

# **Dr. Gary Yates, Jeremiah, Lecture 14, Confessions and Prayers of Jeremiah, Part 1**

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This is Dr. Gary Yates teaching the book of Jeremiah. This is session 14, Jeremiah chapters 11 through 20, Confessions of Jeremiah, The Prayers of Jeremiah, Part 1.

In our next three lessons, we're going to be looking at Jeremiah chapter 11 to 20 and a series of passages that are referred to as the Confessions of Jeremiah.

We'll talk about what those are in just a minute. I wanted to begin just with a personal comment that's not related to the lesson itself as we begin this. As I have studied the prophets, and again, thank you so much for joining us for this study.

I have benefited greatly from the work and the studies of others on the prophets. I just want to use this as a way of passing that on. I want to say a word, a special thanks.

When I was at Dallas Theological Seminary, Dr. Bob Chisholm was my mentor. Many of the things that I'm sharing in the lessons and in these videos are things that I learned from him. I want to make sure that I give credit to that.

I don't always know what I'm talking about, but I steal from people that do. So I just want to pass that word along. Now we're going to move into a section of the book of Jeremiah that has just deep personal significance to me because we're looking more at the person of Jeremiah and, in many ways, what ministry is like, what a relationship with God looks like in the context of ministry.

One of the things that I appreciate about the Old Testament and why I believe that we need the Old Testament is that in the stories of God dealing with people in the Old Testament or in the interaction of God and people in the Psalms or in prayers like we're going to be looking at in Jeremiah's life, the principles of the New Testament that are taught to us sometimes in a very didactic way are fleshed out in real life experiences. The reality of God as a person and how he relates to people is reflected and fleshed out for us in the Old Testament in ways that, if we ignore, we miss a huge part of how God reveals himself. The confessions of Jeremiah are not really confessions, the term that's used for these passages, but really what they are prayers that Jeremiah offers to God.

They are prayers that actually though are Jeremiah's words to God, but they become God's words to us as well. That's the power of inspiration. And these prayers are in fact laments like we have in the Psalms where Jeremiah is pouring out his heart to

God over the pain, the difficulty that's in ministry, the hardships in his life, and the opposition and the persecution that he's felt.

J. Andrew Dearman has a great statement about the confessions, and I wanted to read that as the beginning point. He says that one of the marvelous gifts of Jeremiah's book is the humanness of his prayers when wearied and depressed by the struggle with rejection and persecution. Zeal for the path of discipleship and in the case of Jeremiah, zeal to carry out his prophetic commission is no guarantee of smooth sailing in life.

God will hear the prayers of his disciples just as he heard Jeremiah's prayers and his cries to God. So, if you've ever been wearied by rejection, depressed, or felt opposition and persecution in ministry, and I think all of us have, these are prayers that you are going to resonate with. These prayers are unique among the prophets in some sense because Jeremiah, more than any book, is going to give us insight into the struggles that Jeremiah had in fulfilling the commission and the calling that God had given to him.

These prayers reflect what we could describe as raw emotion. There are places when I read them, I wonder, is this something that you really can say to God? Could I say this to God myself and not be zapped by a lightning bolt? Does God allow you to say this? These prayers and these confessions, as they're referred to, are found in six different passages. They're found in chapter 11, verses 18 to 23; chapter 12, verses 1 to 6; chapter 15, verses 10 to 21; chapter 17, verses 14 to 18; chapter 18, verses 19 to 23; and chapter 20, verses 7 to 18.

So, as we look at Jeremiah 11 to 20, these prayers weave themselves throughout the messages and the oracles that are there. They're very important to this part of the book of Jeremiah. Now to look at these and ask the question, are these really things that you can say to God? I want to read a couple of them and give us a sampling of what these are like.

First of all, in Jeremiah chapter 15, I'm going to read the lament that is expressed there. We're going to read verses 10 to 18 of that lament. Jeremiah says woe is me, my mother, that you bore me, a man of strife and contention to the whole land.

I have not lent, nor have I borrowed, yet all of them curse me. So, he says, woe is me. This is not exactly rejoicing the Lord always.

And again, I say rejoice. Can you say this to God? I am the source of contention in the whole land. I've simply tried to be faithful to God, and I've experienced all kinds of abuse and hardship because of that.

The Lord said, have I not set you free for their good? Have I not pleaded for you before the enemy in the time of trouble and in the time of distress? Can one break iron from the north and bronze? The Lord says to the people of Israel, your wealth and your treasures, and I will give a spoil without price for all of your sins throughout all of your territory. I will make you serve your enemies in a land that you do not know. For in my anger, a fire is kindled that shall burn forever.

And that message about God's fire that's going to kindle and burn forever is the message that has gotten Jeremiah into so much trouble. Jeremiah says in verse 15, O Lord, you know, remember me and visit me and take vengeance for me on my persecutors. In your forbearance, take me not away.

Know that for your sake, I bear reproach. Your words were found, and I ate them, and your words became to me a joy and the delight of my heart. For I am called by your name, O Lord God of hosts.

I did not sit in the company of revelers, nor did I rejoice. I sat alone because your hand was upon me, for you had filled me with indignation. Jeremiah says, look, Lord, I want to remind you of some things.

The difficulties that I'm experiencing are because I delighted in your words. I ingested them. I took them into my soul.

They became a part of me. They became a part of my living expression. I have not sat in the company of the partygoers.

I've been faithful to you, God. And in the midst of that, I've suffered incredible opposition and persecution. Why, Lord? Jeremiah chapter 15, verse 18, and this may be one of the most shocking statements in all of the book.

Jeremiah says, why is my pain unceasing? Is my wound incurable, refusing to be healed? And again, this doesn't sound like rejoicing the Lord always. Again, I say rejoice. Then Jeremiah asked a question.

Will you be to me like a deceitful brook, like waters that fail? And again, we're at that place. Can you really say that to God? And Jeremiah here is picturing one of the wadis in Judah that, in a storm, could quickly fill with water. But at other times, when the weather became hot and dry, that water would be completely missing.

And he says, God, you've been like one of those wadis out in the desert during the hot summer months. There's no water there. That image and that metaphor is especially significant to me when I think back to Jeremiah chapter 2, verse 13.

My people have abandoned the source of living water and hewed out for themselves broken cisterns. Jeremiah, in that passage, says Judah is dry and parched and thirsty because the gods that they have trusted in are like broken cisterns and the life and joy and blessing and security and significance that they thought those gods were going to provide for them. There's no water there.

The Lord is the source of living water. Well, in this passage, the Lord himself has become; he's not a broken cistern, but he's a deceitful brook, and there's no water there. And Jeremiah says, will you be like the waters that fail? This is a very good representative example of the types of things that we see in Jeremiah's laments.

Another one is found in chapter 18. This is a shorter one. So I want to read this one.

Give us another sampling of this. Listen to the prayer that Jeremiah prays in chapter 18, verses 19 to 23. Hear me, O Lord, and listen to the voice of my adversaries.

Should good be repaid with evil, yet they have dug a pit for my life. Remember how I stood before you to speak good for them, to turn away your wrath from them. Lord, again, I'm, I'm simply doing what God has told me to do.

I've tried to warn them so that they might shun and turn away from their sin. Therefore, now here's where the prayer gets difficult in light of the fact that they have not listened. Therefore, deliver up their children to famine.

Give them over to the power of the sword. Let their wives become childless and widowed. May their men meet death by pestilence.

Their youths be struck down by swords in battle. May a cry be heard from their houses when you bring the plunderer suddenly upon them. For they have dug a pit to take me and laid snares for my feet.

Yet, O Lord, know all their plotting to kill me. Forgive not their iniquity. Do not blot out their sin from your sight.

Let them be overthrown before you. Deal with them in the time of your anger." And it's like Lord, bring your wrath and vengeance. And Lord, don't just judge them. Judge their families.

And may their children experience this, and may their families experience the hardships that come about as the consequences of their sin. What happened to pray for those who hate you and love them, love your enemies, and be like your Father in heaven? What about the Lord, who doesn't take delight in the death of the wicked? That's, that's an Old Testament passage. Are, are these the kinds of prayers that a righteous person could pray? And, uh, as we, uh, as we work through the Psalm

sometime, or as we work through Jeremiah, uh, with my students sometimes, are, uh, are, are these prayers, uh, are they good prayers or bad prayers? Was Jeremiah in the will of God, or was Jeremiah outside the will of God when he's praying these kinds of things about his enemies? Uh, I, as we're working through these and just trying to provide a basic framework for understanding them in this lesson, I'm going to try to make the argument that I believe that these are very much righteous prayers.

Uh, I think in one sense, they reflect at the very beginning, the absolute, uh, freedom that we have in prayer, uh, with access that's been given to us by Christ, we have absolute freedom to come to God and to be honest with him. Psalm 62:8 says that you are to pour out your heart to God. That's, that's what prayer is.

And the image that's used there in Psalm 68, I imagine a container filled with water, someone emptying that out, perhaps as a drink offering to the Lord. We can do the same things that are there in our, with, with, with what's in our hearts. We can bring them to God and pour them out to him. And that doesn't just mean our prayers and praises and happy thoughts.

It also means sometimes, uh, our negative thoughts, our anger, those kinds of things. Absolute honesty is in our prayers. Pour out your heart before God.

Uh, I think about that verse, and I think about the men who went behind enemy lines to get David water. And when David heard what they had done, he poured that water out on the ground, and he says, if I were to drink that, that would be like drinking blood. We can empty the contents of our hearts before God.

And God allows us to come there with the freedom to express that. I think we need these prayers. I think we need to spend time in these prayers, uh, so that we understand that rejoicing in the Lord always is not just the idea of being a happy Christian, uh, or that the Christian life is simply a facade.

When we put on this plastic image, whether we feel like it or not, we are going to rejoice in the Lord. We're going to put a smile on our faces. We're going to be happy.

I don't think that's really what rejoicing in the Lord is about. Someone has said, we know very well how to worship in the major keys. The Old Testament, the Psalms, Jeremiah's prayers in many ways, give us the freedom to also worship God in the minor keys.

And as we look at, uh, contemporary worship, I think much of it, much of it is based on the major keys. Worship is about joy. It's about celebration.

Many times, we go to church and it sounds like a pep rally. Rejoice in the Lord, be happy, be joyful. Yeah, there's a, there's a great joy that the Lord, that the Lord gives us to, uh, that the Lord gives to us.

But we need to learn to worship in the minor keys as well as, uh, the minor keys as well as the major ones. How do we worship God after a time of personal or community wide or even national disaster? And one of the closest experiences that I've ever had to this is I remember a church meeting and a prayer meeting that we had in our community immediately after 9-11. Uh, it was not a time to simply sing praise songs.

It was a time to come to God and grieve over thousands of people who had lost their lives and what had happened to our nation. And that's the emotion that's going on in Jeremiah's life as he deals with the struggles and difficulties of ministry. Jeremiah in the Old Testament, the Psalms particularly remind us we have the freedom to come to God in that way.

Federico Villanueva tells this story. He says, uh, in a ministry conference in the Philippines, in his home country, there was a fire in a hotel. There were 70 people who died in the fire.

A hundred people were injured. Um, and what made that especially tragic for the church is that most of the guests at the hotel at that time were pastors and Christian workers who were at a conference being sponsored by an American evangelical group, teaching them and training them how to do ministry. Uh, Federico said that a, a friend of his died.

And, uh, this man was a man who loved God. He was involved in ministry. He had a wife and three moms and three small children.

And so, you can imagine the devastation that the people experienced. And it was God's people that were believers. It was Christians who had gone through that.

One of the pastors who came down and observed what had happened in the fire and the responses of the family members, um, he commented to Federico and he criticized them in a way. And he said the people who lost loved ones here are acting like they're not Christians. They're weeping and agonizing like they have no God.

Federico said that he came to an understanding that in the Old Testament, as we look at the laments of the Psalms or we look at the laments of Jeremiah, we have the freedom to cry to God. That, that's the that's the that's the reaction we're supposed to have as we go through these types of tragedies and disasters. I remember one time in, just in a personal example of, uh, interacting with a woman at a hospital after she had lost her husband.

A friend of mine was there who was a man in our church. She had just lost her husband. She was a believer.

She knew the Lord. Her husband was a believer who knew the Lord. And I remember my friend saying to her, uh, it's a great thing as believers that we know the Lord and you don't have to grieve, uh, as a believer.

That was absolutely the wrong thing to say. We have this hope as believers. It was, it was the, it was the truth in some respect, but it was the wrong time to say that.

She needed to be able to grieve. Uh, in my own life, I go back, uh, to April 2nd, 1978. I was 17 years old.

I came to church one Sunday night, and before the service started, I learned that my best friend in the youth group, had been killed in a motorcycle accident. And, there was a group of us that went outside, and we were just sitting there, and we weren't verbalizing. It was hard to talk, but I can remember sitting in the dark, and the sky was filled with stars, and I'm at church, and we've just lost our friend.

And I remember the verse, the skies declare your handiwork and all these stars that were there. But what was in my mind was God. Instead of the stars, why not show your face? And why not explain to us why this happened? And, uh, in the aftermath of all of that later, I realized that may not have been the most brilliant theological moment in my life. Uh, but there were times when I felt guilty that I'd asked God those kinds of questions.

We need the laments. We need the confessions of Jeremiah because they give us the freedom to ask God those kinds of questions. But we want to make sure that we do it in a way that's honoring to God as well.

I think Jeremiah becomes a model for us. So, the question that my students often ask is, is this how we're supposed to pray? Is this a model of prayer? And I believe that it is. I'm going to give us some reasons why, as we put this in the context of a theology of prayer in the Old Testament and the New Testament as well.

First of all, let me remind you one thing. In the Old Testament, we have a long history of people who argue with God. I know that sounds theologically off-key, but there's a long history of people arguing with God.

One of my favorite examples is Abraham in Genesis chapter 18. God announces to him, I'm going to destroy the city of Sodom. The Lord announces his intentions, and Abraham begins to pray.

And Abraham begins to argue with God. Lord, would you destroy the righteous along with the wicked? Would you save the city if there were 50 righteous people there? And the Lord doesn't tell Abraham, Abraham, I've told you what I'm going to do. Stop arguing with me.

God agrees to his request. Abraham continues to negotiate, and he works it down to 45. The numbers go to 40, 30, or 20, finally down to 10. We wonder what if Abraham had continued to negotiate, but there's a long history of people arguing with God.

Moses, when the Lord says, uh, after the golden calf or after the people have listened to the report of the spies, stand back, Moses, I'm going to destroy these people and start over with you. And in some ways, that might've seemed like an attractive thing, but Moses says, God, what about the Egyptians? They're going to hear that you destroyed your people. Lord, what are you doing here? And it says, as a result of Moses's prayer, that God changed his mind.

Moses effectively argued with God. The prophet Habakkuk, who is a contemporary of Jeremiah, and he's dealing with the Babylonian crisis. And, you know, we, we have to understand that the Babylonian crisis in many ways turned Israel's theology upside down.

And the book of Habakkuk is very similar to Jeremiah in the sense that this small, tiny prophetic book is basically an argument between God and the prophet. The prophet Habakkuk comes to God at the beginning of the book, and he expresses a statement to God. He says, Lord, have you noticed the wickedness that's in the land? Lord, if you haven't, or in case you haven't noticed, I have.

And Lord, how long until you do something about the wickedness in the land? It's tough being a righteous person here. The Lord comes back to Habakkuk with an answer, and he says, Habakkuk, I am going to do something about that. I'm sending the Babylonians to judge the wickedness and the sinfulness of my people.

So, there's, there's stage one of the argument. Habakkuk thinks about God's response and there's part of that, that's, that's troubling to him as well. Okay, Lord, if that's, I, let me give you part two here.

How can you use the Babylonians to judge us when the Babylonians are worse than we are? Habakkuk and God comes back to Habakkuk and says, Habakkuk, after I have judged my people, I am going to judge Babylon, and I will bring down my judgment on them because they are a city that is built on blood. In the midst of that discussion, the Lord never says to Habakkuk, Habakkuk, look, I've told you what I'm going to do. Be quiet.



Stop. Don't ask, don't ask these questions. The Lord brings him through this process and the purpose of this was not Habakkuk expressing his lack of faith in God.

It actually was Habakkuk wrestling through his faith in God. And he comes to the point at the end of the chapter where we have one of the most beautiful expressions of faith in all the Bible. Lord, even if you take away everything, there are no animals in the stalls, there are no crops in the fields, there are no grapes in the vines, there are no olives on the trees.

I'll trust you. If he had not been able to argue with God and work through this, Habakkuk may have never come to that point. So, there's a long history of arguing with God.

I'm a huge baseball fan. I've already mentioned that a couple of times, and I apologize for that. But one of the things that I love about baseball is that baseball gives coaches and managers the opportunity to argue with the officials in ways that are not true in other sports.

And you can come out in baseball and you can make your case to the umpire. Now, I'm really disappointed. As a little league coach, I never got to do that because my son would say, look, Dad, you're embarrassing me.

Please don't do this. But that's one of the rights of a coach or a manager in baseball is to come out and argue with the umpire. However, there are parameters and guidelines for how to properly argue.

If you turn your hat backward, get in the umpire's face, spit tobacco juice in his face, question his integrity, or call him certain names, you've stepped over the line. And I believe in the Bible there is a proper way as we come to God in faith, as we are really trying to know God and God's will and God's way. God gives us the freedom to argue with him. Now, there's a difference between arguments when we are questioning to know and to understand and when we're simply complaining that we don't like our circumstances.

In Israel, during the wilderness, they would come to God and they would complain, they would argue, they would question. And when they taunted, we don't have food, we don't have water, Moses, what are you going to do about this? At times, God was angry and judged them because they were not asking the umpire for clarification. They were coming to the umpire and questioning his integrity.

So, there's a right way and a wrong way, but I believe theologically, God gives us the right to argue with him. In the Psalms, one of the things that I notice is that the psalmist does not simply ask God for certain things. The psalmist will actually give God the reasons and the motivations for why God should answer.

Lord, save me from death, or I will no longer be able to sing your praises. God, if you don't save me, there's going to be one less person at choir practice next week. And they are actually not just asking God to do something, they're giving God the reasons and the motivations why they believe God should do that.

Jeremiah is doing the same thing with that. Lord, here's what I think you should do about this. Here are the reasons.

This situation where I'm suffering at the hands of my enemies, it's unjust. Do something about this. And Jeremiah has the right and the freedom to do that.

God also has the right to say, I understand your reasons, but in my sovereignty, I have better reasons for what I'm doing, even if I don't explain them to you. And ultimately, we come to a place where we accept God's answer, and we grow, and we learn through that in the same way that Habakkuk did. But the process of faith, the process of learning, it's not just doubting God, but it's coming to a place where we are trying to understand.

So, there's a long history in the Old Testament of people arguing with God. There is also in the Old Testament a long history of people bringing negative emotions to God. Many people don't understand this, but the predominant genre in the Psalms, which is the hymn book of ancient Israel, the predominant genre of the Psalms is lament.

As many as one-third of the Psalms are characterized as laments, and laments are exactly what Jeremiah is doing here. When I read these passages from Jeremiah, I'm reminded very much of similar types of prayers, expressions, imagery, and things said to God that are in those laments that are found in the Psalms. In Psalm chapter 6, verses 6-8, the psalmist says, I am weary with my moaning.

Every night, I flood my bed with my tears. I drench my couch with my weeping. My eye wastes away because of my grief.

It grows weak because of all of my foes. This is not just rejoicing the Lord always and being happy and putting on this facade. That's not always where we are at in life.

And so, there's this long history of bringing these negative emotions to God. And in the Psalms and in Jeremiah's prayers, one of the things that impresses me is that often they go to really extreme lengths to help God to understand what they're going through. And some of us, why do we need to do that? God's omniscient.

I thought he knew what I was going through. Why do I need to give him a detailed description of my troubles? Often, they take real pains in a poetic way to say, God,

look, I want you to really understand. I'm going to paint a picture for you of what I'm going through.

And listen to the way that the psalmist in Psalm 22 describes the opposition of his enemies. We know that, ultimately, this is a prayer that Jesus prays on the cross, but it's also a prayer that describes David's hardship and the enemies and the opposition he's experiencing. And he says in verse 12, In a sense, that's what Jeremiah is doing.

And the psalmist is not just describing this to God, he uses very powerful, vivid images to do that. And again, I believe the reason for this is that this is part of the healing process. Being able to take those negative emotions, the pain that's there, and there's healing that comes out of this as we dialogue with God.

What we're beginning to understand about prayer is that we talk about this long history of arguing with God and this long history of people bringing their negative emotions to God. Prayer is not about putting a dollar in the Coke machine and getting back something. Prayer is about a relationship where we come to God, and we pour out our hearts to Him, and we bring every aspect of our personality to God.

We're absolutely honest with Him, we revere Him, we respect Him, we petition Him, but we also grow to know Him through that process. And so, there's a long history of arguing with God. There's a long history of people bringing negative emotions to God. Most of the Psalms and the laments they're going to turn to praise at some point, but we even have Psalms 88, where there is no word of praise.

There's nothing there but darkness, gloom, depression, and, to be honest, people are there sometimes in life. And we're going to minister to people that are there in that place in life. They need to know these psalms.

Ministry, for us, is often going to be a terribly lonely occupation. We need to know these psalms, because there's healing that comes from being able to come to God in this way. Alright, so there is a long history of arguing with God; Jeremiah's doing that.

There is a long history of bringing negative emotions to God; Jeremiah's doing that. There is also a long history of people bringing accusatory language toward God. Alright, now I've already said that we can argue with God, and that sounds kind of theologically dangerous.

Now, I'm actually going to suggest that again, if we do this in a worshipful way, understanding God as holiness, as greatness, as love, as mercy, we can come to God with accusatory language. In fact, Craig Broyle says that in the Psalms, there are more than 60 of them that have some type of accusatory language toward God. And we've already seen Jeremiah saying, God, you're like a deceptive brook.

The people have followed broken cisterns by worshiping false gods, but in many ways, God hasn't been much more helpful to me. That's a pretty powerful accusation. Broyle's notes that sometimes the accusatory language toward God takes the form of charging God with passive neglect.

Psalm 13: how long, Lord? Are you going to ignore my prayers forever? Where are you? But at other times, there's going to be accusatory language toward God where the psalmist, really in a more in-your-face way, is going to say, God has actively brought this trouble into my life. Sometimes, we go through adversity, and we say, God allowed this to happen. And there's theological validity in doing that.

The psalmist, many times, though, is not going to look at the secondary agent that's bringing the trouble. God, you did this to me. I think one of the most powerful examples of this in the Psalms is found when the people of God come to the Lord in Psalm 44, and they are going to accuse God of not keeping his covenant.

They understood that there was the possibility that if they obeyed God, they would be blessed. If they disobeyed, they would be punished. So, one of the punishments that God would bring on them was military defeat.

But what's going on in Psalm 44 is that it appears that the people have been faithful to God. This is not a time of apostasy. And in spite of that, they have experienced some form of military defeat.

Now, we could argue, well, maybe they're just defending themselves. But it seems like they're coming to God with an honest plea here. And what they say in Psalm 44, in verse 8, In God we have boasted continually, and we will give thanks to your name forever.

But you have rejected us and disgraced us and have not gone out with our armies. You have made us turn back from the foe, and those who hate us have gotten spoiled. You have made us like sheep for slaughter, and you have scattered us among the nations.

You have sold our people for a trifle. You have made us the taunt of our neighbors. You have made us a byword among the nations.

And in verse 17, all of this has come upon us, though we have not forgotten you, and we have not been false to the covenant. It's not just, well, look at what the enemy did here, Lord. Do something about this.

They are directly accusing God of being the one who is responsible for their problems. And the imagery here, we have the anti-Psalm 23. In times of joy and

blessing and even in trouble, there were places where the psalmist could reflect and say, The Lord is my shepherd, and I shall not want, and he'll protect me.

But in this passage, we are like sheep for the slaughter. Where's the Lord is my shepherd? We're at the butcher's house now. So that's the degree of accusatory language that people can bring toward God.

Job brings accusatory language toward God. And it says at the beginning of Job that Job did not curse God. But as you read it, sometimes it looks like he got pretty close.

And I have to wonder, as I'm reading Jeremiah 15, 18, and Jeremiah says, Lord, you are to me as a deceptive brook. Jeremiah has gotten pretty close to the edge. But it's a reminder of how we can come to God and how we can approach God.

Listen to what Job says in Job 13:23-28. How many are my iniquities and my sins? Make me know my transgression and my sin. Lord, if all this stuff that's happened in my life is the result of some kind of sin or something that I've done, tell me what I did, and I'll change.

Why do you hide your face and count me as your enemy? Will you frighten a driven leaf and pursue dry chaff? For you write bitter things against me and make me inherit the iniquities of my youth. You put my feet in the stocks, watch over all of my paths, and set a limit for the soles of my feet. Man, waste away like a rotten thing, like a garment that is moth-eaten.

We know from chapters 1 and 2 in Job that it's really Satan who's done these things. Job says, God, you did it to me. And I think one of the things that's a reality about God is that sometimes we need to just come to the terrifying reality that God can do anything that he wants to us.

Sometimes, that's a scary thought. God is holy and God is righteous, but that's a scary thought. Job deals with this in chapter 16, verse 11.

God gives me up to the ungodly and casts me into the hand of the wicked. I was at ease, and he broke me apart. He seized me by the neck and dashed me to pieces.

He set me up as his target. His archers surround me. He slashes open my kidneys and does not spare.

He pours out my gall on the ground. He breaks me with breach upon breach, and he runs upon me like a warrior. God's like a warrior, and he's declared war on me.

What did I do? So, in light of this tradition of prayer in the Old Testament, where these prayers are not just the words of man to God, they're the words of God to us,

we receive and understand that there's a model of prayer here that we can come to God and approach him in this way. There's a long history of arguing with God. There's a long history of expressing negative emotions to God.

There's a long history beyond that of even people coming to God, and again, in a worshipful and respectful way, of accusing God of neglecting them or abandoning them. Now in light of that, and I know we've spent some time flipping around, turning around to different scriptures, let's go back and let's listen to Jeremiah 15:18 once again. Why is my pain unceasing? Why is my wound incurable, refusing to be healed? Do you hear the questions there? He's arguing with God.

Do you hear the negative emotions there? My pain is unceasing. My wound is incurable, refusing to be healed. And then finally, again, that comment, will you be to me like a deceitful brook, like waters that fail? There's accusatory language toward God.

And so if Jeremiah's prayers are not righteous prayers, then there is a long tradition of prayer in the Old Testament that we're going to have to deal with as well. Now, I'd like to look at another one of Jeremiah's statements about the Lord in the confession that's found in Jeremiah chapter 20. And again, it's one of those places where we might look at the text and ask the question, can you talk to God like this? And Jeremiah begins this confession in chapter 20, verse 7. O Lord, you have deceived me.

Throughout the rest of the book, the Lord is going to talk about the deceptive message of the false prophets or the deceptive ways that Israel has trusted in Baal and Baal has turned out to be hell for them. But, O Lord, you have deceived me, and I was deceived. The word that is used here for deceive me is the Hebrew verb *patah*.

In preparing for this lesson, I began to look at some of the different contexts where the verb *patah* is used and what does this word mean? In Exodus chapter 22, verse 6, it's the word that's used to describe a man who seduces a virgin and then is required to marry her. The Lord has deceived me.

In Deuteronomy chapter 16, verse 11, it is a verb that is used to talk about people who are deceived in their worship of other gods. In the book of Judges, in chapter 14, it's the word that the Philistines use talking to Samson's wife, and they say, entice him to tell us what we want to know. In 1 Kings chapter 22, it's the word that's used in the story where the Lord is standing in the midst of the divine council, and he says to his messengers, who will go and *patah*, entice Ahab and convince him to go into battle so that I can put him to death? Now, we understand why God would want to entice to seduce, and to deceive Ahab.

He was the worst king that Israel had. The prophet says, Lord, you have deceived me. And we certainly can't take every aspect of a verb that's found in whatever context and plug all of them into this one passage.

But the idea of seduction of a virgin, the enticing of a husband, the deception of a wicked man, there's some strong accusatory language directed toward God. And then Jeremiah says, you are stronger than I, and you have prevailed. I didn't have a choice.

This is not a fair fight. And that's one of the recurring things that Job is going to say is, Lord, I just want to have a man-to-man meeting with you. And God is, in a sense, going to come back to him and say, we're one man short.

And Jeremiah already realizes that. You're stronger than I am. You have prevailed over me.

I have become a laughingstock all day. Everyone mocks me for whenever I speak or I cry out, and I shout violence and destruction. The word of the Lord has become for me a reproach and a derision all day long.

But I can't stop. I have to pronounce God's word because God has overwhelmed me. I come away from this thinking that to talk to God in this way, you have to know him very, very well.

This is not like talking to your aunt in Cleveland. You visit her once a year, and you're afraid to sit on her sofa. This is talking to someone with whom you have a deep personal relationship.

So I believe that instead of these being prayers where, we need to sit down with Jeremiah and say, you know, Jeremiah, you need some therapy. Or you need some prayer theology. You need to take a class on prayer at our church.

I think, in a sense, we need to learn to take a class from Jeremiah and to learn what real prayer, real struggle, and real interaction with God look like. I want to conclude this lesson and again place Jeremiah's prayers within the context of Old Testament prayer. The things that Jeremiah is going to pray in these prayers resonate with prayers that we find that are almost verbatim or at least the same concepts and ideas that are found in other Old Testament prayers.

For example, in Jeremiah chapter 15 verse 10, Jeremiah says, Woe is me, my mother, that you bore me. In the final confession in chapter 20, the last words in chapter 20 verses 14 to 18, Jeremiah curses the day of his birth. Well, in Job chapter 3 verse 3, Job does not curse God but he does curse the day of his birth and he says, I wish that I had never been born.

In Jeremiah chapter 12, verse 3, Jeremiah says this: Lord, you know me, you see me, and you test my heart towards you. And then he speaks about his enemies. Pull them out like sheep for the slaughter and set them apart for the day of slaughter.

He's no longer praying that God will forgive them. They have rejected the word of God. They have rejected God's offer, and the prophet is simply praying here that God destroy them and give them what they deserve.

In a sense, appealing to God's covenant, God said that people are judged and dealt with by God on the basis of their actions, and Jeremiah is saying, Give them an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth. Exactly what you've laid out in your law. We say, wow, praying for the judgment of his enemies and for them to be slaughtered.

Is that biblical? Well, in Psalm 58 verse 10, the righteous will be glad when they bathe their feet in the blood of the wicked. That's a disturbing passage. Psalm 58, Lord, tear out the teeth of my enemies and their fangs.

Let them melt away like water and like a slug on the sidewalk. Let them just simply vanish and be done away with. Not just, Lord, put them to death, but make it painful when you do that.

Psalm 137, O daughter of Babylon doomed to destruction, blessed will be he who takes your infants and dashes them against the rocks. Jeremiah is praying for God's righteous judgment. In a sense, using the curse language of the Old Testament and the context of the Holy, we understand all of those things.

But ultimately there is a cry for God's justice in an unjust world, and that's a righteous cry. Some have argued, well, this type of imprecation, that's Old Testament, it's not New Testament. But remember what the New Testament tells us about the enemies of the gospel.

Paul says, if anyone preaches to you any other gospel than that which I have preached to you, let him be accursed, let him be damned. Revelation chapter 6, verses 10 and 11, the saints in heaven that have been martyred and put to death, and they're in heaven, and they're free of their sin nature, and they're no longer asking for vengeance in this sort of human vengeful kind of way, but they're under the throne of God in heaven saying, how long, Lord, until you avenge our death and bring judgment on those who have done this to us. When Jeremiah is praying for the destruction of his enemies, he is praying for covenant rebels who have rejected God and the message of the gospel.

And the New Testament, in many ways, says the same thing about the enemies of the gospel. Paul says in 2 Timothy chapter 4 verse 14, Alexander the coppersmith has



done me much harm, the Lord will repay him for what he's done. So yeah, there is a tradition where we pray, Lord, bring this person to faith.

We realize that you're not willing that any perish, but that all should come to repentance. But there is also a proper place for praying for God's justice on those who are enemies of the gospel. We saw Jeremiah chapter 18 verse 21, Therefore deliver up their children to famine, give them over to the power of the sword, let their wives become childless and widow.

May their men meet death by pestilence. In Psalm 109, there is a similar prayer, maybe the harshest imprecation of all, where the judgment falls on the family of the evildoer. And again, we look at this and this is overwhelming.

But this is part of the heart and the cry for justice. Jeremiah chapter 12, verse 11, and this is the last one that we'll mention here. Jeremiah says to the Lord, Righteous are you, O Lord.

He recognizes God's character. Righteous are you, O Lord, when I complain to you, yet I would plead my case before you. Why does the way of the wicked prosper? And why do all who are treacherous thrive? Jeremiah says, look, I have a problem.

As I look at life, I have been absolutely faithful to God, and my life has turned out miserably. What about all those people who are getting wealthy, who are doing their thing, and they're not experiencing this? God, where is your justice? And before we would think, you know, I'm not sure that you can talk that way to God, let me remind you of some other prayers. The prayer of Asaph in Psalm 73.

Asaph comes to God just in an honest way. Lord, I know that you're good to those who are in Israel, but my feet had almost slipped when I started to think about the prosperity of the wicked. They don't go through the pains and the pangs that righteous people do.

Why? And finally, Asaph works through that and understands their ultimate destiny in the end, but God does not rebuke him for asking the question. And closing with our prime example here of Job, Job's friends said, Look, God is punishing you for your sin. God is a just God who blesses the righteous and rewards the righteous and he punishes the wicked.

In many ways, their theology is very close to the book of Proverbs. And Job is going to say, I agree with your theology. I believe in your theology.

I believe in the idea that God blesses the righteous and punishes the wicked. But what you have to understand is your theology is not enough. And Jeremiah or Job will say in chapter 21, verse 7, Why do the wicked live on? Why do they reach old age

and grow mighty in power? Their offspring are established in their presence, and their descendants are before their eyes.

Their houses are safe from fear and no rod of God is upon them. Why? So, all of these questions, all of these prayers, all of these petitions that God hears from Jeremiah are things that God hears from other righteous people throughout the Old Testament. These confessions are a model of what real prayer is about.

And I've saved my last finishing point, my final attempt to try to convince you about this. These are not just the prayers of the Psalms. These are not just the prayers of Job.

These are not just the prayers of Jeremiah. These are the prayers of Jesus Christ himself. On the cross, Psalm 22, My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Hebrews chapter 5, verse 7, says Jesus was saved by God because he cried out to him with loud cries.

I believe that passage is talking about the laments in the Psalms. Worship is not just about praise, joy, happiness, and blessing; the Lord is my shepherd. Prayer is also, at times, being honest with God.

And Jeremiah gives us a great model in these confessions of what honest and true prayer really looks like.

This is Dr. Gary Yates teaching the book of Jeremiah. This is session 14, Jeremiah chapters 11 through 20, Confessions of Jeremiah, The Prayers of Jeremiah, Part 1.