

Dr. Gary Yates, Jeremiah, Lecture 21, Jeremiah 34-35, Death to the Nation and Life to the Remnant

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This is Dr. Gary Yates in his teaching on the book of Jeremiah. This is session 21, Death to the Nation and Life to the Remnant, Jeremiah 34-35.

We have been looking at Jeremiah 26 to 45, the second section of the book of Jeremiah and how it's a story of the ways and the different responses that people had to the ministry and the preaching of Jeremiah.

The theological message that emerges out of this is that God brought judgment upon the people of Judah, brought the judgment of exile upon Jerusalem because of the fact that the people did not listen. They did not obey the word of the Lord that was spoken to them through Jeremiah. Throughout the book, we're going to see statements like the Lord has repeatedly and recurrently sent his prophets, but the people have not listened and obeyed.

We get documented evidence of that in the story of Jeremiah's ministry in chapters 26 to 45. Along with that, the story of the actual fall of Jerusalem that validates Jeremiah's ministry, that proves that his warnings of judgment were something that the people should have taken seriously. And that confirms that he is a true prophet of God.

We've looked at the structure of this section as well and seen a framework around this section through the Jehoiakim passages, chapter 26 to 35, a Jehoiakim story and an episode in 26 and 35 that mark off that first panel. There's a second panel, 36 and 45, where again, we have Jehoiakim narratives or episodes and both sections are going to document that Judah did not obey and did not listen to the word of God. They missed an opportunity to be spared from judgment.

In our last section, we looked at the stories at the beginning of the framework in both sections. The disobedience of Jehoiakim after the temple sermon is preached, as well as Jehoiakim's rejection of the word of the Lord, Chapter 36, Jehoiakim's destruction of the scroll of Jeremiah's prophecies.

So, at the beginning of each one of these panels, there is the possibility, maybe the people will respond. They will turn from their evil and God will no longer send the calamity that he's threatened to bring against them. Both of those raise that possibility, 26.3 and 36.3. We have the word *ulai*, perhaps, and the Lord expressing his willingness to relent if they will repent.

What both of these sections are going to show, 26 to 35 and 36 to 45, is the closing down of those opportunities to be spared from judgment. The time of Jehoiakim's reign in Judah was a watershed moment. There's still the opportunity to be spared from this judgment.

God has given the people recurring opportunities, but there's one last chance. And then when Jehoiakim and the people reject the word of the Lord, and that continues until the time of the fall of Jerusalem, that judgment that is possible at the beginning of Jeremiah's ministry that the prophet is warning about becomes irrevocable as we move closer to the time of the fall of Jerusalem. What we have at the end of both panels is a statement of judgment on the nation at large, because of the fact that they did not accept the word of the Lord.

The possibility of life and death is offered at the beginning of each panel. The final response is they're going to reject the word, and it brings death. We see that in Jeremiah chapter 35, the judgment that God is going to bring against the people that are remaining in the land that are still in Judah in the final days of Jerusalem and in the final days of Judah as a nation.

We also see that there's a judgment that takes in the people as a whole in Jeremiah 44. And the judgment there is on the Jewish refugees that are in Egypt. They reject the word of the Lord as well.

So, at the beginning, maybe they will respond. Maybe they will repent at the end of each panel. No, that's not going to happen.

Listening to the word of God is a matter of life and death. Moses had told the people in his day, choose for yourself, either life or death. Life will come from following God's word.

Death and cursing will come from those who choose to disobey his commands. And we see that working itself out in the life and ministry and preaching of Jeremiah. But what we also have in the concluding chapters that close each of these panels in chapters 44, or in the first section in chapters 34 and 35, and then in the second section in chapters 44 and 45, is that there are limited examples of either individuals or groups that responded positively to the word of God, and they are going to be spared from the judgment.

They are going to experience the gift and the reward of life because they listen to God. So, on the whole, this is a really frustrating thing to look at Jeremiah's ministry. There's the possibility that if the people were to relent, they would be spared.

The nation as a whole rejects that opportunity, but there is a remnant who will respond, and they will experience the blessings that come from obeying God. So,

what we have at the end of each of these panels is there is a contrast between the death of the nation and the salvation of key individuals who respond in a positive way to God or to his word. In the first panel, the positive response and the promise of life and deliverance are going to be given to a group of people called the Rechabites.

And that may be a group of people or a name that you're completely unfamiliar with. They are a very obscure group, but they are promised life in contrast to the judgment that's going to fall on the nation as a whole. In the second panel, we have the judgment of the refugees in Egypt.

They're going to continue in their idolatrous ways. God is not going to spare them, but we also have the salvation of an individual, a member of the faithful, and his name is Baruch, Jeremiah's scribe. So, the tragedy in all of this is that there is the possibility that the nation as a whole can experience life and blessing.

The reality is, is that only a tiny minority of people are actually going to respond in a positive way and they will be the ones who experience the blessing of salvation. Throughout Israel's history, we have this idea that we have a people, and to varying degrees, the people at large seem to be disobedient to God. They're stiff-necked, they're rebellious, and hard-hearted, but no matter how badly things turn in the history of Israel and Judah, there is always a faithful remnant.

In the Northern kingdom during the days of Ahab's apostasy, when his wife Jezebel led the people astray into Baal worship, there are still faithful prophets in Israel and there are still faithful servants of God. Ahab even has one of his officials, Obadiah, who is a faithful, devoted, loyal follower of the Lord. And in the last days of Judah, the nation as a whole has drifted away from God.

In Jeremiah chapter five, the Lord imagines someone going through the city of Jerusalem and trying to find one righteous person, but they can't even find a single righteous person. Judah and Jerusalem have become even more wicked than Sodom and Gomorrah. But even in this time of national apostasy, where God has reached a point where he says, I'm going to bring judgment, there are still some faithful individuals.

Now, the group that is promised salvation and deliverance in the first panel or in chapter 35, at the conclusion of this, is the group called the Rechabites. All right, let me read the opening verses of Jeremiah 35, and we'll talk about the Rechabites and who they are, why they're in this story, and why they're significant.

Chapter 35, verse one says this, the word that came to Jeremiah from the Lord in the days of Jehoiakim, the son of Josiah.

So, we're back in the time of Jehoiakim. This is the conclusion to the frame in the first section. Go to the house of the Rechabites and speak with them and bring to the house of the Lord into one of the chambers, then offer them wine to drink.

So, I took Jaazanai, the son of Jeremiah, the son of Habazziniah and his brothers and all of the sons and the whole house of the Rechabites, and I may have slaughtered some of those names there. I brought them to the house of the Lord, into the chamber of the sons of Hanan, the son of Igdaliah, the man of God, which was near the chamber of the officials, above the chamber of some of these other leaders in the sanctuary. And it says in verse five, then I set before the Rechabites pictures, pitchers full of wine and cups.

And I said to them, drink wine. But they answered, we will drink no wine for Jonadab, the son of Rechab, our father commanded us, you shall drink wine, neither you nor your sons forever. You shall not build a house.

You shall not sow seed. You shall not plant nor have a vineyard, but you shall live in tents all of your days in order that you may live many days in the land where you sojourn. We have obeyed the voice of Jonadab, the son of Rechab, our father, in all that he commanded us to drink no wine all of our days, ourselves, our wives, our sons, our daughters, and to not build houses to dwell in.

We have no vineyard or field or seed, but we have lived in tents and have obeyed and done all that Jonadab, our father, commanded us. But when Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon, came up against the land, we said, come and let us go to Jerusalem for fear of the army of the Chaldeans and the army of the Syrians. So, we are living in Jerusalem.

Okay. What, what in the world's going on here? Or the larger question that you may be asking, so what? All right. The Rechabites were a nomadic clan that lived in Judah, and they were faithful to one of the vows that their forefather, Jonadab, had taken back during the days of Jehu 200 years ago.

And their forefather, Jonadab, what he had done is that during the time when Israel in the Northern kingdom had been unfaithful to the Lord, and they had been worshipping Baal and Ahab and Jezebel had promoted this, King Jehu came along in order to purge Israel of this apostasy. Well, Jonadab, who was the ancestor of the Rechabites was a friend and a supporter of Jehu's reforms. And as Jonadab saw the corruption and how, I think in many ways, Canaanite influence had drawn the people of Israel away from the Lord.

He took a vow that he hoped, I think, in some way, would preserve his family and keep them faithful to the Lord. And his vow involved three specific things. They would not plant crops.

They would not live in houses. Instead, they would live in tents, and they would not drink wine. All right.

I think, again, the purpose of all of this was, in some way, to keep his family isolated from the corruption of Israelite society. And I think from the Canaanite influence that had come about as a result of Ahab and Jezebel promoting the worship of Baal. And so, all of this happens during the time of Jehu's reforms.

You can read about this in 2 Kings chapter 10, verses 15 to 17. This ancestor of the Rechabites is mentioned in that specific passage. Okay.

Now, was there anything ungodly about living in houses, planting crops, and drinking wine? Well, actually, they were things that God had promised to Israel as blessings for living in the promised land. In Deuteronomy chapter 6, verses 10 and 11, I'm going to give you houses that you didn't build. I'm going to give you vineyards that you didn't plant.

And I'm going to bless you with the abundance of all of the crops that are going to be in the land. So, in a sense, Jonadab was taking a vow that really deprived his family of specific covenantal promises that God had given to the people of Israel as a whole. But again, this was a voluntary vow to God that I think in some sense, again, was an attempt to keep his family loyal to the Lord.

Now, some people have suggested that the Rechabites, by the time that we get to Jeremiah's day, 200 years later, may simply be one family, or it may actually be a guild of people that have bonded together. They may be metal workers. The word, the Rechabites, the word for chariot is rakab.

Some people have suggested that they were builders of chariots. So maybe it's a guild, but in some way, because of this vow, they have kept themselves separate from society. Okay.

Again, there was nothing commanded by God that specifically said, you're not supposed to do these three things. In fact, again, this was a blessing God had given, and they have voluntarily denied themselves these things, and they have become sort of an isolated identifiable group as a result of this. Looking at an ancient parallel, we may compare them to the Nazarites.

And remember a Nazarite vow, Numbers chapter six, verses two to four, involved three things. When the person took the vow, they did not cut their hair. They did not drink anything alcoholic or, in fact, eat any sort of grape product, and they did not come in contact with a dead body.

Now, being a Nazarite normally, except in extreme examples like Samson, that was simply something that you did for a short period of time to express your devotion to God, maybe to pray to God over something that was urgent. But the Rechabites had also taken a voluntary vow. And it was something that had not just been Jonah dabbed, but they had actually continued this for 200 years.

Okay. So, here's this family, here's this clan, or maybe a group or a guild that has bonded together. Looking at a contemporary example, we may compare them to the Amish in America.

They're like the Israelite Amish. They're a very identifiable group that in some sense has separated themselves from society by these three specific things. But it tells us that they're living in Jerusalem in the last days because the pressures from the Babylonian army have forced them to come within the city walls.

Jeremiah brings them to the temple. And he not only brings them into the temple, he puts jars and flasks of wine in front of them, and he tells them to drink. And maybe we could portray this and imagine this as another one of Jeremiah's synopsis.

But it seems kind of ironic here. This family has been faithful to their vow for 200 years, and Jeremiah is telling them to break it in the temple. Okay.

So, in 26 and 36, Jeremiah preached some important messages to the people of God at the temple, and the people didn't listen. So now, Jeremiah brings the Rechabites to the temple and tells them to drink wine. Hey, revoke your family custom that's been going on for 200 years.

And it's like, what's Jeremiah doing here? Amos chapter 2, verse 12 says that one of the sins of the Israelites is that they made the Nazarites drink wine. And they encouraged these people who were expressing their devotion to God to do something that broke their vow. In a sense, it looks like Jeremiah is doing the same.

Drink wine. But the amazing thing that happens as Jeremiah tells the Rechabites to do this, they refuse to do what the prophet has told them. Okay.

Now, that sounds a lot like the people of Judah. The king of Judah and the people of Judah have refused to listen to the word of the Lord at the temple. But the irony is that God blesses the Rechabites because they don't do what the prophet tells them.

Okay. Now, the point of this is that there's a very powerful object lesson in all of this. Jeremiah and the Lord want the people to understand something.

If the Rechabites have been this loyal and faithful to a family tradition that was not directly commanded by God, then why have the people of Judah not listened to the

words of the Lord that were commanded to them by God himself? All right. The Rechabites have been faithful to human tradition. And in a sense, that's commendable.

I believe that it's played a real role in helping them in some way to be faithful to God. It's commendable, but it's the instruction of their father. It's the tradition of a man.

What Judah has not listened to is the word of the Lord. And so, even though these people actually disobey the prophet and don't do what the prophet tells them, the Lord ends up blessing them and rewarding them for their faithfulness to their father's traditions. So, here's the message that emerges out of this story of the Rechabites.

Here's what the prophet says; here's what the Lord wants to say to the people. The Lord instructs Jeremiah to go to the people of Judah and says this. Verse 14, the command that Jonadab, the son of Rehob, gave to his sons to drink no wine has been kept, and they drink none to this day for they have obeyed.

They have listened, Shammah, to their father's command. The irony is the people of Israel have not listened to the Lord. They have listened to their father's command, and I have spoken to you persistently, but you have not listened to me.

I have sent to you all of my servants, the prophets, sending them persistently saying, turn now every one of you from his evil way and amend your deeds and do not go after other gods to serve them. And then you shall dwell in the land that I gave you to your fathers, but you did not incline your ear to listen to me. Remember, the Rechabites have been faithful to their father's vow for 200 years.

But the Lord has been dealing with Israel and Judah for hundreds of years, and they have persistently disobeyed God. They have persistently not listened to the prophets. And so therefore behold, I am bringing upon Judah and all of the inhabitants of Jerusalem, all of the disaster that I have pronounced against them.

Okay? So, there's the context here of the people who have not listened to God. As a result of that, there is going to be a national judgment that is going to fall upon all of the people that are still remaining in the land. And the Lord is going to bring these various waves of exile and God is going to judge the nation.

Why? Because they did not listen to God. But the Lord is going to bless the Rechabites because they did listen to their father. And so, as we look at the panel in 26 to 35, there's the possibility at the beginning in chapter 26 of all of the nation being spared from judgment.

However, at the end of the panel in chapter 35, you have not listened, you have not obeyed, you've responded to Jeremiah in exactly the same way that you responded to the other prophets. Therefore, I'm bringing disaster on these people. But listen to the promise that's given to the Rechabites.

But to the house of the Rechabites, Jeremiah said, thus says the Lord of hosts, because you have obeyed the commandment of Jonadab, your father and kept all of his precepts and done all that he commanded you. Therefore, thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, Jonadab the son of Racheb shall never lack a man to stand before me. Now, that's not a promise that they are going to endure forever, but it's a promise that as long as this clan is in existence, they will have someone to represent them in front of God.

Okay, so there's death for the nation as a whole, and there's life for this tiny group. There is the possibility at the beginning of Jeremiah's ministry that this entire people, that the nation as a whole can experience life if they'll just turn to God and respond to him and obey him. At the end of this cycle, there's a disappointment here because the only group that is going to be spared from this judgment are the Rechabites.

Now, I think there are some very effective rhetorical devices that are going on here. There are some reasons why the use of the Rechabites here is an especially effective way of conveying the message that the Lord wants to give to the people as a whole. First of all, the mere fact that the Lord has to use this obscure tribe, the Rechabites, who really are not even citizens and residents of Jerusalem, to begin with, the fact that he has to use them as his example of obedience, I mean, Jeremiah has had to look long and hard to find someone that's been faithful.

All right, the second thing that's ironic, and again, we've already mentioned this, is that the Rechabites espoused a lifestyle that did not fully allow them to enjoy all the blessings of the covenant, the houses, the vineyards, the crops, the products that the Lord would give them. In fact, they probably, by working their craft, had to trade that for food because they didn't raise crops themselves. They did not get to enjoy the vineyards and the wine and the houses and all the things that God had prepared for these people, and yet they are the ones who are spared and are going to experience blessing.

But it's a very limited kind of blessing because they live a life that, again, doesn't allow them to fully enjoy the land flowing with milk and honey. The third irony here is that this passage never really tells us anything directly about the piety of the Rechabites or their devotion or their commitment to God. Now, we assume that the purpose behind this, Jonah, they have the reason for this vow initially: my people, my descendants, are not going to grow crops, live in houses, and drink wine.

It was a way of keeping them separate from the corruption of the society around them. We assume that the Rechabites have continued this as part of their devotion to God, but there is nothing specifically stated about their love for the Lord or their devotion to God. And they even disobey the commandment that the prophet gives them at the beginning, drink wine.

So, it's almost like they're as unresponsive to the prophet as, but the Lord rewards them. And again, the final irony of all of this is that the Lord blesses them for obedience to the traditions of their fathers. And the contrast is if God would bless these people who have kept this voluntary vow, then why has Israel and why have Judah, why have they not listened to the word of God? Okay.

The word of God and our response to that is a matter of life and death. The Rechabites will experience life. The nation as a whole will experience death.

This blessing again comes from listening to the teachings and paying attention to the traditions of their fathers. So, there's some interesting things going on here. Here's our example of the remnant.

What does the remnant look like? It's the Rechabites. It's the Amish of Judah. That is going to be preserved.

Now, the promise that's given to the Rechabites that they will not lack a man to stand before me is the same promise that's given to the Levites and to the house of David in Jeremiah 33. Now, when that promise is given to the Levites and to David in Jeremiah chapter 33, it has great national significance. It means that the role of the Davidic king, even though God is judging them in the present, that role and that special relationship that God had with David is going to be continued.

That special covenant promise that God made to David that he would establish his throne forever that's going to continue. And that's central to the life of Israel as a nation. And it's going to be central to their ultimate restoration.

When the Lord says, the Levites will never lack a man to stand before me. That's important. Because for the nation, the role of the Levites was to be the priest and the people who served at the temple that mediated God's blessing.

But when we come to chapter 35, it says, the Rechabites will never lack a man to stand before me; that has great significance for the tribe, but it doesn't mean much for the nation. So, all of this portrayal of the Rechabites as being the ones who are the faithful example, who are the ones and the only ones in this section that experienced the blessing of life. This is an incredible condemnation of the nation of Judah as a whole.

And what is laid beside the example of the faithfulness of the Rechabites is the national disobedience of Judah. When we go back to chapter 34 and a specific act of disobedience that's going to happen at the end of Judah's history, and again, the timeframe of Zedekiah and the timeframe of Jehoiakim are often going to be laid side by side.

But here's the event in chapter 34 that brings the national judgment that is decreed in chapter 35, that brings the first panel to an end and says the people had a chance to experience life, but they're not going to receive it because they did not respond to God in the right way. We go back to chapter 34, and now we're in the last days of Judah. It's the time of Zedekiah, the Babylonian invasion and the army is pressing on Judah in a severe way here.

Verse 7, chapter 34 says this, the prophet Jeremiah spoke all of these words to Zedekiah, the king of Judah and Jerusalem, when the army of the king of Babylon was fighting against Jerusalem and against all of the cities of Judah that were left, Lachish and Azekah, for these were the only fortified cities of Judah that remained. So we see a place in chapter 34, 7, where there are only three fortified cities of Judah left, Lachish, Azekah, and Jerusalem. When we read the Lachish letters, which are extra-biblical sources talking about the same time, they mentioned that the signal fires at Azekah have gone out, so it's going to get worse.

The reason that things are going to get worse is directly tied in verses 8 to 22 in Jeremiah 34 to a direct act of disobedience against God and God's law that happens during the time of Zedekiah. All right, let me, let me read a few verses here and then we'll, we'll set the context in the setting of what's going on. In verse 8, right after 34, 7, there are only three cities, there are only three cities, fortified cities still standing.

The word that came to Jeremiah from the Lord after King Zedekiah had made a covenant with all of the people in Jerusalem to make a proclamation of liberty to them, that everyone should set free his Hebrew slaves, male and female so that no one should enslave a Jew, his brother. And they obeyed. They shema.

There is a rare example here of the people of Judah actually doing something that obeyed God. All right, here, here's what's going on. The Old Testament law had instructed the people of Israel that they were not to permanently enslave their fellow Israelites.

If an Israelite was required to become a slave because of debt that he owed to another person, he was only required to serve for six years. But in the seventh year, Exodus 15 and Deuteronomy 15, that person was to be given the opportunity to go free. And when you release them as a slave, you are actually giving them provision so that they could set themselves up for their new life.

There was never to be a permanent enslavement of any other Israelite. God had laid that out very clearly in his law. What this passage reflects is that there had been a long time when Judah had not observed this law.

Now, some scholars have argued that what Zedekiah and the people did here is not directly tied to these commandments because there is a general amnesty given to all of the servants. And, Zedekiah simply says, look, we're going to make a covenant, and we're going to release all of our servants. Okay.

I think it simply reflects the fact that it has been so long since they have obeyed God's command that they have to proclaim this general amnesty. I still see a connection to Exodus 15 and Deuteronomy 15. All right.

So, this is a positive thing. They listened and they obeyed and, and they're doing what God's law commanded them to do. They are releasing their slaves.

What they're really trying to do, though, is that as the Babylonian army is pressing on them, maybe we can find some way to get God's favor. And maybe we should have paid attention to God's word. And if we, if we do this kind act to our slaves, and if we give this general amnesty, then maybe there's the possibility that God is going to take his judgment away from us.

Okay. But Jeremiah 34:11 is going to say this, but afterward, and maybe for some reason, the Babylonian army withdraws. We read about that happening in some other way.

Things aren't as tight as they once were. The Babylonian army is not pressing on them as much as it was when they issued the decree, made the covenant, and released their slaves. But afterward, they turned around.

Okay. There's our word *shub*. And they took back.

There's the causative form of our verb *shub*. They took back the male and the female slaves they had set free and brought them back into subjugation as slaves. So, we begin this episode with something that looks very positive.

They obeyed one of the specific precepts of the law of God regarding releasing their slaves. They, they, they listened. They *shema*.

They obeyed. They repented. They *shub*.

They turned their direction. But what this passage is saying is they're going to put themselves back under judgment because what happened is they repented of their repentance. Okay.

Throughout the book of Jeremiah, they have been a turning away people who need to turn back. Now, finally, they do turn. They do what, they do what God commands them and then they shub and they turn away from what God has said.

And as a result of that, they bring themselves back under a sentence of judgment. The Lord says this, you recently repented. Okay.

We finally had an example of where you finally, you shub, you did what God commanded you to do. You repented and did what was right in my eyes by proclaiming liberty each to his neighbor and you made a covenant before me in the house that is called by my name. So, they did two things right.

They turned around, and they made a covenant. You know, the problem throughout Jeremiah's ministry is that he'd been charging the people that they have broken the covenant. They made a covenant to do what is right in God's eyes.

But again, in verse 16, they repented of their repentance. You turned around then and profaned my name, and each of you took back his male and his female slaves whom you had set free. Okay.

So, at the end of the first panel, what we have is an example of national disobedience in the city of Jerusalem where Zedekiah and the people blatantly try to manipulate God by, by keeping his precept for a little while that they're to release their slaves. And then when things get easy again, or when the pressure of the Babylonian army is relieved a little bit, they take their slaves back. As a result of that, there is national judgment.

As a result of that, the possible relenting of judgment that's set forth in chapter 26 is not going to happen. And that national judgment is set in contrast to the faithfulness of this obscure tribe, the Rechabites, who, you know, it's not even their commandment. It's not even obedience to the commandments of God. It's the commandments of their father.

They will be spared from judgment. There is national judgment. There is a tiny remnant that experiences life.

Response to the word of God is a matter of life and death. We're reminded of that again and again. And we see that in the contrast of Jerusalem and the Rechabites.

All right. Listen to the decree of judgment that God is going to pass. Listen to the sentence that he executes on them because of their unfaithfulness in this particular covenantal thing that's going on in 34.

Verse 17, Lican, therefore. Thus says the Lord, you have not obeyed me by proclaiming liberty, everyone to his brother and to his neighbor. Okay.

They have taken away the liberty of these people who are released. So the Lord says, behold, I proclaim to you liberty. Okay.

We've got a repetition here, a word play going on. You took away the lay, the liberty of these Hebrew servants. I'm going to give you liberty.

And here's what this liberty is going to involve. I am going to give you the liberty to die by the sword, by pestilence, and by famine, declares the Lord. And I will make you a whore to the kingdoms of all the earth.

Throughout the prophets, there's going to be this emphasis on the idea that the punishment fits the crime. You took away their liberty. I'm going to give you liberty, and it's going to be liberty to die in some pretty horrible ways.

The other aspect of this where the punishment fits the crime is that as they made this covenant, they followed the rites and the rituals that were often associated with covenant-making in the ancient Near East, which involved the cutting up of animals. And it seems like the reason and the purpose they did this was they would cut the animals up. They would lay them out.

This was part of the sacrifices and things they did as they were making these covenants. And the covenant partners would walk between the animal parts. And what this solemn ceremony is signifying is, is that the covenant partners were binding themselves to this agreement and saying to each other, if we don't keep the terms of this agreement, then may the same thing happen to us that has happened to these animals that we have offered as part of this ritual.

We see this happening in the covenant between God and Abraham back in Genesis 15. Abraham falls asleep as God passes through the animal parts, and God obligates himself to keep the covenant. They had obligated themselves to do what God had said. First of all, their forefathers had obligated that when they had received the Mosaic law at the beginning, they have recommitted themselves, they have made a covenant.

And so, what God says is because you have not kept that covenant, the punishment is going to fit the crime. And he says this in verse 18, the men who transgressed my covenant and did not keep the terms of the covenant that made before them. I will make them like the calf that they cut in two and pass between the parts.

There is going to be a national judgment because of the disobedience of the nation as a whole. And so, at the end of the panel, what we have at the end of the first

panel is the national judgment of the people who did not keep their covenant. They repented of their repentance, and we have the promise of life to the Rechabites.

Now as we go to the end of the second panel, we are going to see something very similar. We go to chapter 45, and here is the promise of life that's given at the end of the second panel. In chapter 36, again, at the beginning of this, it's the same situation.

If the people will obey, if they will listen, if they will turn from their sinful ways, God will relent and give them life. Are they going to do that? And in chapter 37, Hezekiah, his attendance to the people, they did not obey the word of the Lord. That's why Jerusalem fell, and this whole panel is going to document more disobedience.

But the promise of life that is offered in 36 is given to one individual in chapter 45. Again, note the size of the remnant. And in the chapter, in the first panel, it's a small remnant.

It's a small clan. It's an obscure group and you get the idea that Jeremiah had to look kind of long and hard to find someone. At the end of the second panel, the remnant consists of one individual.

And the Lord gives this promise to Baruch. And remember, Baruch is Jeremiah's faithful scribe. Baruch is the man who had the courage to go to the temple and read the words that Jeremiah had dictated to him.

That was a courageous act. Because of his faithfulness, because of his obedience, because of the fact that he remains with Jeremiah really through thick and thin, the Lord's going to give him this promise. Thus says the Lord God of Israel, chapter 45, verse 2. You have said, O Baruch, woe is me, for the Lord has added sorrow to my pain.

And so, Jeremiah was a weeping prophet. Baruch was a weeping scribe. I mean, they both went through similar things.

I am weary with my groaning and I find no rest. Thus, you shall say to him, thus says the Lord, behold, what I have built, I am breaking down. And what I have planted, I am plucking up.

That is the whole land. There are those key verbs that are introduced to us back in chapter 1 to talk about Jeremiah's ministry of judgment. The Lord's bringing this about.

But here's the promise to Baruch. As for you, do not seek great things for yourself. Seek them not, for behold, I am bringing disaster upon all flesh, but I will give your life as a prize of war in all of the places to which you may go.

So, Baruch, even if you go to the temple and the king hates you and does not want to hear your message, I'm going to protect you and preserve you. Baruch, when Johanan and the military officials take you and Jeremiah and lead you away into Egypt, and you have to go into this foreign land, I'm going to be with you. Baruch, whenever all of these experiences are happening to you and Jeremiah, whatever happens, I'm not promising you that you will not have to go through difficulty.

Do not seek great things for yourself. And that term is used in Jeremiah chapter 33 to talk about the ultimate restoration of the land. Baruch's not going to get to live to see those kinds of blessings, but God will reward him with his life because of his faithfulness to God.

Notice what he says. I will give you your life as a prize of war in all of the places to which you may go. I like the way that William Holliday has explained that little expression.

He says that it's an old soldier's joke. That we went into battle and what plunder did we get? Well, the only plunder that we got is that we escaped with our very lives. And that's all that God is promising to Baruch.

He will escape with his very life, but Baruch experiences the blessing of life that is offered to the people at the beginning of Jeremiah's ministry, but was rejected by them. Listening to the word of God is a matter of life and death. Baruch will experience God's blessing because of the fact that he has been obedient to God.

That act of faithfulness and obedience is directly contrasted with the disobedience of the Jewish refugees that are in Egypt in Jeremiah chapter 44. And remember the prophet, we've looked at this passage before, the prophet comes and confronts them about their idolatrous ways. They need to put those practices behind them.

They need to be faithful to the Lord. Being in this foreign environment, it seems has added to their, you know, their willingness to follow these other gods. And they say to Jeremiah, as for the word that you have spoken to us in the name of the Lord, we will not listen to you.

We will do everything that we have vowed. We will make offerings to the queen of heaven. We will pour out our drink offerings to her.

We will not listen to you. And this kind of brings us to the end of everything that we've observed in 26 to 45. There's constantly the charge that people do not listen to God.

They did not pay attention to his word. Well, at the very end of this, they blatantly say, we will not listen to what the Lord says. It's also interesting to contrast chapter 44 at the end of the second panel and this national disobedience of the refugees in Egypt with the disobedience of the people that are in Judah in chapter 34.

Because what you have in chapter 34 is that the people renege on a vow to do what is right. What you have going on here is that the people persist and express their willingness and their commitment to fulfill a vow that involves doing something that is wrong. We're going to keep offering our sacrifice.

We're going to keep making our offerings to these pagan deities because we believe that they can bless us in ways that the Lord did not. In fact, the disaster that has come upon us as a nation came about as a result of Josiah's reforms, where he took those things away from us. Here's God's response to the words that they have said.

And we come to the end of this. The life of Baruch, the judgment of the people. The Lord says this, I have sworn by my great name, says the Lord of Egypt, saying, as the Lord God lives, behold, I am watching over them for disaster and not good.

They did not turn away from their Ra'as, so the Lord's going to bring disaster on them. All of the men of Judah who are in the land of Egypt shall be consumed by the sword and by famine until there is an end of them. And those who escape the sword shall return from the land of Egypt to the land of Judah.

Few and number and all of the remnant who came to the land of Egypt to live shall know whose word shall stand, mine or theirs. So, there is going to be a judgment of those people in Egypt. There's going to be a judgment of the remnant there and they are going to be practically wiped out.

Only a tiny minority of them will come back to the land. So again, at the end of the second panel, exactly the same thing that we've seen at the first, there is a people-wide judgment followed by the salvation of a tiny remnant. Jeremiah also told the people that the hope for Israel's future lay with the exiles that were in Babylon.

And remember that in the aftermath of exile, we have Jews that are actually in three different places. We have Jews who remain in the land of Judah. We have the Jews that went down to Egypt in chapter 43, and then we have the Jews that are in Babylon.

What we see here are the judgment of two of those three groups. The people that are in the land are judged in 586 by the destruction of the city. The people that are in Egypt are going to be practically wiped out.

So, in the story of Jeremiah here, we see exactly what Jeremiah has said: the hope for Israel's future lies with the exiles. We see that in the working out of the story as well. But in the two panels that are given to us, what is laid before us is the idea that listening to the word of God is a matter of life and death.

The nation as a whole experiences judgment because they will not listen. They do not obey God. A tiny remnant responds and experiences life as a result of that. How we listen to God and how we listen to the words of the prophets, ultimately, both for the people then and for us today, is a matter of life and death.

It's the most important decision, the most important issue facing all of us. What is your response to God's word and the ways that he speaks to us through it?

This is Dr. Gary Yates in his teaching on the book of Jeremiah. This is session 21, Death to the Nation and Life to the Remnant, Jeremiah 34-35.