

Dr. Gary Yates, Jeremiah, Lecture 15, Jeremiah 11-20, Confessions, Part 2, The Pathos of God

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This is Dr. Gary Yates teaching the book of Jeremiah. This is session 15, Jeremiah's Confessions, Part 2, The Pathos of God.

Our session now is the second look at Jeremiah's confessions in Jeremiah 11 to 20.

What I would like to do in this lesson, we looked in the previous lesson at how these confessions are an expression of Jeremiah's personal relationship with God, but what I would like to see in this session is that these confessions are really a message toward Israel and toward the people of Judah about the broken covenant. And so, in a sense, the prayers of Jeremiah become just as much a statement of what they are going through and the broken covenant with God as the sermons that he So we need to understand these confessions or these laments in the context of the broken covenant between God and Israel that's in the background in Jeremiah 11 to 20. Remember, this section begins with a sermon in Jeremiah chapter 11 where the Lord is basically charging Judah with covenant unfaithfulness and reminding them that he has and continues to be in the process of bringing the covenant curses against them.

The Lord says in this particular sermon, Jeremiah chapter 11, verse 10, they have gone after other gods to serve them. The house of Israel and the house of Judah have broken my covenant that I made with their fathers. There's the accusation.

They've broken the covenant. They're guilty. Therefore, here comes the announcement of judgment.

Thus says the Lord God, behold, I am bringing disaster upon them that they cannot escape. Though they cry to me, I will not listen to them. Then the cities of Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem will go out and cry to the gods to whom they have made offerings, but they cannot save them in their time of trouble.

For your gods have become as many as your cities, O Judah, and as many as the streets of Jerusalem, and I will not listen to you. I will not listen to you. I will not listen to you.

I will not listen to you. Jeremiah chapter 7, verse 16, you are not to pray for these people because I have already decided to judge them. Your prayers are not going to make a difference.

Your intercession is not going to help them. That is a shocking thing because intercession was one of the primary jobs of a prophet. Now, in case Jeremiah didn't

hear this, the Lord in chapter 11, verse 14, after the sermon about the broken covenant and the covenant curses, therefore do not pray for these people or lift up a prayer on their behalf, for I will not listen when they call to me in their time of trouble.

I'm not going to listen to your prayers for them. I'm not going to listen to their prayers. If they want help, if they want someone to save them, then they need to cry out to the gods that they have trusted and built altars to.

Jeremiah chapter 14, verse 11, the Lord has said to me, do not pray for the welfare of this people. Though they fast, I will not hear their cry. Though they offer burnt offerings and grain offerings, I will not accept them, but I will consume them by the sword, by the famine, and by pestilence.

Jeremiah, your prayers and your intercession are not going to deliver them from the covenant curses. It is not going to keep them from being destroyed by the sword, by famine, by pestilence. And so, three different times here, the Lord says, you're not to pray for these people.

And so, the prayers of Jeremiah in Jeremiah 11 to 20 are a reflection of that broken covenant. It's not just a broken relationship between God and Judah. There is something broken about prayer and prophetic intercession itself.

Now, this is hugely significant in light of the fact, as we've already mentioned, that praying for the people and interceding for the people, especially during times of apostasy or sin, was a major, major role that God had given to the prophets. We go back to the example of Moses. After the worship of the golden calf, after the people have listened to the response of the spies, first of all, in Exodus 32, Numbers 14, God says that he's ready to destroy the people.

And Moses comes to him and reminds him of the covenant promises that he's made. What about the Egyptians? What about your reputation? What are they going to think when they hear that you have destroyed the people that you rescued and delivered out of bondage in Egypt? And it says there that the Lord changed his mind. In the book of Samuel, during the time when Israel asked for a king, the people rejected God in a sense by doing that.

The Lord had promised to provide them a king, but it would be on his terms and in his way. They had sinned against the Lord. And at the end of Samuel's life, as he's calling them back to their responsibilities to keep the covenant, he intercedes for them as a prophet.

And in a sense, he turns away God's judgment on the people of the sin that they had committed in asking for a king. And so, here's what happens near the end of

Samuel's public ministry to the people. They're together for this assembly, and the Lord sends a thunderstorm during a time of harvest when rain is not normally expected.

The people got the message that God was sending them a word that he was displeased with them. So, it says that Samuel called upon the Lord, and the Lord sent the thunder and the rain that day, and all of the people greatly feared the Lord and Samuel. So, he prayed, and God brought the thunder and the rain.

But then the people are going to say this to Samuel in verse 19. All the people said to Samuel, pray for your servants to the Lord, your God, that we may not die for we have added to all of our sins this evil to ask for ourselves a king. They realized God was angry.

They could potentially die as God puts them to death. Please turn away God's anger. In verse 20, Samuel said to the people, do not be afraid.

You have done all this evil yet. Do not turn aside from following the Lord, but serve the Lord with all your heart. Do not turn aside from empty things that cannot profit or deliver for they are empty.

For the Lord will not forsake his people for his great namesake, because it is pleased the Lord to make you a people for himself. Moreover, and this is the important verse here, as for me, far be it from me that I should sin against the Lord by ceasing to pray for you. So, in this particular situation, it was Samuel's intercession that had spared the people when they sinned by asking for a king.

And Samuel says, in my ongoing role, in the final days of my ministry as I continue to be a prophet, far be it from me that I would sin by ceasing to pray for you. For a prophet not to pray for the people that's the ultimate sin. So, in a sense, it's a strange thing that God is coming to Jeremiah and saying, look, don't fulfill your prophetic role.

Don't intercede for this people. The exact opposite of what we see with Moses and with Samuel. And in looking at that phrase that the Lord changed his mind, I really believe that if Moses doesn't pray, then God destroys the people.

This is not simply a metaphor. This is not simply, well, God knew all along what he was going to do, so he's just trying to teach Moses a lesson. Moses' intercession effectively changes the direction that God is going to take.

And so, in a sense, is this a metaphor? Yes, in some sense it is. God doesn't change his mind in the way that we do. On a whim, I'm going to McDonald's instead of Burger King.

God doesn't change his mind in the sense that he has limited understanding or knowledge of what's happening in the future, as open theism has taught. But it is saying, beyond just simply being a metaphor, that one of the real aspects of God's nature in the Old Testament is that he was open to the prayers of his prophets, and he changed the course of his actions based on either how the prophet would pray or how the people would respond. It's a real thing.

God is entering into real give-and-take relationships with the people. And in a sense, we almost have to understand that, yes, there's a God in the Bible who is eternal and outside of time, and he knows all things, but there's also a God who comes into time, interacts with people, deals with them in real history and in real give-and-take relationships. And so, the prayers of God's prophets ultimately, at times, changed the direction of God's actions.

Now, there are some passages in the Bible, like 1 Samuel 15 or Numbers 23, that say that God does not change his mind. What do we do with these passages that say there are times when God does change his mind? The answer is it depends on the circumstances. There are times when God has sworn an oath, when God has made a covenant promise that he is not going to turn back from, or God has issued a sentence of judgment that he says is unalterable. At those times, the Lord does not change his mind.

One of those times happened when God rejected Saul as king. And Samuel, though, understanding that the Lord sometimes does change his mind, prays all night. If God is simply immutable and never changes his mind, there's really no reason for him to do that.

But when the Lord comes back to him and says, in this particular case, when the Lord has issued a decree that is unchangeable, when the Lord has sworn an oath, he does not change his mind. But in other times, like the situation with Moses in Exodus 32, or like Moses, again, with the children of Israel in Numbers chapter 14, God is open to changing his course of direction based upon how people respond to him. And prophetic intercession often turned God's judgment away from the people of Israel and Judah.

We have another example of powerful and effective prophetic intercession in Amos chapter 7, verses 1 to 6. Amos sees a vision of a locust swarm that invades the land of Israel. Remember the devastating effects that those kinds of things could have. This locust swarm almost completely consumes and destroys the land of Israel.

As Amos sees that, he says that he cried out to the Lord and said, ah, Lord God, Israel is too small. They could never survive this. He comes to God, pleads for God's mercy, and gives God motivation for answering his prayer.

And the amazing thing again, the same thing that we see with Moses, God relented, God, he changed his mind. He did not bring the judgment. Then Amos sees the vision of a fire that sweeps through the land.

And Amos, the same prayer, the same petition to God, Lord, ah Lord God, Israel is too small. They can't withstand a judgment like this. This fire that's going to sweep through the land and consume it.

God changes his mind and does not send the prayer. So, for God to say to Jeremiah, do not pray for these people, do not intercede for them, what that means, that isn't an alterable decree of judgment. We have seen the closing down at the beginning of Jeremiah 1-25, repeated recurring calls for the people to return, and the opportunity to do that.

Then in chapters 17 and 11-20, only three calls to return. Then, 21-25, those calls basically disappear. There is a closing down of the opportunity to repent.

And part of that is reflected again in the fact that God tells Jeremiah, don't waste your time praying for these people. We are past the point where I am willing to respond to that. Now, looking at that past history that we've just talked about, the intercession of Moses and Samuel, they're the primary examples of prophetic intercessors who delivered the people.

The Lord says this to Jeremiah in chapter 15, verses 1 and 2, and now I think these verses make more sense in light of what we just said. The Lord said to me, though Moses and Samuel stood before me, yet my heart would not turn toward this people. Send them out of my sight and let them go, and when they ask you, where shall we go, you shall say to them, thus says the Lord, those who are for pestilence to pestilence, those who are for sword to the sword, those who are to famine to famine, and those who are to captivity for captivity.

Look, if Moses and Samuel were to show up on the scene, and if they were to intercede, I would not listen. So, we might look at Jeremiah's ministry and say, well, Jeremiah's kind of a sub-prophet because you had these great prophets in Israel's past who had an in with God, and God responded to them when the people had committed serious sin, and the Lord forgave them, and the Lord relented from sending judgment. The problem is not with Jeremiah's gifting as a prophet.

The problem is not that Jeremiah is not as tight with God as Moses and Samuel were. The Lord says, look, even if Moses and Samuel were around today, they would not be able to intercede for these people. There has been a closing down of the opportunities to repent.

And God now is saying, the time for intercession, the time for praying for the people, that's over, because God is ready to destroy them. And so, at one level, we see God telling the prophet not to pray for Israel. And then, at the other level, in the same context, and in the same chapter, we have the prophet praying to God.

The confessions and the laments of Jeremiah reflect that he's no longer interceding for the people of Israel. And so, instead of praying for God to deliver them, Jeremiah is praying for God to slaughter his enemies like sheep for the slaughter because they are covenant rebels who have not listened to God. They have shook their fist in God's face.

They have defied God and God's messenger. It's not simply that they've mistreated Jeremiah.

They have rejected the word of God. And on the basis of the covenant, they deserve this judgment. And so, the role of a prophet in the days of Moses, Samuel, was to intercede that God would relent from sending judgment.

The imprecations reflect that now the role of the prophet is to, in a sense, pray against the people. And so, the brokenness of the covenant, the removal of prophetic intercession, is being reflected by these confessions, where instead of praying these great prayers like Moses and Samuel prayed for God to spare the people, Jeremiah, in the desperate situation that he is living in, is actually praying for God to judge the people. Andrew Sheed says that Jeremiah, in a sense, is functioning as a mediator between God and Israel.

He represents the anger and the wrath of God toward the people of Israel, and he represents the pain and the sinfulness of Israel toward God. And Sheed says, standing between God and man in this situation is a painful place to be. So, the confessions, the laments of Jeremiah reflect the breaking down of prophetic intercession.

At another level, the prayers of Jeremiah, the intercession of Jeremiah, however, is also a way of God reflecting himself through the person of Jeremiah to the point where Jeremiah becomes a living example of God to the people. As Jeremiah is praying and pouring out his heart and his pain and his grief and his suffering, at one level, he represents a struggling human with all of his foibles and weaknesses, someone that I can definitely relate to as a minister of God. But at another level, he is representing God to Israel.

And the pain in these prayers is, in a sense, the grief of God over the sins of the people of Israel. And this is not just in the confessions. This idea of the pain of God, the suffering of the prophet, and the way that Jeremiah... And Jeremiah is not just a sensitive guy who needs to get over some of this.

He's not a guy who needs to go to therapy or something like that. In a sense, Jeremiah is representing, through his tears, the tears of God. And that begins, actually, before we ever get to the laments.

I want to go back to chapter 4, verses 19 to 22, and Jeremiah's job is to express or to represent God to Israel. And that's why Jeremiah is known as the weeping prophet. Again, it's not just because Jeremiah is really a sensitive guy, or Jeremiah is a guy who was able to get in touch with his feminine side, or Jeremiah is some kind of psychological prophet or profile of the prophet.

This grief of the prophet is an expression of the pain and the grief of God himself. One of the things that commentators on the book of Jeremiah have noted is that in these passages where Jeremiah is talking about his pain, his weeping, he's the weeping prophet. One of the things that we notice in these passages is that sometimes it's difficult to tell who exactly is talking. Is it God? Or is it the prophet? Is it the people? Or could, in some sense, it be all three of those things? And so, one of these grief or anguish passages, one of the first ones we see in the book, is back in Jeremiah chapter 4, verses 19 to 22.

Listen to Jeremiah's grief and anguish. Jeremiah says, Now, this sounds like the words of Jeremiah. He's observing the invading army and all of the terrible things that are happening, and he's grieving and mourning about this.

This looks like the anguish of the prophet over this vision, but listen to verse 22, and it says this, And there, at that point, it's difficult for us to say, as it's talking about my people, is it the prophet or is it the Lord? I'm not sure that, interpretively, we need to make a choice. I think it's both. Jeremiah has swallowed the words of God in the sense that he's become the expression of God in his person, and so we don't really need to know.

Is it Jeremiah, or is it God? It's both. Chapter 9, verses 1 to 3. Again, this is another expression before we ever get to the confessions of Jeremiah's pain and grief over the destruction of his people. Jeremiah says, O, that my head were waters, and that my eyes were a fountain of tears, that I might weep day and night for the slain of the daughter of my people.

And again, it seems like the human reaction of a prophet to the destruction and the death and the doom that's going to be visited on the people of Judah. And then he goes on to say in verse 2, Oh, that I had in the desert a traveler's lodging place, that I may leave my people and go away from them. I wish I could escape from this, but instead, I weep constantly because of the disaster.

So, is it the prophet, or is it the Lord? Well, it sounds like the prophet. But in verse 3, we read this: They bend their tongue like a bow. Falsehood and not truth has grown strong in the land, for they proceed from evil to evil, and they do not know me, declares the Lord.

And so maybe it is Jeremiah who wishes that he could weep day and night because of the destruction that's coming on Israel. But it's the grief of God. It's the voice of God that answers in verse 3. And in a sense, here, what we have happening is the weeping of the prophet becomes the weeping of God.

The voice of the prophet coalesces into the voice of God. This back and forth is expressed as well as we go further down into chapter 9. And what we have here is that the Lord goes back and forth between his anger and his grief. His anger and his grief.

You know, we have this understanding of God sometimes in the Old Testament. He's simply a God of wrath. He's a God of anger.

He loves to destroy. He loves to send pestilences on people. He loves to zap them with lightning bolts.

This section reveals the pain of God himself as he observes and watches what is happening to his people. And listen to the emotion that comes out.

First of all, there's going to be the emotion of extreme anger in verse 9. The Lord says, Shall I not punish them for these things, declares the Lord? Shall I not avenge myself on them on a nation such as this? Absolutely. Remember, they were an unfaithful prostitute. They had been unfaithful to the covenant for hundreds and hundreds of years.

They had betrayed God by worshipping other idols. They had been like a wife unfaithful to her husband. Shall I not avenge myself on a nation such as this? Absolutely.

But listen to the grief that comes out in verse 10. Is it God, or is it the prophet? I will take up weeping and wailing for the mountains and a lamentation for the pastures of the wilderness because they are laid waste so that no one passes through and the lowing of cattle is not heard. Both the birds of the air and the beast have fled and gone.

And there's this sadness. Look at the ruin. Look at the devastation.

Look at the destruction that has come on the people of God. And it's like, this seems to be the prophet again as one of the people experiencing what's going on. But in verse 11, the Lord is speaking.

And the Lord says, I will make Jerusalem a heap of ruins, a layer of jackals, and I will make the city of Judah a desolation without habitation. So, what we have going on here is God is speaking in verse 9. God is speaking words of anger. God is speaking in verse 11.

God is speaking words of anger. There is this section of grief in verse 10 where the speaker is not clearly identified. But we have to hear that in some way as the voice of God, because he's the one who's speaking both before and after.

And there is this idea of God who is angered by the people's sins. The fierce anger of the Lord will not turn back until it's accomplished all that he's designed. But on the other side, God's broken heart over the destruction of the daughter of Jerusalem.

His daughter, his wife, is experiencing all of these things. We talked about the language of the judgment of Judah as a woman and how often many feminist critics will criticize that as being an expression of just things about women that are not appropriate for our culture and our time or that God is being portrayed in some ways as an abusive husband or a divine rapist. But I want to remind us that the purpose of this was not to simply vent his anger.

It's to pour out the pain of a betrayed husband. I remember when all of my children got their driver's licenses. They had to go and appear in front of the judge and be reminded of the privileges and responsibilities that go along with driving.

The judge turned the session over to a police officer who showed all of our kids a video of a traffic accident that took the life of a young person. The judge did not do that because he hated kids, and he wanted to see them in car wrecks. The police officer did not do that because he had been jaded by his years in law enforcement.

The judge and the officer painted those vivid pictures as a warning to my children, and as a parent, I sat there, and I was thankful that they did that. I see God doing the same thing through the prophet Jeremiah. Theologians sometimes have talked about the impassibility of God.

The idea is that God is so separate from his creation and so wholly other that God does not experience either pain or joy based on any other creature or their response or their reaction to them. And I understand the reason why theologians have wanted to stress God's unchangeability, his immutability, his wholly otherness, but that image of God does not work with the book of Jeremiah. God is definitely a God who grieves over the pain of his people.

Terence Fretheim has talked about the suffering of God, and I think that is a very accurate portrayal of the God of the book of Jeremiah. God weeps along with the prophet Jeremiah. He is not a God who is impassively sitting in heaven and saying, I'm going to work this out, I'm going to accomplish my sovereign purpose, and ultimately I'm happy with that.

The Lord, as he sees people making choices that he knows bring destruction to them, as the relationship with his people is severed, he grieves over that. And so the idea of an impassible God, for whatever theological reasons we may want to use that to try to protect God's immutability, simply is not an accurate portrayal of the God of the Old Testament. Jeremiah chapters 12, verses 7 to 11, again, the emotion of God in all of this and the back and forth between God's pain and God's anger.

Chapter 12, verse 7, the Lord says, I have forsaken my house, I have abandoned my heritage, I have given, and listen to how he describes the people, the beloved of my soul into the hands of her enemies. God didn't do that because he simply wanted to destroy them, and the fact that he describes them as the beloved of my soul and as his heritage, his most precious possession, reflects how deeply this pained the Lord. The prophet Hosea, Hosea chapter 11, verses 8 and 9, the Lord says, how can I give Ephraim up? No matter what they've done, I can't stop loving them.

How can I give them up? Therefore, I will not vent the full wrath and anger of God on my people, and I will not completely consume them and destroy them. But the Lord says, I've forsaken my heritage, I've abandoned the beloved of my soul, and that causes God deep pain. Amazing image of God.

Think about God in that light. But then God comes back in verse 8 and says, my heritage has become to me like a lion in the forest. She has lifted up her voice against me.

Therefore, I hate her. Okay, so let's juxtapose that. The beloved of my soul, I hate her.

Sometimes, we use the expression today that God loves the sinner and hates the sin. And I understand the reasons why we do that. But at times, the Old Testament is almost going to convey the idea that God doesn't just hate the sin.

He hates the sinner as well. And that's a scary thing to deal with. But that's God's wrath.

That's God's anger. And it's part of the Old Testament we need to hear. Verse 9, is my heritage to me like a hyena's lair? Are the birds of prey against her all around? Go and assemble all of the wild beasts and bring them to devour.

Many shepherds have destroyed my vineyard. They have trampled down my portion. They have made my pleasant portion a desolate wilderness.

And so, here's the Lord in his anger saying, I'm going to bring the wild animals against Judah, and I'm going to have those wild animals destroy them. But then in the next verse, the Lord is grieving over the fact that the leaders of Israel are the ones that have destroyed this beautiful vineyard. And the Lord planted it and blessed it and put it in a place where it was going to be absolutely fruitful.

But it's the leaders and the Lord grieves over that. Verse 11, they have made it a desolation, desolate it mourns to me. So, the land is mourning, and God hears that weeping, and it touches his heart, and it grieves him at the same time that he's giving the vineyard over to the wild animals to eat it and to consume it.

Then in the midst of this mourning, the Lord says, upon all of the bare heights in the desert, the destroyers have come. The sword of the Lord devours from one end of the place to the other. No flesh has peace.

They have sown weed and have reaped thorns. They have tired themselves out but profit nothing. They shall be ashamed of their harvest because of the fierce anger of the Lord.

And so again, we have this passage: which is it God? Are you a God of passionate love, and is Israel the beloved of your soul, or is it the target of your judgment that you hate and that you want to consume in your fierce anger? The answer is both of those things. And so, as Jeremiah is praying his confessions and at least in places as Jeremiah is grieving over what is happening and what he's experiencing and what he's going through, he's not just expressing the hardships of his own ministry. He is reflecting the grief in the heart of God over what has happened in the midst of this fractured and broken covenant where the relationship between God has been severed with his people.

Chapter 14, verses 17 to 18. Again, we're in the midst of this context dealing with a broken covenant. We're in the midst of this context where we have confessions and laments on the part of the prophet Jeremiah.

Now God is going to specifically say this to Jeremiah, to the people. You shall say to them this word: let my eyes run down with tears day and night, and let them not cease. For the virgin daughter of my people is shattered with a great wound and with a grievous blow.

If I go out into the field, behold, there are those who are pierced by the sword. And if I enter the city, behold, the disease is a famine for both prophet and priest ply their

trade through the land and they have no knowledge. All right, here's what's important about this passage.

The Lord says to Jeremiah, you shall say to them this word, let my eyes run down with tears. All right, so what is significant about this is that the weeping of the prophet is actually the revelation of God. God says, I want you to weep and that is my word to them in this particular situation.

So again, it's not just Jeremiah as a human being who says this is an awful situation. It's not just Jeremiah's human emotions. It's not just Jeremiah as a member of the people of Israel thinking, wow, look at what our country is going to go through.

It's not just Jeremiah grieving, and the Lord saying to him, suck it up, Jeremiah, that's the word of the Lord. Let's move on. The Lord says to Jeremiah, as part of your prophetic word, don't just say, the says the Lord, also stand in front of them and say, thus weeps the Lord.

Andrew Sheed makes this comment. He says that if God's intention and God's design had simply been to tell the people the message that they needed to hear, the Lord could have communicated that message from the distance of the divine counsel in heaven. But the Lord wanted to communicate that message via a person, via an instrument.

And by seeing the weeping of Jeremiah, O, that my head was a fountain of tears, that I might weep day and night. That's not just an overly sensitive prophet. That is God himself grieving for the destruction of his people.

So beyond simply the confessions being an expression of Jeremiah's personal difficulty, the confessions are about the brokenness of the covenant between God and Israel. The covenant is broken. The marriage is irreparably damaged.

Prayer itself is shutting down. Instead of praying for the people, Jeremiah is called to pray against them and to ask God to judge them. Now, as a prophet, the Lord comes to you.

The Lord tells you, don't pray for this people. How would you respond to that? If you're the pastor of a church and you hear a message from God one day, don't pray for your flock. I think as much as you wanted to listen to what God said, you would probably pray even when you couldn't help yourself.

And Jeremiah, in a very real way, does that in chapter 14, because we have the brokenness of prayer, not just between God and the prophet, but we have the brokenness of prayer between God and the people. And in chapter 14, the people

come to God with a confession of their sin. And here's what the people, they're going to pour out their hearts in prayer to God.

Remember that Jeremiah is the one who is expressing these prayers for the people. So, in a sense, God has said, Jeremiah, don't pray for these people. Don't intercede for them.

I'm not going to answer anyway. Jeremiah's praying is a confession of sin for the people. He's doing what God told him not to do.

And here's what the prayer says. Though our iniquities testify against us, act, O Lord, for your name's sake. For our backslidings are many, our shoes, our turning aways are many.

That's what the prophet had said about them back in chapters 2 and 3. We have sinned against you. Let me ask you a question. Does that sound like a good confession? Yeah, it looks pretty good.

It's got all the right elements in there. A proper measure of humility and all that. I mean, this is what a confession is supposed to be.

Then they say to God, O you hope of Israel, its savior in time of trouble. Why should you be like a stranger in the land, like a traveler who turns aside to tarry for a night? Why should you be like a man confused, like a mighty warrior who cannot save us? Lord, why would you turn away from your people? Yet you, O Lord, in the midst of us, and we are called by your name, do not leave us. Is that a good confession? Absolutely.

They're confessing their sin. They're confessing their need and their dependence on God. In fact, this is the kind of prayer that Jeremiah tells them back in chapter 3, verses 22 to 25.

This is what you need to pray. The Lord says there, return, O faithless one, and I will heal your faithlessness. And the people say, behold, we come to you, O God, for you are the Lord our God.

Truly the hills are a delusion, the orgies in the mountains. Truly in the Lord our God is the salvation of Israel. That passage is envisioning the time when they're finally going to renounce their idols.

They're finally going to revoke all the past practices. And they're going to turn to God in confession. And we look at this in chapter 14 and say, well, maybe we're here.

Maybe we're finally at this place. And all of the judgment, these other things that are going to happen in the rest of the book, that's not necessary. They're saying exactly the right words to God.

They are not saying the words to God that they said when the Lord indicted them in the courtroom in chapter 2. We have not sinned. We have not followed after the Baals. We are innocent.

Well, we don't understand what you're talking about. At the same time, they were saying, Lord, we can't help ourselves. We have to run after these gods.

We say to a tree, you are our father. We say to a stone, you are our mother. They're not saying those kinds of things.

They are saying the right words. And so, we think God obviously is going to answer their prayer, right? God obviously is going to say, hey, great, we're having a time of national revival. The judgment is averted.

That's the end of the book of Jeremiah. But no, verse 10 says this, thus says the Lord concerning this people. They have loved to wander thus.

They have not restrained their feet. Therefore, the Lord does not accept them. Now he will remember their iniquity, and he will punish their sins.

Jeremiah, don't pray for these people. Jeremiah, Lord, I can't help it. I got to pray for them.

The people are coming to you and confessing their sins. The Lord says, Jeremiah, I'm not going to listen because they're just words. And they have not restrained their feet.

They're not really turning around. And a shocking statement here, the Lord says, I'm going to remember their iniquity. If you think about the new covenant passage in Jeremiah 31, when the Lord says, I will no longer remember their sin, and we're not at that point yet.

Because the people have not been changed, they've not been transformed. I mean, great prayer, great words, orthodox.

It could make it into any confessional book of prayer. But words without real substantive repentance don't mean anything. So, if that's not enough, the prophet comes to the Lord again on behalf of the people with another confession in the same chapter.

Immediately after this passage where, the Lord said, let my eyes run down with tears day and night, and let them not cease, for the virgin daughter of my people is shattered. The people come to God again. And again, the prophet, don't pray for these people, Jeremiah.

Lord, I can't help it. I'm going to pray for them anyway. And here's the prayer that's found there.

Have you utterly rejected Judah? Does your soul loathe Zion? Why have you struck us down so that there is no healing for us? We looked for peace, but no good has come. We look for a time of healing, but behold, terror. Now, right here, it almost sounds like our suffering is kind of unjust.

We don't understand what you're doing. But listen to what they say after this. Verse 20, we acknowledge our wickedness, O Lord, and the iniquity of our fathers.

They're no longer saying the fathers eat the sour grapes and the children's teeth are set on the edge. We're just as sinful as our fathers. They acknowledge that.

We have sinned against you. Do not spurn us for your namesake. Do not dishonor your glorious throne, Jerusalem.

And then they say this: remember and do not break your covenant with us. Highly ironic, right? Chapter 11 introduces the section. You have broken the covenant.

The covenant curses are coming. Chapter 14, Lord, don't break your covenant with us. This is a good prayer.

Again, it could work in our liturgical prayer books, but this is the time when God responds in chapter 15, though Moses and Samuel stood before me, yet my heart would not turn toward these people. Send them out of my sight and they will experience pestilence and plague and all of the things that the Lord had threatened to bring against them. The covenant curses are coming into effect.

Great confession, great words of prayer. The Lord is not going to respond. Jeremiah, do not pray for these people.

Here's the Lord is going to continue with what he's going to do. Here's the response to that great confession. I will appoint over them four kinds of destroyers, declares the Lord, the sword to kill, dogs to tear, birds of the air, and the beasts of the earth to devour and to destroy.

And after I make them a horror to all of the kingdoms of the earth because of what Manasseh, the son of Hezekiah, the king of Judah, did in Jerusalem, now the

judgment that he had threatened a while back that he had averted, that's back in play. The Lord is not listening to their prayers. And God is going to, again, talk about the grief of all of this in the verses that follow, and we'll close by looking at this passage.

Chapter 15, verse 5. Who will have pity on you, O Jerusalem? Who will grieve for you? Who will turn aside to ask about your welfare? You have rejected me, declares the Lord. You have kept going backward. So, I have stretched out my hand against you and destroyed you.

I'm weary of relenting. I have winnowed them with a winnowing fork in the gates of the land. I have bereaved them, and I have destroyed my people.

You see this angry God, but I also see the irony of that question. Who will have pity on you, O Jerusalem? Or who will grieve for you? The answer to that is the Lord himself will. God says in verse 8, I have made their widows more in number than the sands of the sea.

The people had said, don't break your covenant with us. In the Abrahamic covenant, God had promised to make the people of Israel as numerous as the sands on the seashore. Now, in the reversal of the Abrahamic covenant, God is making their widows more than the sands on the seashore.

The covenant is broken. She, who is born seven, has grown feeble. She has fainted away.

Her son went down while it was yet day, and she has been shamed and disgraced. And the rest of them I will give to the sword before their enemies declare the Lord. The confessions of Jeremiah are not just the prayers of a struggling prophet.

They, in a sense, help us to see a grieving God. And in our theology of God, Jeremiah 11 to 20 reminds us of something very powerful. That God is a God of incredible passion and emotion.

A God who experiences and who feels wrath and anger over sin. And we best not neglect or avoid or try to do away with that aspect of God. But a God of love and mercy and compassion and grace who also grieves even as he brings judgment on his people.

Through the confessions of Jeremiah, we're not only given insight into the character of the prophet. We're also provided revelation into the character and the nature of God himself. You

This is Dr. Gary Yates teaching the book of Jeremiah. This is session 15, Jeremiah's Confessions, Part 2, The Pathos of God.