

Dr. Gary Yates, Jeremiah, Lecture 9, Jeremiah 2, The Lord's Dispute with Israel

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This is Dr. Gary Yates in his course on Jeremiah. This is session 9, Jeremiah 2, The Lord's Dispute with Israel.

In our recent sessions, we've been looking at Jeremiah 1 and Jeremiah 2. I believe these are formative chapters for the book of Jeremiah as a whole, 52 chapters.

But if we get a good grasp of what's here, we have the same problem. Oh, I'm sorry. Let me, okay? All right. Okay. I'm good. Okay. Everything's good. All right.

In our previous sections, we've taken some time to look at Jeremiah 1 and 2, and I do believe these are formative chapters for our study of the book of Jeremiah. Jeremiah 1 and the call of the prophet actually introduce the themes that are going to work their way through the book. Then we have the opening message of Jeremiah chapter 2, verse 1, all the way to chapter 4, verse 4. This opening message introduces the plot of the book.

Judah is God's unfaithful wife. The stories of Jeremiah's life, the narratives, the sermons, the poetry, the prose—all of these things are working us through the complicated story of how the Lord is going to take his people through exile and then ultimately restore them and repair this broken relationship. We looked at the metaphor and the figure, the image of Israel as God's unfaithful wife, and how important that is to the book.

Again, the prophets remember that they are speaking primarily to our emotions, not just to inform us of facts. They want us to feel the message. They want us to sense the pain, the anger, and the betrayal that the Lord feels.

They want us to also understand the depravity of Israel's sins and the significance of their betrayal of the Lord. Now, along with metaphor and images, which the prophets are very effective at, one of the other things that have helped me as I study the prophets is to better understand the literary genres that appear in the prophets, the literary forms, and the ways that they communicate their message. And we're going to take a look at some of those in chapter 2 here.

But every day when our morning newspaper arrives, or whether we look it up online or read a hard copy, we are actually practicing genre criticism because we understand the literary forms that are in a newspaper. When I see a headline that says, Lions invade Cincinnati, I realize that I don't need to call the police in Ohio to warn them about this. It's a sports headline.

If I'm a movie buff or a TV addict, I know how to read the movie listings or the TV guide, and I'm proficient at that because that's something that's important to me. If I see a story in the center of the paper that says the president's policies are a failure, I understand that that's an opinion. It's an editorial and it may or may not be accurate, but I'm able to read the paper in an informed and sensitive way because I understand the literary forms and the genres, the ways that the writers of that newspaper communicate their message.

In the same way, if we understand the literary forms of the prophets, we can understand how they communicate their message. As a teacher, as a pastor, understanding the literary genres often will provide for me the outline of the passage and the way that I want to break this down as I teach it to others. But a literary form, a literary genre helps us to know what to expect as we're going into a passage.

It also helps convey what the writer is trying to say. Now, those who have studied the prophets and scholars who have done this basically divide the prophets' genres into two categories. There are genres of judgment and genres related to salvation, the two aspects of their message.

The most basic prophetic judgment speech is simply referred to as a judgment oracle. A judgment speech in the prophets contains two primary elements. There is an accusation and there's an announcement.

The accusation, the specific list of the crimes that Israel has committed, the sins that the target of the judgment speech has committed against God. The announcement, often introduced by *Lo ken*, therefore, here's what God is going to do. The specific things that God will do to bring punishment on them for their sin.

So, we obviously have a genre of judgment speech in Jeremiah chapter two. Judah has been the Lord's unfaithful wife. Therefore, as a result of this, here are the judgments that he has brought against them to get their attention.

Here are the judgments that he's going to bring against them in the future if they do not pay attention. Now, the prophets can take that basic judgment speech and develop it in several ways. Some of the prophets will add the word *woe* to the beginning of a prophetic judgment speech.

The Hebrew word is *oi* and it's translated *woe* in the King James. It's a *lass*. The Net Bible will translate these oracles.

Israel is as good as dead. And the reason for that is that a *woe* oracle, the word *woe* is associated with death and with a funeral. When a person had died, often the

lament of the person that was left behind, they would say, alas, or woe for this person and express their sadness and grief of the death.

When Jeremiah announces the death of Jehoiakim, one of the things he says is that there will not be someone to pronounce a woe for Jehoiakim. They'll be glad this guy is dead. So, when a prophet introduced his judgment speech by saying to the people, woe, he was announcing their coming funeral.

He was, in effect, saying to them, Israel is as good as dead if they do not change their ways. And you can imagine having a dream at night where you're at a funeral. You want to see who's in the casket. Who is it? You walk to the front, and you see your own image there.

The prophets, in a sense, were calling Israel to their own funeral and reminding them that this is what is going to happen to you if you do not change your ways. Now, another type of prophetic judgment speech that I think we definitely see here in Jeremiah chapter two, and several of these genres are going to coalesce together in this chapter, and we see a covenant lawsuit. In Jeremiah chapter two, verse nine, the Lord says, therefore I still contend with you, declares the Lord.

And the word, therefore, contend in the ESV is the Hebrew word *rive*, which means dispute or case. And so, what we can imagine is that the prophet is bringing the people into the courtroom. The prophet is the prosecuting attorney.

The Lord is the judge. The people are the defendant, and they are working, in a sense, through a criminal trial. And in these covenant lawsuits, several things are going to happen.

Many times, the prophet will call the witnesses into the courtroom. In Isaiah one, hear O heavens and listen, O earth. There's a formal courtroom setting here, and let's bring the witnesses in and see how Israel is done.

There's a rehearsal of the past relationship between God and Israel. And in Jeremiah chapter two, verse five, the Lord is going to say, what wrong did your fathers find in me that they have gone so far away from me? There's a rehearsal of the past covenant. The Lord's faithfulness contrasted with the people's unfaithfulness.

In Isaiah 1, the Lord says, I have raised up children. I have reared children, but they have rebelled against me. And so, as the history of the people of God and their covenant with the Lord, as that is being rehearsed, there's a reminder of God's faithfulness to people's unfaithfulness.

The specific list of crimes that they've committed, again, the accusation, the indictment is brought out in the trial setting. And then the Lord finally is going to pass

sentence. And it will either be a judgment or a call for Israel to change their ways and repent before the judgment falls upon them.

So, I want you to try to imagine a courtroom scene where you're going into the courtroom. And I've only had to do this one time where I was the defendant. And I was involved in a traffic accident and it happened on State Road 666.

So, there may have been some significance to this, but I was charged by the state police for driving on the wrong side of the road. And the reason for that is I was driving on the wrong side of the road. And I had to go into the courtroom.

I had to answer the judge. It's an intimidating thing to do. But imagine what it's like to go into the courtroom and face God as the judge.

In a sense, that's what Jeremiah 2 is doing to the people. God is bringing them into the courtroom. And I don't know a lot about legal proceedings.

I have not gone to law school, but I know that when the judge and the defendant or the judge and the prosecuting attorney are on the same team when the prosecuting attorney is working for the judge, the defendant is in big trouble. And so, in a sense, we have this courtroom setting in Jeremiah chapter 2, where the prophet is formally charging them with their disobedience to the Lord. Later in the chapter, the Lord is going to say to the people, why are you contending with me? And so, the Lord is bringing them into the courtroom.

The Lord has a wreath against them, but the people are protesting, and they say that they have a wreath against the Lord. Now, another prophetic genre related to the message of judgment is that I believe we also have in Jeremiah chapter 2, a disputation. And obviously whenever we go into a courtroom, there's going to be the back and forth of trying to prove the case.

And so, the Lord is using the prophet to prove his case and to convince the people that they truly are guilty. I believe a good example of a prophetic disputation is found for us in Ezekiel chapter 18. There's a proverb that people have been using during the time of judgment to explain their situation.

And they say the fathers have eaten the sour grapes, but it's the children whose teeth are set on edge. In other words, what that proverb meant is our fathers have eaten the sour fruit, but the bitter taste and the edginess on our teeth, we're the ones that are experiencing that. Our fathers committed the sin.

They broke the covenant and we're experiencing the consequences of that. And so, what the prophet is going to have to do in the middle of that situation is to convince them that their understanding of this situation is absolutely wrong. And the prophet

is going to take them through several scenarios where he explains to them, a wicked father does not bring punishment on a righteous son.

Or a righteous father cannot save a wicked son from God's punishment. And then ultimately to say, your fathers were wicked, and so were you. And that's ultimately why you're sinning.

And he takes that proverb that says, the fathers eat the sour grapes, the children's teeth are set on edge. And instead, he says, a man will die or live based on his own behavior and his own actions. It's taking a message that the people disagree with and ultimately convincing them that the prophet is right.

And in Jeremiah chapter two, we definitely have a disputation because the Lord says, Israel, Judah has been an unfaithful bride. They have committed serial infidelity against the Lord. And the people are going to come back and say, how have we sinned against the Lord? The prophetic book of Malachi is built around a series of disputations between God and the people.

And the Lord will say, I have loved Israel. And the people will answer back, how have you loved us? So, the prophet is going to say, Israel, Judah is an unfaithful wife. And the people are going to say, how are we an unfaithful wife? Jeremiah chapter two is going to try to explain that and try to convince the people of the prophet's argument.

When I think of a disputation, I sometimes imagine what I do when I'm preparing a sermon. If I'm preaching on a difficult topic or a controversial issue, I imagine three or four people sitting in my audience. And over here on the right side, there's a hardened skeptic who's not going to buy what I'm saying.

Or maybe over here, I think of a member of my family who struggled with something, and they're going to say, but yeah, what about this? Or what about that? And to really be effective in our preaching, sometimes we have to anticipate how people are going to object to what we're saying. So, the prophet comes in and is going to say to Judah, you're an unfaithful wife. And on top of that, you have prostituted yourself.

You have committed adultery. You have spread your legs and advertised yourself under every green hill and on every high place in the city. There's a good possibility that the people are not going to be terribly receptive to that message.

Think about this in the New Testament as well. In James chapter four, verses eight and nine, listen to the message that James gives to Christian people. This is in the New Testament context.

Draw near to God and he will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. Be wretched, mourn, and weep.

And we might say, is he talking to us? So, I can imagine if, on a Sunday morning, you people have prostituted yourself against the Lord. My congregation may not take that very well. In fact, I was doing a presentation at an academic conference talking about prophetic imagery and this whole idea of Israel as an unfaithful prostitute.

And one of the professors there said, why do you think that pastors don't use these kinds of images when they talk to people today? I did not have a good scholarly answer. My pragmatic answer from being a pastor was because they want to keep their jobs. So, the people are not going to be terribly receptive to being charged with prostitution and being convicted and put in prison.

There'll be times when the prophets will compare the city of Jerusalem to Sodom and Gomorrah, which is the ultimate city of wickedness in the Old Testament. And I can imagine they were not terribly receptive to that message. The prophet Amos, speaking to the wealthy women of Samaria, refers to them as the fat cows of Bashan.

And he had courage because I would never say that on a Sunday morning. But how do you convince people of things that they didn't want to hear? So, in Jeremiah chapter two, let's look at the elements of a covenant lawsuit and disputation. What does the prophet do to convince the people that they are guilty as charged? As we've already talked about, one of the things that the prophet does is that there's extensive use of figures of speech and metaphor.

We looked at several of those in our previous session. I don't want to go through all of those again, but let me remind you of some of the ones that we may have just briefly touched on. In chapter two, verse three, Israel is mentioned as God's first fruit.

They belonged to him and were devoted to him. When they were, God protected them and watched over them. No one was allowed to eat or devour God's first fruits.

When they turned away from him, God sent these enemy armies to devour them. Chapter two, verse 24, they are like a wild donkey in heat. They have debased themselves by their idolatry.

Chapter two, verse 34, they are covered with bloodstains. Chapter two, verses 20 and 33, the image of a prostitute that we have already talked about quite a bit. The idea of Israel being an animal in heat is going to be something that carries over into chapter five, verses eight and nine.

The prophet describes the people there, they were well-fed, lusty stallions, each named for his neighbor's wife. Shall I not punish them for these things, declares the

Lord. So, here's God's chosen people being basically described as animals who have lost their sense and are totally consumed by their passions.

Again, one of the images and metaphors that stands out the most for me in Jeremiah chapter two is the one again that's in verse 13. I think it's one of the key verses that I want anyone to remember about Jeremiah. It says, my people have committed two evils.

They have forsaken me, the fountain of living waters. God gives living water. He can satisfy your soul.

He can meet your needs. He can provide the security that you're looking for, but they have hewed out for themselves cisterns that are broken and can hold no water. We touched on this briefly in another session, but from May to September in the land of Israel, there's very little rain.

It's a dry season and they would need cisterns in the ground that would provide water. Sometimes they use natural rock formations, but over time these cisterns would often crack and the water would leak out. So, imagine going months without rain and then losing your water supply.

That's what idolatry is. Trusting in anything other than God to take care of you and to meet your needs, and to help you understand life. It's a cracked cistern.

And in this metaphor of marriage and infidelity and unfaithfulness, the Lord and the prophet in chapter two is even going to compare the alliances and the military coalitions that they've made with other nations. The Lord's going to compare that to adultery as well. And you say, well, that's just politics.

That's just real-world stuff. You make alliances, and you join your army with this army. But in God's perspective, Israel, by joining alliances, was committing adultery with these other nations because they were surrendering away God's exclusive prerogative as their king to be their protector.

And they ended up in the process of making alliances with these other nations, giving loyalty to those nations, to their gods that belong to God exclusively. When Ahaz, earlier in Judah's history, made an alliance with Assyria, it says that he copied the worship practices of the Assyrians. He brought an Assyrian altar into the temple in Jerusalem.

And so, trusting in other nations was as much a form of idolatry as worshiping their gods. And that image and that metaphor creep into the text in chapter two, verse 18. The Lord says to the people, and now, what do you gain by going down to Egypt and drinking the waters of the Nile? Or what do you gain by going to Assyria to drink the

waters of the Euphrates? Now, I'm not sure exactly if anyone would really want to drink river water, but the image here is that trusting in these other nations and political alliances was like drinking the waters of those nations.

As I was thinking about that in light of marriage and in light of the whole issue of idolatry here, I was drawn back to Proverbs chapter five, verse 15, when the father is warning the son about the adulterous woman. He says, drink the waters from your own fountain. And so, in a sense, there's a charge of adultery in this passage because instead of drinking the water that the Lord provided for them in their relationship, they were going to other places.

So, the image of water comes up in chapter two, verse 13. You have forsaken the living waters for cracked cisterns. And then in chapter two, verse 18, like an adulterous man or an adulterous woman, instead of drinking the water provided by your spouse, you have gone and drank other fountains.

So, the prophet as he's using these images, he wants the people to see their betrayal of God. And it's an effective way of communicating that message. There's a second thing that the prophet is going to do, again, to convince the people that they are guilty.

This is a courtroom setting. We have to make our case here. The second thing that the prophet is going to do is that he very effectively uses a series of rhetorical questions.

Walter Brueggemann has talked about the fact that throughout the book of Jeremiah, rhetorical questions are an effective way; again, whereas the prophet is preaching his message, it causes the audience to stop and think. He's not expecting them to verbally answer, but he is expecting them to take this to heart. So, listen to some of the rhetorical questions that are in chapter 2. The Lord, at the beginning of verse 5, says, what wrong did your fathers find with me that they went far from me? I'd like to know, what exactly was it that led your fathers to turn away from me? And as they really think about this, they're going to have to answer, and there's nothing because God was absolutely faithful to us.

Chapter 2 verses 10 and 11. The people of Israel, I'm sure often viewed themselves as superior to the pagan nations around them. We know the true God, but listen to what the prophet does here.

He says, cross over to the coast of Cyprus and see, or send a Kedar and examine with care. See if there's ever been such a thing. You think you're better than these other nations? Go see what they do.

And here's the question. Has a nation ever changed its gods even though they are not gods? I mean, what nation in the ancient Near East would give up their loyalty to their national deity who provided protection and blessing in their geographical area and begin to worship other gods? But he says, but my people have changed their glory for that which does not profit. I mean, no nation that worships idols and false gods would change their gods.

My people who know the only true God have exchanged their glory, the glory of the Lord, for gods that do not profit. Chapter 2, verse 17. All the disaster that's happened to Judah, all the things that they have experienced, the exile of the Northern Kingdom before the time of Jeremiah, have you not brought this upon yourself by forsaking the Lord your God when he led you in the way? All right, God hasn't abandoned you.

You've abandoned God, and you've brought these disastrous situations upon yourself. Chapter 2, verse 28. Where are your gods that you made for yourself? Let them arise if they can save you in your time of trouble.

For as many as your cities are, so are your gods, O Judah. And again, these other nations often would have gods that were associated very specifically with definite cities or geographical areas. Judah sort of bought into that lie and they have as many gods as they have cities.

But where are they? What kind of protection have they provided? Let's do a cost-effective analysis here and see, has worshiping these gods really helped us? Chapter 2 verse 32. Can a virgin forget her ornaments or a bride her attire? And as I read that, I have two daughters that are teenagers or young adults and they love these reality shows, Say Yes to the Dress, where brides give all of this attention. They spend hundreds or thousands of dollars on their bride.

Would a bride on her wedding day forget her wedding dress? Would she show up in blue jeans instead of in this beautiful dress that she's bought? Obviously not. But here's the punchline. Yet my people have forgotten me for days without number.

And so, through all of these rhetorical questions, a good prosecuting attorney keeps coming back and pressing his case again and again in every way. And we know that sometimes they can get pretty aggressive and in-your-face. Jeremiah is getting aggressive, but he wants the people to think and reflect: yeah, we really are guilty.

We have really turned away from the Lord. So, the prophet will use images and metaphors, as well as rhetorical questions.

A third device is Jeremiah, as prosecuting attorney, as he's making his disputation, as he's pressing his case, he's going to use quotations from the people of Judah

themselves. Now in an American courtroom, the testimony of the defendant can be so damning that they are protected from being required to testify against themselves. What the prophet is going to do, however, is that he's going to let the people testify for themselves.

And by their very own words, by their own testimony, they're going to convict themselves. Now, what we look at, though, when we see their testimony, and as we look at the transcripts here, what we're going to see is that they often say some very conflicting things about themselves. Let's look at verse 23.

Here's an audience quotation. How can you say, I am not unclean, I have not gone after the bales? The prophet's charging them. Look, you have back in verse 20, under every green tree, you have bowed down like a whore.

In verse 23, we have not. I am not unclean. I have not gone after the bales.

They are protesting their innocence. All right, let's go down two verses. Verse 25, in the middle of the verse.

But you have said it is hopeless, for I have loved foreigners, and after them, I will go. And here, they portray themselves as helpless nymphomaniacs. They can't help it.

They are addicted to going after foreigners and foreign gods. Verse 23, I haven't gone after the bales. Verse 25, I can't help myself.

We have to do it. Verse 27, two verses later, you say to a tree, you are my father, and to a stone, you gave me birth. Speaking of their worship of idols and the relationship they have there.

But then, finally, in verse 35, we are back to the protest. Yet you say I am innocent, and surely his anger has turned away from me. What do you mean we are guilty? I am innocent.

Why would God be angry at us? And so, the Lord says, behold, I will bring you to judgment for saying, I have not sinned. And so, throughout the book of Jeremiah, one of the things that we are going to see is that the people are going to say all kinds of wrong things to the Lord. We have not sinned.

We will not repent. Chapter 44, the last words of Judah to the prophet Jeremiah, we will go on keeping our vows to the foreign gods. But imagine as you're working your way through the book of Jeremiah, and ultimately in chapters 31 to 33, in the restoration section, they're going to come to the Lord weeping, and they will confess to him, we have sinned.

We have broken the covenant, and God is going to ultimately lead them to that place. But as we're in chapter two, what they are saying is, we don't understand what you're talking about. We're innocent.

We have not chased after the bales, but there's still this conflicting evidence. They say to a tree, you're my father; to a stone, you've given birth to me. We can't help ourselves.

We have to go after other gods. So, there are conflicting quotations from the people themselves that ultimately damn them and convict them. Finally, one of the other devices that the prophet is going to use in this passage to convince Israel of their guilt is that he's going to use wordplay.

And often remember, as the prophets were preaching, they were preaching these messages orally. They were often using poetry in parallel lines. And so, to make the message vivid, they would often use subtle plays of words.

Sometimes, we do this with puns or that kind of thing. And there are actually a couple of word plays in this chapter, in Jeremiah chapter two, that I wanted to call attention to. In chapter two, verse five, it says, and again, we've looked at this verse already, but here's another element.

What wrong did your fathers find in me that they went far away from me? And then the last line says, and they went after worthlessness. The Hebrew word there is hevel, vanity. It's the word in Ecclesiastes, vanity of vanities, futility.

They went after futility in chasing these other gods and they became worthless. They became hevel. So they chased hevel, the wind, cotton candy that evaporates immediately.

And in the process, they became like what they worshiped. They became hevel themselves. Again, another wordplay that basically builds on the same idea is found in chapter two, verse eight.

The priest did not say, where is the Lord? Those who handle the law did not know me. The problem with their spiritual leaders. The shepherds transgressed against me.

And here comes the wordplay. The prophets prophesied by Baal, Baal in the Hebrew. And they went after things that did not profit, Yaal, the verb that's used there.

And the word play between Baal and Yaal, the very close, similar sound there reminds them of what Baal really is. He's a worthless God. They believe he's the storm God.

He's the God who's going to bless us. He's the God who's going to bring us prosperity. No, he's the God who's going to bring you to worthlessness.

And that idea and that word is so important that it's repeated again in chapter two, verse 11. Has a nation changed its gods, even though they are no gods, but my people have changed their glory, kavod, the glory of God for that which does not profit Yaal. And so, the wordplay between Baal and Yaal, they worshiped Hevel, they became Hevel.

I think that's really what the essence of this message is. Idolatry for Israel, for us, is not just wrong. It's not just morally evil.

It's stupid. It's a counter-effective way of living your life because you put your trust, you give your service, you give your love, and you give your devotion to anything other than God. In the end, it's going to end in disappointment.

Now, another example of prophetic wordplay is just to bring in another prophetic book. We have one of these in the Song of the Vineyard in Isaiah 5, and I think this is one of my favorite ones. The Lord compares Israel there to an unfaithful or an unfruitful vineyard.

And it says, the prophet says in this song, he says, the Lord was looking for good grapes, for anuvim, but instead what he got were hard and sour, wild grapes, bet usim, that were worthless. The Lord was looking from his people for mishpat, for justice. And instead, what he got from them was mishpak, which is bloodshed and violence.

The Lord expected that his people, because of all that he invested in them, that they would produce righteousness, zedekah. But instead, what he got from his people was zedekah, which were cries of distress because of the ways that the rich were oppressing the poor. The point made through the word plays very effectively, you can hear it.

The Lord did not receive what he expected from his investment. When the Lord makes an investment in his people, he expects a return. And instead of getting what he produced after all of this time and effort, he's gotten exactly the opposite.

And the point in Jeremiah 2 is very similar. The Lord blessed Israel in every way, brought them into a fruitful land, and gave them everything they could have possibly imagined. What wrong could they ever find with God? And yet what the people have done is that they have taken all of that, and they have turned to worthlessness.

I think this ultimately leads us to what this part of the book of Jeremiah is all about. The message here, the conclusion to the lawsuit, is that number one, Judah

absolutely is guilty. They can protest, they can say all that they want: I'm innocent, I'm not.

They have flagrantly violated the covenant, and they have flagrantly cheated on the Lord as their spouse. Their guilt is beyond doubt. We see that right at the very beginning.

And because of that, throughout the book of Jeremiah, God will judge them. The fierce anger of the Lord will not turn back until he's accomplished what he's said that he's going to do. But what the Lord is also trying to do before this judgment ever comes is that he wants the people to understand the futility of their choices.

And if they will come to understand the emptiness of worshiping idols, if they come to understand that, look, idolatry isn't just wrong. God didn't just tell you not to worship Baal because he wanted to keep you from that. Idolatry is stupid.

It's foolish. Trusting in anything is your ultimate source of security. It's not going to work.

And so, throughout this chapter, the rhetoric of the chapter, the point of the chapter, is that idolatry is futile. Turning away from God and trusting in anything else ultimately is not going to work for you. Chapter two, verse 13, again, they have hewed out broken cisterns that cannot hold water.

In the two halves of Jeremiah chapter two, the first half begins or ends at verse 18. And again, that passage about how they've chased after foreign alliances along with foreign gods. And chapter two, verse 18 says, and now what do you gain by going down to Egypt to drink the waters of the Nile? Or what do you gain by going down to Assyria to drink the waters of the Euphrates? What value is there in this? We conclude with the same idea at the end of the second half of chapter two, where it says this, at the end of the chapter in verse 36: how much you go about changing your way.

You make an alliance one day with these people; you make an alliance the other day with these people. It says you shall be put to shame by Egypt as you were put to shame by Assyria. For from it too, you will come away with your hands on your head, for the Lord has rejected those in whom you trust and you will not prosper by them.

So, within this passage, there's a condemnation of their idolatry and the futility of that. It's bracketed by statements about the futility of their political alliances, where they have joined in with the nations that worship these gods. And the first section of the chapter ends with, why are you going down to Egypt? Why are you going down to Assyria? And then, at the end of the chapter, you're going to be put to shame by Egypt and Assyria.

These nations that you're making alliances with they're actually the ones that are going to execute your punishment. So don't do this. Don't turn away from God.

In chapter two, verse three, again, the idea of futility. The Lord treated Israel as his first fruits. They belonged exclusively to him.

And it says that anyone that devoured those crops, anyone that touched Israel, God would devour them. But the problem was that when they turned away from the Lord, the Lord took his hands off. He no longer protected them as their first fruits.

And as a result of that, they became a slave that was subjugated by their enemies to bondage and oppression. In chapter two, verse seven, the Lord says, I brought you into a plentiful land to enjoy its fruits and its good things. This is a land flowing with milk and honey.

God wanted them to enjoy all the abundance of that. But then the verse says, but when you came in, you defiled my land and made my heritage an abomination. They ruined this good place that God gave to him.

And so, verse 15 says, the lions have roared against him. They have roared loudly. They have made his land a waste.

His cities are in ruins without inhabitants. So, imagine the contrasting picture here. The picture of a land that is filled with milk and honey.

The Lord says, I want you to come in and enjoy cities and houses and vineyards and crops and all these things that you didn't even build or plant, but I'm just going to give them to you as a gift. But by turning to Baal and thinking Baal was going to be their source of security, they've ultimately turned the land into a wasteland. Chapter two, verse two is going to say that they followed the Lord in the wilderness.

Verse six is going to say that the Lord led them in the wilderness. But then, in chapter two, verse 31, the Lord is going to ask them, how is it that I have become a wilderness to Israel or a land of thick darkness? So, in the beginning of the chapter, rehearsing God's covenant faithfulness, the Lord brought them out of the wilderness. The Lord brought them out of a land of deep darkness where they were dependent on manna to be the thing that would feed them.

And yet they turned away from God, and God became a wilderness and a land of deep darkness to them. All throughout this chapter, God is trying to help the people to see the futility of the choices that they've made. Chapter two, verse 27, again, going back to the issue of idolatry, you say to a tree, you are my father, to a stone, you gave me birth.

But where are your gods? How are they going to save you? As a result of this, we come to understand that the Lord did not just bring his people into the courtroom to pronounce sentence on them. The Lord brought the people into the courtroom so that, ultimately, they would change their ways. He gives them the opportunity to repent.

The Lord is still working with his people. And I think that that's often what the Lord does as he brings his people into the courtroom. In Micah chapter six, what does the Lord require of us? Is it all of these lavish sacrifices that we could give the Lord? Is it even the first fruit of our own bodies, could we give that? No, what the Lord requires of you is that you do justice, love mercy, and walk humbly with your God.

And if you will do those things, the Lord will protect you. Isaiah calls the people into the courtroom, Isaiah chapter one. He says, hear, O heaven, listen, O earth.

The Lord has raised and has reared rebellious children. He raised them. He was faithful to them.

They rebelled against him. What should the Lord do to that? What should the Lord do about that? The law said that a rebellious son was to be put to death. But at the end of that judgment speech and at the end of that trial scene, the Lord says, come now and let us reason together.

Though your sins be scarlet, I'm willing to make you white as snow. You're covered with blood. You're guilty.

The judge says I'm going to pass sentence on you. But before I do that, let's meet in my chambers. Let's reason together.

If you will change your ways, I will allow you to live, and I will bless you. The prophet Jeremiah is doing exactly the same thing here. He brings them into the courtroom.

He says, without a doubt, Israel is guilty. They are an unfaithful wife. They have committed adultery against the Lord.

But if they will recognize the futility of their ways and turn back to me, I will spare them from judgment. The courtroom scene in Jeremiah chapter 2 really introduces us to the struggle that the entire book of Jeremiah is about, the plot of the entire book. And when Judah will not repent, when Judah will not admit its guilt, when they will not change their ways, ultimately judgment is going to fall.

But here, at the beginning, there's a chance for them to come into the courtroom to meet with the judge in his chambers and ultimately to change their ways and to be

spared from judgment.

This is Dr. Gary Yates in his course on Jeremiah. This is session 9, Jeremiah 2, The Lord's Dispute with Israel.