

# Dr. Gary Yates, Jeremiah, Lecture 18, Jeremiah 23, False Prophets

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This is Dr. Gary Yates in his instruction on the book of Jeremiah. This is session 18 on Jeremiah 23, False Prophets.

We're going to bring against them the judgment of exile.

When God commanded Jeremiah, in Jeremiah chapter 36, in 605 BC, after he had already been ministering for more than 20 years, to write down a scroll of the prophecies of judgment that he's been preaching against the people of Judah and to have his scribe, Baruch, read them at the temple, that scroll may have looked something very similar to what we have in Jeremiah 25. It's an anthology of 20 years of ministry on Jeremiah's part, where he's warning of the coming judgment. Part of the indictment against Judah in all of this is that Judah has had some really bad leadership.

Their apostasy in part can be explained by the fact that their leaders, both the civil leaders, the kings, the officials of the kings, the military leaders have led them astray. And so have the spiritual leaders like the prophets, the priests, and the scribes. In the early section of the course, we looked at Jeremiah 22 in the historical background, Jeremiah's relationship with the final kings in the line of Judah.

Remember that that section focuses on Judah's bad kings. There is a woe, for example, pronounced on Jehoiakim, the king of Judah who reigned from 609 to 597. And in a sense, he is Jeremiah's ultimate antagonist.

And in chapter 22, verse 13, woe to him who builds his house by injustice and unrighteousness. There's a death sentence pronounced on this king. The irony is that when the king's death takes place, Jeremiah 22:18 says there will not be a woe oracle said for him or a woe speech or a lament said for him when he dies because the people are going to be glad to get rid of him.

So, God is announcing death and destruction on the kings and on the leaders. Chapter 23, verse 1, the passage that we're focusing on, begins again by announcing judgment on the leaders of Judah. And it says, woe to the shepherds who destroy and who scatter the sheep of my pasture.

So, there is a death sentence again pronounced on the leadership of Judah. They're described as shepherds, which is really a very effective image of leadership. A shepherd was designed to care for the flock.

It was designed to take care of the flock, to provide for them, to do whatever was necessary to protect the life of the flock. The problem with Judah's leaders is that they have consumed the flock rather than protecting and providing for them. The kings were a representation of that.

Wicked rulers like Jehoiakim and the last four kings of Judah, in general, reflect that poor leadership. But part of the leadership problem in Judah also involves the prophets that God had sent to announce his word that the office of prophet was how God would communicate to his people in addition to his law. And there is this message given concerning the prophets in Jeremiah, beginning in verse 9. And the Lord says, concerning the prophets, my heart is broken within me, and all of my bones shake.

I am like a drunken man, like a man overcome by wine because of the word and because of his holy words. This is the prophet speaking here, not the Lord. And he says, for the land is full of adulterers because of the curse the land mourns and the pastures of the wilderness are dried up.

Their course is evil, and their might is not right. Both prophet and priest are ungodly. Even in my house, I have found their evil, declares the Lord.

At the beginning of the book, in Jeremiah chapter 2, the prophet had indicted Judah for being an unfaithful wife. They had prostituted. They had spread themselves under every tree and on every green hill.

They had been unfaithful to the Lord as their husband. The idea of spiritual adultery comes up here again. And the blame for that is specifically attributed to the prophets of Judah.

They are the ones who have led the people into this unfaithfulness. They have promoted the worship of these false gods by promising peace when God had warned of judgment. Instead, they made the people feel comfortable about their sins.

They had encouraged this adultery. They were largely responsible for it. The Lord says because of that, he's going to bring judgment on the priest and the prophets.

Therefore, their way shall be to them like slippery paths in the darkness into which they shall be driven and fall. For I will bring disaster upon them in the year of their punishment, declares the Lord. So, the priest and the prophets had not announced the judgment, the disaster that was going to come upon the people of Judah.

And so, the Lord was going to punish them appropriately by bringing disaster on them as well. A further indictment of the prophets and just how corrupt they had been is reflected for us in verses 13 to 15. In the prophets of Samaria, talking about

the prophets of the apostate northern kingdom, the people of Judah would have compared themselves to Israel and thought, you know, we're better than them.

We were not as apostate as they were. But the Lord says in the prophets of Samaria, I saw an unsavory thing. They prophesied by Baal or by Baal.

They led my people, Israel, astray. A large burden for the responsibility of the defection and the apostasy of the northern kingdom of Israel belongs to the prophets in that land. The same thing is even more true of the prophets that are in Judah.

The Lord says, but in the prophets of Jerusalem, I have seen a horrible thing. They commit adultery. They walk in lies.

They strengthen the hands of evil-doers so that no one turns from his evil, and all of them have become like Sodom to me and its inhabitants like Gomorrah. You are not better than the apostate northern kingdom. In fact, your prophets have promoted just as much or even more adultery.

Jerusalem has become like Sodom and Gomorrah, the ultimate paradigm of wickedness in the Old Testament because of the ministry and the message of the prophets that have led the southern kingdom astray. Verses 16 to 18. Now here's the specific things that were causing them to lead the people astray.

What was the essence or the content of their message that was making that happen? Verses 16 to 18 reflect that for us. Thus says the Lord of hosts, do not listen to the words of the prophets who prophesy to you, filling you with vain hopes. They speak visions of their own minds, not from the mouth of the Lord.

They continually say to those who despise the word of the Lord, it will be well to you. And everyone who stubbornly follows his own heart, they say, no disaster will actually befall you. Okay, so there are several things that the prophets were doing and saying that were leading the people astray.

First of all, they were speaking their own words, their own visions, their own dreams, which often in the ancient Near East was a way that the gods communicated their message. But they had not received these messages from the Lord. 2 Peter says that a true prophet speaks messages that did not have his origin in the human mind or in the human will, but they spoke as they were moved along by the Holy Spirit.

That's not true of these false prophets in Judah. They were speaking their own minds, they simply were giving their own dreams, and they were filling the people with vain hopes. They were offering a message of false peace.

They were giving people who had a presumptive faith, who believed that God was going to protect them no matter what. They gave them an excuse to continue in their sin and not to repent in the way that Jeremiah was encouraging them. And they were offering this false message that said, peace, peace, God is going to take care of us. Remember the promises that God has made to Jerusalem.

The Lord is our fortress, and we will not be moved. God is there to protect us, no matter what. These are the prophets who were saying the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord, and Jeremiah had stood up at the temple sermon and said, don't trust in these deceptive words.

These were the prophets who were saying, remember the promises that God made to David. God had promised to establish the throne of David forever. God had promised that He would always raise up sons for David.

Look, God's made these promises, and He's going to protect us no matter what. And so, Jeremiah characterizes their message as saying, peace, peace, when there is no peace. And by offering this false sense of security, they were taking away from the people any real motivation for them to change.

The book of Jeremiah, maybe more than any other Old Testament book, definitely more than any other Old Testament prophet, is going to reflect the struggle or the conflict over true prophecy versus false prophecy. Jeremiah is going to have to interact with these false messages of peace and these false prophets. In the stories of Jeremiah's life, Jeremiah is actually going to interact with people like Hananiah in the land or Shemaiah, who is a priest down in Babylon among the exiles.

And so, this problem of the false prophets and the false hopes that these prophets are offering to the people is going to constantly come up as we're working our way through the book. Now, going back and looking at chapters 1 to 25 as a whole, remember the indictment of Israel and Judah. One of the major problems that's addressed is the message of these false prophets and these prophets of peace and how that's had a corrupting influence on the people of Judah.

We really have prophets that have a fundamentally different understanding of the covenant than Jeremiah does. Jeremiah, based on the Sinaitic covenant, the Mosaic covenant, believes that God blesses his people and punishes them or rewards them on the basis of obedience or disobedience. Those traditions are as important to his theology as the promises that God made to David or the promises that God had made concerning Zion.

That covenantal understanding caused Jeremiah to say, remember, God made a promise to David, but God also placed an obligation on the sons of David. Throughout the covenant history of the Old Testament, whenever God makes

covenant promises, they are always accompanied by covenant responsibilities and obligations. The false prophets had a completely different understanding of the covenant.

They focused exclusively on the promises. They ignored the responsibilities. And so you can imagine how they're the ones who contribute to this presumptive understanding, this belief that God will protect them no matter what, this false confidence in the inviolability of Zion.

Zion's never going to fall. God's protected it in the past. He will always protect it in the future.

So, this issue of the false prophets who promise empty assurances of peace, this is going to come up continually in the book of Jeremiah. We go back to chapter 4, verses 9 and 10. In that day, in the day of God's judgment, courage will fail both kings and officials.

The priests shall be appalled and the prophets astounded. Then I said, Ah, Lord God, surely you have utterly deceived this people, and Jerusalem saying, it shall be well with you, whereas the sword has reached their very life. Alright? These people were deceived by these prophets into thinking that everything would be well for them, and really they were about to be devoured by the sword.

Judgment and devastating destruction were about to come upon them. And the interesting thing in this passage is that Jeremiah says that God is the one who has deceived the people into believing this. Alright, I don't think that removes the responsibility from the people.

It's not blaming God for this, but it is reminding them that God has had a hand in punishing them for their unbelief by doing this. God has punished their unbelief about the message given to them by the true prophets by causing them to believe the message of the false prophets. And we've mentioned this in another session and in another section, but God often punishes unbelief with unbelief.

And the prophets, God's messengers, had come to Israel time and time and time again and had warned them about judgment that was coming. The people would not listen. One of the consequences of that is that God blinded their minds so that they believed these empty messages.

Now, you know, in light of what was going on, who would have believed that everything was going to be peaceful for them? But they had deluded themselves into believing that, and God had given them over to that belief. He had punished their unbelief with further unbelief and spiritual blindness. 2 Thessalonians 2 verse 11 says

that in the time when the man of sin will come in the future, God will send them a delusion that will cause them to believe a lie.

In other words, God is going to punish their unbelief by adding to that and causing them to believe the lies of the Antichrist. We have that going on in the experience of Jeremiah as well. Romans chapter 1. The truth about God and the reality of His power and the fact that God is creator, it's visible in the creation itself.

His eternal power and at least those attributes of God are reflected in creation. There's a creator behind all of this, but humanity, from the very beginning of time, has rejected that knowledge, has bent and twisted it, and perverted it into idolatry. Romans 1 says that the judgment that God executes on them is that He gives them over to their false way of thinking.

And professing themselves to be wise, they become fools. Judah, by its worship of idols, thought that they had found a wise way to live a life that was better than the way that God had mapped out for them in the law or that was better than what the prophets like Jeremiah were preaching to them. But professing themselves to be wise, they had become fools.

They had come to believe the message of these false prophets. Chapter 6, verses 13 and 15 say this: From the least of them to the greatest of them, everyone is greedy for unjust gain. And from prophet to priest, everyone deals falsely.

They have healed the wound of my people lightly, saying, Peace, peace, when there is no peace. And that's sort of the motto of their message. Peace, peace, everything is going to be well.

But what these prophets were like is that they were like a physician who was prescribing two aspirins for a tumor. They were lightly treating the wounds of these people and, as a result, were giving the people a theological excuse not to turn from their sin. And so, it says in verse 15, Were they ashamed when they committed abominations? No, they were not at all ashamed.

They do not know how to blush. Therefore, they shall fall among those who fall. At the time I punish them, they shall be overthrown.

Now, here it's obvious. It's not the Lord who has imposed this unbelief. They're responsible for their own belief.

They have given in to the message of the prophets. But what has happened is by these false offers of peace, the people have not been confronted by their sin. They feel no shame.

The prophets have validated their lifestyle by saying that God's going to take care of you no matter what. And they believe this message. And ultimately, they're going to be deluded by that.

Chapter 8, verses 8 to 12, says this: How can you say we are wise and the law of God is with us? But behold, the lying pen of the scribes has made it into a lie. People who were teaching the word of God had altered its message. Now, whether they were actually changing the text or not that's not clear.

But what they were changing was the force and the significance and the emphasis of that message. The text stressed both their covenant responsibilities as well as their covenant blessings. They were altering the message to where the only thing that was being focused on was the promises.

Therefore, in verse 10, I will give their wisdom to others and their fields to conquerors. They're going to experience judgment. They have not turned from their sin.

The problem is the prophets, again, verse 11, They have healed the wound of my people lightly, saying, Peace, peace, when there is no peace. Like a physician who says, Hey, everything's well, take two aspirin. There's a rotten internal disease that is eating away at their lives.

That needs to be treated. And the message of the prophets like Jeremiah who were confronting them with their sin and saying you need heart surgery at the beginning, that's a painful process. But ultimately, it's the only message that could save them.

What Jeremiah says is that ultimately, what is going to happen to these people is that they are going to come to a place of bitter disappointment because these false promises of peace are going to end up proving to be an empty delusion. And so, we see the disappointment of the people who commit themselves to this false assurance of peace in chapter 8, verse 19, and they're making these statements. Is the Lord not in Zion? Is her king not in her? I mean, that's what the false prophets have been telling them.

The Lord is in Jerusalem. The Lord is your fortress. You're okay.

You'll be taken care of. They had scripture verses to support that. But the Lord says, if I am in their midst, why have they provoked me to anger with their carved images and with their foreign idols? The harvest is past.

The summer is ended. And we are not saved. You know, we believe that God was going to step in at the eleventh hour and rescue us and deliver us.

But God's not there. He's not saving us. For the wound of the daughter of my people is my heart wounded.

I mourn and dismay. Has taken care of me. They're going to come to realize too late that they have a terminal illness.

And when they come to see this, the only thing that is going to be left to mourn about is the disaster that God is planning to bring on now. Okay? Chapter 14. We go to verses 13 to 16.

And there's another reminder of the message of these false prophets. And here's what the Lord says about the lying prophets. Verse 13.

Ah, Lord God, behold the prophets say to them, you shall not see the sword, nor shall you have famine. But I will give you assured peace in this place. Alright? Jeremiah was warning them about the covenant curses.

Sword and famine and plague. These prophets were saying you don't have anything to worry about. Jeremiah's an alarmist.

He doesn't know what he's talking about. We have a message from God that God is going to give us peace. But here's what the Lord says.

The prophets are prophesying lies in my name. I did not send them, nor did I command them or speak to them. They are prophesying to you a lying vision.

Worthless divination. They're no different than the prophets who are using astrology and all of these other things. They're not telling you the truth and the deceit of their own mind.

Therefore, thus says the Lord concerning the prophets who prophesy in my name, although I did not send them and who say sword and famine shall not come upon this land, by sword and famine those prophets shall be consumed. Alright? They have announced to the people that the people are not going to experience sword and famine and covenant curses. Therefore, the punishment is going to fit the crime because God is going to make sure that those prophets experience the very judgments that they have told the people are not going to come.

Okay? So, this conflict between Jeremiah as a true prophet of God who faithfully represents what the covenant between God and Israel is all about and the fact that if they want to be blessed by God, they must walk in accordance with God's commandments and God's ways. That conflict with these false prophets who are simply giving empty assurances of peace works its way throughout the book of



Jeremiah. And Jeremiah is going to describe their theology as Sheker, the Hebrew word for falsehood.

And that's going to be a recurring word. So, as we come to chapter 23 and we understand this ongoing battle that Jeremiah is engaging with these false prophets, we have to put ourselves in the shoes of the people and feel somewhat sympathetic for them because the question is, what does a real prophet look like? How do we tell the difference? And so, if you're living in Judah in the 6th century, the 7th century, as God's getting ready to bring these judgments, and you have, on the one hand, a prophet like Jeremiah who is warning you of judgment on the other hand, you have these prophets of peace like Hananiah that we're going to meet in chapter 28 promising you that things will be well and within two years all of this is going to be resolved, which one of those prophets are you going to be inclined to believe? I think the tendency would be to believe this message of peace rather than to pay attention to the warnings of judgment. Now, God had not left his people without a way to tell the difference between true prophets and false prophets.

The office of prophet was really established and initiated with Moses himself. And Moses was the representation or the prototype of what a prophet was supposed to be like. And then later on, Samuel, in many ways, as kind of the first prophet during the time of the monarchy, represented what a prophet was going to be like.

But back in Deuteronomy chapter 18, the Lord had given a promise in the days of Moses, and here's what he says. The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from among your brothers. It is to him that you shall listen.

All right? So, in the days of Moses, Moses was kind of the prototype of an Israelite prophet. When the Lord had spoken to Israel at Mount Sinai, and the people saw the power of God and the thunder and the smoke, they were afraid to go into God's presence. And so, they said to Moses, you go to God as our representative, you listen to what God says, and you come back and tell us that message.

And that became the role and the mission of a prophet. So, what Deuteronomy 18:15 is saying, I will raise up a prophet for you like Moses. That passage is not just talking about one single prophet.

In a collective way, I will raise up a prophet for you like Moses. God was saying that throughout Israel's history, for each generation, he would raise up prophets that would do the work of Moses, of going to God, getting his word, getting his message, and coming back and giving that message to the people. Now when we hear that passage, maybe as Christians, I will raise up a prophet like Moses, we think of Jesus as the eschatological prophet.

And Acts chapter 3 is going to use the passage in that way. But really, in this passage, it is collectively talking about all of the prophets. And after Moses, it's going to be Joshua, then there's Samuel, there's Elijah, there's Elisha, there's Isaiah, there's Jeremiah.

All of the prophets are fulfillments of this promise, I will raise up a prophet like Moses. Remember the call of Jeremiah, where Jeremiah says, ah Lord, God, I'm but a child; I don't know how to speak. In the very first chapter, Jeremiah is validated as a prophet like Moses.

In this passage, Deuteronomy 18 says, in verse 18 I will put my words in his mouth. That is exactly what God says to Jeremiah in chapter 1. And so, Jeremiah is a prophet like Moses. He is one of these true spokesmen of God that God raises up to tell the people what they need to hear.

But again, the question is, how do we know a true prophet? And in Deuteronomy 18, 15 and following, the Lord gives Israel some standards to measure the difference between a true prophet and a false prophet. A true prophet, number one, must be an Israelite. He must speak in the name of the Lord.

He must not advocate the worship of other gods or lead the people into idolatry. He must issue prophecies that come to pass a hundred percent of the time. A good batting average is not enough.

If a prophet is wrong a single time, he's not a true prophet. If a prophet pretends to speak in the name of God, but God has not sent him, that's a serious offense. Deuteronomy chapter 13, if a prophet advocates the worship of other gods, then that prophet is to be put to death.

So, in Jeremiah's day, some of the prophets that were there in Judah would have been invalidated by that one test. They were advocating the worship of Yahweh and the worship of Baal. By doing that, they had proved that they did not meet the test.

But the problem in Jeremiah chapter 23, and really the problem with many of these false prophets, is they did not necessarily come advertising themselves as prophets of other gods. The struggle for the people in Jeremiah's day is that they don't have a detector that they can wave over and say, oh, you're a true prophet, you're a false prophet. False prophets, in order to be effective at what they do, do not wear t-shirts that identify themselves as false prophets.

Many of them were smart enough not to speak in the name of Baal, even if that was the prophet who may have been motivating their message. They are going to speak in the name of the Lord just as much as Jeremiah did. J. Andrew Dearman raises this possibility.

Many of these false prophets at times may have been true prophets. They may have been people who at some point in their ministry and in their lifetime, or maybe even shortly before they issued some of these incorrect prophecies, God may have spoken through them. They may have had, at some point in their life and ministry, a valid work of being a prophet like Moses.

And so, there's this struggle with knowing the difference between a true prophet and a false prophet. Well, we have the test. If a prophet predicts something, then it's something that has to happen 100% of the time.

Well, the problem with that test is that Jeremiah is saying that the city of Jerusalem is going to be destroyed, that the exile is going to last for 70 years. The false prophets are saying, we're going to be spared, and within two years, the crisis will be over. The articles of the Lord's house will be returned to us.

The problem with the 100% test is these events haven't happened yet. We read the book, and we know Jeremiah was the true prophet here. The historical events that unfold are ultimately going to validate Jeremiah's message.

Read the accounts in chapter 39 and chapter 52. They're going to show us Jeremiah was exactly right. The people lived in exile for 70 years.

Jeremiah was on target. But those events haven't happened yet. So again, how do we know the difference? In chapter 23, going back to this message, the Lord is going to say, again, the problem with these false prophets is that they are speaking messages that I have not spoken through them.

And in spite of the difficulties that the people are having in balancing and weighing through and assessing these, Jeremiah is a true prophet. These opponents who are preaching peace, peace, are not. And here are the ultimate reasons why.

Verse 16, thus says the Lord of Hosts, Do not listen to the words of the prophets who prophesy you, filling you with vain hopes. They speak visions of their own minds, not from the mouth of the Lord. They say continually to those who despise the word, It will be well with you.

So, God's going to announce, Hey, look, this is just their word. I have not sent them. I have not spoken to them.

And here's the verse that I want to call attention to and a very powerful image of what a true prophet is in verse 18. The Lord says, Who among them has stood in the counsel of the Lord to see and to hear his word? Or who has paid attention to his word and listened? See, the counsel of the Lord represents, in a sense, we can

compare it to this. It's the cabinet meeting in heaven where God is presiding as the great king and the presiding ruler over this council of his angels.

God is announcing his decrees and his decisions. Now, in the pagan religions around Israel and Judah, the divine council represented the meeting place of the gods where these many multiple gods would get together, and they would work out the decrees and the decisions and sometimes announce them or at least carry them out in the human realm. The ancient cultures around Israel, these pagan cultures, envisioned the divine government above like human government below or maybe even had used that as a way of validating various forms of government.

In Israel, we do not have multiple gods in this council. What we do have is God meeting with his angelic messengers and those who execute and carry out his will. And in the counsel of God, the Lord announces his decrees and his decisions.

We have some biblical passages that I think reflect the idea of the counsel of the Lord. In Genesis chapter 1, as God prepares to create human beings, he says in verse 26, let us make man in our own image. And I think sometimes, as Christians, we want to read that in here, let us, as a reflection of the trinity, that idea is not clearly unpacked in the Old Testament.

What is more likely is the idea is that God is announcing among his divine council his intention to create humanity and he's going to make human beings in the image of God. In Isaiah chapter 6, when the prophet sees the vision of the Lord seated on his throne high and lifted up, he's the great king. He's the sovereign.

And the beings that are around him are announcing his glory and his holiness and his power. But the Lord, in the midst of his divine council, says, who will go and speak for us? And remember Isaiah responds by saying, Hine, here I am, Lord. Send me, I will go and speak.

So, I think we have some passages that illustrate for us exactly what Jeremiah is talking about here in chapter 23, verse 18. The council of the Lord is the place where God is announcing his decisions and his decrees. I think another Old Testament passage that we could bring into this discussion is Job chapter 1. God is meeting with the sons of God, the angels, and the spiritual beings that are part of his divine council, and Satan shows up at that divine council meeting to question the integrity of Job and to raise questions about him.

So, we sort of see the heavenly council meeting in action in Job chapter 1. So, here's the significance of all this for verse 18 in Jeremiah 23. Jeremiah is saying, what characterizes a true prophet is this, as God is having his heavenly cabinet meetings, God invites a true prophet to come into those council meetings to sit in on the presidings, to hear what God has announced and then, as his messenger, to go back

to other human beings and to announce the message that has been determined and decreed in heaven. I mean, this is a pretty audacious statement.

Jeremiah is saying, and you want to know the reason why I'm telling you the truth when I announced to you that judgment is coming and why these guys who are over here saying there's going to be peace when there's not going to be? Do you know why you can trust me? There's been a meeting up in heaven. I was there. I was at the meeting.

I've heard what God is determining and what God has decided to do and I have come to you with the minutes of that meeting to announce God's plans, God's decisions and God's intentions. These prophets that are announcing to you that everything is going to go well, that there's only going to be peace and no judgment, they did not stand. They weren't there.

I was at the meetings. They weren't. And instead of them telling you what God has determined and decreed, they're only speaking their own minds.

They're only giving their own commentary about this. They're speaking their own delusions. I am coming to you with thus says the Lord because I've been at the heavenly council meetings and I'm his messenger.

Now we have one other passage about the divine council and the role of the prophet in that council that I think is very important to all of this. It's found in 1 Kings chapter 22, and it's one of my favorite stories because of the message of the prophet there. We have a prophet named Micaiah, and Ahab and King Jehoshaphat of Judah have allied themselves together, and the issue is that Jehoshaphat should not have been in that alliance. But Jehoshaphat is seeking a message from a true prophet of God.

The false prophets of Ahab have come in and they've offered assurances, hey, things are going to go well. One of them even has a helmet with horns on, and he goes around butting into the walls, showing what Ahab and Jehoshaphat are going to do to their enemies. And so, there's this massive group of prophets who are all saying, hey look, things are going to go great, things are going to go well.

Jehoshaphat says, aren't there any prophets of Yahweh here? And Ahab says, well, there's one; his name is Micaiah, and I hate him because he never says anything good about me. Let's bring him in. And Micaiah, apparently in a very sarcastic way, says to Ahab, go into battle.

The Lord will bless you and protect you. And Ahab, I think, can read the sarcasm and says, okay, Micaiah, tell us what you really think. And Micaiah says this, I was present at the assembly of God.

I was in the divine council. And I heard God, as the one who presides over that council, stand and say to his messengers, who will go and be my messenger and deceive Ahab so that he will go into battle because I have determined that I am going to judge him for his apostasy and put him to death. And Micaiah says, there was a divine messenger, there was an angel there who said, I will go and I will execute this plan.

And then Micaiah says, what's going on here is that these false promises that are coming from your prophets that are on your payroll are really the delusional message of this angel that God has sent to deceive you because the Lord has determined to put you to death. And we struggle with this, well, does God lie or does God deceive? But again, we're going back to the idea that God punishes unbelief with unbelief. God can harden the heart of Pharaoh when the Pharaoh refuses to believe.

God can send a delusional message for Ahab to believe because Ahab has heard the truth again and again, and he's rejected it. But we have a very clear idea; Micaiah says, I was at the meeting up in heaven, and I heard what God has decreed and what God has determined, and the Lord has determined to put you to death. Okay? Jeremiah is making the same claim about himself as he preaches, and he says in verse 22 about the false prophets, if they had stood in the Lord's counsel like Jeremiah had, then they would have proclaimed my words to my people and they would have turned away from their evil way and from the evil of their deeds.

They didn't preach... They're not preaching the word of the Lord. They're not warning the people of the judgment to come, and the reason is they did not stand in the counsel of the Lord. That's the issue.

Jeremiah is speaking a message from God, and so this idea, this image, this picture of the divine counsel, and the prophet's access to the divine counsel is a very powerful confirmation of the New Testament teaching about the inspiration of Scripture. 2 Timothy 3. All Scripture is God-breathed. It's spoken by God.

Jeremiah is not speaking his word and remember throughout this book, the words of Jeremiah and the word of the Lord are equated. We have theological systems today that say the Bible contains the word of God or the Bible gives testimony to the word of God. That is not in line with the theology of Jeremiah which says the words of the prophet are the words of God.

Why? Because he's been in the divine counsel. It's confirmation of 2 Peter 1 that says the prophets did not speak messages that came from human will or that were initiated by themselves, but they spoke as they were moved along by God, and that's the difference. As a result of that, verses 16 to 22 is going to emphasize the prophets that are promising you peace.

The word that describes their message is sheker. It's a lie. Verses 33 to 40, we have a wordplay and these always stand out and interest me that again is going to speak of the worthlessness of the message of these prophets.

It says in verse 33, when one of this people or a prophet or a priest asks you what is the burden of the Lord? A prophetic message by the Israelite prophets is often referred to as a burden, a masa. And I think it's the idea of something that has to be carried and taken to the people. But when the people ask what's the burden of the Lord, this is what Jeremiah is supposed to say to them, to the prophets.

You are the burden, and I will cast you off, declares the Lord. And as for the prophet, priest, or one of the people who says, the burden of the Lord, I will punish that man and his household. So the burden has become the prophets themselves.

Or the reading in the Septuagint, what is the burden of the Lord? Jeremiah turns around and says to the people, you're the burden of the Lord. But instead of being a word from God that would help them, it has become a word from God that has burdened them down and is ultimately keeping them from coming to know the truth. As a result of that, the message of these prophets is not something that leads them to God.

It is something that leads them away from God. Now as we move into the second half of the book, in some of our layers, we're going to get to see a real living example of Jeremiah's interaction with one of these prophets of Sheker. And again, it's going to be Jeremiah and Hananiah in Jeremiah chapter 27 to 28.

And there's going to be this conflict because this is the time when Jeremiah comes in, and he's wearing the yoke, and he's got this wooden yoke, and he's carrying it around, and he's under its burden and its weight, and he says to the people, this represents how God is going to put you in subjugation and bondage to Babylon. And a prophet by the name of Hananiah who comes and speaks in the name of the Lord says, that's not the way it is. He takes the yoke off of Jeremiah's neck, smashes it to the ground, and says, the Lord is going to break our bondage, and within two years, all the articles of the Lord's temple that have been taken away are going to be restored to us.

The people are going to be faced again with this struggle. How do we know the difference between a true prophet and a false prophet? Jeremiah's message is that this word that God was going to bring peace was a message that had not come from God. It was a message that was simply a dream of the people.

And Jeremiah's message is the one that is more likely. Jeremiah's message is the one that they need to pay attention to when they look at their own lives when they see

that they're not fulfilling their covenant responsibilities, when they see the noose tightening around their neck; how could Hananiah's message possibly be the truth? But when we get into those passages, we're going to have to deal with the struggle that Jeremiah's audiences are having. How do we know the difference between a true prophet and a false prophet? In chapter 23, Jeremiah wants us to see.

The difference between a true and a false prophet is that the true prophet has stood in the counsel of the Lord. He has received a message from God. On the other hand, these prophets who are promising peace, these prophets like Hananiah, who are telling the people a message that they want to hear, they're speaking words that are just the visions of their own mind.

And the people are ultimately going to learn of the emptiness of those promises when they face the destruction that God is going to bring against them. As we think about our contemporary culture, we come to realize that the problem of false teaching and false prophecy is just as real today as it was then. The New Testament and passages in 2 Peter and Jude remind us that false teachers and false prophets were a problem in the early church.

And the thing that I'm reminded of is I'm comparing the true message of Jeremiah and the false message of the prophets in his day is that false teaching often involves saying what is popular. It involves saying what people want to hear. It is preaching a message that keeps us from conflict.

In our culture, that keeps us from being accused of being narrow-minded and intolerant. A passage or a message that helps to make people uncomfortable when the job of a prophet sometimes is to definitely not make them feel comfortable. It is often simply validating the prevailing ideas of the culture around us rather than confronting that culture with the truth of God's Word.

I'm convinced today that if Hananiah were alive, he would have a lot of followers on Twitter and Facebook. He might possibly be a very popular television preacher who presided over a megachurch because he preached a message that people wanted to hear. And so sometimes the danger of false prophecy, particularly, is that it involves shaping our message in a way that confirms and validates what people want to hear.

2 Timothy chapter 4 verse 3 says that in the last days, there will come a time when people no longer tolerate sound teaching. They will only want teachers that tickle their ears or that scratch where they're itching. And they will seek out teachers that validate their own sinful natures.

That's exactly what happened with Hananiah. Hananiah and the false prophets were preaching a message that allowed the people to continue in their sinful ways rather than confronting them with the need to change. And so let me just close by thinking



about some ways that maybe we do the same of making our message comfortable for people to hear.

False prophecy today may take the form of prosperity theology. Where instead of reminding people of the fact that the call to be a disciple of Jesus may lead to suffering and taking up your cross, we tell people that God wants them to be healthy, successful, and prosperous. And believing in God or trusting in Jesus can help you to get that.

Believe me, when you do that, you don't have a problem gathering an audience. It's a message that people want to hear. Sometimes it leads to a syncretism of our materialistic American culture with orthodox Christian faith, and I think that's really what prosperity theology is.

Use your faith as a way to gain this wealth that has been turned into a god by our culture. False prophecy and saying what is comfortable may result in people who are so steeped in postmodernism that they surrender the exclusivity of Christian faith and the teaching of Jesus, that Jesus Christ is the only way to God. Or they have bought into the relativism of postmodernism to the extent that they believe that the moral absolutes of scripture are up for grabs.

I think in a sense, that's the same thing that the prophets of peace were doing in Jeremiah's day. We're drawn into this when we think that building a large and a successful church is so important to us that we emphasize the positive aspects of the gospel, the love of God to the exclusion of the wrath of God and the demands that the gospel places upon us. It's unpopular today to speak of a holy God who demands atonement for sin.

It sounds like child abuse that God would demand that his own son die as atonement for sin. So, let's not talk about that. Let's alter what the cross and what the atonement is all about.

The doctrine of eternal punishment is offensive. So, we'll revise our understanding of these texts. In a sense, we're doing what Hannah and I and the prophets of peace were doing then.

We have to redeem the Bible because it's out of step with the prevailing ideas of culture. It's too controversial to really reflect upon what the Bible says about ethical issues like abortion or homosexuality. And so, we're not going to talk about that.

Let's focus on helping the poor or changing the culture. Why bother about all of these inconvenient doctrines and theological truths that divide people? And the answer to that is, though, is that what you believe is ultimately the only thing that

will consistently motivate you to do the right things. The Bible does not teach that ethics begin before doctrine.

Doctrine gives rise to ethics. And so, in many ways, the reality of false teaching and saying what is popular or what is in line with what the culture believes is as much a temptation today as it was then. And so, the danger and the struggle that the people in Jeremiah's day felt is, how do we know the difference between true spokesmen of God and those who are false? The reminder from Jeremiah is the true covenant spokesmen of God were those who were reminding the people both of God's love and God's blessing, but those who are also reminding the people of God's judgment, God's holiness, and the responsibilities that he placed upon them.

False teaching can come to us in very subtle ways. And it's something that we need to be as much on guard about as the people in Jeremiah's day. As we work our way through the stories in Jeremiah's life, we're going to see real living examples of how much the struggle between Jeremiah and the false teachers, how much that bled into his ministry.

And we're going to be reminded through that of why it's still important to us today.

This is Dr. Gary Yates in his instruction on the book of Jeremiah. This is session 18 on Jeremiah 23, False Prophets.