

# OpenTheo

## Jeremiah 17 - 20



### Jeremiah - Steve Gregg

In "Jeremiah 17 - 20", Steve Gregg continues to explore the Book of Jeremiah with an analysis of chapters 17 through 20. Gregg highlights the stark contrast between trusting in God versus trusting in man, emphasizing the importance of remaining faithful to God even in difficult times. He also delves into the poetic language used in the book, discussing the use of metaphor and analogy. Ultimately, Gregg concludes that Jeremiah's message is still relevant today as a call to repentance and faithfulness.

### Transcript

Last time, we covered Jeremiah 16, where he was told by God not to marry or have children in the land of Judah or in the city of Jerusalem, because those who had wives and children were going to be bereaved. There would be gruesome deaths for the inhabitants of Jerusalem because of the Babylonian invasion that was coming, and Jeremiah was to be spared that. It's very much like what Jesus said when he was talking about the destruction of Jerusalem that was coming after his time.

And he said, they will say, blessed are those wombs who never bore and those breasts that never gave suck because of the great turmoil, the great grief that would come upon parents seeing their children enduring those ravages of war and famine and so forth. And Jeremiah was to be spared that. His not getting married was part of his message, and his message was, things are coming on Jerusalem so horrible that he's not going to subject any family members of his to it.

He's not going to get married. And there was another reason he was told not to marry, and that was in chapter 16, verse 8, and that is that it would be inappropriate to rejoice as one does at one's wedding. You cannot get married without rejoicing.

It's a celebration. And yet this was no time for celebrations in Jerusalem. This was a time for mourning and so forth, and so he should not be doing things that would be celebratory.

And his refusal to have a wedding himself would be emblematic of the fact that there would soon be a cutting off from Jerusalem, all the voice of gladness, the voice of the

bridegroom, and the voice of the bride. That is, not only Jeremiah would not be married, but no one would be getting married anymore because the city would be really depopulated and destroyed. Now, there is a messianic passage before the end of chapter 16 where he talks about the time that would come where they would no longer say the Lord lives who brought up the children of Israel from the land of Egypt, but as verse 14 and 15 say, they'll say the Lord lives who brought up the children of Israel from the land of the north and from all the lands where he had driven them.

This is referring to the fact that the return of the exiles from Babylon would itself be a more vivid memory of God's deliverance of his people than the Egypt deliverance was in the Exodus. And yet both of these are types of the messianic deliverance. And so it's talking about a time when Christ's salvation and his gathering of us from all nations to himself would replace the memory of the Exodus.

And therefore, as the Passover celebration, the traditional one, was a memory of the Exodus and God delivering them out of Egypt, that would be basically replaced with something that commemorates the messianic salvation. And that's what Jesus was saying when he said, from now on when you do this, that is when you take the Passover, you'll do so in remembrance of me. So he is now upstaging the Exodus.

The Exodus he's accomplishing in Jerusalem is upstaging the Exodus of the days of Moses. And that is a fulfillment of this prophecy in chapter 16. And chapter 16 verse 19 mentions the Gentiles also would be coming in.

So we know we're talking about the messianic age. However, in chapter 17, he says, The sin of Judah is written with a pen of iron. With the point of a diamond it is engraved.

In other words, it's with such a hard stylus, you could carve very deeply into hard stone and therefore, it is rather permanently etched. That's what he's saying. Their sin is permanently etched.

They're stained with their sin in a way that cannot be cleansed with soap, he said earlier, or even lye. And now saying the same thing a little differently, it's not so much a stain, but an etched record, deeply written of their crimes, cannot be expunged, obviously. On the tablet of their heart and on the horns of the altars, while their children remember their altars and their wooden images by the green trees on the high hills.

Now remember images, I should say the altars, are not the altars in the temple in Jerusalem that God ordained through Moses. These are the altars that are up on the high places where sacrifices are offered to the Canaanite deities. Oh my mountain in the field, I will give as plunder your wealth, all the treasures, that is all your treasures and your high places of sin within all your borders and you, even yourself, shall let go of your heritage which I gave you.

And I will cause you to serve your enemies in the land which you do not know. For you have kindled a fire in my anger which shall burn forever. Now, I've been trying to observe every time we come across this imagery, throughout Jeremiah, it often refers to the destruction of Jerusalem as the kindling of God's wrath like a fire against these people.

And on a number of occasions previously, we've seen that it actually says that the fire cannot be quenched. For example, in chapter 4 and verse 4, it says, circumcise yourselves to the Lord and take away the foreskins of your hearts, you men of Judah and inhabitants of Jerusalem, lest my fury come forth like fire and burn so that no one can quench it. And so we have a fire that's unquenchable, no one can quench it.

We've got a fire that is here said to burn forever. And yet none of these things are really quite literal because it's talking about the destruction of Jerusalem. It may be that for the lifetime of these people, it will burn, they'll experience that judgment for the rest of their lives, but not for eternity.

This is not talking about a postmortem judgment. This is talking about the destruction of the city. It's a little bit like Jude's words in Jude, where he's talking about Sodom's destruction.

In verse 7, he said, as Sodom and Gomorrah and the cities around them in similar manner to these having given themselves over to sexual immorality and gone after strange flesh are set forth as an example, suffering the vengeance of eternal fire. It says that the example that God has made of Sodom and Gomorrah to all nations and all people who would otherwise be inclined to live ungodly was that he punished them with eternal fire. Well, this is referring to the fire and brimstone that came down upon them in the days of Abraham.

This is not a reference to hell because hell is invisible and therefore could not be set forth as an example to sinners. God has not made a visible example by sending Sodom and Gomorrah to hell because no one can see them there. But it's talking about the visible example of destroying them in the days of Abraham with what he calls everlasting fire.

Now, these are images that the judgment passages use, not when they're talking about postmortem punishment, but when they're talking about judgment on a nation or on a city. And so here we just need to note that. It's not the most important thing at this point in our study of Jeremiah.

It's just something to stick in your memory because, of course, you will encounter the very same kind of language in the New Testament. And yet in the New Testament, Christians sort of automatically apply this idea of eternal fire and so forth to events after a person's death where, in fact, it's a very standard phrase. It's a very standard image in

the Old Testament for the destruction of Jerusalem or the destruction of Sodom or the destruction of some other city.

It's the anger of God, which is likened to fire. When it says he'll burn forever. Well, that's not exactly true.

I mean, not literally true, because although God did destroy Jerusalem in 586 B.C., even Jeremiah himself said that would only last for 70 years. And then he's going to restore it. We'll see that in chapter 25 of Jeremiah and verse 11, where it says, this whole land shall be a desolation and an astonishment, and these nations shall serve the king of Babylon 70 years.

And we know that that is how long it lasted. So it wasn't really for eternity. So the language, my anger will burn forever, is obviously a hyperbole.

And we should be aware of that kind of usage. Verse five, thus says the Lord, cursed is the man who trusts in man and makes flesh his strength, whose heart departs from the Lord, for he shall be like a shrub in the desert and shall not see when good comes, but shall inhabit the parched places in the wilderness and in a salt land, which is not inhabited. Now, we've seen when we studied Isaiah that there's a common motif of fruitfulness and fruitlessness.

And people who are fruitless, people who do not bear the fruit of justice and righteousness, are sometimes like the thorns and thistles and other desert shrubs, because they aren't fruitful. They don't produce anything of value. On the other hand, when God pours out his spirit, Isaiah says, then the desert blossoms like a rose and fills the earth with its fruit and the people become like a watered garden themselves and bear fruit.

Jesus talked about trees being known by their fruit. He's talking about people. And so here also people are likened, if they are trusting in man, and this could mean people who are at this point trusting in maybe Egypt to come and help them from the Babylonians or trusting in some other, you know, sub divine resource, that they are cursed and they are fruitless and they will be inhabiting a dry land and they will not be, you know, spiritually nurtured.

But by contrast, in verses seven and eight, he says, blessed is the man who trusts in the Lord, and everything is opposite. And from this he takes his language from Psalm 1. As we know, if we're familiar with Psalm 1, he says, in whose hope is the Lord, for he should be like a tree planted by the waters, which spreads out its roots by the river and will not fear when the heat comes, but its leaf will be green and will not be anxious in the year of drought, nor will cease from yielding fruit. This is not a direct quote from Psalm 1, but it is clearly a deliberate reference to it.

Of course, David, who wrote Psalm 1, lived much earlier than Jeremiah, and therefore the Psalms were available to him. And it says in Psalm 1 that the blessed is the man, that's how this begins. Verse seven begins, blessed is the man.

So Psalm 1 begins, blessed is the man. He describes the man who does not walk in the counsel of the ungodly or stand in the way of sinners nor sit in the seat of scornful, but says his delight is in the law of the Lord. And it says in Psalm 1, he should be like a tree planted by rivers of water.

And it says his leaf will not wither and his fruit will be produced in its season. And those are the things that are said here. This one who trusts in the Lord will be like a tree planted by waters.

Its leaf will be green. It won't cease yielding fruit. So it's Psalm 1 through 3 that is referred to here, but it's given here in contrast to the curse on those who trust in man.

So you either trust in man or you trust in the Lord. Verse nine says, the heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked who can know it. I think I, I don't know if I mentioned this school, but I've mentioned it recently somewhere.

I remember when I was in Santa Cruz in the 70s as a young person in ministry in my 20s and or even late teens, I guess I was in my early 20s. And I was witnessing some hippie at the park and he said what was very common to hear people say in those days, I believe we should just follow our heart. And so having a pat answer ready at hand, I said, but the heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked who can know it.

The Bible says. So I thought I'd nailed him on that one. And he came back and said, yeah, but who is that written to? And I thought for a moment, I thought, you know, I've never even checked.

I just knew the verse. It was just a Bible verse I'd memorized. I didn't even think about who it was written to.

I just assumed it was a generic statement about human hearts. I was doing what the Calvinists do really. They take verses.

They're talking about specific evil people to describe how corrupt they've become and saying this is a picture of all people, which is of course not exegesis. Exegesis is where you actually try to find out what the verse is talking about, not when you try to apply it to something you want to try to prove. The fact is, Jeremiah was describing the wickedness of his people, of his generation.

Their hearts were desperately wicked, deceitful above all things. There's already been previous reference to the deceit of their own hearts. How the prophets spoke out of the deceit of their hearts.

We're going to find that phrase again in the chapters we look at today. And so the deceitfulness of the heart is a description of the people. This is a condemnation of his people.

Remember I said last time that some of these verses that are taken as if they are intended to teach anthropology, biblical anthropology, as if they're trying to teach human psyche and the condition of humanity and a theological point. They're really prophetic denunciations of specific hearers. Now that they may apply to some others besides the original hearers, no one could deny, but to try to make them function as a description of all people is simply to go far beyond anything that any writer of scripture intended by these kinds of remarks.

And therefore it is the opposite of exegesis. It's eisegesis. It's reading into it what a person hopes to prove.

It was commonly believed in those days that partridges sit on the eggs of other birds, but they don't necessarily stay around for them to hatch. And therefore it's like the riches that you are trusting in, they are there for a while, but they won't be around when you need them. In the end you'll be shown to be a fool if you're trusting in your riches.

A glorious high throne from the beginning is the palace of our sanctuary. O Lord, the hope of Israel, all who forsake you shall be ashamed. Those who depart from me shall be written in the earth, because they have forsaken the Lord, the fountain of living waters.

It was stated in chapter 2 that they had hewn out cisterns, broken cisterns that could not hold water and had forsaken God, who was the fountain of living waters. So he's repeating that, but here he says, those who depart from me shall be written in the earth. That's a strange phrase, and it's not self-explanatory.

Some suggest this means that their inheritance will be the dust, or to die and go back to the dust. It's hard not to think of what Jesus said to his disciples. Do not rejoice that the demons are subject to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven.

Those who depart from God will be written in the earth. To say your name is written in heaven is no doubt to suggest that you're a citizen there. Your destiny is there.

You're on the register of the citizens of heaven. But to have your name written in the earth would seemingly mean that you're not going to heaven. You're stuck here.

Your ultimate end is to inherit dust and earth. But it's a very strange expression. It's hard also for me not to think of John 8, though I seriously doubt that this has anything to do with this passage.

But when Jesus was dealing with those who brought the woman taken in adultery to him, and he stooped down and he wrote with his finger in the earth, in the dust, what did he

write? No one knows, but some people think he wrote down the names of the people in the crowd and their sins. I don't think it's very likely, but it's a common suggestion. But when it says those who depart from God shall be written in the earth, it's hard to not think of Jesus writing in the earth, that is, in the dust on the temple floor, writing maybe the names of those people who were apostates.

But none of these suggestions really work smoothly, and therefore they're only random thoughts. Obviously, whatever he's saying is a negative thing, probably that they'll just end up buried in the earth. Now, 14 says, Now he's saying, I have not run away from this unpleasant task and this dangerous job, and I also have not been pleased about the message I've had to proclaim.

The woeful day has not been something I've been delighting about. It's just something I had to announce. He says, Yet another of the many imprecations in Jeremiah.

Now, in chapter seven, he was told to go and stand in the gate of the temple and pronounce against the temple. Here, he's in the gate of the city, apparently. It says, So he's in the gate of Jerusalem speaking this word.

At a later point, he's going to have a prophecy again against the temple in chapter 26, and he's going to be told to go and stand in the court of the Lord's house, the court of the temple. So some of his messages have to be delivered from specific foreordained spots that God wants these messages proclaimed. In this case, he's in the gate of the city where the people go and where the kings of Judah come in and go out.

Nor carry a burden of your houses on the Sabbath day, nor do any work. But hallow the Sabbath day as I commanded your fathers. But they did not obey or incline their ear, but made their neck stiff that they might not hear or receive instruction.

And it shall be if you diligently heed me, says the Lord, to bring no burden through the gates of this city on the Sabbath day. But hallow the Sabbath day and do no work in it. Then shall enter the gates of this city kings and princes sitting on the throne of David, riding in chariots and on horses.

They and their princes, accompanied by men of Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem in this city, shall remain forever. And they shall come from the cities of Judah and from the places around Jerusalem, from the land of Benjamin and from the lowland, from the mountains and from the Negev, the south, bringing burnt offerings and sacrifices, grain offerings and incense, bringing sacrifice of praise to the house of the Lord. But if you will not heed me to hallow the Sabbath day, such as not carrying a burden when entering the gates of Jerusalem on the Sabbath day, then I will kindle a fire in its gates and it shall devour the palaces of Jerusalem and it shall not be quenched.

Now, here he talks about not bearing burdens on the Sabbath day. This is not the only

thing they would have to change in order to be preserved. In other prophecies, he tells them other things they have to do, like stop oppressing the poor and so forth.

But one of the great sins and great sacrileges of Jewish behavior in much of their history was that they ignored the Sabbath instructions. And the Sabbath was supposed to be the sign of the covenant between them and God. So said Exodus chapter 30, he said the Sabbath is a sign of the covenant I have with you.

And their neglect of the Sabbath was to neglect essentially their relationship with God altogether and their covenant specificity. You might remember it's either Ezra or Nehemiah, I believe it was Nehemiah, found people bringing their wares into the gates of Jerusalem on the Sabbath. And he drove them out and said the gates are going to be shut, they're not allowed to come and do that anymore.

But at other times, I mean Nehemiah was a reformer, at other times apparently the gates were open and people were allowed to bring stuff in even though it was against the Sabbath law to bear burdens and to do business on the Sabbath. So in other words, go back to covenant loyalty. Go back to fulfill the terms of the covenant and God can spare Jerusalem.

In fact, he says that the city would remain forever at the end of verse 25. Of course, forever could be a hyperbole, but the idea is that there would be no reason for God to dispense with Jerusalem ever if they were always faithful to him. Which there wasn't much danger of that happening.

But he did say in verse 24, if you diligently heed me and in verse 27, if you will not heed me. So it's very much like Deuteronomy 28, only a shorter version. Again, another similarity to Deuteronomy and Jeremiah, there's many.

The reason I think that he delivered this oracle at the gates is because of the nature of the threat that was made in the final verse. I will kindle a fire in Jerusalem's gates and it shall devour the palaces of Jerusalem and it shall not be quenched. These words are an echo of the earlier words of Amos the prophet.

And I don't know how recently you may have read Amos or if you've read it at all, but the first two chapters of Amos are a series of about I think seven or so short prophetic denunciations of individual nations. First Damascus, second Gaza, the Philistine city, then Tyre, and then Ammon, and then Moab, and then Judah, and then Israel. And so we have several pagan nations plus Judah and Israel.

And each of these prophecies in Amos chapters 1 and 2 have the same basic structure. And when he talks about his judging them, he says, for example, in Amos 1.4, But I will send fire into the house of Hazael, which will devour the palaces of Ben-Hadad. I will also break the gate bar of Damascus, cut off blah, blah, blah.



Let me see here. What do I want to read here? I will send fire upon the wall of Gaza, verse 7, which shall devour its palaces. There's sort of this repeated refrain, verse 10, but I will send fire on the wall of Tyre, which shall devour its palaces.

In verse 14, I will kindle a fire in the wall of Rabah, and it shall devour its palaces. And this framing of this threat is the same for each of these things. And it's very similar to the way that Jeremiah says about Jerusalem.

I will kindle fire in its gates, and it shall devour the palaces of Jerusalem. Amos said, I'll kindle fire in the walls and devour the palaces. And Jeremiah says, I'll kindle fire in the gates and devour its palaces.

But very similar phrase, not likely to be coincidental. Almost certainly it is a, you know, influenced by the prophecy of Amos. Now, chapter 18, the word which came to Jeremiah from the Lord, saying, Arise and go down to the potter's house, and there I will cause you to hear my words.

Then I went down to the potter's house, and there he was making something on the wheel. And the wheel that he made of clay was marred. The vessel, excuse me, that he made of clay was marred in the hand of the potter.

That is, he, somehow it didn't turn out how he liked it. So he made it again into another vessel, as seemed good to the potter to make. That's the point.

The potter has every right to make it however it seems good to him. If he didn't like the way it turned out the first time, he can reshape it and make something new the way he likes it. Then the word of the Lord came to me, saying, O house of Israel, can I not do with you as this potter, says the Lord.

Look, as the clay is in the potter's hand, so are you in my hand, O house of Israel. Now, the imagery of God being the potter and Israel the clay first is found in Isaiah 45.9. And also Isaiah 64. So Jeremiah is now given a prophecy based upon that similarity that was already revealed to Isaiah, that it's like a potter and clay.

Obviously the Apostle Paul picks up this image in Romans 9, speaking of Israel as the lump and God as the potter. And he says that the potter has the right from one lump to make two vessels, one for honor, one for dishonor. And Paul is saying that from the one lump, Israel, God has made two vessels.

One is the remnant, the other is the apostate. The remnant he has made for honor, the apostate he has made for dishonor and for destruction. So Paul gets the imagery here from Isaiah and from Jeremiah.

But here, verses 7-10 are one of the most important passages in the Old Testament for understanding God's words in general, His promises and His threats. In verse 7 it says,

And then the reverse. Now God is saying this is true all the time, whenever.

Whenever I make a threat to a nation to destroy or whenever I make a promise to bless, whenever I do that kind of thing, this is my policy. It's not stated at every point, but it is stated here. And it is always underlying God's promises and His threats.

If He threatens to destroy a nation, He does not have to state any conditions, but there are implied conditions. And this we saw in Jonah's ministry when he came to Nineveh. He simply said 40 days and Nineveh will perish.

He didn't state any conditions. He didn't say, well, unless you repent, then of course God will spare you. He didn't have to say that.

Even the king of Nineveh guessed that this might be true, that God might change His mind if we repent. And so he pronounced that all must repent, which they did, and God did change His mind. In other words, we see in the case of Jonah and Nineveh an example of what is stated here in verses 7 and 8, that God pronounced doom on a nation, but they repented.

So God repented of the evil He said He would do. But then it's turned around and said whenever God promises to build and to plant a nation, now, by the way, God has only said that about one nation ever. So it must be the one He has in mind here.

He has said that to Israel, which of course includes all 12 tribes, the two kingdoms, the northern and southern kingdom of Israel. These kingdoms, Israel and Judah, are the only kingdom that God has ever said He would build and plant in prophecy. And yet He says, well, even then it's conditional.

If they do what's evil in my sight, then I'm going to repent of what I said I'd do for them. In other words, the promises God made to Israel and Judah are just as conditional upon their continued obedience to Him as the threats He made upon Nineveh were conditional upon their continued evil. Whenever God makes a threat, that can be changed if the people repent.

Whenever God makes a promise, that can be changed if the people apostatize. And so this is stated as a policy of God whenever He does this. Now you'll find, of course, in scripture, not only Jonah's unconditional sounding prophecy against Nineveh, which actually was conditional, you'll find many unconditional sounding promises made to Israel and Judah.

But they're not unconditional. Just because the conditions are not stated every time does not mean that they don't exist. Sometimes we have record in the Gospels of Jesus saying, whoever divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery.

No conditions, no exceptions stated. But in Matthew, he says, whoever divorces his wife

for any cause other than fornication and marries another commits adultery. Oh, there is something there.

It's not always stated, but if it's stated ever, it's stated for the sake of all the times it's not stated. God doesn't have to waste words when He's already said something very clearly, that every promise, every threat is conditional. And therefore, He doesn't have to state the conditions every time He repeats a promise or a threat.

That's a given. That if they change, then His prediction changes. Now, therefore, speak to the men of Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, saying, Thus says the Lord, Behold, I am fashioning a disaster and devising a plan against you.

Return now every one from his evil way and make your ways and your doings good. And they said, That's hopeless. So we will walk according to our own plans, and we will, everyone, do the imagination of his evil heart.

Now, they're the ones with the evil hearts, you see, that you talked about in chapter 17, verse 9. By the way, Jeremiah didn't have an evil heart. So it's clear that the statement about evil hearts is not universal. It's about these people, and they even acknowledge they have evil hearts.

We're just going to do what our evil heart says, because it's hopeless to change. We just don't have it in us. Verse 13, Therefore, thus says the Lord, Ask now among the Gentiles, Who has heard such things? The Virgin of Israel has done a very horrible thing.

Will a man leave the snow water of Lebanon, which comes from the rock of the field? Will the cold flowing waters be forsaken for strange waters? In other words, won't you choose the pure water, the pure snow melt, instead of some unfamiliar waters that you don't know, you know, it's safety to drink it? This is another reference to them leaving God, the fountain of living waters, and choosing cisterns of their own making. Because my people have forgotten me, they have burned incense to worthless idols, and they have caused themselves to stumble in their ways from the ancient paths, to walk in pathways and not in the highway, to make their land desolate and a perpetual hissing. Everyone who passes by it will be astonished and shake his head.

I will scatter them as with an east wind before the enemy. I will show them the back and not the face in the day of their calamity. Now, showing them his face would be a Hebraism really for favoring them, causing his face to shine upon them and give them peace, as the Aaronic benediction uses the phrase.

I'll show you my back and not my face means I'll turn my back on you. I will reject you rather than face you and cause my face to shine upon you. Then they said, Come and let us devise plans against Jeremiah.

For the law shall not perish from the priest, nor counsel from the wise, nor the word from

the prophet. Come, let us attack him with the tongue and let us not give heed to any of his words. Now, when they say the law shall not perish from the priest, etc., they seem to be referring to what he is predicting and saying it's not going to happen.

Now, he hadn't made those exact predictions on record for us. He may have said those things on occasions that weren't recorded, but they were at least taking his words to mean this, that God is not going to speak to his people anymore. He's going to turn his back to them, not his face.

And that means he's not going to be talking to them anymore. Now, the way that they were accustomed to God revealing himself to Israel was through three ways. Through the law, which was in the hands of the priests and their custody.

They were supposed to teach the law to the people. And then there was the counsel of the wise. And then there was the words of the prophets.

Now, these are still the three ways that God communicates with us through his written word, through his prophetic words, that is, through the Holy Spirit speaking directly, and through wisdom, that is, common sense. We sometimes discount the latter, as if it's not really that spiritual just to be wise. But actually, Proverbs and other places in Scripture indicate that wisdom is one of the main ways that God directs us.

He gives us good sense. We're human beings who have rational powers. We should use them.

And these three things are the ways in which God directs people. And sometimes we just want to insist on one or the other. Some very charismatic people say, I just need to get a word from God about every decision.

Others say, no, we just go by the Bible. Well, there's more than one way that God directs his people. The word, the written word, the law, which the priests held.

The inspired, you know, current word from the Holy Spirit given through the prophets. And then there was just wisdom, the wisdom of the wise. Usually the counsel of wise men was a very important factor for kings in making decisions about what God wanted them to do next.

These three are also spoken of in Ezekiel, chapter 7, and verse 26. Ezekiel 7, 26 says, disaster will come upon disaster and rumor upon rumor. Then they will seek a vision from the prophet, but the law will perish from the priest and counsel from the elders.

The counsel is the counsel of the wise. The vision is, of course, the prophetic word. So the prophet with his vision, the priest with the law, and the wise counselor with his wise counsel.

Will not be available anymore. Why? Because God's not guiding anymore. When God was angry at King Saul, Saul sought a word from the Lord and God wasn't talking to him.

And God wasn't answering through the Urim and the Thummim or through dreams or through prophets. And so what did Saul do? He went to a witch. And, you know, sometimes people just aren't satisfied for God not to give them a special revelation or a special word.

But frankly, he expects that we know what he wants him to do, what he wants us to do. And therefore, he doesn't speak whenever we want him to. And especially someone who's under judgment like Saul.

God was just done talking with him. He had rejected the word of the Lord and God had rejected him from being king. Likewise, Jerusalem here is rejected by God.

And therefore, Jeremiah's words imply that the people will not be able to hear from God. The priests will not be able to have the law to teach. The wise will not be wise enough to give counsel and the word from the prophet will vanish.

And the people say, no, that's not going to happen. Let's get rid of Jeremiah. We don't like what he's talking here.

He is basically speaking against our leaders. And so they said they want to cut him off, make plans against him. And in verse 19, he says, In other words, he's doing them good.

He's trying to save their lives by giving them the right counsel that will save them. And they just want to hurt him. And to turn away your wrath from them.

Now, this is about the most cruel of the imprecations he gives in his book, I think. Again, we always feel a little uncomfortable hearing Jeremiah pray such harsh things. It seems so un-Christlike to have those attitudes.

There is a perspective here, though, that we might need to consider. And that is that all the things he's saying, let this happen to them, are things that God has already revealed are going to happen to them. Everything he's describing and wishing on them are the things that he has already prophesied are going to happen.

Their children and their wives and their own bodies could be slain with the sword, could be lying in the streets rotting and so forth. In other words, he's not innovating bad things to wish on them. He knows these things are going to happen.

He might just be saying, well, let it happen then. You know, I was weeping for them before, but hey, I don't think I'm going to weep now. They want to kill me? Let these things happen.

You've already said they're going to happen. I'm not going to resist it. You know, these

people are bringing it on themselves.

I think they deserve it. It's still not very charitable to them. But it's not as though Jeremiah is sitting up just thinking of mean things and harsh things to wish upon them.

The things he says are the things that God has already declared. And Jeremiah didn't ask to be told these things, but God told Jeremiah, this is what I'm going to do to these people. And so his words here could be just understood to be, well, I'm not going to resist that anymore.

I mean, let it happen. They seem to deserve it. And then in chapter 19.

It says, thus says the Lord, go and get a potter's earthen flask. I guess he was already at the potter's house in chapter 18. Since he's at the potter's house, he might as well buy something.

And the Lord says, go and get a potter's earthen flask. Take some of the elders of the people and some of the elders of the priests. And go out to the valley of the son of Hinnom, the valley of Hinnom, Gehenna.

Which is by the entry of the potsherd gate. And proclaim there the words that I will tell you. And say, hear the word of the Lord, O kings of Judah and inhabitants of Jerusalem.

Thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel. Behold, I will bring such a catastrophe on this place, that whoever hears of it, his ears will tingle. That's kind of an interesting expression.

And it's used elsewhere, too, in the prophets. That your ears will just have this strange feeling in them, hearing such awful things. Because they have forsaken me and made this an alien place, because they have burned incense in it to other gods, whom they, their fathers, nor their kings of Judah have known, and have filled this place with the blood of innocents, meaning the children they burned to Molech, as well as other innocent victims of their crimes.

They have also built the high places of Baal to burn their sons with fire for burnt offerings to Baal. Now, Baal is simply a generic term for pagan gods. And this is no doubt a reference to Molech, who is specifically named as the god that Manasseh and others burned their sons to.

He says, which I did not command or speak, nor did it come to mind. This expression has been found previously. It's kind of one of Jeremiah's favorites, in a way, that he's saying God did not command this, and it wasn't just neglect on his part.

It's not like he really was thinking about commanding it, but forgot. He wasn't thinking about it. This is not the kind of thing he would ever have commanded.

It never came to his mind to do this, to give a command like that. Therefore, behold, the days are coming, says the Lord, that the place shall no more be called Tophet, or the Valley of the Son of Hinnom, but the Valley of Slaughter. The prophecy we have here is going to be an expansion on the same prophecy given back in chapter 7. At that point, it was given at the gate of the temple.

It's when he said that God would do to this place what he had done in Shiloh. And then he went on to talk about how the destruction of Jerusalem would result in corpses so abundant that they would fill up the Valley of Hinnom, or Tophet. And he says it again here.

Same prophecy, but he kind of expands on it. This place shall no more be called Tophet, or the Valley of the Son of Hinnom, but the Valley of Slaughter. And I will make void the counsel of Judah and Jerusalem in this place, and I will cause them to fall by the sword before their enemies, by the hands of those who seek their lives.

Their corpses I will give as meat for the birds of the heaven and for the beasts of the earth. I will make this city desolate and a hissing. Everyone who passes by it will be astonished and hiss because of all its plagues.

And I will cause them to eat the flesh of their sons and the flesh of their daughters. And everyone shall eat the flesh of his friend in the siege and in the desperation with which their enemies and those who seek their lives shall drive them to despair. This eating of their sons and daughters is about as bad as it can be imagined.

First of all, one of the most horrible things that could happen to someone is simply for their children to die. Another thing really horrible is to end up eating human flesh. To eat your own children's flesh is about combining the two most horrendous things into one act.

And yet this was predicted in Deuteronomy. And it's possible that Jeremiah is simply reminding them of what was warned of them in the book of Deuteronomy, the book that probably had been found in the temple and was now being rediscovered in Jerusalem. And Jeremiah must have read the book and had made many references to it, many allusions to it.

And this was probably one of them. It's Deuteronomy 28, verses 53 through 55. Moses had said that if Israel would rebel against him, many curses would come upon them, including invasion from foreign powers that would besiege their cities and the famine in the city, because of the siege, would be so great that they'd be driven to the expedient of even eating their children.

Now, we don't have a record in the Bible of this specific thing happening when the Babylonians besieged the city, but we have no doubt that it happened. We don't have

hardly any data about the siege of Jerusalem by the Babylonians. The historical books just mention that the city was besieged and that the Babylonians conquered it, but the details are not given to us in the historical narrative.

However, in earlier wars, like that which we read of in 2 Kings, I think it's chapter 6, if I'm not mistaken, the king learns that the siege of Samaria, which the Syrians are bringing upon them, has caused people in Samaria actually to eat their children. He learns of an actual case, and it grieves him. Josephus said that in A.D. 70, when the Romans besieged Jerusalem, at least one case is recorded of a woman eating her children or her child.

This is not just an empty threat. Whether this happened during the siege of Jerusalem in 586 B.C., we don't have actual historical record, but we have similar records of similar sieges, and there's every reason to believe that this really did happen, that people ate their own children when they were so hungry. Now, God tells Jeremiah, having bought that flask, he has to do something with it now.

This is an active prophecy. Verse 10, The number of small shards into which it's broken would, of course, prevent any hope, preclude any hope of repairing it. He says, Now, here's an interesting thing.

It makes it sound like Jerusalem's going to be busted irreparably, and yet it was rebuilt 70 years later. And that being so, it may simply be saying, for the time being, it'll be irreparable. Of course, God can put anything together if he wants to, and he can eventually take that which is even irreparable and repair it.

Or, it's possible that the destruction of Jerusalem in 586 BC is being here treated as a type of the ultimate destruction of Jerusalem, which will be permanent and was permanent in AD 70, and there has been no restoration from that. I know there's a city over there. I know there's people living in Jerusalem today.

It has not been restored. It is not the people of God over there anymore. It's not the holy city.

It is a city, but it has never returned to its former status and never will. Anyway, it says, says the Lord, or like the Valley of Hinnom. Talking about defiling the city like Tophet was defiled is referring to the fact that Josiah, when he came to power, defiled Tophet because it was a place of worship, of Moloch.

And defiling it meant he made it unclean so that people wouldn't worship Moloch there anymore or anyone else. It became unsuited for worship, as a site for worship. That's what it means to defile it.

How he did so, it's not entirely clear. We know that Josiah, when he went up into Bethel, he defiled the altar that had been made by Jeroboam there by taking the bones of the priests out of their tombs and spreading their bones on the place. Of course, dead bones,



death, dead bodies were very unclean to the Jews.

Any place where there were dead men's bones was an unclean place. So Josiah had defiled Bethel and the altar there, the pagan altar there, with the bones of the priests there. Whether he did the same thing at Tophet, that is the Valley of Hinnom, or defiled it some other way is not entirely known.

Of course, there's the tradition that the Valley of Hinnom became a garbage dump with perpetual fires burning there. That might be what happened. It might be that Josiah did turn it into a garbage dump or some other way he defiled it.

But the point is that as Tophet had been defiled by Josiah, so God was going to defile the whole city probably by having dead bodies and bones and so forth strewn all over the place. Then Jeremiah came from Tophet, where the Lord had sent him to prophesy. And he stood in the court of the Lord's house and said to all the people, Thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, Behold, I will bring on this city and all her towns all the doom that I have pronounced against it, because they have stiffened their necks that they might not hear my words.

Now very quickly, chapter 20. Now Pasher, the son of Emer, the priest who was over the chief governor in the house, also the chief governor of the house of the Lord. Now he's not the chief priest, but he was a priest who had sort of a political office as probably the guard, chief of the guards who were the temple guard.

He heard that Jeremiah was prophesying these things. He's prophesying that the temple is going to be destroyed and Jerusalem is going to be defiled. Then Pasher struck Jeremiah the prophet and put him in stocks that were in the high gate of the Benjamin, which was by the house of the Lord.

So stocks were usually a place where a criminal was humiliated in public. They'd stick his hands in his head through a stock and people would just go by and see him. He'd be in a humiliated situation.

This was in the high gate of Benjamin. That was the tribal territory where Jeremiah was from, so that probably the people who knew him would be able to mock him and see him in this condition, which was by the house of the Lord, the gate of Benjamin. I'm sorry, it wasn't the tribe.

My mistake. It's not the tribal area of Benjamin. It's the gate of Benjamin, which was one of the gates of the city that opened out toward Benjamin.

See, part of the city was in the tribe of Benjamin. Jerusalem was shared by the tribal inheritance of Benjamin and Judah. It happened on the next day that Pasher brought Jeremiah out of the stocks.

Then Jeremiah said to him, the Lord has not called your name Pasher, but Magar Misabib. Well, I wouldn't want to be called that no matter what it means. It actually means fear on every side.

For thus says the Lord, behold, I will make you a terror to yourself and to all your friends, and they shall fall by the sword of their enemies, and your eyes shall see it. I will give all Judah into the hand of the king of Babylon, and he shall carry them captive to Babylon and slay them with the sword. Moreover, I will deliver all the wealth of this city, all its produce and all its precious things, all the treasures of the kings of Judah, I will give into the hand of their enemies who will plunder them, seize them, and carry them to Babylon.

Isaiah had made this exact same prediction in Isaiah 39, verse 6, where he told Hezekiah that the Babylonians would someday come and take all the treasures that the king had acquired and had stored in Jerusalem. And you, Pasher, and all who dwell in your house shall go into captivity. You shall go to Babylon, and there you will die and be buried there, you and all your friends to whom you have prophesied lies.

Now he prays, O Lord, you have induced me, and I was persuaded. I think what he's saying here is I didn't want to be a prophet. You kind of persuaded me to do it.

I objected, and you overrode my objections. You induced me, and I was persuaded. You're stronger than I and have prevailed.

I am in derision daily. Everyone mocks me. For when I spoke, I cried out.

I shouted, violence and plunder, because the word of the Lord was made to me of reproach and of derision daily. That is, because I stood for the word of God, I faced derision, which means mockery and reproach from the people on a daily basis, because I was loyal for the word. Then I said, I will not make mention of him nor speak any more in his name.

I don't like this kind of treatment. I'll just be quiet from now on. But his word was in my heart like a burning fire, shot up in my bones.

I was weary of holding it back, and I could not. So that's the problem when you're actually a prophet. You just cannot retire.

It's a job you can't quit. Amos speaks that way like, and Amos was a prophet who knew very well the inward pressures building up inside a prophet when the word of the Lord was poured into him. And in Amos 3, chapter 8, he said, A lion has roared.

Who will not fear? The Lord God has spoken. Who can but prophesy? That is, just like it'd be impossible not to fear when a lion roars, it's equally impossible not to prophesy when God has spoken to you. You can't not prophesy.

Amos 3, 8. Actually, Job talked about being full to the bursting point also of the things that were on his heart. In Job chapter 32, in verse 18, he says, For I am full of words. The spirit within me compels me.

Indeed, my belly is like wine that has no vent. It is ready to burst like new wineskins. I will speak that I may find relief.

And so, maybe you've known this phenomenon, or maybe you're not a prophet, but when God is putting it on your heart to denounce or to speak something, even though you can foresee that it's going to get you into trouble, you just can't not do it. It's something God does inside. It was like trying to shut up this fire in his bones, and it just couldn't do it.

He got weary trying to hold it back. He couldn't stop being a prophet. Verse 10, For I heard many mocking.

Fear on every side. That's, of course, the term, the name that he gave to Pashur, Megarmisabib. It means fear on every side.

So the people were kind of mocking Jeremiah. Oh, fear on every side, you say. Report, they say, and we will report it.

All my acquaintances watch for my stumbling, saying perhaps he can be induced. Then we will prevail against him. In other words, they want to lure him into some kind of ambush.

And we will take our revenge on him. But the Lord is with me as a mighty awesome one. Therefore, my persecutors will stumble and will not prevail.

They will be greatly ashamed, for they will not prosper. Now, this is not the same thing as an imprecation. It's a prediction, though he does lapse into an imprecation.

Their everlasting confusion will never be forgotten. But, O Lord of hosts, you who test the righteous and see the minds and heart, let me see your vengeance on them, for I have pleaded my cause before you. Sing to the Lord, praise the Lord, for he has delivered the life of the poor from the hand of the evildoers.

This verse kind of stands out by itself as a very uplifting, positive, optimistic verse. Apparently, his confidence that God is sparing him from those who are trying to kill him, as God promised when he first called him in chapter 1, said, I will be with you to deliver you. He's counting on that, but then he goes back to his depression, because his present circumstances are not very optimistic.

Cursed be the day in which I was born. Let the day not be blessed in which my mother bore me. Let the man be cursed who brought news to my father, saying, a male child has

been born to you, making him very glad.

And let that man be like the cities which the Lord overthrew and did not relent. Let him hear the cry of mourning and shouting at noon, because he did not kill me from the womb, that my mother might have been my grave, and her womb always enlarged with me. Why did I come forth from the womb to see labor and sorrow, that my days should be consumed with shame? This cursing of the day of his birth is really kind of following in the tradition of a certain kind of Middle Eastern mourning.

Job, you might remember, in Job chapter 3, after he had held his peace for about a week when his friends had arrived, he finally burst out with his response, his emotional outburst, and it was basically the same thing as this. Cursed is the day I was born. Cursed is that night not be numbered with the nights and the day not numbered on the calendar, and so forth.

These are just poetic ways of saying, I wish I'd never been born. He's not really wishing harm on the guy who didn't kill him at birth, or on his mother for not becoming his womb and refusing to give birth to him, or the man who brought news to his dad to tell him his son was born. He doesn't, you know, he's not really genuinely wishing harm on these people.

This is just poetic venting, venting about how miserable it is to be alive and how much he, at this point, wishes that he'd never been born. He did the same thing with somewhat less detail back in chapter 15 and verse 10. He had said, woe is me, my mother, that you have borne me.

A man of strife, a man of contention to the whole earth. He's just saying, I wish I hadn't been born. My life is full of contention.

Nobody's my friend. Everyone's my enemy. And now he kind of ventilates even in more detail.

Probably felt silly about some of the things he said later, but when you speak out of your emotions, you don't always speak rationally. And he's wishing harm on people who are actually innocent people, and he doesn't really mean it. What he does mean is that he hates being alive.

Alright, well we're going to take a break and come back to chapter 21 next time. Thank you.