

Dr. Gary Yates, Jeremiah, Lecture 16, Jeremiah 11-20, Confessions, Part 3, The Pathos of the People of God and Jeremiah

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This is Dr. Gary Yates teaching the book of Jeremiah. This is session 16, Jeremiah 11-20, Jeremiah's Confessions, Part 3, The Pathos of the People of God and Jeremiah.

In this session, we're taking a final look at Jeremiah's confessions that are scattered and spread throughout Jeremiah chapters 11 to 20.

In the first section where we looked at the confessions, we saw them and how they stand within the prayer and the worship tradition of the Old Testament. Jeremiah's prayers represent the same kinds of righteous prayers that we see other people in the Old Testament presenting. In our last session, we talked about how the confessions of Jeremiah are not just the cries of a prophet but, in a sense, are an expression of revelation about God's character as God is responding to the destruction of his people and the judgment that he's bringing upon them.

The confessions reflect both God's anger and God's grief. We saw how those two emotions mingle with each other. Jeremiah, in a sense, has become the word of God, not just by the things that he says when he proclaims, thus says the Lord.

Jeremiah has become the word of God by his very life and his very person. Andrew Sheed talks about this in his book, *A Mouthful of Fire*, one of my favorite books on the theology of the book of Jeremiah. On page 138 of that book, Sheed makes this statement, In the life of Jeremiah, God's word, his message is made concrete and immediate to those who hear and see it.

And insofar as God conveys himself, his character, his will, his inmost thoughts, by his word, we might say that in the life of his prophet, God makes himself present to his people. It is the word of God, not Jeremiah that we hear when Jeremiah speaks. And it is the word of God, not Jeremiah, that we see when Jeremiah acts.

Jeremiah's life itself is one great act of divine self-communication. So, in a sense, Jeremiah, as an expression of God's word, prefigures Jesus as the incarnate word of God, who, in a full way, exegetes and explains for us who God is. A few pages later, on page 141, Sheed also says this: Were Jeremiah simply to stand over against the people and address them from the divine counsel as God's emissary, his message could be perfectly understood.

However, it turns out that this cannot do justice to the word of God in its particularity. This is because God does not stop loving his people in order to judge them, but suffers with their suffering through the suffering of Jeremiah. We saw that in the last lesson.

Despite Jeremiah's and Judah's relegation to the status of one of the nations, God never stops addressing her as bride and daughter. By refusing to withhold his love, the reverse is also allowed to happen. We see Jeremiah suffering with God's own suffering at his rejection by the people that he loves.

And so, Jeremiah is in his confessions and really in his prophetic ministry as a whole, representing God before the people. But I want to remind us that Jeremiah is also representing the people before God. And Jeremiah is also representing himself as an individual who are a part of that people before God.

And we have to understand Jeremiah's laments and confessions in light of that. The difficulties that Jeremiah is experiencing as a prophet, and then the suffering and the anguish of the people, the prophet is trying to express that to God so that God can understand what his people feel. I saw a cartoon about prayer in the church, and a woman stands up to pray in the church service, and she says this: Lord, I lay before you all of the prayer concerns that have been voiced by others this morning, even though most of them sound like whining to me.

And our reaction as we look at the prayers of Jeremiah might be, sounds like whining, Jeremiah grow up. Or what's up with Jeremiah being the weeping prophet? Is he just a sensitive guy who needs to get over this? Jeremiah is expressing the deep hurt and anger of God in his confessions, but he's also expressing his own deep hurt and the deep hurt of the people as they suffer through the experiences of exile. Jeremiah is a mediator between God and the people.

In one direction in that mediatorial role, Jeremiah is helping the people to see the anger and the hurt of God. Coming at it from another direction as a mediator, Jeremiah is trying to help God see the hurt and the suffering of the people. Jeremiah is standing between God and Israel.

As we said, I think in a couple of sessions ago, that is a dangerous place to be. If you have ever been in a difficult counseling situation where there is a badly fragmented relationship or a marriage, and you're trying to mediate, that's a dangerous place to be. Whatever you say to try to help the husband may offend the wife.

Whatever you try to say to help the wife may offend the husband. And everyone wants you to take their side. Jeremiah, in a sense, is almost in the counseling room with God and Israel.

He's standing between them. And so, we need to sympathize with Jeremiah and the struggles that he's going through. So, let's think about the confessions as Jeremiah is expressing his own heart, his own pain, and his own grief toward God in a reminder that in ministry, ministry is not a career, ministry is a calling.

And ministry can often involve some very difficult things. We have that inclusion in Jeremiah chapter one, where the Lord says, I have called you from the womb, Jeremiah 1:5. And then we have the close or the end of that inclusion in chapter 20, verse 18, Lord, I wish that I had never been born and that I had never come forth from my mother's womb. Maybe that's something we need to read to people at the end of seminary graduation.

Remember this. The slogan of some of our seminaries may, ought to be at some point, we're training people who will wish that they had never been born. But ministry at times can become very toxic.

The difficulty and something that we need to be aware of in our own spiritual lives is that as we're trying to help people in their relationship with God, we're going to see things, experience things, and go through things in our lives that, at times, will fragment our own relationship with the Lord. And we're going to have to work hard at keeping that. Ministry can be a toxic thing.

And so, this is a common experience of prophets and messengers of God in the Old Testament. I want to talk about a prime example of this. I think Moses represents this.

In Numbers chapter 11, Moses expresses something that I can imagine if I were the leader of the people of Israel that this might've been my thought at least one time or another as I was leading the people through the wilderness. Moses says Moses heard the people weeping through their clans, everyone at the door of his tent, and the anger of the Lord blazed hotly. And Moses was displeased because they were complaining and griping about not having food and provisions.

And Moses says this to the Lord, why have you dealt ill with your servant? And why have I not found favor in your sight that you lay the burden of all of this people on me? Did I conceive all of these people? Did I give them birth that you should say to them, carry them in your bosom as a nurse carries a nursing child to the land that you swore to give to their fathers? Lord, did I give birth to all these people that now I'm responsible for them? And what had happened is that Moses, in his role of being a deliverer for the people, had imperiled, in some sense, his own relationship with God. And there's a fracture in the front. Lord, why did you put this on me? And I remember as we move forward in the story of Moses going to chapter 20, and remember again, it's another one of those situations where the people are not complaining about having, or they're complaining about not having water.

God tells Moses to speak to the rock. Moses strikes the rock, and God says, you know, because you did this, you're not going to be allowed to go into the promised land. I've read that story many times.

And in some sense, it's one of those times where I'd like to argue with God and say, look, can I stand in on Moses' behalf? Moses got a raw deal here. Moses had to put up with people who griped and complained and moaned and whined for 40 years, and he hit a rock, and you're not going to let him go into the promised land? Well, in some sense, Moses had improperly displayed to the people what God was like in his own anger. And Moses, perhaps, in some sense, had taken glory away from God by striking the rock rather than speaking to it, indicating that he was the one that had brought the water out.

But Moses, in some sense, got a raw deal. And it reminds us of the difficulties and the toxicity of ministry at times. In Deuteronomy chapter 3, verse 26, Moses talks to the people, and he says, the Lord was angry with me because of you, and that's the reason that I'm not going to be able to go into the promised land.

Okay, now you say, well, Moses is just sort of blaming the people. In a sense, what Moses is saying is right. And so, I think Jeremiah in his confessions as he's pouring out his heart to God, he's saying the same kinds of things that Moses said.

Lord, did I give birth to all these people? Jeremiah and Ezekiel are there at the end of Israel's history. Lord, why did you appoint us to be the watchmen? Why do we have to stand on the city walls? We've tried to tell the people and they won't listen to us. God had told Jeremiah, you're not to marry or to have children.

Why? So, I can get across a message to people that aren't going to listen to you anyway. Ezekiel, you're going to lose your wife and that's going to be a sign to the people of the grief that they're going to experience and they're going to be too busy not even to mourn that. I'm going to send that message to the people.

They're not going to listen anyway, but I'm going to take your wife away from you. And as they think about those difficulties and as Jeremiah is dealing with those difficulties, that's part of why he is crying out to God in these confessions. Lord, you have been like a deceptive brook to me.

Lord, you have deceived me and overpowered me, and I didn't have any choice in the matter. I had to preach your word. When I think of the difficulties and people struggling with God in ministry as they try to help lead others to God, I'm also reminded of the prophet Elijah.

After the great victory on Mount Carmel and the defeat of the prophets of Baal and the fire that comes down from heaven and consumes the sacrifice in the altar, Jezebel, in chapter 19, wants to put Elijah to death for putting to death her prophets, the prophets of Baal. And it says that out of fear for his life, Elijah ran and he fled and he went through the length of the land and he came to the place where he said to God, Lord, I've had enough. Take my life.

I'm ready to die. Well, someone has said that if that's really what Elijah wanted, he could have stayed there and allowed Jezebel to do God's work for him. But it's a reminder to us of the struggles of ministry, the realities of ministry.

Jeremiah is going through that as well as he's thrown into cisterns, as he's put into prison, as he's accused of being a traitor, as he's called a liar, as he's kidnapped, and taken away as there are people who say Jeremiah needs to die as a false prophet because of the things that he said about God's house. As he's living through the days of exile, Jeremiah is expressing the hurt of a Moses or the hurt of an Elijah. That's what ministry is like.

And we developed in chapter one at the time of Jeremiah's call, that in a sense, he is a second Moses. Remember in chapter one, Lord, I don't know how to speak. I'm but a child.

Don't worry. Don't worry, Jeremiah. I will put my words within you.

Moses says, Lord, I don't know how to speak. I don't know what to say. I'm not gifted.

I'm not eloquent. The Lord says, don't worry about Moses. I'll put my word.

Jeremiah is a second Moses. In the story of Jeremiah, he definitely is a second Moses. In the same way that Moses was forbidden to enter the promised land and he lived primarily with the generation that would experience God's judgment, those 40 years in the wilderness, Jeremiah is going to end up, his life is going to be spent in its last days outside the land, back in Egypt, in the place where God had delivered the people from in the days of Moses.

Just like Moses would be part of a generation where all of them but just two select individuals would die and not be allowed to enter in the promised land, Jeremiah says it's going to be 70 years before the exile is over and the return from exile is going to be after I'm dead and gone. He's a second Moses. And that's behind these prayers as Jeremiah is struggling with God.

What I'd like to do is I'd like to walk through these prayers where they are in their context in Jeremiah and just how they reflect the difficulties that Jeremiah is having

with God and with his circumstances. The first prayer, chapter 11, verse 18. The Lord made it known to me and I have known that you showed me their deeds, but I was like a gentle lamb led to the slaughter.

I did not know it was against me. They devised schemes saying, let us destroy the tree with its fruit. Let us cut him off from the land of the living so that his name might be remembered no more.

Lord, I didn't know what I was getting into. I didn't know that the people were going to want to put me to death. So, he says to the Lord in verse 20, but O Lord of hosts who judges righteously, who tests the heart and the mind, let me see your vengeance upon them for to you I've committed my cause.

Lord, I believe that you're just. I didn't know I was going to go through all of this. So he prays for God to judge the people.

God is going to respond back to him in his confession in verse 21, chapter 11. Here's the response of God to the prayer of Jeremiah. He doesn't say, well, Jeremiah, you know, you need to love your enemies and forgive them and, you know, practice a little more Christian love here.

The Lord says this to Jeremiah, therefore, thus says the Lord concerning the men of Anathoth who seek your life and who say, do not prophesy in the name of the Lord or you will die by our hand. Some of the people who were persecuting Jeremiah were his own family members in the tiny village of Anathoth. They're like, we don't like your message either.

Therefore, thus says the Lord, behold, I will punish them. The young men shall die by the sword. Their sons and their daughters shall die by famine, and none of them shall be left, for I will bring disaster upon the men of Anathoth the year of their punishment.

So here we have Jeremiah saying, Lord, I'm being persecuted. I'm being oppressed. Let me see your vengeance on them.

And it turns out that the people that God is announcing judgment on are the very people in Jeremiah's own hometown. You know, Jesus said a prophet is without honor except, or the only place that a prophet doesn't get honor in his hometown. And that's true of Jeremiah as well.

And God's going to deal with this problem. Okay. Lord gives him an answer.

However, the next thing we read in the book, chapter 12, verse one, is Jeremiah's next lament. There is nothing in between. We have Jeremiah's complaint.

We have God's response, but then, in chapter 12, verse one, right back at God, here we go. 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? Why do all who are treacherous thrive? You plant them, and they take root.

They grow and produce fruit. Lord, why do the righteous suffer and the wicked prosper? I want to know. Someone has suggested that literarily, the second lament immediately coming right after the first lament almost conveys the sense that Jeremiah has gotten an answer from God that the Lord's going to judge the people, but Jeremiah is not happy because God is not doing it quickly enough.

And so, he wants God to act now. Look, I know you said you were going to deal with this. Do it now.

How long will the land mourn, O Lord, and the grass of every field wither for the evil of those who dwell in it? The beast and the birds are swept away. Look, look at what the wickedness of the land is doing to the land itself. God, do something about this.

And again, the Lord is going to immediately answer Jeremiah's prayers. It would be nice if we would immediately get responses like this sometimes for our prayers. But again, Jeremiah prays, God answers.

That's what happens in chapter 11. That's what's also going to take place here in chapter 12. The Lord says, and here's his response, and we noticed something a little different here.

If you have raced with men on foot and they have wearied you, how will you compete with horses? And if in a safe land, you are so trusting, what will you do in the thicket of the Jordan? For even our brothers in the house of your father, even though they have dwelt treacherously with you, they are in full cry after you. Do not believe them. The Lord now, instead of simply saying, look, Jeremiah, understand I'm going to deal with this problem.

I'm going to avenge you, and I'm going to take care of the people. The Lord's going to say back to Jeremiah this time, Jeremiah, do you understand what you're asking? You're praying for me to help you through this and you view your circumstances and your situation as unbearable. But in a sense, your ministry at this point, you've been running with men on foot.

You're about to get into a race with horses. Are you going to be able to withstand it? And the difficulties that you've experienced up to this point in your ministry are nothing compared to what you're about to experience. Now, there is almost a hint of rebuke in what the Lord is saying to him.

In the first passage, I'm in trouble, the wicked are evil, God's response is, I'm going to judge them. Chapter 12, verse 1, immediately the second lament: God, you're not acting fast enough. Wait a minute, Jeremiah, you don't know how bad things are going to get.

So, we go to the third lament, chapter 15. And this is our passage where Jeremiah is going to say in verse 18, again, the verse that I think in all of these laments that stands out to me, why is my pain unceasing? My wound incurable, refusing to be healed, will you be to me like a deceitful brook, like waters that fail? Now, we saw a couple of lessons ago that there's accusatory language toward God in 60 different Psalms in the book of Psalms. We saw that Jeremiah's words here, in some sense, are not really that much different than what Job says, where he doesn't curse God, but he gets awful close.

We wonder here, how close is Jeremiah to crossing the line? I'm not sure I can answer that, and God allows the prophet to express the prayer, but the Lord does respond to this statement with a rebuke to Jeremiah. Here's what he says in verse 19: Therefore, thus says the Lord, if you return, I will restore you, and you shall stand before me.

If you utter what is precious and not what is worthless, you shall be as my mouth. They shall turn to you, but you shall not turn to them. There are a couple of things that I want to notice in that chapter or in that verse.

There is a word of rebuke here. Look, the prophet can come to him. He can vent his frustrations.

He can express his accusations. He can complain. He can argue.

But at this point, God steps in and there is a word of rebuke. The word of rebuke that is found there is the word *shub*, and it's prominent. And remember, that's the word Jeremiah has been telling the people all throughout the book.

You need to *shub*. You need to return. You need to repent.

You need to come back to God. Well, what happens here is that in this particular situation, God says to the prophet, you are the one who needs to *shub*. And if you will return *shub*, then I will restore the causative form of *shub*.

I will restore you. And if you return and look, Jeremiah, it's okay. If you want to come to me and express this feeling that I've been a deceitful brook, that's okay.

I can handle that. But if you stay at this place in your spiritual life, if you stay at this place in your perspective on my calling that I've placed upon you, then you are not going to be able to serve as my messenger. If you want to stand before me as a prophet, you've got to shuv and come back and realize what I have called you to do.

And then the word shuv is used again down at the end of this verse. Remember Jeremiah's role. He's standing between the people and God.

He's representing God to the people. He's representing the people to God. But as a prophet, always, if it comes down to it, he always sides with God rather than the people.

And so, the Lord says to him, they will not turn to you. Or I'm sorry, they shall turn to you, but you shall not turn to them. Look, in this mediatorial thing that you're doing, you can't simply go over to the side of the people and side with them and accuse me of being an empty brook.

You ultimately are going to have to continue to do your ministry so that they will turn to you. And I will ultimately make you strong. I'll make you like the bronze wall and the fortified wall of bronze.

They will fight against you, but I will prevail. The Lord's going to do the things that he promised to do for Jeremiah in chapter one. But what I want us to understand is that the laments and the confessions are an expression in some ways of even the broken relationship between God and the prophet or a relationship that is about to be broken because of all of this covenantal dishevel or upheaval that's going on in Jeremiah's life and times.

This is a serious thing. So, chapter 15, verse 20, the Lord promises him, I will make you to this people a fortified wall of bronze. They will fight against you, but they will not prevail over you, for I am with you to save you and deliver you, declares the Lord.

There's a promise. In the first lament, chapter 11, verses 18 to 23, there is a quick, immediate promise. The Lord is going to deal with the men of Anathoth who are seeking your life.

The Lord knows what's going on. In chapter 12, Jeremiah comes right back to God. This time, Jeremiah, you've run with men.

You're about to run with horses. It's going to get worse. Jeremiah chapter 15, another answer from God that is both rebuke and promise.

Jeremiah, you've got to return to me. And remember, I've made some promises. I'm going to deliver you.

Verse 21, closing out this lament, I will deliver you out of the hand of the wicked, and I will redeem you from the grasp of the ruthless. Look, I know what you're going through. When we come to the prayers that are in chapter 18 and in chapter 20, or in chapter 17, chapter 18, and chapter 20, I want you to notice that there's something missing.

First of all, chapter 17, verses 14 to 18, says this: heal me, O Lord, and I will be healed. Save me, and I shall be saved. Jeremiah, in these confessions, has not abandoned his faith.

He's not praying out these negative things because he's turned his back. He's asking God to act in accordance with his covenant, and he's asking because he believes, not because he doesn't believe. Behold, they say to me, where is the word of the Lord? Let it come.

They're challenging. If you're saying God's going to bring judgment, let it happen. Let it fall.

I have not run away from being your shepherd, nor have I desired the day of sickness. You know what came out of my lips. It was before your face.

Be not a terror to me. You are my refuge in the day of disaster. Let those be put to shame who persecute me, but let me not be put to shame.

Let them be dismayed, but let me not be dismayed. Bring upon them the day of disaster. Destroy them with double destruction.

He's praying for the judgment of the people, but what I want us to notice is what he's saying about God. In one part of this prayer, heal me, save me, deliver me. You are my praise.

In another part of the prayer, Lord, you're a terror to me because of all of the things that I am experiencing in this calling where I represent God to the people and represent the people to God. Well, here's the interesting thing in the confession of chapter 17 that makes it different from the three that came before it. We come to verse 18, bring upon them the day of disaster, destroy them with double destruction.

There is no response from God. The next thing we read, it's, thus says the Lord, go and stand in the people's gate. Hey, it's time to preach another sermon.

There is no direct response to the prayer of Jeremiah. Chapter 18, verse 19 to 23, let me read this lament. Hear me, O Lord, and listen to the voice of my adversaries.

Shall good be repaid with evil, yet they have dug a pit for my life. Same thing we've seen before. Look at what these people have done for me.

Remember how I stood before you to speak good for them, to turn them away from your wrath. God, I did what you asked me to do. I came to shove them, to help them to turn away from their wrath and to turn back to them or to turn back to God.

Therefore, they deliver up their children to famine, give them over to the power of the sword, let their wives become childless and widowed, all these terrible things that are going to come upon them. Verse 23: yet you, O Lord, know all of their plotting to me. Forgive not their iniquity.

Do not blight out your sin. Let them be overthrown before you. Deal with them in the time of your anger.

What do you think God's going to say to that? Just like in chapter 17, there is no direct response to Jeremiah's prayer. Chapter 19, verse 1, thus says the Lord, go buy a potter's flask. I got another sermon for you to preach.

No answer to Jeremiah's prayer. Chapter 20, verses 7 to 8, O Lord, you have deceived me, and I was deceived. You are stronger than I am, and you have prevailed.

I have become a laughingstock all day. Everyone mocks me. It's all about the calling.

That's the source of his suffering. He's not suffering because he disobeyed God. He's suffering because he obeyed God directly.

And Jeremiah wants to stop preaching, and it looks like he is going to end his ministry. But he comes to a place in verse 11, which often happens in the Psalms, in the midst of lament, he expresses his confidence and his trust in the Lord. And he says in verse 11, but the Lord is with me as a dread warrior. Therefore, my persecutors will stumble.

They will not overcome me. They will be greatly ashamed, for they will not succeed. Their eternal dishonor will never be forgotten.

O Lord of hosts who tests the righteous, who sees the heart and the mind, let me see upon them your vengeance. For to you I have committed my cause. And here he's confident that God's going to help him.

Lord, you're the warrior that goes out in front of me. You fight my battles. And if you're going into ministry, knowing that God is going out with you as a dread warrior to fight your battles, that's a good thing to know.

Being reminded that the Lord of hosts is the Lord of armies, who does what is just and righteous and tests the hearts and minds. That's a good thing to know. And Jeremiah, finally, there's this word of praise where it's like we haven't seen too much of this.

And Jeremiah says, sing to the Lord, praise the Lord, for he has delivered the life of the needy from the hand of evildoers. And we think, great. The relationship between God and the prophet has finally been healed.

We've got this great word of praise that's the end of the confessions. However, listen to verse 14. Cursed be the day on which I was born and the day that my mother bore me; let it not be blessed.

Alright, sing to the Lord, praise the Lord. Verse 13, verse 14, curse the day that I was born. Wow, we're right back to lament.

The last words Jeremiah prays in his confessions. Why did I come out from the womb? To see toil and sorrow and to spend all of my days in shame. And what's God's reaction? What's God's response? Again, there is no response to God or no response by God in chapter 20.

Next thing we read, chapter 21, verse 1, this is the word that came to Jeremiah from the Lord. Time to go preach another sermon. In three of the last five laments, or in the last three of the five laments, no answer from God, no response from God.

Have you ever prayed a prayer and not gotten an answer or not gotten a response from God? We all have. Lord, why are you silent? There are times we all sense when, you know, my prayers have not gone any higher than the ceiling. Lord, where are you? Where were you? Jeremiah is going through those things.

Jeremiah is wondering, at times, if I made the right vocational call or choice listening to God when he called me. In a way, I think God was like a deceptive brook, and he overwhelmed me, and I didn't have a choice, but I wish I could have done something else. There has been a fragmented relationship, not just between God and the people, but the relationship between God and Jeremiah is fragged at the edges as well. And this prayer where Jeremiah is praying for God to save him, is God going to answer that prayer? Absolutely.

In chapter 39 and in chapter 40, when the city of Jerusalem is captured and when Jerusalem is destroyed, Jeremiah has been kept in prison and the Babylonians come into town and they are the ones that deliver him out of prison. So, Jeremiah is praying for deliverance in chapter 11, chapter 12, chapter 14, chapter 15, chapter 17, chapter 18, chapter 20. There is no direct answer to that prayer, however, until chapter 39.

And there is a lot of stuff between chapter 20 and chapter 39. There's going to be prison, there's going to be accusations, there's going to be thrown in the dungeon, there's going to be the reality of the exile, there's going to be the horrors of an enemy siege, there are going to be false prophets that will call Jeremiah a liar, there will be people who stand at the temple and say that he should be put to death, there's a king named Jehoiakim who wants to kill him and cuts up his scroll, all of that stuff. Lord, save me and deliver me.

Is that going to happen? Yes. But will it happen right away? No. In all of this, the difficulties, the struggle of ministry, there's some good practical pastoral theology to work through as we do this.

Jeremiah, in his confessions, is speaking from God to the people, but he's also speaking from himself as an individual to God. And then finally, the last piece of this, as we look at the confessions, he's representing himself before God and all of the unfairness and the injustices, but remember that Jeremiah is also representing the people as a whole. There's no question that he's on God's side; he's God's messenger, but Jeremiah is a human being.

Jeremiah is one of the people. Jeremiah, as a human being, is going to live through the conditions of siege and exile. Being a righteous person doesn't give him an exemption from that.

And so sometimes, as part of this group of people, this nation that is experiencing God's wrath and God's judgment, Jeremiah is going to cry out to God and say, Lord, I've done my job of telling the people what you feel about this. Let me do my job of also telling you what the people are going through as a result of this. And sometimes we think of the people of Judah at this time, and we think, you know, they deserved what they got.

They worshipped idols, they sacrificed their children, they set up Topheths, they followed after the Baals, they did all of these things, they were hard-hearted, they did not listen to the Lord. It says in places they didn't even know how to blush when they were confronted with their sin. They got what they deserved.

But another part of this is that we see the story of one of the just most graphic tragedies in all of the Bible. The destruction of a nation of people. And even though they would not repent, and even though they would not mourn over their sin, they are going to come to a place where they mourn over their suffering.

And we've seen the mourning, we've seen the weeping of the prophet for God. Let me talk just a little bit about the weeping of the people throughout the book.

Jeremiah, remember, is picturing the invasion of the land in chapters 4 to 6. And in chapter 4, verse 21, here's the weeping in the morning.

Here's what Judah is going to experience as they're going through this exile. Jeremiah says, And so, think about Jerusalem in this way. They are God's virgin daughter, and they are about to give birth to a child, and the pains of childbirth is seizing the city of Jerusalem.

We should feel compassion for them. Yeah, they're sinners. They're rebels. They've broken the covenant, but they're going through a terrible tragedy.

And so, Jeremiah's weeping often is for what the people themselves are experiencing and going through. He's expressing that grief to God as much as he's expressing the Lord's grief to Israel. Chapter 6, verse 26, This is going to be a terrible thing.

Chapter 8, verses 18 to 22, is more about the mourning of the people. Jeremiah says, Alright, is he talking about God's anger here? In verse 19, he says, Jeremiah says, God's going to protect us. We might look at this and say, you know what? Thank God, what they deserved.

They thought that God was going, and they presumed God's grace, but Jeremiah says, The people say in verse 20, has taken hold of me. Look, these people are grieving over the fact they thought God was going to deliver them. And Jeremiah doesn't laugh at them and say, look, you got what you deserve because of your bad theology or because of your evil lifestyle.

Jeremiah grieves over that. Alright, I'm reminded as a pastor that when I talk to people about God's judgment, you know, I need that same heart and that same attitude. Chapter 9, verse 17, the degree of Judah's mourning.

The Lord says to the people, We have left the land, and we have cast out; we have been cast out of our dwellings. You know, they wouldn't come to a place where they would weep over their sin, but even as sinful rebels, they would weep over their exile. And Jeremiah says, you know what? As God's messenger, I weep with them.

He calls for the professional mourning women. And this was a custom in our, in a right in the ancient Near East is that sometimes in times of grief or lament that people would actually come, that they were professionals at this. And it's time for that in Judah because of the national disaster and calamity that they're experiencing.

Verse 21 says, Death has come into our windows. It has entered into our palace. It is cutting off from us, the children on the streets, and the young men from the squares.

The dead bodies of men shall fall like dung upon the open field, like sheaves after the reaper. None will gather them. Imagine the dead bodies that are scattered through the land.

What's the response? Grief. Not simply the idea, well, they were sinners. They got what they deserved.

Jeremiah is expressing the grief, the sadness, the mourning, the hurt of the people. And he's presenting that and putting that in front of God so that God can be reminded and so that God will act in accordance with that. Now, here's another complicating factor in all of this.

Jeremiah, as he's praying, is not simply representing the people as a whole but thinking about a specific group of people who are going through the horrors of exile. There are righteous people in Jerusalem who are going to be affected by the invading army just as much as the wicked. Now, Ezekiel chapter 9 says that before the judgment comes, the Lord goes out into the city with an angel, and he puts a mark on the head of those who mourn over their sin and who know him.

And in some sense, there's a kind of protection here. We see protection given in the book of Jeremiah to people like Baruch and Jeremiah and Evid, Melech, and others who go through exile and believe in God. And the Lord says I'm going to preserve your life.

But that promise wasn't necessarily true for all of the righteous. There were righteous people who died in the streets of Jerusalem. There were righteous men who died in battle with the Babylonians.

There were righteous women who lost their sons and daughters or who perhaps were taken as prisoners of war. What about them? In a sense, the prayer of Jeremiah, as he's praying for God to deliver him as a righteous person, are prayers that are being expressed for the righteous people in general. So, I believe that the last function and the last role of the laments of Jeremiah is that these prayers will become models of prayer for the Jewish exiles themselves as they pray for God to deliver them.

Jeremiah's confidence in the Lord that he would deliver them can be their confidence. Jeremiah's prayers that the Lord would avenge the wicked who have mistreated him are the prayers of the people in Psalm 137: O daughter of Babylon, doomed to destruction, blessed are those who take your babies and dash them against the rocks. They're praying the prayers of Jeremiah.

Psalm 74 and Psalm 79 look at what these people have done to the Lord's sanctuary and to the Lord's people. God, deal with them. And the words that Jeremiah prayed

heal me save me, be a refuge for me, were the words that the exiles themselves could pray.

Chapter 30 in the book of Consolation, the Lord is going to heal the wound of the people of Israel. So, these are not just Jeremiah's prayers. As the people are sent away into exile, as righteous people suffer injustice themselves, they can pray these prayers to God.

As the exiles begin to seek God with their whole heart, how do we come back to him? What do we say? Here's a model: the prayers of Jeremiah himself. And the deliverance of Jeremiah, as he prayed in chapter 20 and then went through all of the adversity leading to the deliverance that came in chapter 40, is a reminder to Israel: you may go through terrible suffering, but I will deliver you in the same way that I've delivered my prophet. A last example of this is that I think in many ways, the prayers of Jeremiah, we see an echo of them in the prayers of Lamentations.

Jewish tradition has attributed this book to Jeremiah. Whether Jeremiah is the author or not, I'm not sure that we can really be confident about that. But as you hear the prayers of Lamentations, you hear the echoes of Jeremiah's confessions. We acknowledge our sin, but Lord, look at how much we've suffered.

It's time for it to end. Jeremiah prays, Lord, you're a dread warrior with me. The people say, great is your faithfulness, O Lord.

We know that you're going to deliver us. Jeremiah's prayers become a model for the exiles themselves, who are promised that they will be able to pray as they call out to God and pray for deliverance. Ultimately, they will experience deliverance in the same way that Jeremiah has.

We spent some time over the last three sessions in Jeremiah's confessions, looking at them as model prayers, looking at them as revelation of God's heart to the people, and looking at them as reflections of Jeremiah's struggles in ministry. And then finally, looking at them as expressions of what the people can say to God in their difficulty and in their suffering. These are not just prayers that reflect Jeremiah and God.

They are prayers that represent Jeremiah's role of standing between God, representing God to Israel and representing Israel to God.

This is Dr. Gary Yates teaching the book of Jeremiah. This is session 16, Jeremiah 11-20, Jeremiah's Confessions, Part 3, The Pathos of the People of God and Jeremiah.