

Dr. Gary Yates, Jeremiah, Lecture 23, Jeremiah 38-39, Zedekiah Disobedience and the Fall of Jerusalem

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This is Dr. Gary Yates in his teaching on the book of Jeremiah. This is session 23, Jeremiah 37-39, Zedekiah's Disobedience and the Fall of Jerusalem.

Our focus in this lesson is Jeremiah chapters 37-39 and we're dealing with the disobedience of Zedekiah and the fall of Jerusalem.

Obviously, we understand that these are very important chapters because they deal with really the central event that took place in Jeremiah's life and ministry, the destruction of the city of Jerusalem. What the theology of Jeremiah is going to develop for us is that this fall of Jerusalem is the direct result of the king and the people and the officials of Judah not listening to the word of the Lord. Again, the greatest theological crisis, perhaps in the Old Testament, is the exile and how God allowed the temple to be destroyed.

What's happened in all of this? We see passages in the Psalms where the people are wrestling with this and struggling with what happens to the future of God's people. Psalm 89, what's happened to God's covenant with David? This is a major event. The theological message of Jeremiah is that it is directly connected to the failure of the people to respond.

It is not God abandoning his people. It is not God failing on his covenant promises. It is Israel who has failed in the covenant by not listening to or obeying the Lord.

We see in the design and the literary structure of Jeremiah 26-45 that Jeremiah 37-39 is closely related to the passage that we looked at last time in 27-29. Both of them are dealing with the last days of Judah as a nation. They're dealing with the time of Zedekiah, and they're dealing with the varied responses that people have to Jeremiah's message, submit to the Babylonians, the exile is going to last for 70 years, God is using the Babylonians as an instrument of judgment.

In many ways, that was a subversive message. The idea that God had given control of Judah over to these pagan Babylonians and the false prophets of peace were the ones that were particularly opposing this message. We saw in Jeremiah 27-29 the whole issue of prophetic conflict and how very real that was.

We almost get a chance to put ourselves on the streets of Jerusalem in the last days of Judah as a nation and put ourselves in the minds of the people. Who's telling us

the truth here? Now this problem with false prophets and prophetic conflict and the engagement in those kinds of issues is not just found in the book of Jeremiah, but it's also briefly reflected for us also in the prophet Micah. I wanted to just reference a couple of verses here as a follow-up to what we talked about last time.

Remember, Micah preached a century before Jeremiah. He announced that the city of Jerusalem was going to be destroyed and Jeremiah 26 specifically says that it was the preaching of Micah and those warnings of the destruction of Jerusalem that motivated Hezekiah's response of repentance. Well, as Micah was preaching that message and pronouncing and proclaiming the judgment that was coming, he was opposed in the same way as Jeremiah.

Again, by prophets of peace who had a defective view of the covenant that believed God would protect Israel, they were his chosen people, no harm could befall them, God would look over his house, God would protect the Davidic king, and so their response to Micah as he's preaching, Jerusalem's going to be leveled, it's going to be reduced to a heap of rubble, they said these things. Do not preach, thus they preach. One should not preach of such things.

Disgrace will not overtake us. Should this be said, O house of Jacob, has the Lord grown impatient? Are these his deeds? You know, and they were saying, look, you know, you shouldn't preach this way. Why would God bring judgment against his people? Then, in verse 11, Micah thinks about how the people have responded to that and how they want to hear the messages of peace rather than the messages of judgment; he says to them, if a man should go about and utter wind and lies, saying, I will preach to you of wine and strong drink, and he would be just the preacher for this people.

Look, you don't want to hear my messages of judgment, but if someone were to come along and say, God's going to give you plenty of beer and wine to drink, and you're going to experience all kinds of pleasure and prosperity, that'd be the guy you'd want to hear. But I'm warning you, those kinds of people are only speaking lies and wind to you. I'm telling you the truth.

In chapter 3, verses 5 and 6, Micah talks about the false prophets. He says, Thus says the Lord concerning the prophets who lead my people astray, who cry, Peace. So, he's dealing with the same kind of prophets that Jeremiah had, who were saying, Peace, Peace. They say Peace when they have something to eat, but they declare war against him who puts nothing into their mouths.

So, they not only offer empty promises of peace, but if you pay them the right price, they'll tell you what you want them to say. They'll offer you promises of peace, but if you don't give them a good love offering, they're going to announce judgment on you. So, Micah was struggling with false prophets, and ultimately, Hezekiah made the

right choice to respond to God, to listen to the warnings of judgment, and to take those things seriously, and Jerusalem was spared in 701 in part because of that.

Jeremiah, in chapters 37 to 39, is preaching that God is going to bring destruction on Jerusalem. Zedekiah is not going to respond in the right way, and the first thing that we read in chapter 37, 1-2, introducing this section, an important summary statement for Jeremiah 26-45 as a whole, says this: Zedekiah, the son of Josiah, whom Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, made king in the land of Judah, reigned instead of Coniah, or Jehoiachin, the son of Jehoiakim, but neither he, nor his servants, nor the people of the land listened to the words of the Lord that he spoke through Jeremiah the prophet. Okay, so, why is the destruction of Jerusalem that's described for us in chapter 39, that's also recounted for us at the end of the book of Jeremiah in chapter 52, why did it happen? Because the king and the people did not respond to the word of the Lord.

What we see in Jeremiah 37-39, leading up to the account where we have the actual fall of the city, is that we have five separate episodes that deal with the response to Jeremiah's message of how we submit to Babylon. Okay, back in 27-29, we had Jeremiah repeating three times: submit to Babylon, surrender to his authority, don't listen to the prophets who are trying to deceive you. In the same way, we're going to have various episodes where Jeremiah is going to talk about the need to surrender to the Babylonians and what kind of response he receives.

Okay, now the layout of this in these five episodes is also going to follow a specific pattern. We're going to have a pattern, again, where we have a type of paneling going on, where we have A and B elements that are being laid beside each other. We have an A element in chapter 37, verses 3-5, where we have King Zedekiah interacting with Jeremiah and his response to the message that they need to surrender to the Babylonians.

In chapter 37, verses 6-10, we have a B element where we have the military officials that are under Zedekiah and their response to Jeremiah. Chapter 37, going back to the A element, we have a story of Jeremiah interacting with King Zedekiah. Then the next B element, again, it's the military officials in chapter 38, verses 1-12, and their response to Jeremiah's message and their hostility to this message that Jeremiah is preaching that they believe is decreasing the war effort and hindering their resistance against Babylon.

And then finally, at the end of chapter 37, from verses 17 to the end of the chapter, we have the A element again of where Jeremiah is interacting with King Zedekiah. So, in this ABABA, contrasting Jeremiah's different interactions with the king and the royal officials, we again see some narrative parallelism that helps us to see the recurring examples of response to the word of the Lord. We also have narrative

parallelism in chapters 37-39 in the sense that the disobedient response of Zedekiah is placed beside the earlier disobedient response of Jehoiakim in chapter 36 as well.

And Jehoiakim was the king who reigned from 609-597. He did not listen to the word of the Lord. In fact, when the word of the Lord came to him, he became angry and hostile.

He killed Uriah in chapter 26. He cut up the scroll of Jeremiah's prophecies in chapter 36. Now, the responses of Zedekiah, chapters 37-39, are placed right beside that.

And Zedekiah is the king in the last days from 597-586. Neither he nor his people nor the attendants, they didn't listen to the word of the Lord as well. So, in whatever time frame you're looking at, whatever time period of Jeremiah's ministry you're considering, the leaders and the officials and the people did not listen to the word of the Lord.

Zedekiah is as deserving of God's judgment as Jehoiakim. Now, that's a little bit surprising because when you compare the two individuals, they look very different. Jehoiakim becomes angry and becomes violent whenever he's confronted with the word of the Lord.

He does not fear God. It appears that he has no regard whatsoever for the prophetic word at all. No fear of the consequences that could happen.

There is never a time when Jehoiakim and Jeremiah have a meeting with each other because it's just too volatile. The relationship between these men is too explosive. Jeremiah can't be in the presence of this king because if he is, the king is going to seize him and do the same thing to him that he did to Uriah and have him put to death.

On the other hand, when we come to Zedekiah, we have a much different kind of individual. We have a prophet or we have a king who is constantly interacting with the prophet. There are the messages of where Jeremiah is speaking to Zedekiah.

They're dialoguing with each other. Zedekiah is constantly asking him, is there a word from the Lord? And every time he asks him, is there a word from the Lord? The message is essentially the same. But we have him three different times here.

Is there a word from the Lord? But we have already seen Jeremiah and Zedekiah interacting with each other earlier in the book as well. Chapter 21, verses 4-10. Zedekiah says to Jeremiah, would you pray for us? That the Lord might bring deliverance.

Chapter 32, verses 1-5. Again, Jeremiah's message. This is what's going to happen to the king if he doesn't submit.

Chapter 34, verses 1-7. Another time where Zedekiah says, is there a word from the Lord about what's going to happen? And the word of the Lord is the same every time. Now, chapter 34 is interesting because it seems like Jeremiah gives Zedekiah a more positive response.

You're going to be able to die in peace, and it seems like things could go well for Zedekiah. Now, some critical scholars have looked at this, and they've tried to separate out different editors and different redactors who have composed these different responses to Zedekiah. But what I think we have going on is that we have the possibility of different outcomes based on how Zedekiah will respond to the word of the Lord.

You see, in spite of the fact that Judah has really crossed over the line, in spite of the fact that God has had all of these movable deadlines and ultimately, they've reached a point of irrevocable judgment, God is still giving Zedekiah some flex that if he responds to Jeremiah's message and surrender, then his life will be spared, and things will turn out for him much better than they actually did. Jeremiah is saying in chapter 34, you're going to die in peace. When we look at what happens to Zedekiah in chapter 39, we realize that he forfeited the opportunity of this positive outcome by the way that he responded to God's word.

Now Zedekiah is constantly having these conferences with the king. He's different from Jehoiakim. He doesn't get angry.

He doesn't threaten the life of the king or doesn't threaten the life of the prophet. He often does things to help the prophet in some sense, partly because Zedekiah is as afraid of the officials as Jeremiah is, but ultimately, he's just as disobedient as Jehoiakim. And it doesn't matter if someone is rebellious and hostile and angry toward the word of God or just indifferent and fearful to carry through on what God tells them to do. Ultimately, that's disobedience.

Whether someone angrily rejects the gospel and says, I don't want to hear that, get away from me, or someone politely hears it and then ignores what it says, they both stand under God's condemnation. And I think that that's really what you see in the narrative parallelism in the second panel here, is that the disobedience of Zedekiah is paralleled to the disobedience of Jehoiakim. Ultimately, they're in the same boat.

Okay? All right, so let's look at these five episodes. Chapter 37, verses 3 to 5. Zedekiah says this in verse 3. He says, Please pray for us to the Lord our God. All right, so here's the initiation of the conference.

We need prayer. Well, remember what God said to Jeremiah back in Chapter 7, chapter 11, chapter 14, and chapter 15? Do not pray for this people. And so, the prophet ultimately is not going to be able to do what the king is asking him to do.

Okay? Now, what exactly is the king asking Jeremiah to pray for? Is he asking Jeremiah to pray that the Lord would give me wisdom to obey him and strength and courage to follow through on what God is telling me to do? Now, that's not exactly what he's praying for. We learn in chapter 21, verse 2, which may be simply a parallel account of the same event that we're reading in chapter 37. Here's what he's actually asking God to do.

Inquire for the Lord for us, for Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, is making war against us. Perhaps the Lord will deal with us according to all of his wonderful deeds, and he will make him withdraw from us. So, he is not asking for the courage and the moral fiber to do what God wants him to do.

He's asking for God to get him out of this situation. When we come back to 37 and the encounter there in the episode, Jeremiah is not going to pray for him. He's not going to open him the opportunity that God's going to rescue him out of this.

He's going to tell him the situation is hopeless. Now, I've brought this up a number of times, and I promise this is probably the last time that I'll mention this, but whenever we hear these stories about the coming fall of Jerusalem, we always have what's happened with Hezekiah and the city of Jerusalem in 701 BC. That's still echoing, and it hasn't been that long ago.

It was a miraculous deliverance. God had stepped in at the 11th hour. It fulfilled, confirmed, and, in a sense, validated the traditions that the people of Judah had about Jerusalem, that God was always going to protect the city.

And so, when Hezekiah experienced this deliverance, what Zedekiah is asking for when he prays, maybe the Lord will relent, maybe the Lord will deliver us, he's asking maybe God will do for us a Hezekiah deliverance. Now, we saw with Jeremiah's interaction with Jehoiakim that that is not going to happen because King Jehoiakim, you are no Hezekiah, you are no Josiah, your judgment is going to come. But we're back to this possibility.

We've got a new king here. We've got a king who is at least willing to invite the prophet in and hear what the prophet has to say. Maybe there's the possibility that God will bring about a deliverance.

Maybe we're going to experience another one of these Hezekiahs. Well, listen to what God is going to say to the prophet or what God is going to say to the king and

to the officials. So partly, what had motivated Zedekiah to come to Jeremiah and ask him to pray for him is that there had been a positive turn of events.

The Egyptians had marched up and they were offering help to Judah because they didn't want the Babylonians encroaching on their territory. They knew that if the Babylonians ultimately took Judah, that just made them closer to invading our land. So, they're trying to help Judah to stop this.

Zedekiah trusts in this alliance with Egypt as possibly being what will deliver him. Jeremiah comes, and he absolutely explodes any possible hopeful resolution to this. The Egyptians are not going to help you.

Their military intervention in this situation is not going to turn this situation around. In fact, if your army marched out and defeated the Chaldeans, the wounded people that were left in the Chaldeans, they could still capture this city. Remember how David had gone in and ultimately captured Jerusalem with a small group of people that had sort of snuck into the city.

Hey, the Chaldeans are going to do that. There is no getting away from this. Even if you could have a major military victory, it's not going to work.

Well, this sort of sets Jeremiah up. Let's contrast Jeremiah and Isaiah as a prophet. Isaiah, the Lord is going to deliver this city.

Sennacherib and his armies would not fire a single arrow into this city. I'm sure the king was thinking, why couldn't we just have one of those prophets from the good old days like Isaiah? You know, Jeremiah seems like kind of a lesser guy. Isaiah is tight enough with God that he can guarantee the Lord's deliverance.

We sort of got a second-class prophet who all he can tell us is judgment. Pete Diamond provided some interesting intertextual studies of this part of Jeremiah. One of the things that he noticed is that there are definitely some intertextual connections between the story of Isaiah and Hezekiah and then of Jeremiah and Zedekiah.

And the interesting thing here is that Jeremiah definitely comes off looking like a lesser prophet. In fact, what Diamond is going to suggest is that if you go back to the story of Isaiah and Hezekiah, the individual in that story that Jeremiah most closely resembles is the pagan Assyrian Rabshakeh, the commander of the Assyrian army, who is telling the king of Judah, it's hopeless for you to try to withstand our army. So if we're going to do an intertextual comparison between Isaiah and Jeremiah, Jeremiah doesn't look like Isaiah.

Jeremiah looks more like a pagan Rabshakeh, the commander of the Assyrian army, who is telling the people of Judah, look, it's hopeless. There is no way that you're ever going to be delivered from our army. In fact, listen to this passage from Isaiah 37:4-9, and compare it to what we just heard Jeremiah saying to King Zedekiah.

Look, even if you defeat the Babylonians, even if the Egyptians come and help you, the wounded guys in the Babylonian army that are in the hospital, they're the ones that could come in and burn the city. Listen to what the Rabshakeh says, and it's in chapter 36, verses 4-9. Say this to Hezekiah, thus says the great king, the king of Assyria, on what do you rest this trust of yours? You know that the city of Jerusalem is going to be protected.

Do you think that mere words are strategy and power for war? In whom do you now trust that you have rebelled against me? Behold, you are trusting in Egypt. Hezekiah had done the same thing that Zedekiah was doing. He had made an alliance with Egypt and thought that the military assistance of the Egyptians was going to help him.

It's not going to help. Jeremiah is saying the same thing that the Rabshakeh says in Jeremiah chapter 37. The Rabshakeh also says Egypt is just a broken reed of a staff which will pierce the hand of any man who leans on it.

Such is the Pharaoh, the king of Egypt, to all who trust in him. So, you're putting your trust in this army that's going to help you. They're not going to be a help.

And the Pharaoh is just going to be like a broken reed that's going to puncture your hand. He's not going to deliver you. He goes on to say in verse 8, Come now, make a wager with my master, the king of Assyria.

I will give you two thousand horses. If you're able on your part to set riders on them, how then can you repulse a single captain among the least of my master's servants when you trust in Egypt for chariots and for horsemen? Moreover, it is without the Lord that I have come up against this land to destroy it. Is it without the Lord that I've come up against this land to destroy it? The Lord said to me, go up to this land and destroy it.

Alright? So, in every way, if you're going to do an intertextual comparison between Isaiah and Jeremiah and Hezekiah and Zedekiah, Jeremiah doesn't come out looking too good. He looks like the Assyrian Rabshakeh. Don't trust in the Lord to deliver you.

Jeremiah says, look, even if you defeat the army, even if you defeat the Chaldeans, the wounded guys in the hospital will still defeat you. The Rabshakeh, the Assyrian commander, taunts them and says, look, let's make this a fair fight. I will give you two thousand horses.

You don't even have enough of an army to put guys on the horses. I'll help you out here. Even then, I would still defeat you.

The Rabshakeh says, look, I didn't come up here on my own strength. The Lord sent me to come and to defeat this people. Jeremiah says the Lord is the one who has brought up the Babylonian army.

The Lord is the one who will give Jerusalem into the hand of King Nebuchadnezzar. You know, in every possible way here, the only person that Jeremiah looks like is not Isaiah. Not a true prophet of God.

He looks like the Assyrian commander. And just like this pagan who said, don't trust in the Lord to deliver you, it almost sounds like that's what Jeremiah is saying as well. But the twist and the punchline of this intertextual, the problem is not the prophet.

The problem is not that Jeremiah is a lesser prophet than Isaiah. The problem is not that, you know, Jeremiah shares the theology of a pagan commander. The problem is that there is not going to be a response in the life of Zedekiah comparable to the response of Hezekiah.

And therefore, there can be no deliverance. There can be no army marching in in the eleventh hour to deliver because there's no response of faith here by Zedekiah. So, the intertextuality that appears to diminish the ministry of Jeremiah is again making the same point that Jeremiah had earlier made to Jehoiakim.

Jehoiakim, you're no Hezekiah. The prophet is now saying the same thing to Zedekiah. Look, there has been no response, there's been no repentance, therefore, God cannot bring deliverance.

Okay, what kind of response does this get from Zedekiah? There's no indication that he's ever going to respond in a positive way. In fact, what happens is now we have the intervention of the military officers in our B element in chapter 37, verses 11 and following. Now, when the Chaldean army had withdrawn from Jerusalem at the approach of Pharaoh's army, Jeremiah set out from Jerusalem to go to the land of Benjamin to receive his portion there among the people, probably dealing with the purchase of land that he had made back in chapter 32.

But when he is getting ready to leave the city, it says that a group of military officials seized him. And I'm not going to read their names this time like I did in one of the earlier videos and massacre them and butcher them. But here's what they say to them.

They seized Jeremiah and said, you are deserting over to the Chaldeans. This confirms exactly what we think about you. You're a traitor.

And this whole message and this whole idea that we need to surrender to the Babylonians, you're defecting over to them to try to get away. And in some sense, you would think they'd be glad to be rid of him, but they accuse him of defection, and Jeremiah says it is a lie. I am not deserting to the Chaldeans.

But they would not listen. They seized Jeremiah. They imprisoned him.

They beat him. So, the A element is the king's response. He can't accept what Jeremiah has to say.

He's fearful of that. Then, chapters 37 verses 11 to 15, the B, we have the episode where Jeremiah is interacting with the military officers. They're hostile.

They're angry. They're accusing Jeremiah of being a traitor. And as a result of that, they beat him and put him in prison.

Now, back to the A element. The next episode, again, is going to be Jeremiah repeating to Zedekiah you need to surrender to the Babylonians, chapter 37, verses 16 to 21. Jeremiah is put in prison.

He remains there for many days. And here's what happens in verse 17. We've seen this before.

King Zedekiah sent for him and received him, and then the king questioned him secretly in his house and said, is there any word from the Lord? I haven't gotten God's perspective on this yet. Is there any word from the Lord? Jeremiah's response should have been, yeah, you've already heard it numerous times. But Jeremiah says, yeah, there is.

You shall be delivered into the hand of the king of Babylon. Jeremiah also said to Zedekiah, what wrong have I done to you or your servants or your people that you have put me in prison? And verse 19, where are your prophets who prophesied to you saying, the king of Babylon will not come against you and against this land? So, we're back to the prophetic conflict. Look, if those guys were right, why aren't you talking to them? Is there a word from the Lord? The only thing, again, is that there's no response; Zedekiah is not going to follow the word of the Lord.

The only thing that he does here is that he gives Jeremiah a more favorable prison to stay in. Instead of the dungeon that the military officers have put him in, it says that Jeremiah is going to be put in the court of the guard and be given more favorable conditions. He's also going to be given a loaf of bread.

But you know, that's not enough. It's not just taking care of the prophet and preserving his life. If he really wants to listen to what God has to say here, he needs to carry through and obey.

But the idea that you get he's coming secretly, he's inquiring, he's as fearful of these military officers and what they might do to him as Jeremiah is. So, we've had this A element, the king meets with the prophet. We have the B element, the military officers meet with the prophet, they imprison him, and they accuse him of being a traitor.

Then we're back to the king, and in chapter 38, verses 1-13, the next episode, we're back to Jeremiah interacting with the military officers. And again, the response that the officers are going to have is one of anger. They are going to say, why do you keep preaching this message that he who stays in this city shall die by the sword? They bring this to the king.

Verse 4, this man is weakening the hands of the soldiers who are left in the city. The same expression is found in the Lachish letters, where military officers discuss how the troops have become demoralized, and it talks about the weakening of their hands. They're discouraged.

They don't want to keep fighting. And Jeremiah's message is directly the cause of that, they say. So as a result of that, what we need to do is, we need to get rid of Jeremiah, and they throw him into a cistern.

Zedekiah, being the weak leader that he is, vacillating back and forth, fearful of these officers and these commanders, he says, behold, he's in your hands, for the king can do nothing against you. So, they took Jeremiah, and they threw him into the cistern. And they leave him there to die.

It is only the intervention of an officer by the name of Ebed-Melech, a foreigner, who says to the king, we can't do this great evil. He's a messenger of God, and this foreigner, this Ethiopian, convinces the king to rescue Jeremiah from the cistern. We'll talk about Ebed-Melech a little bit more.

But notice the response of the officers. And we go back and forth, the vacillation of Zedekiah, the anger of the officers. This is going to play itself out in one more encounter between Jeremiah and the king.

I'm going to note just a couple of things here. Chapter 38, verse 14: King Zedekiah sent for Jeremiah the prophet and received him at the third entrance of the temple of the Lord.

He's going to have his moment at the temple of the Lord in the same way that Jehoiakim did back in chapters 36 and 26. The king said to Jeremiah, I will ask you a question. Hide nothing from me.

He hasn't hidden anything from the king, but he's going to inquire again. Do you have a word from the Lord? And I just want to mention a few specifics here. As we go into verses 17 and 18, here's the word from the Lord.

You know what it is. Surrender to the Babylonians and be spared. If you surrender to the officials of the king of Babylon, then your life shall be spared, and the city will not be burned with fire, and your house shall live.

There's an if-then thing going on here. You have the chance to avoid God's judgment. But if you do not surrender to the officials of the king of Babylon, then this city shall be given into the hands of the Chaldeans.

So, the choice is yours. The message has not changed. It's exactly what we've heard the prophet saying time and time again.

Three separate times in chapters 37 and 38. Again, this reminds us of chapter 27, three separate times, submit to the king of Babylon to these different groups. There's clearly a parallel here.

Finally, in verse 19, we get an explanation from King Zedekiah of exactly what it is that's keeping him from obeying the word of the Lord. And here's what Zedekiah says. I am afraid of the Judeans who have deserted to the Chaldeans, lest I be handed over to them, and they deal with me cruelly.

Look, I'm afraid of these guys that have already been taken hostage and exiled into Babylon, or maybe people that have defected over to the Babylonians. They're going to blame me for all the things that are happening. And if I get put in prison with these guys, somebody's going to give me the shiv in the middle of the night.

So, he's scared. So, ultimately, it is fear of men that keeps him from properly fearing and responding to God. Zedekiah is more afraid of what's going to happen to him if he's captured and given over to these other Jewish prisoners than he is of what will happen to him if he fails to listen to the word of God.

And the consequences and the disaster that's going to come when you don't listen to the word of God is always going to be far more severe. But he's afraid of men. He's afraid of what's going to happen to him.

Jeremiah's trying to say, look, you need to understand what's going to happen if you don't listen to God. And then finally, here's a last statement that Jeremiah's going to

make to the king. But if you refuse to surrender, this is the vision that the Lord has shown to me.

Behold, all of the women left in the house of the king of Judah were being led out to the officials of the king of Babylon, and the women were saying, now let's listen to these words because there's something important here. Your trusted friends have deceived you and prevailed against you. Now that your feet are sunk in the mud, they turn away from you.

All right? So, he pictures Zedekiah being arrested and the women of the palace saying, Zedekiah, look what's happened to you. The friends, the allies and the officers have turned away from you, and your feet have sunk into the mud. Now, the wording is not exactly the same, but I can't help but hear as I read that The officers throw Jeremiah in the mud, and it says earlier in this chapter, in verse 6, that there was no water in the cistern but only mud, and Jeremiah sunk in the mud.

Okay, that was bad. There are some bad circumstances. The real prisoner in this story is Zedekiah.

He was in much worse shape than Jeremiah, being thrown into the cistern and left to sink in the mud because God had ultimately promised to deliver him. Zedekiah has sunk into the mud, and there is not going to be anyone to deliver him because he's not listened to the word of the Lord. Jeremiah, when the city of Jerusalem is going to be captured, Jeremiah is released.

Zedekiah is not going to be released, and like a prisoner who was thrown into a cistern, Zedekiah's feet are going to sink into the mud. Now, we come to the end of chapter 38, and the last words that Zedekiah and Jeremiah share with each other is Zedekiah is making it clear he doesn't want Jeremiah to tell anyone what they've talked about. But the last verse of this chapter kind of speaks to me in a significant way here.

It says, Jeremiah remained in the court of the guard until the day that Jerusalem was taken. And we've seen this kind of summary statements about Jeremiah being in prison before that sort of wrap up these different episodes. But there's nothing in this story, there's nothing in this passage that tells us about the response of Zedekiah to the word of the Lord.

It reminds me in some ways of what the narrator does in chapter 36 when Baruch reads the scroll in the hearing of all the people, and there's no mention of their response. The word has been read in the presence of the king. He simply allows the events to unfold, the resistance continues, and he does not listen to the word of the Lord.

And the first statement that we read in chapter 39 is a title telling us that now the city of Jerusalem is going to fall. There's a real sense of prophetic justice here in that the man who allowed Jeremiah's feet to sink in the mud is ultimately going to be the one who sinks in the mud as a prisoner. Jeremiah is going to be released.

Zedekiah is not. And I won't go through all the details in the stories. We've talked about the fall of Jerusalem before, but let me just remind you of what happened to Zedekiah.

His response to the word of God is a big part of 37 and 38, and so it's important for the narrator to stress that what happens to Zedekiah as a result of this, God is meting out justice. This is what happens to kings and to people and to leaders when they fail to listen to God's word. God's word is a matter of life and death.

When the city of Jerusalem is captured, Zedekiah and his sons attempt to flee by night. They make it about 10 or 15 miles outside of Jerusalem, and they are captured in the plains of Jericho. Then they are shackled up and they are brought as prisoners to Nebuchadnezzar at Riblah, which is to the north of Syria.

Nebuchadnezzar, because Zedekiah was a rebel against the Babylonians, had set him up on the throne as their puppet. Take care of our interests, submit to us, pay tribute to us, maintain the situation here, and we'll allow you to stay on the throne and pretend to be a king. That's, in a sense, what it was.

Zedekiah was too weak as a ruler to even do that, and so Nebuchadnezzar pronounces a sentence on him as a rebel. And the sentence is that Zedekiah's sons are executed in front of him. And then the Babylonians gouge out Zedekiah's eyes.

And I can't help but think about the fact that his unwillingness to hear the word of the Lord ultimately leads to a sentence of blindness and imprisonment in chapter 39. There are serious consequences to spiritual blindness. Almost, and I don't know if there's a particular connection here, but we're almost reminded of what happens to Samson at the end of his life.

He's blinded and taken away as a prisoner. And Zedekiah is going to die in a Babylonian prisoner as a blind man who has been deprived of his sons because of his failure to obey the word of the Lord. There is also a sense of justice here in that the officers and the king who have kept Jeremiah in prison, and the prisons provide such a context for Jeremiah's ministry, the people who have done that to Jeremiah will now experience their own form of imprisonment.

And while God made it possible for Jeremiah to be released, and the Babylonians, when they take the city, they're going to be the liberators who release him from prison, the captivity that the officers and the king who inflicted these things on

Jeremiah, there is not going to be a deliverance for them. And all that the people and all that the leaders and all that the king of Judah have to look forward to who did not obey the word of the Lord is a sentence of imprisonment, and there will not be a release until the time that Cyrus conquers the city of Babylon and allows the Jews to return to their homeland. But that's going to be for another generation.

So, we've spent some time in 26 to 45 looking at all of the ways that the narrator demonstrates that the fall of Jerusalem and the judgment of Jerusalem was absolutely deserved. There is a sense of prophetic justice here because this is the punishment that Judah received for failing to hear the word of the Lord. The people who afflicted imprisonment and persecution on Jeremiah are now going to experience their own forms of persecution and imprisonment.

And so, as we're looking at all of this section and we think about all the things that we've talked about in the previous sessions, this is a pretty depressing part of the Bible. The offer of life that's given to Judah at the beginning of each one of these panels in chapter 26, the only people who experience it are the Rechabites in chapter 35. In the second panel, the offer of life that is offered to Israel when the Temple Scroll is read in 605 BC, the only person who responds in a positive way to that is Baruch.

But if we go back to this section of the book of Jeremiah, we're also going to see that sometimes, between the lines and sometimes as less major figures here, there are other positive examples of obedience to the prophetic word and to the word of the Lord. And so, I'd like us to close out this lesson by looking at some of those positive examples of obedience, people who did listen to the word of the Lord. We have such a negative example here with Zedekiah and the consequences of what happened to the people at large, but let's remember some of the positive examples that we've been introduced to in 26 to 45 as well.

First of all, going back to the Temple Sermon. Remember the response where the people say, the officials and the people say to the priest and the prophets, and this man does not deserve the sentence of death for he has spoken to us in the name of the Lord our God. They recognize Jeremiah as a true prophet.

The tragedy is they don't really respond to that or really do anything about it, but there is a positive response here. Chapter 26, verse 24 tells us that when King Jehoiakim executed Uriah the prophet, it says in verse 24, but the hand of Ahikam, the son of Shaphan, was with Jeremiah so that he was not given over to be put to death. So this family of Shaphan throughout the book of Jeremiah, they're going to be supporters of Jeremiah.

They're going to take his message seriously. And at this time when Jehoiakim is trying to wipe out the prophets of judgment, he's taking care of one of the witnesses. Maybe if I can get rid of the other one, we can do the same.

Ahikam intervenes and uses his influence to protect Jeremiah and he hides him away so that the king can't get his hands on him. The family of Shaphan is going to be an example. The scribal family is going to be an example of a positive response to the word of the Lord.

Jeremiah's scribe, Baruch, is a positive example of obedience to the Lord. When the Lord has him write down the message that Jeremiah dictates to him, Baruch is the one who faithfully carries out that commission and goes to the temple, and with all of the risks that are involved in all of that, he does what the Lord commands him to do, and in a very real way, Baruch is as much a faithful servant of God as Jeremiah himself. So that's why in chapter 45, he's the one who is positively rewarded at the end of this.

Chapter 36, verse 11, when Baruch reads the scroll and the people at large basically ignore this, it does tell us in verse 11, chapter 36, when Micaiah, the son of Gemariah, the son of Shaphan, heard all of these words, again, it's a family member in this scribal family from Shaphan who listens to God's word, takes it to the other officials and they say, wow, we've got a crisis here, we need to take this to the king. There were at least a group of people that day when the nation ignored it, when the king destroyed the scroll, there were at least some scribes and officials who listened to what the prophet had to say. We very quickly were introduced to Ebed-Melech.

Chapter 38, verses 7 to 13. It's ironic that the one officer who steps into the situation here and says, look, we need to listen to Jeremiah, we would be doing a great sin here by putting Jeremiah to death, the one officer who stands up for him is Ebed-Melech, an Ethiopian eunuch. So, foreigners who were outside the covenant actually responded more faithfully to the word of God than the Jews did themselves.

And I believe that Ebed-Melech, the Ethiopian eunuch here, previews and prefigures for us an Ethiopian eunuch in the book of Acts who is also going to respond positively to a prophetic message and comes to know Jesus and is baptized. We have another faithful Ethiopian eunuch here in the book of Jeremiah. The promise that's given to Ebed-Melech at the end of this, in 39:15 to 18, after the city of Jerusalem is captured, Ebed-Melech's life is spared.

And the Lord gives him a promise because of the fact that he was the one who intervened to deliver Jeremiah out of the cistern. Thus says the Lord God of hosts, Behold, I will fulfill my words against this city for harm and not for good, and they shall be accomplished before you on this day. But I will deliver you on that day,

declares the Lord, and you will not be given into the hand of the men of whom you were afraid.

For I will surely save you, and you shall not fall by the sword, but you shall have your life as a prize of war. So, the Lord is going to deliver Jeremiah. The Lord is going to deliver Baruch.

But the Lord is also going to deliver Ebed-Melech. And the same expression that is used to describe the deliverance of Baruch, you will have your life as a prize of war. Remember that kind of soldier's joke.

Things didn't go well in the war. We didn't bring back any plunder, but at least we saved our own necks. The Lord promises Ebed-Melech that the reward for his obedience to God and for taking care of the life of the prophet is that when the city of Jerusalem is captured, the Lord will rescue him in the same way that he will rescue Baruch and Jeremiah.

So, as we look at this section of the book, it is a very depressing time. There are all kinds of disobedience, all kinds of episodes where we basically know how things are going to turn out. Someone's going to hear the word of the Lord and not respond to that in a positive way.

But even in this time of national apostasy, even in this time when there's so much resistance to the prophetic word, there are these family members of Shaphan. There is Ebed-Melech. There are the princes and officials who take Jeremiah's message seriously.

There is a faithful scribe by the name of Baruch. There are the Rechabites who remain faithful to their family traditions. In the midst of national apostasy, there is always a remnant.

And that remnant throughout history, in the history of God's people, in the history of salvation, the remnant is always going to be marked by faithfulness and obedience to God's word and to the message of God's servants.

This is Dr. Gary Yates in his teaching on the book of Jeremiah. This is session 23, Jeremiah 37-39, Zedekiah's Disobedience and the Fall of Jerusalem.