We’re beginning a new segment of our study of the book of Jeremiah moving away from chapters 1 to 25 and the messages of judgment and indictment against Jews that are found there into the second section of the book that is found in chapters 26 to 45. We notice that there is a difference between this material in that we are primarily in this section looking more at stories about Jeremiah's life and ministry and the things that take place in the last days of Judah as a nation. Chapters 1 to 25 are more a sampling of his messages of judgment. Again, I think that we can connect chapters 1 to 25 with this story in Jeremiah 36 where God commands Jeremiah, after he has been preaching for twenty years, to write out on a scroll the messages that he's been preaching over the entire course of his ministry. Jeremiah obviously cannot write down every word or give us transcripts of every sermon that he's preached but chapters 1 to 25 are likely a reflection of what that scroll might have looked like and the messages that Jeremiah had preached. What we have in 26 to 45 are the stories and the accounts of how the people responded to that message. As Jeremiah preached these messages, what was their response to that? That begins to be fleshed out and explained for us in the second section of the book.

Response to the Word of God

The focus of the book of Jeremiah is on the word of God and some statistics that I think help reflect that the expression; "thus says the Lord" appears 155 times in the book of Jeremiah. The expression "the word of the Lord came to Jeremiah" or "came to me" appears 23 times. The description of the passage or section or an oracle as a declaration of the Lord appears 167 times. So “the word of the Lord” is very important to the book of Jeremiah. What this section is about is Judah’s response to the word of the Lord.

It also is going to give to us in chapters 37 to 44 more of a chronological narrative of what happens in the last days of Judah, the fall of Jerusalem and the city, and then the
aftermath of that fall in chapters 40 to 44 showing us the consequences of what happened as a result of the fact Judah did not respond to the word of God in the way God had desired. So the book of Jeremiah is about the word of God. It’s the story of the word of God, remember Andrew Shead saying that. What happens as the word of God becomes a fire in the prophet’s mouth? The destruction that brings those who reject the word, the tearing down the dismantling of the nation of Judah because of their apostasy and unbelief but then the power of the word of the Lord that is also going to rebuild and to restore.

Stories of the Prophet’s Life

Jeremiah is unique among the prophets in the sense that it gives us so many stories, narratives, and accounts of actual events from the prophet's life. We have a handful of those things from some of the other prophets but there is no other prophetic book, other than the very brief book of Jonah, that focuses so much on the life and the actual events that take place in the prophet's life as the book of Jeremiah. For example, in the book of Isaiah we have narratives from Isaiah's life that appear in chapters 6 to 8 and chapters 36 to 39. In the book of Jeremiah we are going to have 20 chapters that primarily are going to focus on stories from Jeremiah's life. So, I'm excited about getting into this. There are some great stories here. My kids love stories, and I found that, even as a seminary professor, my students love stories. So I think we can learn from these accounts. There's some incredible literary, rhetorical, and theological artistry in this section. This particular section of the book is important to me because a number of years ago I wrote my dissertation on Jeremiah 26 to 45 and I will definitely resist the urge to bring my dissertation in and read parts of that, which would be even more boring than my lectures. So let's get into this.

The Word of God and How People Respond to It

Jeremiah 26 to 45 thinking about it as a story not just about Jeremiah's life but about the word of God and how people respond to it. The purpose of this section of the book is not to give us a biography of Jeremiah's life. It's not to tell the story of Jeremiah
per se but it's more to provide a theological reflection on what are the consequences of the people's choices primarily not to listen to the word of God.

There is an expression that appears all throughout this section of the book of Jeremiah; it's going to say again and again and repeatedly: “the people did not listen,” or “the people did not obey the message of Jeremiah.” In fact, when I wrote my dissertation my subtitle for this section “the people have not obeyed.” The Hebrew word “to listen” or “to obey” is the word shama. So the prophet is going to repeatedly say or the narratives are going to repeatedly unfold for us "they did not listen," or "they did not obey." That expression appears in these verses chapter 26, verse 5; chapter 29, verse 19; chapter 32, verse 33; chapter 34, verses 14 and 17; chapter 35, verses 14, 15, 16, and 17; chapter 36, verse 31; chapter 37, verses 1 and 2 and then verse 14; chapter 40 verse 3; chapter 42, verses 13 and 21; chapter 43, verse 7; and then chapter 44, verses 16 and 23. So this expression works itself throughout. It’s there through chapter 26 it's there at the end of chapter 44 and on top of that it is repeated again and again. The people did not shama; they did not listen--they did not obey.

This idea, however, is not something that's new this is not something that we are just introduced to as we get to chapter 26. It is a problem that is continually and repeatedly noted in the first part of the book as well. In studying the literary design of the book of Jeremiah one of the things that I've noticed is that many times in the summary sections in the prose narratives that we've looked at are sort of giving us an interpretive guide for the poetry and a summary of what Jeremiah’s message was all about that is going to be a recurring issue. The people did not listen and did not obey what the prophet had to say. As a matter of fact, they have not been listening and they have not been obeying for a long time throughout their history before Jeremiah ever came on the scene.

In the Temple Sermon in Jeremiah chapter 7 this becomes the issue at the end of the message. We read in verse 23, “This commandment I gave them: ‘Obey [shama] my voice, and I will be your God, and you should be my people. And walk in the way that I command you, that it may be well with you.’ But they did not obey [they did not shama] or incline their ear, but they walked in their own counsels and the stubbornness of their
evil hearts, and they went backward and not forward. From the day that your fathers came out of the lord of Egypt to this day, I have persistently sent all of my servants the prophets to them, day after day. Yet they did not listen to me or incline their ears, but stiffen their necks. They did worse than their fathers.” So they did not obey the word of God. It’s not simply some restatement for how people respond to the message of Jeremiah, in many ways its some statement for the whole history of all people of Israel of Judah.

Chapter 11 verse 17 again another prose sermon about the broken covenant and the covenant curses; verse 7 says this: “For I solemnly warned your fathers when I brought them out of the land of Egypt, warning them persistently, even to this day, saying, Obey my voice [shama]. Yet they did not listen or incline their ear, but everyone walked in the stubbornness of his evil heart. Therefore I brought upon them all the words of this covenant, which I commanded them to do, but they did not.” This is the same thing, the same wording again in a prose section. Chapter 19 is after Jeremiah’s second visit to the potter where he smashed the jar because things were irreparably doomed and judgment is inevitable there in verse 15: “Thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, behold, I am bringing upon this city and upon all its towns all the disaster that I have pronounced against it, because they have stiffened their neck, refusing to hear my words.”

So chapter 25, which again is a prose section is a summary tying together everything that we see in the book, and chapter 25 verse 3-9 says this: “For twenty-three years, from the thirteenth year of Josiah the son of Amon, king of Judah until this very day, the word of the Lord has come to me, and I have spoken persistently to you, but you have not listened. You have neither listened nor inclined you ears to hear, although the Lord has persistently sent to you all of his servants the prophets saying, ‘Turn now, every one of you from your evil way.” So in the literary design and the rhetorical strategy of the book of Jeremiah there is a constant emphasis on people not listening to the word of God. It’s an expression that is repeated throughout the second section of the book--that’s what it’s all about.
But also, in the first part of the book, as we’re having the actual message being preached, as there are these prose passages that want to explain for us and summarize for us what this message is all about, it comes down to constantly this same issue: they haven’t listened to the word of God.

Structure not Haphazard

So that’s critical to the message of the book of Jeremiah. Another reflection for us I think a book of Jeremiah is not a book that has haphazardly been thrown together we don’t take the oracles of Jeremiah and just thrown them together with the story. The emphasis on not hearing the word of the Lord that will help you to keep thinking and focus on what’s this is all about. It’s not a biography for Jeremiah. It’s a history of rejection of God’s word.

Now there is something else you’re going to notice as you work through the story and it represents some problems as you try to understand this part of the book. In fact, if pick up the book of Jeremiah and read it, I think this is going to be one of the biggest struggle that there is no real chronology in the section or it seems to skip back and forth. Sometimes it’s going to skip back and forth between genres it is definitely not going to read in a linear chronological way. So again I think that it’s not about us giving a biography of Jeremiah’s ministry from day one on until the end of the story. It is going to be arranged in a way that is different for our reading and different for our way of understanding but again I think is related to the theological message and a theological design of this section.

The Jehoiakim/Zedekiah Oscillation

Let me just sort of work through this. If I was trying to read Jeremiah 26 to 45 and pay attention to chronology, I will see something like this. In chapter 26, we have a story from the region of Jehoiakim 609-597 early days of his reign. In chapter 27 to chapters 29, we immediately jump forward to the reign of Zedekiah with each other they are placed beside one another. In chapter 30 and 31 we have poetic oracles that do not have a chronology. We have even left the genre of narrative. In chapters 32 and 33, we have messages and episodes of hope that come from the time of Zedekiah and we’re back into
prose, that carries over into an event from Zedekiah’s life in chapter 34 that is going to focus more on judgment. But then interestingly, as we go to chapter 35 and chapter 36 we’re back in the reign of Jehoiakim 609-597. So we start with Jehoiakim 26, we move to Zedekiah and some poetic oracles 26, 27, to 34 and then in 35, 36 we are back to Jehoiakim.

In chapter 37 to 44 we probably have the most chronological order in section of this part of the book. May be this originally existed as its own independent source but we have a more chronological story of what happened in Judah’s final days. Jeremiah being in prison, how the people respond to the word of God, the fall of Jerusalem when the king rejects Jeremiah’s message. Then what’s going to happen in the aftermath of that? Jeremiah is a prophet that is among of those who are left in the land and Jeremiah is a prophet in Egypt when he is take down there by military officers at the end of his ministry. That part of the book end that part of the chapter 26 to 45 looks fairly chronological.

But then the book concluded. Chapter 45 id in the fourth year of Jehoiakim an oracle that is given to Baruch that goes back to 609 and specifically the year 605. So, we’ve got Jehoiakim, Zedekiah, Jehoiakim, Zedekiah, fall of Jerusalem, the aftermath of that and then back to the reign of Jehoiakim. Obviously this is not chronological. What is going on here? Well, again the purpose of this not to tell this in a logical fashion or an unchronological fashion the history of Jeramiah. I believe that the argument of this material highlights the recurring cycle of the people disobeying and refusing to the hear the word of the Lord. Remember Jeremiah had an incredibly long ministry. It lasted at least something like 45 to 50 years.

So what I believe is going on the chapter 26-45 is that the ministry so Jeremiah could be devided into three basic time periods. What’s happening here is that it advance from these different types from all three of these time periods are being joined together sometimes in non-chronological ways to say the response that the people had to Jeremiah at the beginning of his ministry isn’t really very different to the response that the people had at the end of his ministry.
So the early stage of Jeremiah’s ministry we can identify that as the time before 597. The time before when the Babylonians crisis really became serious and the second wave of exiles were taken away and king Jehoiachin is removed from the throne. We have advanced from this early stage of Jeremiah’s ministry in chapter 26 and 36. Jeremiah is warning them you need to change your ways and if you do, there is the possibly that God will relent and not send the judgment. So in the early days of the ministry there’s a choice that Judah has that they’re not going to have later in Jeremiah’s ministry. They can actually repent at this point and God may not send the judgment.

Passing the Point of No Return

Now after 597 after the second wave of exiles have already been taken away, and the destruction of Jerusalem is looming in the future in 587 and 586, they don’t have that choice any more. The choice facing them then is going to be surrender to the Babylonians or be destroyed. Look, you’re being judged no matter what. You can either surrender or you can be destroyed. But in the early stages in Jeremiah’s ministry, they had a legitimate opportunity to repent and avoid judgment. It’s like the first visit to the potter. They are still clay that can be reshaped and reformed without facing judgment.

So we have events depicting for us how they rejected the word of the Lord in the early stages of Jeremiah’s ministry. Particularly, King Jehoiakim did not listen to the word of God. After Jeremiah’s Temple Sermon, he executes a prophet named Uriah. After Jeremiah’s scroll is read to him, he cuts it up and throws it into the fire. Jehoiakim did not listen to the word of God [Jer 36].

But then we also have events after 597, after the second wave of exile, but before 587 -586 and the destruction of Jerusalem. We have stories from the reign of Zedekiah in 27 and 28, chapter 29, chapter 34, chapters 37-39 that describe for us and explain for us that Zedekiah did not listen to the word of God either. The message that Jeremiah was preaching to Zedekiah was: submit to Babylon. If you and your military officers will submit to Babylon, will surrender, then you and your officials, and the people can be spared from destruction. If you don’t submit, then the Babylonians are going to destroy everything; and that’s exactly what happens.
So we have this summary statement in chapter 37, verses 1 and 2: “Zedekiah the son of Josiah, whom Nebuchadnezzar the King of Babylon made king in the land Judah, reigned instead of Coniah the son of Jehoiakim. But neither he nor his servants nor the people of the land listened to the words of the Lord that he spoke through Jeremiah the prophet.” So episodes from the earliest stage of Jeremiah’s ministry in the days of Jehoiakim are placed directly beside episodes from Zedekiah in the second stage of Jeremiah’s ministry to say, basically, Jeremiah got the same response. Jehoiakim and Zedekiah seem to be different people. Jehoiakim responds in anger and hostility. He never actually has a physical encounter with Jeremiah but his rejection of the word of the Lord is placed side by side to the rejections of Zedekiah, who was constantly asking the prophet to pray for him, who is constantly inquiring of the prophet. But you know what? It doesn’t matter. Ultimately, he lacks the courage and the fear of the Lord to really obey. So, he’s really no different than Jehoiakim.

The third stage of Jeremiah’s ministry, is the time after the fall of Jerusalem in 587; going probably on to 580. Initially, Jeremiah remains in the land with the people. He’s going to minister to the poor people that are there in a very servant like way being there he could when he had the option he could have gone to Babylon. He’s going to continue to preach the word of the Lord. Jeremiah actually disappears for a couple of chapters here. But the message of Jeremiah is still there. What Jeremiah is telling the people in the aftermath of exile is actually the same thing that he is telling them before—submit to Babylon. Serve the Babylonians and things will go well for you. Zedekiah had rejected that message. When Jeremiah came to him and said submit to Babylon and you’ll be able to save yourself and the city and the officials, the officials turned around and accused Jeremiah of being a traitor. He’s encouraging treason in going over to the Babylonians. But Jeremiah was looking at this from God’s perspective. Babylon was God’s instrument of judgment, they could not resist them.

So in the aftermath of exile, Jeremiah is trying to say the same thing: God is using Babylon as the instrument of judgment—that’s going to last for about 70 years and then God’s going to deal with Babylon. But in that time, you need to submit to Babylon. The
people in the aftermath of exile are going to respond to that message of “submit to Babylon” in exactly the way Zedekiah did. They’re not going to listen to what the prophet has to say. Ishmael, this renegade from the family of David, is going to murder Gedaliah, the governor that the Babylonians have appointed and he’s not going to listen to the prophet’s message: submit to Babylon.

You would think that after all the things the people of Judah have experienced in the life and ministry of Jeremiah after he’s been preaching to them for more than 20 years that judgment is going to fall that the city is going to be destroyed—you would think they would listen, you would think they would respond to what the Lord had to say. But they are continuing to not listen to the word of God.

So after Ishmael assassinates Gedaliah and he flees, there’s another group that comes to Jeremiah. There’s a group of officers led by a man named Johanan. Who rescues some Jewish refugees from Ishmael as this renegade and they come to Jeremiah and they say: “Jeremiah we want you to pray for us,” which is interesting because before the fall of Jerusalem, God had prohibited the prophet from praying for the people. Jeremiah says, “Yes, I’ll gladly pray for you. The time of judgment is over.” But they have the opportunity now for the prophet to pray for them; for the prophet to give them direction. Jeremiah says, “Look, I’ll give you the word from the Lord; give me ten days.” He prays and he seeks God’s face. Jeremiah comes back to Johanan in chapter 42 and 43 and he says “Look, here’s God’s word to you. Submit to Babylon. Do not fear them. Serve the Lord by submitting to Babylon.” Johanan and his men wanted to flee to Egypt because they felt that was the way to escape reprisals from the Babylonians for the death of Gedaliah. Jeremiah says, “No, that’s not what God wants you to do. Stay in the land. Submit to Babylon.” Have we heard Jeremiah say that to anyone before? He said it to Zedekiah. He said it to Ishmael and to the people and they didn’t listen. He says that to Johanah and this military group that wants to go down to Egypt. In chapter 43:7 it says, “they entered into Egypt in disobedience to the word of the Lord.” It seems that they kidnapped Jeremiah and took him along.

So the purpose of this section is not to give us a day by day of the ministry of
Jeremiah, it’s not even necessarily to lay that out in a strict chronology. What it’s designed to do is to say, from the very beginning of Jeremiah’s ministry until the very end of Jeremiah’s ministry there’s been one thing that has characterized that: refusal to listen to the word of God. In a sense, the fact that this is not laid out in a chronological way makes that point more effectively. It is as if: Are we ever going to get past this cycle where the people stop rebelling against the word of the Lord and listen to what God says?

Jeremiah’s Embodiment of the Word of God

Now in the stories that are told in this particular part of the book of Jeremiah the people’s disobedience to God – remember the charge – they did not listen to the word of the Lord. That disobedience is often going to be reflected in various forms of persecution that are going to be inflicted on the prophet Jeremiah. So we don’t just have stories in Jeremiah 26-45 of Jeremiah preaching the word and the people not listening, we have stories in Jeremiah where Jeremiah preaches the word of the Lord, the people don’t listen, and then they are going to take out that unbelief on the prophet himself.

We have mentioned as we’re working through the book, various ways that Jeremiah comes to represent and embody the word of God, not just in his words, but I think in his very life. In a sense he anticipates Jesus as the incarnate word of God, because as the prophet he is a living representation of God’s word. What that means is that, when the people do not accept the word of God, the way they are often going to respond to that message is by abusing the prophet. So this is another way where we really see Jeremiah; he is a scroll. His life is a message given to the people, and in the same way Jehoiakim cut up the scrolls of his prophecies, the people are going to try and cut up the living scroll, because they don’t want to hear and accept what he has to say.

Jeremiah’s Rejection and Persecution (Jer 11, 20)

The persecution of Jeremiah, in the book, actually begins all the way back in chapter 11, verses 18-23. Remember, that’s where Jeremiah prays his first lament. In that particular passage, it’s the men of Anathoth who are conspiring to put Jeremiah to death, and Jeremiah is praying for God to avenge himself on his enemies. Here’s the starting
point, and we might get an idea here of what things are going to be like in the days ahead for Jeremiah, and the people in his own home town. In this small tiny village, they are the ones who initially want to put Jeremiah to death. A prophet is not without honor except in his hometown, and Jeremiah is going to experience that in his own life; Jesus went through this as well, but right away there’s opposition. In the call of Jeremiah, Jeremiah had learned from God, “I’m going to make you like a bronze wall; I’m going to make you like a fortified city.” That should have informed him right away, this is not going to be easy.

So the first form of persecution is in chapter 11, in chapter 20, after the sign act where Jeremiah smashes the pot in verses 1-6, a priest by the name of Passhur, has Jeremiah beat and put in the stocks.

That’s really the prelude to various types of opposition that Jeremiah is going to experience in chapters 26-45. So as you are reading these stories you will find that Jeremiah is going through all kinds of things where physically he is either threatened or abused because his life represents the word of God. The people hate that message, they don’t want to accept it, they are going to reflect that in their treatment of the prophet.

Examples of Jeremiah’s Being Rejected

Here are some examples; quick over view and a quick survey, chapter 26, Jeremiah preaches the Temple Sermon. I believe we have here an alternate version of the message he preached in chapter 7. The immediate response of both the leaders and the people, “this man should die because he has prophesied against God’s house.”

In chapter 27 and 28, Jeremiah is preaching about the subjugation of Jerusalem, and he’s wearing the wooden yoke symbolizing the bondage of the people to Babylon. He is immediately opposed by Hananiah, who comes and breaks the yoke and says within two years the Babylonian crisis is going to be over. Jeremiah is going to be countered and opposed by Hananiah.

In chapter 29, even though he’s not even living there, Jeremiah is opposed by the false prophets who are living in Babylon. We have in chapters 27-29, this sort of literary thing going on it is what I call “prophetic mirroring.” Hananiah imitates the example of
Jeremiah. He speaks in the name of the Lord; Jeremiah also speaks in the name of the Lord. Jeremiah preforms the sign act with the yoke; Hannania preforms the sign act with the yoke. We have the same thing going on in chapter 29, Jeremiah sends a letter to the exiles, telling them that they’re going to have to settle down and live in Babylon because God has determined that the exile is going to last for 70 years. We have a false prophet by the name Shemaiah who writes a letter back in the other direction saying that Jeremiah needs to be put in prison and censured. So there’s another act of prophetic mirroring, Jeremiah a letter, Shemaiah writes a letter. So there’s going to be all kinds of opposition.

Chapter 32, Jeremiah is in prison, in the last days, in various forms of imprisonment. How does all this chronologically fit together? One writer said he goes from prison to another, from one location to another, and we don’t always know exactly where these places are or how they fit together. Prisons provide the back drop for much of Jeremiah’s ministry.

Chapter 36, Jeremiah’s scroll is read at the temple, Jeremiah has to go into hiding. Baruch has to go into hiding. When they take the scroll and read it to Jehoiakim and Jehoiakim takes a knife and cuts it up the scroll piece by piece and throws it into the fire. If Jehoiakim had been able to get his hands on Jeremiah, he would have done the same thing to him.

Chapter 37, Jeremiah is put in prison because he is accused of being ready to desert over to the Babylonians. “We know what you’re going to do, you’re going to run over to the other side. We’ll put you in prison to make sure that doesn’t happen.” You kind of wonder why didn’t they just let him go?

In chapter 38, Jeremiah is thrown into a cistern by military officers and they leave him there to die. Zedekiah goes along with this, because they’re accusing Jeremiah of being a traitor who is weakening the war effort. After a foreigner by the name of Ebed-Melek convinces the king to get Jeremiah out of the cistern, they put him back in prison.

Jeremiah is in prison until the capture of the city and it’s the Babylonians that release and let him go. But then finally, in chapter 43 after he tells Johanan and the military officers “don’t go down to Egypt,” they take him by force, against his will with
them. He’s going to finish the rest of his ministry in exile as a refugee in Egypt. Jeremiah encounters and experiences all of those kinds of things again.

The purpose here is not biography, the purpose is not to say let me tell you a story about a guy who went through more suffering than you can possibly imagine, the stories to say look at the hostility that Jeremiah encountered as he preached the word of God again and again. The recurring type-scene is God is going to confront the people with a message from the prophet, God is going to go to the king with the message from the prophet, God is going to go to military officers with the message from the prophet. Again and again and again he experiences some form of persecution or opposition.

The Jehoiakim Framework

We’ve stressed that the structure and the design of this section of the book is not chronological. There are parts that are, 37-44, but overall the structure is not chronological. I want to just give you one possible suggestion here, that I think there is a possible structure that does give some order and design. In fact the structure is put in place as a way of helping us to interpret the life of Jeremiah. In the same way that we have these, prose sermons in Jeremiah 1-25 that are sort of sign posts that summarize the message of Jeremiah, I believe there are structural passages that are sort of an interpretive grid for us as we are reading, these different stories about the life and ministry of Jeremiah. These stories that provide sort of this interpretive grid are what I refer to as “the Jehoiakim framework.”

Let me explain what that means. As I’m reading through these stories and all these different accounts and episodes from Jeremiah’s life, what I notice is that there are only four chapters that specifically deal with events from the reign of King Jehoiakim. Remember who he is? He is Jeremiah’s prime antagonist; they really do not like each other. Jehoiakim, represents, maybe the most serious antagonist to the word of God. He puts to death the prophet Uriah, chapter 26. He cuts up the scroll of Jeremiah’s prophecies. He demands the arrest of Jeremiah and Baruch. They’re enemies. So, what I believe is going on is that these four stories or episodes or messages from the time of Jehoiakim provide a frame around chapters 26-45.
Here’s where these stories are found. There is a story that is relayed from the time of Jehoiakim, chapter 26, verse 1. There is another passage in chapter 35, verse 1, that is given a heading dated to early in the reign of Jehoiakim, same expression that is in 26:1. There is another Jehoiakim episode in chapter 36, verse 1 from the fourth year of Jehoiakim. And then finally, in chapter 45, at the very end of this section, again 45:1: “an oracle from the fourth year from Jehoiakim.” So, obviously, we see that there’s a Jehoiakim story, chapter 26 at the beginning and there’s a Jehoiakim oracle, in chapter 45, at the end. And then there’s one in chapters 35 and 36.

So, I believe what we have going on here is that in, in the midst of something that looks kind of disorderly to us, and out of order, this frame divides Jeremiah 26-45 into two sections or panels that are designed to both parallel and contrast with each other. We have one panel in chapter 26 that ends in chapter 35. We have a second panel that begins in chapter 36 and goes until chapter 45.

Now, as English writers and English composers, if we were writing a story about Jeremiah’s life, we wouldn’t structure the story this way. But, in an oral culture, where often these stories were read or told orally, perhaps what we have going on here, is a form of parallelism, where chapters 26-35 are going to parallel each other. There are similarities between this section and the second section in chapters 36-45.

Additionally, there are also some contrasts in chapters 26-35 that are going to be important when we compare it to 36-45. We take a story and we plow from the beginning to the end. What I think Hebrew narrative often does, is that it tells the story in panels, and uses narrative parallelism and repetition. I believe that we’re going to see some forms of that as we look at this particular section of the book.

Function of the Jehoiakim Framework

What does this Jehoiakim framework do for our understanding of the message of chapters 26-45. Well, I think it conveys a couple of important things. Number one, it reminds us that the time of Jehoiakim’s reign was a decisive moment in Judah’s history. When this man rejects the word of the Lord after the Temple Sermon, when this King, who was the leader of God’s people, when he cuts up the scroll of Jeremiah that is a
decisive act of rebellion against the Lord. So, in a sense we view this as a watershed moment, the closing down of the opportunities to repent. In many ways, Jehoiakim’s life and his reign is the time when Judah moves from possible repentance to irrevocable judgment.

Now, also remember that in chapter 36 and chapter 45, there is a specific time in Jehoiakim’s ministry, or Jehoiakim’s reign, 605 BC, is the year that the Babylonians defeated the Egyptians at Carchemish. It’s also the year that the first wave of the exiles is taken away back to Babylon. This is a decisive moment. And so, I believe the Jehoiakim framework is partly here to remind us, that this time they passed from possible repentance to irrevocable and inevitable judgment. I think that the reign of Jehoiakim when he formally rebels against the word of God, as it was preached in the Temple Sermon, and then as it was written in the scrolls, that’s a decisive moment.

Now, to add to the significance of this, and I think to further validate how the writer is portraying this is a critical moment, listen to chapter 25, verse 1, which concludes the first major section of the book. It says in 25:1, “The word that came to Jeremiah, concerning all of the people of Judah, in the fourth year of Jehoiakim, the son of Josiah.” So, the concluding message that wraps all of the judgment that we see in chapters 1-25, when did it happen? The fourth year of Jehoiakim. In that passage, God announces how he is sending the Babylonians, and how there’s going to be 70 years of exile. This is the first year, where the exiles are going to be taken away and Jeremiah is laying out in the, in the fourth year of Jehoiakim, this is what’s going to follow. This is a decisive moment in Judah’s history.

So, the fourth year of Jehoiakim closes the first section of the book, chapter 25. It introduces the second section of the book chapter 26. It concludes the second section of the book, chapter 45. Then listen to what it says in chapter 46, verse 1, in the third section of the book that introduces the oracles against the nations. I bet you can’t possibly imagine what time period is going to be mentioned in 46:1. Now here’s the third section: “The word of the Lord came to Jeremiah the prophet concerning the nations.” And, it says about Egypt, “concerning the army of Pharaoh Necho, the King of Egypt,
which was defeated by the River Euphrates at Carchemish, and which Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon defeated in the fourth year of Jehoiakim, the son of Josiah the King of Judah.”

So, I believe that Jehoiakim framework, takes these stories from various periods of Jeremiah’s ministry and life, and it puts a frame around them to say, think about this. Jehoiakim’s life and Jehoiakim’s reign, when he was the king, and when he rejected the word of the Lord, that cast the die for the people of Judah. In the sense, that was the last straw. There had been other last straws in the past. Micah had announced judgment and God relented when Hezekiah repented. Manasseh did more evil than all kings that came before him- “I’m going to wipe Jerusalem like a dish” - God relented through the reforms of Josiah. But with Jehoiakim, there’s a final rejection of God, or the final rejection of God’s word, and the die is cast and judgment is going to happen. I think the Jehoiakim framework makes that point.

First Panel (Jer 26-35)

Now there’s a second thing that the Jehoiakim framework does for us, as we look at these two sections. It divides 26 to 45 into chapters 26 to 35 and then 36 to 45. So let’s look at the first panel. There’s a movement here. In chapter 26 verse 3 at the beginning of panel one, the reason that Jeremiah is going to preach his Temple Sermon here it is: “It may be that they will listen and everyone will turn from his evil way that I may relent of the disaster that I intended to Judah.” There is the possibility (ulai) maybe they will listen and I can relent, so there is the possibility in chapter 26 that all of the judgments that are going to be carried out against Judah, if the people will listen, then maybe God will relent from sending the judgment. So what happens is with all of these examples of how they did not listen they obviously missed the opportunity.

At chapter 35 we come to the end of panel one and here’s what it says, verse 15 to verse 17, “I have sent you all of my servants, the prophets, sending them persistently saying turn now everyone of you from his evil way and amend your deeds and do not go after the other gods and serve them.” Remember, that’s what he’s saying in 26--change your ways maybe you can be spared from judgment. Verse 17 though, here’s their
response, “Therefore, thus says the Lord the God of hosts, the God of Israel, ‘Behold, I am bringing upon Judah and upon all the inhabitants of Jerusalem all the disaster that I have pronounced against them because I have spoken to them and they have not listened,’” [shama] they didn’t obey “I have called to them and they have not answered.”

So what happens in panel one of the Jeremiah narratives of 26 to 35 in this first panel? They have an opportunity to hear but at the end they have not listened and God is going to judge them.

Second Panel (Jer 36-45)

That same movement is going to reflected in the second panel in chapters 36 to 45. So let’s go to the second panel it’s introduced by the statement, “In the fourth year of Jehoiakim,” the writing out of the scroll. Why is Jeremiah going to do this, verse 3 “It may be [perhaps (ulai)] that the house of Judah will hear all the disaster that I intend to do to them so that every one may turn from his evil way, and that I may forgive their iniquity and their sin.” So it’s four years later from chapter 26 maybe they’ll relent; maybe they’ll turn away and I won’t have to send the judgment. There is the possibility at the beginning of the second panel of being spared from judgment.

How does that work out? Well, we go to chapter 44 verses 16 to 18 at the end of the second panel, are the people going to listen to word of God? Here’s the response of the Jewish refugees that are in Egypt and you remember what they say, verse 16, “As for the word that you have spoken to us in the name of the Lord, we will not listen to you. But we do everything we have vowed, making our offerings to these pagan gods [Hey, we’re not going to listen to you Jeremiah].” So the same movement that we have in the first panel is reflected in the second. It begins with the possibility of repentance and being spared from judgment. It ends with the people not listening to the word of God and experiencing national doom.

So the LORD says at the end of chapter 44 verse 26, “I have sworn by my great name, says the LORD, that my name shall no more be invoked by the people of Judah” and I’m going to bring absolute destruction on these refugees that are living in Egypt. Only a handful of them will ever return to the land.
So what we have going on here, the Jehoikim framework does a couple of things; number one, it shows us that the time of Jehoikim was a turning point; it was a watershed moment. Number two, it also does the same thing that we’ve seen in the first half of the book of Jeremiah. There was an opportunity to repent and to be spared and we see the closing down of that in chapters 26 to 35. We see the closing down of that again in 36 to 45, and by not doing this in a strictly chronological way, but by laying it out in parallel panels we get to see the repetitiousness of this.

It’s just like in chapters 1 to 25, remember what happens there? It begins with repeated and recurring calls to return to the LORD. Those return calls gradually diminish and disappear and in the midst of this there are the two visits to the potter. You can still change. You can still revise. You’re still wet clay in the hand of God. Second visit to the potter--you’re a fixed vessel that is going to be smashed. All throughout the book there is the closing down of the opportunities to repent. So the Jehoiakim framework helps us to see that.

Finally, there’s one last thing in the Jehoiakim framework. In the first section in chapters 26 to 35 we have the promise of restoration in chapters 32 to 33, referred to as the Book of Consolation. We’ve been focusing so much on judgment we haven’t really talked about that, but in the midst of all this national disobedience there are also the promises of restoration. In light of the disobedience that comes before it and the disobedience that comes after, it this is a pretty significant thing.

So this is what God is planning to do in the aftermath of exile when he restores his people. There is a very interesting contrast; however, between that and what we see in the second panel in chapters 40 to 43, where in the aftermath of exile there is more disobedience, more judgment, and more wrath from God because the people have not listened. There is going to be a restoration, but it’s not going to appear in the near future. It’s not going to take place during the life and times of Jeremiah. It’s going to be something in the distant future, but God will bring his people back.

Jeremiah chapter 26 to 45 we have stories and very good ones, very interesting ones, about Jeremiah preaching the word of God and their reaction and response to that.
From all different time periods in Jeremiah’s ministry and there’s hostility, there’s rejection, there’s indifference, there’s persecution of the prophet, and ultimately the rejection of the word of God. That is why the judgment of Judah is ultimately to come.

Practical Application

In the practical application of this I am reminded from the stories of Jeremiah’s life how we respond to God’s word is the most important and decision we’ll ever make. Listening to God’s word is a matter of life and death. The book of Jeremiah is about the word of the LORD, its power to bring death, but also its power to bring life, but ultimately it depends on our response. I hope as we study through this that the negative ways that Judah responded to Jeremiah’s message and to the word of the Lord will be a reminder to us that finding real life comes from listening to God and responding in obedience to his word and the message he’s conveyed to us in his written word in the same way that he spoke to the people in Jeremiah’s day through the prophet and through his spoken word.