters 30 to 33, are going to express for us how that relationship is going to be restored. It's hard for us at times to read the book of Jeremiah. Again, it's different from the kinds of books that we're used to reading.

It's not like the ones that we have in our Kindle. Even reading the New Testament, the epistles of Paul or the gospels, it's difficult. But I believe in a sense that if we understand the book of Jeremiah as a story that goes along with all of these messages, there's two things that are working themselves out in this story.

Number one, as Andrew Sheed reminds us, the book of Jeremiah is the story of the word of God. It's the story of the word of God and how it looks and how it's presented and how it's responded to in the life and times of Jeremiah. It's a story of what the word of God accomplishes.

The word of God is powerful. The word of God brings down the nation of Judah because of their disobedience, but the word of the Lord also gives hope to them for the future. So, that's part of the plot.

What happens to the word of God? What is it like? What does it look like? What does it accomplish? But another part of Jeremiah where we can imagine almost a plot unfolding throughout the book is that the book of Jeremiah is about Judah as God's unfaithful wife and, ultimately, how the Lord is going to restore that broken relationship. Now, as we begin looking at chapter two and chapter three in Jeremiah, this passage, as many of the prophets and as the poetry of the Old Testament in general, is true of there are a number of very powerful metaphors and word images. The prophets do not want to just feed us information.

The prophets want us to feel the message that they're conveying to us. They want us to capture the emotion. That's one of the things I love about Jeremiah is the passion of his preaching.

But we don't simply get the information the Babylonians are coming and they're going to be here in 586. We get the impression the Babylonians are coming, and they're going to be an ancient nation that you can't even identify. They're going to wipe you out.

They're going to be like locusts that consume your land. They're going to be like lions and wolves and leopards. All these images come crashing down on us.

In chapter two, we have a number of figures of speech and a number of images where Jeremiah is really doing the job as God's prosecuting attorney of announcing God's indictment against them. Here's the accusation. Here are the sins that you have committed.

I just want to go through and point out some of the key metaphors that stand out to me as I read this chapter. But then there's one central metaphor that I think ties all these together. In chapter two, verse three, the Lord is going to say that Israel as a people was like the first fruits of the harvest.

It says in verse three Israel was holy to the Lord, the first fruits of the harvest. All who ate of it incurred guilt. Disaster came upon them, declares the Lord.

In the Old Testament law, the first fruits of a harvest belong to the Lord. That was God's portion. The Lord says of Israel, they are my portion.

They're my chosen selected people. And as a result of that, if anyone tried to harm them or eat them or consume them, then the Lord would destroy them for doing that. They were touching God's portion.

What's going to work out in the rest of the book is the fact that the Lord has allowed these nations to come in and ravage Israel because they have defiled their position as God's chosen people. So that's an image, very powerful one at the beginning. In chapter two, verse three, they're the first fruits of the harvest.

In chapter two, verse 14, the image is that Israel has become a slave. There's a rhetorical question in chapter two, verse 14: Is Israel a slave? Is he a home-born servant? Why has he become prey to these other nations? And so the image there is that Israel has become a slave. They've become in bondage to these other nations.

That's not the position that God had designed for them in the first place. The Lord had rescued them out of bondage. And so, the sad thing was by their idolatry, Israel was putting themselves back in bondage.

In chapter two, verse 21, the Lord compares Israel to a choice vine. And it says there, I planted you in the promised land, the Lord is saying, like a choice vine holy of pure seed. How, then, have you turned degenerate and become a wild vine? So, the Lord initially planted his people in the land.

He wanted them to be fruitful. He wanted them to bear fruit in their lives. Instead, they've become a wild vine, like poison oak or poison ivy.

And they're useless. They're weeds that should be cut down. And that image of Israel as a vine is used in other places in the Old Testament.

In Psalm 80, the Lord pictures Israel as a vine that he planted in the land, but that again becomes unfaithful to him. In chapter five, Isaiah presents Israel as a vineyard. The prophet says that the Lord wanted good grapes, but instead, they've produced wild and sour grapes.

In a sense, that's the same image here. The Lord planted Israel and did everything that he could to make sure that they would become a productive vine. Instead, they've become a wild and corrupt vine instead.

Chapter two, verse 22, and chapter two, verse 34 is going to picture Judah as a criminal who is covered with bloodstains. So we read in chapter two, verse 22, though you wash yourself with lye and use much soap, the stain of your guilt is still before me, declares the Lord God. Verse 34, also on your skirts, is found the lifeblood of the guiltless poor.

You did not find them breaking in, yet in spite of these things, you say, I am innocent. And so, they are pictured as having bloodstains. The investigators, without even having to turn on the purple light that shows the presence of blood, can see the blood all over Israel.

It reminds us of what the prophet Isaiah says in Isaiah chapter one, verses 10 to 15. The people of Judah are lifting up their hands to God and they're petitioning him and praying to him. But as they're praying to God, the Lord looks down, and he sees the stains of blood.

Now, Jeremiah's audience might've protested that we're not murderers. We're not criminals in that sense. But by the way, they had treated the poor, the way they had oppressed them, the way that they had deprived them of their livelihood, in a sense, in God's eyes, all of them, whether they were violent criminals or not, they were covered with the guilt of their sin.

And it's a very powerful image. Chapter two, verse 23, describes Israel's tendency to wander away from God. It says, how can you say I am not unclean? I have not gone after the Baals.

Look at your way in the valley and know what you have done. You are a restless young camel running here and there. So, the Lord charges them with idolatry.

They say we've not gone after the Baals. We haven't pursued these other gods. The Lord says, look at yourself.

You're like a restless young camel, just an animal going back and forth. You lack sense. What you've done has reduced you basically to nothing more than a beast.

That's what you are. Now, the image gets a little bit more offensive in verse 24. There is another metaphor here.

He says you are a wild donkey used to the wilderness in her heat, sniffing the wind. Who can restrain her lust? You're like a donkey in heat. And in the same way that a donkey in heat sniffs the urine trail looking for his mate, you're like a wild animal in heat chasing after these gods.

I mean, their idolatry had reduced them to that level. The Lord wanted them to see that. And so Jeremiah uses this powerful image of what that's like.

In chapter Two, verse 26, they are like a thief who has been caught in the act. Chapter two, verse 26, as a thief is shamed when caught, so the house of Israel shall be shamed. They were caught in the very act of robbing and thieving.

And yet, throughout this chapter, one of the things we're going to see the people say is that we're innocent. We haven't defiled ourselves with these other gods the way that you've claimed. And so these metaphors, these images, they collide on us, and they crash down on us in many ways, trying to help us to see the guilt of Israel.

J. Andrew Dearman, as he describes this section, says this is likely an anthology of Jeremiah's messages, things that he's preached over the long course of his ministry. They are setting the stage for what we see in the rest of the book, as Jeremiah is going to charge them with covenant infidelity. But the prophet doesn't just convey information.

He wants the people to see the depravity of their sin. The Lord looks at them like an animal in heat. The Lord pictures them as a slave.

They are in bondage themselves. The Lord views them as a corrupt vine that is not producing the fruit that it should. The Lord views them as criminals who have bloodstains on their hands or have been caught in the act.

And all of these images are there to convince the people of their sin. But the unifying metaphor and the unifying image that works itself out, I believe, in chapter two, verse one, on into chapter three, is that Judah is an unfaithful wife. And by their failure in their covenant to the Lord and their failure to be obedient to him, more importantly in the issue of loyalty, their failure to worship him exclusively and serve him exclusively, they have become like an unfaithful wife who has prostituted herself and has committed adultery.

And so, we have this idea that appears throughout the Old Testament that idolatry is not just a sin. Idolatry is a form of spiritual adultery where the people of Israel have been unfaithful to God as their husband. Now, there are a number of places in chapters two and three where we see specific references to this marriage relationship.

Back in chapter two, at the very beginning of this message, the prophet is going to say, thus says the Lord, I remember the devotion of your youth and how you loved me as a bride and how you followed me in the wilderness in a land not sown. So, let's think about the marriage relationship between God and Israel. When the Lord

brought them out of Egypt and when he was taking them through the wilderness, the prophet says that was like the honeymoon time in the marriage.

You followed the Lord, you were obedient to him, and we begin to think about other parts of the Old Testament, and our response to that might be, are you kidding? Remember what life in the wilderness between God and the Lord? They are worshiping the golden calf in Exodus 32 before the details of the covenant between God and Israel have even been brought down from the mountain. They confirm, and they state to the Lord that they will live under that covenant in Exodus 20 to 24, but they are basically cheating on God before the honeymoon is even over. And this passage says, well, actually though, when you compare it to the present, the way that Israel responded to God in the wilderness, that was like the honeymoon.

That might reflect something of how unfaithful they have become during the time of Jeremiah's ministry. They were a stiff neck, hard-hearted, rebellious people. They constantly disobey the Lord.

They end up wandering through the wilderness for 40 years because of their disobedience. Yet the Lord says I remember the devotion of your youth. Now, the prophet Ezekiel, in chapter 20 of his book, is going to give us a more realistic assessment of Israel's history.

He is going to say, basically you have worshiped idols throughout your entire lifetime. You were worshiping idols in Egypt. You continue to worship idols in the wilderness, and basically, that's their history.

But in Jeremiah 2, as part of the picture, I remember at one time, you loved me the way that a bride loved her husband. And I always imagine the story of the husband and the wife and the wife who always sat beside her husband in the car. They've become distant and apart, but the husband reminds her, look, I'm not the one who's moved, you have.

And in a sense, that's what the Lord is saying to Israel. Now, there are other passages and other verses that are going to directly use this metaphor of God and Israel as a bride. And the primary thing that these verses are going to say is that Israel has become a prostitute.

They have been unfaithful. They have committed adultery. It may not necessarily convey that they have sold themselves for sex, but it conveys the idea of spiritual unfaithfulness to God.

Verse 20, yet on every hill and under every green tree, you have bowed down like a whore. Verse 33 says this, taking the imagery a little bit further, how well you direct

your course to seek love, so that even to wicked women you have taught your ways. Alright, you're not just a prostitute.

You're not just unfaithful to the Lord. You could actually give classes on this because you're really good at it. Chapter 3, verse 2, the Lord is going to say, or chapter 3, verse 1, you have played the whore with many lovers, and would you then return to me, declares the Lord? Israel was not just guilty of infidelity, and they were guilty of serial infidelity.

Chapter 3, verses 6 to 10, Israel and Judah are unfaithful sisters. And the Lord has already written a certificate of divorce for Israel. And in a sense, because Judah has not learned the lesson of what God did with Israel, Judah is worse than the apostate northern kingdom.

Chapter 3, verses 19 to 21, Judah has become unfaithful sons and unfaithful wives. And so, both images, the closest possible family relationships, the relationship of a husband and a wife, the relationship of a father and his children, it's strange to us at times the way the Old Testament is going to join those two things together, but it's emphasizing the Lord has the closest possible relationship to his people, and they have not been faithful to that relationship. Now, as we look at the Old Testament prophets, this idea of Israel as an unfaithful wife is not just something that we find in the book of Jeremiah.

It is also part of the message of two other Old Testament prophets in a very prominent way. It's very prominent in the story and the message and the preaching of the prophet Hosea. Hosea's own life represents and pictures the history of Israel with God.

He marries an unfaithful wife named Gomer. Whether she is unfaithful to him before the marriage or after the marriage is something that scholars dispute, but ultimately, that relationship is fractured. The children that are born to that marriage reflect the severing of the relationship with God, the names that are given to him, not my people, I will not have compassion on them.

But Hosea ultimately loves his wife, takes her back and restores the relationship. That's the story of Israel and God. Ezekiel chapter 16 and Ezekiel chapter 23 are also going to use very powerful images of Jerusalem and Judah and Israel as God's bride.

Ultimately, how they have been promiscuous and unfaithful against him, again, in a spiritual way by their worship of idols, sometimes the shocking metaphors and language that Jeremiah uses, you're like an animal in heat. In chapter two, verse 33, even the worst of women could learn from your ways.

The prophet Ezekiel uses imagery that is just as graphic and just as vivid. He says to the people that were living in exile, the people of Israel originally, they were like a baby that had been abandoned in a field. The umbilical cord had not been cut.

The baby was covered in its blood from its birth. It was abandoned by its parents. God found this baby girl and loved her and raised her, lavished every possible gift that he could upon her.

Then he took her as his bride. Then, after all of the things that he had lavished upon her, after all the ways that in his splendor he had made them beautiful, this woman turned against him and used her beauty and used all of the things that the husband had given to her, the Lord had given to Israel to become unfaithful. She became promiscuous in every way, every street corner, every high place she advertised herself.

Ezekiel says the difference between my people and a prostitute is that a prostitute gets paid for her services. My people have actually paid the lovers that they have pursued. In the normal course of business, there are those who seek out a prostitute.

Israel, as a prostitute, sought out her lovers. The prophet Ezekiel is even going to compare Israel or Samaria, Jerusalem, and Sodom as three sisters who were promiscuous and unfaithful. He's going to say Judah is worse, Jerusalem is worse than any of her sisters.

So this same kind of graphic imagery that appears in Jeremiah, it's the heart of the story of Hosea. It's part of the preaching of Ezekiel. In chapter two, I think it's very important for us to understand what exactly is the purpose of the marriage metaphor in the book of Jeremiah.

What does it convey and what can we learn from this image? This is the foundational message in the book of Jeremiah. This is the first thing that we're going to read that the prophet says. So here are some things that I think the marriage metaphor conveys.

Number one, the marriage metaphor stresses the depth of God's love for Israel. Jeremiah chapter 31 verse two, I have loved you with an everlasting love. One of my favorite verses in the book of Jeremiah.

Well, we see the depth of that everlasting love in the fact that God uses the closest possible human relationship, marriage itself, the relationship between a man and a woman, to talk about his love for the people of Israel. In the New Testament, how does God picture his love for us? Christ, as our husband, as our groom, gave himself up for his bride. The command given to us in Ephesians chapter five, husbands love your wives even as Christ loved the church.



The marriage metaphor in scripture between God and his people expresses the depth and degree of God's love for us. Whenever I do a marriage ceremony, one of the passages that I like to read as part of the ceremony is found in Song of Solomon chapter eight verse seven. And I think we realize Song of Solomon has a few things to say about love and marriage and the beauty of all that.

But there's an expression about marital love in Song of Solomon chapter eight, verse seven. It says this: many waters cannot quench love. Neither can floods drown it out.

If a man offered for love all of the wealth of his house, he would be utterly despised for it. And I tell couples, as I marry, I pray that you will know in your home and in your life that kind of love. That it's more valuable to you than any wealth, any possessions.

Nothing could ever extinguish this kind of love. That's what real marital love is about. I pray that as a couple, they will experience that.

But if that's what marital love is like, and the Bible is using the metaphor of God being married to his people or Christ, we're his bride. And he died on the cross so that he could wash us, cleanse us, and purify us. It's speaking in a very powerful way of the depth of God's love.

The second thing that it reminds us of is that the marriage metaphor in the covenant in Israel remind us of the exclusivity of the covenant relationship. God is expecting Israel to be absolutely exclusively devoted to him. Deuteronomy chapter six, verse four and five.

What's the covenant standard that the Lord puts in front of the people of Israel? You are to love the Lord with all of your heart, all of your mind, and all of your strength. Every fiber of your being is to be devoted exclusively to God. That does not allow for the possibility of something else or someone else coming into that relationship.

Deuteronomy chapter 13. You are to have no other gods before me. There is nothing that is to compete with God as a rival.

And so, the whole marriage metaphor is stressing the exclusivity of the relationship. Sometimes I ask my students to think, to ask them to think about this. Would you ever think about taking your best friend on a honeymoon? That's generally not accepted because that's a time when you're exclusively devoted, given to your husband, given to your bride, and enjoying that new relationship that you've entered into.

The relationship that God had with Israel, they were to be exclusively devoted to him. And what we see constantly happening in the Old Testament, the Israelites, by worshipping idols, are typically not throwing away their relationship to the Lord. In a syncretistic way, they are trying to bring these other gods in.

Hey, let's make sure that we're covered with all of our bases. God is saying that he wants his people to be exclusively devoted to him. Now, even though polygamy was a reality in the Old Testament, it was something in that culture that God tolerates and puts up with and regulates in the Mosaic law. We remember that going back to Genesis chapter 2, God's original design for marriage is that one man and one woman would be joined together as one flesh, and that relationship would exist for their entire life.

That's God's design for marriage at the human level. At the spiritual level, God's design is that there is nothing else in life that should ever take the place of the Lord. There's nothing in our lives, in terms of either something that we give ourselves to, or that we trust in, or that we love, or that we serve, that would ever compete or provide a rival to him.

The sin of idolatry, of all of the covenant disobedience that Israel could offer to God, the sin of idolatry, I think, was the most severe, because it was a sin of loyalty and of disloyalty that gave rise to these other sins. So, number one, the marriage metaphor stresses the depth of God's love. Number two, the exclusivity of the relationship.

Number three, in the context of the ancient Near East, the marriage metaphor conveys the dependence of Israel on the Lord as their husband. Now, marriage in our culture versus what it was like in the days of the Old Testament is quite different. There's a much more, there's an egalitarian type of relationship that we enter into as husband and wife.

But in the culture of the ancient Near East, the wife, in almost every way, was dependent on the husband. He was her livelihood. He was her life.

In the culture of the Old Testament at large, the husband had rights and privileges in that marriage that were not necessarily true of the wife. Now, that particular aspect of marriage is not necessarily endorsed by the Bible, but as the prophets used this metaphor of God as the husband of Israel, it's a reminder in that particular culture that there is an unequal relationship here in some sense. Israel is dependent on God, and they need him in the same way that a wife would need her husband in the context of the ancient Near East.

Number four, the marriage metaphor is going to stress for us, I think, the seriousness and the shamefulness of Israel's sin. And that's part of this graphic imagery. Why would the prophet charge them with being like an animal in heat? Why would the

prophet say these shocking things? You have spread your legs under every tree or at every high place in the city.

I can imagine that if we walked into a church as a pastor and made these kind of statements in church today, it might not be received really well. So, what were they trying to do? They were trying to help these people understand the severity of their sin. They have violated this special, sacred relationship.

And the amazing thing is that instead of God only feeling anger about that, which obviously he does, the Lord also feels the grief of a husband who has been betrayed by his partner. And I know as a pastor, the most painful moments that I've ever spent with people are the times when someone in a marriage relationship, whether it's a husband or a wife they've broken that trust, whatever the circumstances or however much they love each other or want to restore that relationship, there is pain in that kind of thing that no other experience in life is like. And so, the idea of Israel as a prostitute conveys that sin isn't just breaking God's law.

In a sense, sin is breaking God's heart. And the Lord feels this pain and this grief over what his wife has done to him, what his partner has done to him. Hosea 2, verses 5-7, and I read this, you know, God and Israel, but I think about as a husband how I feel as I read this passage.

Hosea says that Israel received the good gifts that the Lord had given to them: the land, the wine, the grain, all of those blessings. And what they ended up doing was they attributed those gifts not to God but to Baal. And they gave their love and their devotion to Baal and said, look at how Baal as our husband has blessed us.

Now, as a husband, that's like if I take my wife out for dinner and buy her roses, and she invites our next-door neighbor over for dinner to thank him for that, that's exactly what the people of Israel had done to the Lord. And I think that every husband who was in that audience and heard that message would feel the pain that the Lord felt. In a culture of honor and shame, the women would have felt the shame that would have been attributed to the label of prostitute.

And that was not just something that God was saying about the women in that culture; that was something that all of the people had to place themselves in that position. As every husband, remember, they are the ones that primarily the prophet is speaking to because they're the ones who will make the decisions that decide the direction of the nation. Every husband in that society needs to not just put themselves in the place of God but to put themselves in the place of the wanton woman who has been unfaithful to the Lord.

And this would be a painful thing. I think the idea of adultery, prostitution, and promiscuity was also a very effective image and picture for the sins of Israel because

their idolatry as they worshiped the Canaanite gods often involved fertility rites, that involved sexual immorality and promiscuity. Things that God had never designed to be part of the worship of Israel.

Things in fact I believe that as God was setting up the tabernacle and the temple that God took steps to make sure it would not occur. That was part of their worship, these sexual fertility rites, this perversion, that had come into play. And so the use of the image of prostitution very effectively signifies literally what Judah was doing on every green hill, on these high places, as they worshiped these pagan gods, they were committing sexual immorality.

A fifth thing that the marriage metaphor conveys to us is that it reminds us of the severity of the judgment that the Lord is going to bring as a result of this sin. God is angered in the book of Jeremiah by the sin of his people. And in chapter 23, verse 20, the wrath of God will not abate until it accomplishes everything that it desires.

Jeremiah 13.22, the fierce anger of the Lord is going to break out against the people. And Jeremiah says, I'm filled with the wrath and the indignation of God because God is angered over the sin of his people, and his response is justifiable when we understand the severity of the sin. God's reaction, God's broken heart, God's anger, and then the specific ways that he's going to judge the people are absolutely justified in light of what they have done and the sin that they have committed.

Every husband who heard this message would understand that. In the Old Testament, in Old Testament law, and in Ancient Near Eastern law, adultery was often a capital crime. It could be punished by those who were found guilty of this being put to death.

It was a capital offense. On the other hand, there were times when the husband might actually punish the wife with some form of physical punishment. This metaphor and image of Israel as an unfaithful wife and God as an angry husband who has been betrayed and God responding in anger as a result of that is not just at the beginning of the book.

It's going to work itself through the entire book. And we turn over to chapter 13. We look at verses 24 to 27.

And this is one of the most disturbing passages in all the book of Jeremiah. To be honest, in our culture and in our context, it's even kind of uncomfortable to read these verses. But here's what the Lord says.

Verse 24: I will scatter you like chaff driven by the wind from the desert. This is your lot. The portion that I have measured out to you declares the Lord, because you have forgotten me and trusted in lies.

Remember, the Lord is a betrayed husband in this case. And he says in verse 26, I myself will lift up your skirts over your face, and your shame will be seen. I have seen your abominations, your adulteries, and names, your lewd whorings on the hills and the fields.

Woe to you, old Jerusalem. How long will it be before you are made clean? And so, in the culture of the ancient Near East, God is punishing their adultery in a very appropriate way. He's taking them to a public place.

He is stripping his wife naked, and he's exposing her so that all can see her shame. And again, to be honest, as I read this in our culture and our context, it's painful to read this. As a pastor, and even here teaching this session, I have to be sensitive to how we reflect that in light of the problem of spousal abuse that we have in our culture.

As feminist critics have read this part of the Bible, they've often been deeply troubled by it, and again, understandably so. There are studies that focus specifically on passages like Jeremiah 2, Jeremiah 13, Ezekiel 16, Ezekiel 23, and the Book of Nahum, where the city of Nineveh is described as a woman whom the Lord is going to strip naked and punish. And they have referred to this as porno-prophetic language, the imagery that's there.

There have been studies that have labeled God as a divine rapist. He is a sexual predator. He's an abusive husband.

And in light of the ongoing, as I've said, the problem of abusive women and how that's an issue in our society, again, I think we have to be careful how we teach this and how we express this idea about God from the Old Testament. We have to remember that the prophets are speaking in an ancient Near Eastern culture, in an ancient Near Eastern context. There are aspects of the Bible that are time-conditioned.

Again, this doesn't just drop out of heaven. And it's reflective of the culture of that day where the punishment of a woman in a physical way, even capital punishment at times, was carried out. So, we understand that.

But at the same time, I also want us to understand that we are dealing with metaphorical language. And I think sometimes in the responses and reactions of feminist critics to these passages, I think sometimes they minimize that idea. The imagery is definitely troubling to us, but I don't believe it's our job here to redeem the Bible.

I believe our job here is to listen to what that metaphor has to say. In this context of portraying God as a husband who is going to punish his wife, we are reminded of the purpose why Jeremiah is expressing this in the first place. God is telling the people these things so that they will repent and change their ways.

And yes, the Bible uses some very graphic, horrible, violent imagery to express that. But ultimately, God's purpose was not to carry out this kind of punishment. The purpose of this language was hopefully to turn Judah from their sins so that they would be spared from it.

In a real sense, I think the prophets are simply being realistic as well, as they use this imagery related to the treatment of women. In war, as the Babylonians were going to invade the land, women would be the ones who would be deprived of their children. They would be the ones who would lose their husbands.

They would be the ones who would be raped and physically abused. They would be the ones often taken away as captive prisoners to marry their enemies. And so, as the prophet is using this graphic imagery, these metaphors are designed to say, this is what judgment is going to look like.

The Lord doesn't revel in this. The Lord doesn't take joy in this. The Lord is using this powerful imagery to get the people to respond, to turn from their sin, and to make the judgment seem as awful as it possibly could be so that, ultimately, they might respond to the warnings.

So, I believe we need to understand the metaphorical nature. We need to take into consideration the rhetorical reasons that this is being used. And we need to balance that with the fact that as we look at other parts of the Old Testament, we are reminded that God has a special concern for the oppressed and the needy.

And especially when that comes to the idea of women who are oppressed or abused or not taken care of, God responds to those situations. In Genesis chapter 21, just a beautiful passage, just touching in the compassion that's shown there, the Lord hears the cry of Hagar when Abraham and Sarah have driven her away. And he's aware of Hagar and her son Ishmael.

In Deuteronomy chapter 10, verse 18, we are reminded that the Lord executes justice for the orphan and the widow. And throughout the ancient Near East, that was an ideal. A just king takes care of the poor and the needy.

And if the Lord is a just king, he's going to do that. Deuteronomy chapter 20, verses 15 to 18, remind us that in the normal practice of war, Israel was not to commit violent acts against non-combatants. And that would include women.

And then finally, in Deuteronomy 21 verses 14 to 18, what someone has referred to as what Israel is to do when they take really hot prisoners of war, Israel was reminded that women were taken as captives in war, even if they were to be treated with dignity and to be given time to allow the mourning of their husbands and those kinds of things. So, the metaphors that we see in the book of Jeremiah are never designed to validate, to justify, to excuse, or to rationalize a husband ever abusing his wife or mistreating her in any kind of physical way. We are reminded as well that as God is judging people in the context of warfare, God may use these enemies to carry out his judgment, but at the human level, these judgments are never going to be completely just.

There's an ultimate justice that God will ultimately have to mete out, and God is using very unjust situations, and the metaphor of these women who are going to be abused and hurt and injured and all the things that are going to happen to them conveys the reality and the horrors of that judgment. Divine wrath is a difficult thing. So, in our culture, this is a difficult part of the book of Jeremiah to deal with, and I felt like it's important that we address that.

But beyond this, I think there's a more pressing issue in our culture that we need to think about as we look at this. I think part of our resistance is not just to the idea of spousal abuse of a wife, but I think one of the reasons why these images bother us is that, overall, we are resistant to the idea of a holy God who hates sin. And the fact that our sin and our disobedience and our infidelity and our idolatry, and remember Calvin said our hearts are idol factories, all of us are idol worshippers, and that brings us under God's wrath and God's judgment.

I was reading a very popular Christian blog this week, and the comments on the blog were discussing the abusiveness of any kind of idea or how degrading it was for theologians to say that we are not deserving of God's love. But the Bible is going to remind us that we are not deserving of God's love, that God commended his love toward us not because of what we deserve, but because of his mercy and his grace. And when we understand the wrath of a holy God and the fact that God, in his anger, would allow these things to happen, he would use the Babylonians to bring this kind of degradation on the people of Israel.

When we understand the intensity of divine wrath, then we can begin to understand the greatness of God's love and God's mercy and God's compassion. We don't make God a greater God of love by taking away his wrath and his anger. In a sense, I think we undermine his love.

Now, finally, the last thing that I think that we are reminded of from the marriage metaphor, and we've looked at some pretty negative things here, but as we come to a close, the marriage metaphor in the prophets reminds us of the abiding love and commitment of God to his people. When you see the wrath and hatred of God for

sin, then you can also come to a place where you truly appreciate his mercy and grace. And the same God who is going to punish his wayward wife is also the God who would ultimately restore her.

Remember, God says, I have loved you with an everlasting love. My love and my commitment to you is forever. And on the basis of that, God cannot give Israel up.

God cannot stop loving her. If God's love is an eternal love, there's nothing that can cause us or nothing that can cause God to love us more. There's also nothing that can cause God to love us less.

So, there's this abiding commitment in the book of Hosea, remember, which is a book about God's punishment of his unfaithful wife. The Lord says in Hosea chapter 11, verses 8 and 9, how can I give you up, O Ephraim? It's like I have to carry out my justice and my anger and my wrath against you. I have to execute this judgment.

The justice side of my character demands that. But I also love you. How can I give you up? And then he says in verse 9, because of that, I will not carry out the full fury of my anger against you.

I'm not going to completely consume you or destroy you. And we're driven to this place where we ask the question, why? How could God love his people this much in light of hundreds and hundreds of years of unfaithfulness? There have been times when couples have come to me as a pastor to be married. And I will ask in my mind if I don't ask them directly, what has ever led you to want to marry this person? Well, we could definitely ask that about God in Israel or about Christ in the church.

But the Lord says I have an abiding commitment to my people. And so, in the Old Testament, there is the reality of God divorcing his wife. Jeremiah chapter 3, I'm going to give her a certificate of divorce.

I've already written that out. I've already given it to the people of Israel. The same thing is about to happen to Judah.

But there is also the promise that divorce is only temporary. The severing of the relationship has a time limit. And so, when we come to the prophet Isaiah, the prophet Isaiah says, where is the certificate of divorce that I gave against your mother? It's no longer there because God is going to take his people back.

In Isaiah 54, the barren woman who is alone a widow and childless is going to become God's pure bride all over again. And she's going to have so many children that the city of Jerusalem will not be able to contain her. Isaiah 62, Israel is given a new name because God is going to take her as his bride.



The relationship with Hosea as he goes and takes his wife back is a picture of how God is ultimately going to restore Israel. And I want to close this lesson with a verse in Jeremiah chapter 31, verse 22. Remember, the plot of the book is that it's not just about an unfaithful wife.

It's not just about a broken marriage. It's about God restoring that relationship. And in chapter 31, verse 22, it says this: The Lord has created a new thing on the earth.

A woman encircles a man. There's been all kinds of discussion about what that verse means. The early church interpreted this as a reference to the virgin birth of Jesus.

I believe what it's talking about is that in some way, as God does his work of recreating and restoring, the woman, Israel, is going to encircle. She's going to embrace. She's going to hold on to her husband.

And as God changes her and transforms her, she's going to be absolutely faithful to him. And that marriage between God and his people is ultimately going to be everything that God designed it to be. There's a story in the book of Jeremiah.

That story begins in chapter 2. It's the story of a broken marriage. But the book of Jeremiah as a whole is ultimately about how God will restore that marriage and bring his people back to himself.

This is Dr. Gary Yates in his instruction on the book of Jeremiah. This is session 8, Jeremiah 2-3, The Marriage Metaphor, God and Israel.