

The background of the entire page is a scenic landscape. In the foreground, a campfire with bright orange and yellow flames burns on a rocky shore. The middle ground shows a calm lake reflecting the surrounding scenery. In the background, there are mountains with some autumn-colored trees on the left and more distant, hazy peaks on the right. The sky is overcast with soft, grey clouds.

# Standard LESSON QUARTERLY®

## KJV BIBLE TEACHER

FALL 2025

JUDAH, FROM ISAIAH  
TO EXILE

► International Sunday School Lessons

# KJV BIBLE TEACHER

A quarterly publication of **STANDARD PUBLISHING**

## FALL 2025 JUDAH, FROM ISAIAH TO EXILE

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# Judah, from Isaiah to Exile

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# Quarterly Quiz

Use these questions as a pretest or as a review. The answers are on page iv of *This Quarter in the Word*.

## Lesson 1

1. Isaiah's throne-room vision occurred in the year that King Uzziah died. T/F. *Isaiah 6:1*
2. How many additional years did the Lord promise Hezekiah? (1; 15; 20) *Isaiah 38:5*

## Lesson 2

1. It was decided that Hezekiah's Passover would occur in the \_\_\_\_\_ month. *2 Chronicles 30:2*
2. Hezekiah's Passover celebration resulted in "great \_\_\_\_ in Jerusalem." *2 Chronicles 30:26*

## Lesson 3

1. Who gave "the book of the law" to Shaphan? (Ahikam, Hilkiah, Asaiah) *2 Chronicles 34:15*
2. Which prophetess did Hilkiah speak with concerning the book of the law? (Huldah, Deborah, Noadiah) *2 Chronicles 34:22*

## Lesson 4

1. The servant was "wounded for our \_\_\_\_\_." *Isaiah 53:5*
2. The Lord has laid on the servant the iniquity of us all. T/F. *Isaiah 53:6*

## Lesson 5

1. Jeremiah considered himself too old to speak. T/F. *Jeremiah 1:6*
2. Jeremiah prophesied that "this house" (the temple) would become like what other location? (Sheol, Shechem, Shiloh) *Jeremiah 26:9*

## Lesson 6

1. The Lord warned that lying words repeat this phrase: "The \_\_\_\_\_ of the Lord." *Jeremiah 7:4*
2. The Lord asked, "Is this house, . . . become a den of \_\_\_\_\_ in your eyes?" *Jeremiah 7:11*

## Lesson 7

1. Who commanded the Rechabites to never drink wine? (Joshua, Jonadab, Jehu) *Jeremiah 35:6*

2. The Rechabites lived in tents, just as they were commanded. T/F. *Jeremiah 35:10*

## Lesson 8

1. In which did the Lord say He would "write" the law? (hearts, souls, minds) *Jeremiah 31:33*
2. Which two "came by Jesus Christ"? (choose two: law, grace, covenant, truth) *John 1:17*

## Lesson 9

1. How many men did the king command Ebedmelech to take to rescue Jeremiah? (13; 30; 300) *Jeremiah 38:10*
2. Immediately after his rescue, Jeremiah left "the court of the prison." T/F. *Jeremiah 38:13*

## Lesson 10

1. Nebuchadnezzar's siege against Jerusalem began in the \_\_\_\_\_ year of Zedekiah's reign. *2 Kings 25:1*
2. Who set fire to the temple, palace, and houses in Jerusalem? (Nebuchadnezzar, Zedekiah, Nebuzaradan) *2 Kings 25:8-9*

## Lesson 11

1. The Lord called Ezekiel by what title? (Son of Judah, Son of man, Son of Jacob) *Ezekiel 3:10*
2. Ezekiel would be a "signal" to the people of Judah. T/F. *Ezekiel 24:27*

## Lesson 12

1. The Lord made Ezekiel a "\_\_\_\_\_ unto the house of Israel." *Ezekiel 33:7*
2. The Lord God takes no pleasure in the death of the wicked. T/F. *Ezekiel 33:11*

## Lesson 13

1. The man went eastward and measured a total of 4,000 \_\_\_\_\_. *Ezekiel 47:3-5*
2. Ezekiel saw "very many \_\_\_\_\_" on both sides of the river. *Ezekiel 47:7*



# Quarter at a Glance

by Editorial Staff

This quarter invites us to discover and appreciate how God, through prophets and other leaders, gave help and guidance to the people of Judah. As we study these people, we will see God's hand at work in their lives, just as He is at work in our lives and all human affairs.

## Isaiah and the Renewal of the Temple

The first unit presents us with the prophetic ministry of Isaiah. These lessons recount the theological reasons for the decline of Judah, seen mainly through Isaiah and two faithful kings of Judah. Lesson 1 introduces the call of that prophet and the substance of his witness to a king of Judah (Isaiah 6:1–8; 38:1–5; see lesson 1).

While most kings of Israel and Judah earn bad grades from the writers of Kings and Chronicles, two seventh-century kings of Judah are revealed as seeking the Lord and reforming worship. King Hezekiah celebrates Passover according to what was written in the Law of Moses (2 Chronicles 30:1–9, 26–27; see lesson 2), while King Josiah is a “by-the-book strategist” who sought proper obedience to the Lord (34:15–22, 26–27; see lesson 3).

The destruction of the temple, according to Scripture, was the result of social injustice, moral decay, and covenantal disobedience. Isaiah finds a spark of hope in the devastation—the prophetic suffering of the people has a redemptive purpose, testifying to God's judgment and restoration. Near the end of the Babylonian exile, the prophet envisions a humiliated and afflicted servant who carries the sins of many (Isaiah 52:13–53:12; see lesson 4).

## Jeremiah and the Promise of Renewal

The second unit explores the prophetic career of Jeremiah, a prophet who lived during the worst of the Babylonian assault on Judah and Jerusalem. The Lord called Jeremiah to preach a harsh message to the people of Judah, one they wouldn't heed (Jeremiah 26:8–9, 12–15; see lesson 5).

Through the prophet, the Lord warned the people: “Amend your ways and your doings” (Jeremiah 7:3; see lesson 6). The people had repeatedly forsaken the covenant; therefore, Jeremiah warns that judgment is coming. As Jerusalem teeters on the brink of extinction, Jeremiah is given a word of hope: after punishment, God will bring the people back home. On that day, the law of God will no longer be written in stone but in the human heart (31:33; see lesson 8).

## Ezekiel and the Exile of Judah

The final lessons recount Ezekiel's prophetic messages to the people in exile. The account of 2 Kings 24:18–25:9, detailing the last days of Judah, is hard to read, as it is full of violence and desperation (lesson 10). Into that environment, the prophet-priest Ezekiel, in Babylon among the exiles, reports the devastation in Jerusalem (Ezekiel 24:20–21; see lesson 11). His prophecies are replete with visions, signs, and symbolic actions, testifying to the utter ruin of the homeland and promises of renewal.

*Ezekiel serves as a “watchman” to the people, keeping the promise of a return from exile alive.*

When Ezekiel's wife dies, he obediently follows God's command not to mourn as a sign to the people that no one will weep when Jerusalem falls (Ezekiel 24:15–16). Ezekiel serves as a “watchman” to the people, keeping the promise of a return from exile alive (33:7–16a; see lesson 12).

Ezekiel's message reaches its hopeful climax in his vision of a renewed temple with water flowing from it (Ezekiel 47:1–12; see lesson 13). Ezekiel died in captivity, his life a living symbol that God's Word is forever active, present, and powerful. His ministry helped transform the people into the remnant who find a renewed orientation for hope in the promises of God.

# Get the Setting

*by Ryan D. Donell*

## The Role of a Prophet

Who were the prophets? Prophets are God's mouthpieces delivering a divine perspective on history, politics, and the behavior of God's people (Deuteronomy 18:18; Jeremiah 1:9; etc.). While prophecies could contain unforeseen horizons, such as Jesus' messianic first and second advents, they were nevertheless primarily concerned with the present crisis of their audience and the immanent consequences of responding to or neglecting God's messages (Matthew 13:17; 1 Peter 1:10–12).

Prophets and prophecy were already present in cultures outside of Israel in the Iron Age throughout the ancient Near East and identified as "seers" and "prophets." However, the unique embodiment of God's oracles to Israel was represented by the prophets' indictments, judgment, instruction, support, and explanations in the aftermath of events. Understanding their role in God's purposes will provide a crucial background for many of the lessons this quarter.

## Jeremiah's Example

We turn now to consider one vignette in the ministry of the prophets of ancient Israel, following the fall of Samaria in 722 BC. Jeremiah was a prophet to the southern kingdom of Judah. His experiences convey a glimpse of God's heart that wept over Jerusalem. Even as a young prophet, he pleaded with a rebellious generation to repent.

The prophets were the poet-preachers of inconvenient truths. Grief poignantly marked the life of Jeremiah and won him the title "the weeping prophet." Jeremiah's anguish joined God's lament against Judah's repeated rejection of His words and ways (Jeremiah 13:17; 9:1, 10). Jeremiah was sent to prophesy against kings in his own community: Josiah, Jehoiakim, and Zedekiah. After Jehoiakim's deportation in 598 BC, instead of endorsing Zedekiah's false hopes, Jeremiah

dares to tell the king to submit to Babylon and the assured invasion (38:1–4). If Judah surrenders to Babylon, they will survive. However, this requires them to renounce the propaganda that God's people will never suffer defeat. Unable—or refusing—to believe that God would use a prophet to predict the siege of Jerusalem, Judah's officials accuse Jeremiah of not seeking "the welfare of this people" (38:4). Jeremiah is thrown into a deep cistern and left in the mire to die (38:6). Even when he is finally lifted out, he does not soften God's challenges to Zedekiah, no matter how harsh. Despite the hard words Jeremiah delivers, Zedekiah fails to yield. He refuses to heed the word of the Lord, and as a result Jerusalem is laid waste with a second wave of exiles being deported in 586 BC.

## Application for Today

God's messages through the prophets prefigured the bodily disclosure of God's Word, Jesus Christ (John 1:1–18; Hebrews 1:1–3). While the majority of us will not be called upon to serve in the same kind of prophetic role as Jeremiah and other Old Testament prophets were, we do have a part to play in bringing God's word to His people today. According to Old Testament scholar Walter Brueggemann, the church today must embody three prophetic tasks. First, we are to announce the reality of things, speaking forth the truth. Second, we are to grieve over sin both within God's people and without. Third, we must offer the hope of restoration. In recovering and living into this prophetic role, we may reclaim this promise given by Jesus in His Sermon on the Mount: "Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you" (Matthew 5:11–12).

Mon, Nov. 17	Love Others Despite Suffering	1 Peter 4:1-11
Tue, Nov. 18	Rejoice to Share Christ's Sufferings	1 Peter 4:12-19
Wed, Nov. 19	Answering for Sin	Ezekiel 18:1-9
Thu, Nov. 20	I Confess My Iniquity	Psalms 38:1-2, 10-22
Fri, Nov. 21	Restore One Another in Gentleness	Galatians 6:1-10
Sat, Nov. 22	See to Your Own Sins First	Matthew 7:1-6
Sun, Nov. 23	Let the Wicked Repent	Ezekiel 33:7-16a
Mon, Nov. 24	God Breathes New Life	Ezekiel 37:1-7
Tue, Nov. 25	A Resurrection of Hope	Ezekiel 37:8-14
Wed, Nov. 26	The Thirsty Will Be Refreshed	Isaiah 55:1-9
Thu, Nov. 27	Rivers of Living Water	John 7:2-10, 37-39
Fri, Nov. 28	Hope for God's New Creation	Revelation 21:1-7
Sat, Nov. 29	The Tree of Life	Revelation 22:1-5
Sun, Nov. 30	The River of Life	Ezekiel 47:1-9, 12

### Answers to the Quarterly Quiz on page 2

**Lesson 1**—1. True. 2. 15. **Lesson 2**—1. second. 2. joy. **Lesson 3**—1. Hilkiah. 2. Huldah. **Lesson 4**—1. transgressions. 2. True. **Lesson 5**—1. False. 2. Shiloh. **Lesson 6**—1. temple. 2. robbers. **Lesson 7**—1. Jonadab. 2. True. **Lesson 8**—1. hearts. 2. grace, truth. **Lesson 9**—1. 30. 2. False. **Lesson 10**—1. ninth. 2. Nebuzaradan. **Lesson 11**—1. Son of man. 2. False. **Lesson 12**—1. watchman. 2. True. **Lesson 13**—1. cubits. 2. trees.

## This Quarter in the Word

Mon, Sep. 1	God Sends a Messenger	Mark 1:1-8
Tue, Sep. 2	God Defends the Chosen People	Isaiah 7:1-7
Wed, Sep. 3	God Warns of Coming Disaster	Isaiah 20:1-6
Thu, Sep. 4	God Fulfills Promises	Matthew 11:1-6
Fri, Sep. 5	God Works through a Messenger	Matthew 11:7-15
Sat, Sep. 6	God Is Gracious and Merciful	Psalms 145:1-12
Sun, Sep. 7	God Strengthens the Called	Isaiah 6:1-8; 38:1-5
Mon, Sep. 8	An Everlasting Kingdom	Psalms 145:13-21
Tue, Sep. 9	A Call to Bear Good Fruit	Matthew 3:4-12
Wed, Sep. 10	A Summons to Repent	Acts 3:12-20
Thu, Sep. 11	A Ministry of Care and Comfort	James 5:12-18
Fri, Sep. 12	A Feast of Remembrance	Exodus 12:3-14
Sat, Sep. 13	A Dwelling for God's Name	Deuteronomy 12:5-12
Sun, Sep. 14	An Act of Repentance and Renewal	2 Chronicles 30:1-9, 26-27
Mon, Sep. 15	The Command to Love	Matthew 22:36-40
Tue, Sep. 16	Righteous in God's Sight	Romans 2:9-16
Wed, Sep. 17	Promised Restoration	Deuteronomy 30:1-10
Thu, Sep. 18	Choose Life	Deuteronomy 30:11-21
Fri, Sep. 19	A Greater Message	Hebrews 1:13-2:4
Sat, Sep. 20	Hidden Treasure	Matthew 13:44-52
Sun, Sep. 21	Sorrow Leads to Joy	2 Chronicles 34:15-22, 26-27

Mon, Sep. 22	<b>The Humble Servant</b>	Philippians 2:5–10
Tue, Sep. 23	<b>The Faithful Servant</b>	Isaiah 42:1–7
Wed, Sep. 24	<b>The Resurrected Servant</b>	Acts 2:25–31
Thu, Sep. 25	<b>A Light for the World</b>	Acts 13:44–49
Fri, Sep. 26	<b>A Doorkeeper in God's House</b>	Psalms 84
Sat, Sep. 27	<b>God's Servant Obeys</b>	Isaiah 50:4–9
Sun, Sep. 28	<b>The Suffering Servant</b>	Isaiah 53:1–7
Mon, Sep. 29	<b>Passion for God's Laws</b>	2 Chronicles 34:1–7
Tue, Sep. 30	<b>The Piercing Word of God</b>	Hebrews 4:12–16
Wed, Oct. 1	<b>Return to the Father</b>	Jeremiah 3:12–19
Thu, Oct. 2	<b>Cleanse Yourselves and Be Saved</b>	Jeremiah 4:5–14
Fri, Oct. 3	<b>God's Discipline Proves God's Love</b>	Hebrews 12:3–17
Sat, Oct. 4	<b>God Is a Consuming Fire</b>	Hebrews 12:18–29
Sun, Oct. 5	<b>A Defiant Prophet</b>	Jeremiah 1:6–10; 26:8–9, 12–15
Mon, Oct. 6	<b>Endure to the End</b>	Mark 13:1–13
Tue, Oct. 7	<b>God Will Protect God's People</b>	Mark 13:14–27
Wed, Oct. 8	<b>To Obey Is Better than Sacrifice</b>	1 Samuel 15:20–26
Thu, Oct. 9	<b>Keep Christ's Commandments</b>	John 14:12–17
Fri, Oct. 10	<b>An Indestructible Temple</b>	John 2:12–22
Sat, Oct. 11	<b>The Sacrifice That Pleases God</b>	Psalms 51:15–19
Sun, Oct. 12	<b>Amend Your Ways!</b>	Jeremiah 7:1–11, 21–23
Mon, Oct. 13	<b>The Dangers of Strong Drink</b>	Proverbs 23:29–35
Tue, Oct. 14	<b>Keep Earthly Pleasures in Perspective</b>	Ecclesiastes 9:4–10
Wed, Oct. 15	<b>Be Filled with the Spirit</b>	Ephesians 5:11–19
Thu, Oct. 16	<b>The Nazirite Vow</b>	Numbers 6:1–8
Fri, Oct. 17	<b>Called to Holiness</b>	1 Thessalonians 4:1–7
Sat, Oct. 18	<b>Keep Awake!</b>	1 Thessalonians 5:1–10
Sun, Oct. 19	<b>A Vow of Holiness</b>	Jeremiah 35:5–11

Mon, Oct. 20	<b>A New Salvation</b>	Joel 2:28–32
Tue, Oct. 21	<b>A New Heart</b>	Ezekiel 36:25–35
Wed, Oct. 22	<b>The Law's Essence</b>	Deuteronomy 10:12–21
Thu, Oct. 23	<b>A New Covenant</b>	2 Corinthians 3:1–6
Fri, Oct. 24	<b>A New Spirit</b>	2 Corinthians 3:7–11
Sat, Oct. 25	<b>A New Freedom</b>	2 Corinthians 3:12–17
Sun, Oct. 26	<b>A New Relationship with God</b>	Jeremiah 31:27–34
Mon, Oct. 27	<b>Speak as the Spirit Leads</b>	Matthew 10:16–27
Tue, Oct. 28	<b>Do Not Fear Mortal Powers</b>	Matthew 10:28–42
Wed, Oct. 29	<b>Wait Patiently for the Lord</b>	Psalms 37:1–13
Thu, Oct. 30	<b>God Never Forsakes the Righteous</b>	Psalms 37:25–28, 35–40
Fri, Oct. 31	<b>Overcome Evil with Good</b>	Romans 12:12–21
Sat, Nov. 1	<b>Speak Even When the Message Stings</b>	Jeremiah 38:1–6
Sun, Nov. 2	<b>An Advocate Pleads for Justice</b>	Jeremiah 38:7–13
Mon, Nov. 3	<b>The Master Is Coming Soon</b>	Luke 12:42–48
Tue, Nov. 4	<b>The Purifying Fire of Change</b>	Luke 12:49–53
Wed, Nov. 5	<b>The Lord's Purifying Purpose</b>	Lamentations 2:17–22
Thu, Nov. 6	<b>Hope in the Lord</b>	Lamentations 3:21–36
Fri, Nov. 7	<b>Faith Tested by Fire</b>	1 Peter 1:1–12
Sat, Nov. 8	<b>Prepare for Action</b>	1 Peter 1:13–25
Sun, Nov. 9	<b>God's Judgment Is Sure</b>	2 Kings 24:18–25:9
Mon, Nov. 10	<b>With Righteousness Comes Suffering</b>	1 Peter 3:8–17
Tue, Nov. 11	<b>Christ Exalted through Suffering</b>	1 Peter 3:18–22
Wed, Nov. 12	<b>God Rescues Us from Our Afflictions</b>	Psalms 34:6–19
Thu, Nov. 13	<b>Comfort for the Brokenhearted</b>	Matthew 5:3–12
Fri, Nov. 14	<b>Speak if People Listen or Not</b>	Ezekiel 3:4–11
Sat, Nov. 15	<b>Steadfastness amid Persecution</b>	2 Thessalonians 1:1–4
Sun, Nov. 16	<b>Unspeaking Grief</b>	Ezekiel 24:15–27



# Lesson Cycle Chart

*International Sunday School Lesson Cycle, September 2022–August 2026*

Year	Fall Quarter (Sep, Oct, Nov)	Winter Quarter (Dec, Jan, Feb)	Spring Quarter (Mar, Apr, May)	Summer Quarter (Jun, Jul, Aug)
2022– 2023	<b>God's Exceptional Choice</b> Genesis, Exodus, Deuteronomy, Judges, 1 Samuel, Ephesians	<b>From Darkness to Light</b> 2 Chronicles, Isaiah, Joel, Luke, 1 Corinthians, 2 Timothy, James, 1 Peter	<b>Jesus Calls Us</b> Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, Acts	<b>The Righteous Reign of God</b> Prophets, Matthew, Romans, 1 Corinthians, Galatians
2023– 2024	<b>God's Law Is Love</b> Luke, John, Acts, Romans, 1 Corinthians, Galatians, Colossians	<b>Faith That Pleases God</b> Ruth, 1 Samuel, 2 Chronicles, Proverbs, Prophets, Matthew, Luke, Romans, Hebrews	<b>Examining Our Faith</b> Matthew, Mark, Luke, Acts, Romans, 2 Corinthians, 1 Peter, Jude	<b>Hope in the Lord</b> Psalms, Lamentations, Acts, Epistles
2024– 2025	<b>Worship in the Covenant Community</b> Genesis, Exodus, 2 Samuel, 1 & 2 Kings, 2 Chronicles, Psalms, Isaiah, John	<b>A King Forever and Ever</b> Ruth, 2 Samuel, Psalms, Matthew, Luke	<b>Costly Sacrifices</b> Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy, 1 & 2 Chronicles, Ezra, Matthew, Hebrews, 1 John, Revelation	<b>Sacred Altars and Holy Offerings</b> Genesis, Gospels, Romans, 1 Corinthians, Ephesians, Hebrews, 1 Peter
2025– 2026	<b>Judah, From Isaiah to Exile</b> 2 Kings, 2 Chronicles, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel	<b>Enduring Beliefs of the Church</b> Exodus, Psalms, Gospels, Acts, Epistles, Revelation	<b>Social Teachings of the Church</b> Genesis, Exodus, Deuteronomy, Nehemiah, Psalms, Prophets, Gospels, Acts, Epistles	<b>Faithful Witnesses</b> Judges, 1 Samuel, Amos, Gospels, Acts, 2 Timothy, Philemon

# Prep with Internet Resources

*Teacher Tips by Tanae Murdic*

Many teachers desire additional resources to guide them in their study and preparation for teaching adults. You can move beyond physical resource limitations if you have access to the internet. Use of various websites can expand your access to resources exponentially, bringing numerous options to your fingertips with just a few clicks. Please note that the listing of websites in this article is neither exhaustive nor is it necessarily an endorsement of everything to be found on these sites. Standard Lesson serves a broad audience, and some sites may have been created by those who hold different doctrinal convictions from ours or your own. As in all things, use discernment.

## Resources for Nearly Any Lesson

No concordance handy? No worries! Just visit [www.biblegateway.com](http://www.biblegateway.com). You can search for keywords and topics on this site. It also contains a wide range of Bible translations that can be displayed in parallel columns for side-by-side comparison. Another Bible site is [www.blueletterbible.org](http://www.blueletterbible.org), which offers several Bible translations alongside commentaries and other study tools.

For matters of history and setting, you may want to visit [www.bible-history.com](http://www.bible-history.com). The Bible History home page displays a long list of categories on the left side of the screen, which may aid your preparation. This site also includes several church history resources. Another helpful resource is the “Resource Pages for Biblical Studies” found at [www.torreys.org/bible](http://www.torreys.org/bible). Here you can find pages that examine texts and translations, electronic publications, and materials relating to the social aspects of the Mediterranean world.

Like Bible Gateway, the Bible Study Tools site ([www.biblestudytools.com](http://www.biblestudytools.com)) is a great resource with many aids. It houses several Bible translations

as well as Bible commentaries, encyclopedias, dictionaries, a parallel Bible, and an interlinear Bible. In the search window, you can search within specified categories, such as Bible, topic, Bible study, references, Bible stories, and even pastors. The “References” tab holds a wealth of resources, including the works of Josephus. Josephus’s works are a wonderful resource for a typically reliable, though not inspired, history of the Jews from the first century.

For archaeological evidence and background for Bible lessons, visit [www.biblehistory.net](http://www.biblehistory.net). This site has several tabs (“volumes”) that contain links to various articles that may prove useful in lesson preparation. Clicking on a link will open a page that you can save to your computer as a PDF file, which you can use as a handout or simply read in preparation for the lesson. For example, the information found at [www.biblehistory.net/joshua.html](http://www.biblehistory.net/joshua.html) provides some interesting details about a letter that archaeologists discovered, which was sent from Jerusalem to Egypt asking for help against the “Habiru” (possibly referring to the “Hebrews”).

Regarding Old Testament studies, some Jewish resources can be helpful. One such site is [www.jewishencyclopedia.com](http://www.jewishencyclopedia.com), which provides the entire text of the 1906 print edition of the Jewish Encyclopedia online. Topics can be found instantly by typing a word in the search window.

## Finding Information on General Sites

General search engines can also provide help. But use these with care. As with any media consumption, consider the reputability of your source. Since just about anyone can post anything to the internet, the presence of information there does not necessarily mean it is accurate. Use discretion when deciding which sources to use and cite in your study preparation.

# Isaiah's Call and Ministry

Devotional Reading: Isaiah 2:1–5

Background Scripture: Isaiah 6:1–13; 7:1–7; 20:1–6; 38:1–22

## Isaiah 6:1–8

1 In the year that king Uzziah died I saw also the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and his train filled the temple.

2 Above it stood the seraphims: each one had six wings; with twain he covered his face, and with twain he covered his feet, and with twain he did fly.

3 And one cried unto another, and said, Holy, holy, holy, is the LORD of hosts: The whole earth is full of his glory.

4 And the posts of the door moved at the voice of him that cried, and the house was filled with smoke.

5 Then said I, Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips: for mine eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts.

6 Then flew one of the seraphims unto me, having a live coal in his hand, which he had taken with the tongs from off the altar:

7 And he laid it upon my mouth, and said, Lo, this hath touched thy lips; and thine iniquity is taken away, and thy sin purged.

8 Also I heard the voice of the Lord, saying, Whom shall I send, and who will go for us? Then said I, Here am I; send me.

## Isaiah 38:1–5

1 In those days was Hezekiah sick unto death. And Isaiah the prophet the son of Amoz came unto him, and said unto him, Thus saith the LORD, Set thine house in order: for thou shalt die, and not live.

2 Then Hezekiah turned his face toward the wall, and prayed unto the LORD,

3 And said, Remember now, O LORD, I beseech thee, how I have walked before thee in truth and with a perfect heart, and have done that which is good in thy sight. And Hezekiah wept sore.

4 Then came the word of the LORD to Isaiah, saying,

5 Go, and say to Hezekiah, Thus saith the LORD, the God of David thy father, I have heard thy prayer, I have seen thy tears: behold, I will add unto thy days fifteen years.

## Key Text

*Also I heard the voice of the Lord, saying, Whom shall I send, and who will go for us? Then said I, Here am I; send me. —Isaiah 6:8*

# Judah, from Isaiah to the Exile

## Unit 1: Isaiah and the Renewal of the Temple

Lessons 1–4

### Lesson Aims

After participating in this lesson, each learner will be able to:

1. Summarize what Isaiah saw and his reaction to it.
2. Compare and contrast Isaiah's reaction to God's call with that of Jeremiah in reaction to his own call (lesson 5).
3. Express how to distinguish an authentic call of God from a mere felt need.

### Lesson Outline

#### Introduction

- A. It's Your Call (and His)
- B. Lesson Context

#### I. Commissioned by God (Isaiah 6:1–8)

- A. What Isaiah Saw (vv. 1–2)
- B. What Isaiah Heard (v. 3)
- C. What Isaiah Sensed (v. 4)
- D. What Isaiah Said (v. 5)  
*Majesty Approached*
- E. What Isaiah Received (vv. 6–8)  
*Discerning God's Call*

#### II. Communication with a King (Isaiah 38:1–5)

- A. Message of Death (v. 1)
- B. Tears of Bitterness (vv. 2–3)
- C. Extension of Life (vv. 4–5)

#### Conclusion

- A. Here Am I. Send Me!
- B. Prayer
- C. Thought to Remember

## Introduction

### A. It's Your Call (and His)

At age 11, I first sensed God calling me to vocational ministry. During a revival meeting, an evangelist approached me and said, "Young man, I'm setting you aside for the ministry." At that time, the encounter did not impact me, but I reconsidered the evangelist's words years later.

Throughout my teenage years, I continued to sense that call to ministry. Trusted friends repeatedly encouraged me. People in my congregation confirmed the call and encouraged me to begin training for ministry. Backed by the encouragement and confirmation from my congregation, I enrolled in a Bible college to follow the Lord's call.

There seem to be two types of calls from God. The first type is what we might designate as a "general" call. These are the thoughts, actions, and attitudes that God expects of every believer. The expectations of this call are found in the pages of Scripture.

The second type is what we might designate as a "specific" call: a sensed call of God to a particular or specialized ministry. There is disagreement regarding whether every believer receives this kind of call. Today's lesson examines the details of a call unmistakably from God.

### B. Lesson Context

Isaiah began his prophetic ministry about 200 years after the nation of Israel divided. In 931 BC, the united monarchy of Israel split into two parts: Israel (the northern kingdom) and Judah (the southern kingdom). Isaiah's ministry focused on the southern kingdom of Judah, as reflected by the Judean kings listed in Isaiah 1:1.

Surprisingly, the Lord's call on Isaiah doesn't occur until Isaiah 6. This is at variance from the usual pattern of recording a prophet's call at or very near a book's beginning (examples: Jeremiah 1:4–19; Ezekiel 1:1–3:15). Perhaps the writer wanted to establish the context of the call, which the first five chapters of Isaiah accomplish.

The people of Judah had become a "sinful nation," being openly rebellious against the Lord (Isaiah 1:1–5). A sense of self-sufficiency accom-

panied a facade of economic prosperity, military security, and religious arrogance (2:7–8). The Lord depicts His people as a vineyard that produced unacceptable fruit (5:1–7). In their doing of injustice, they had redefined the terms *good* and *evil* (5:20).

Such was the era that Isaiah found himself in when his call came about.

## I. Commissioned by God

(Isaiah 6:1–8)

### A. What Isaiah Saw (vv. 1–2)

#### 1a. In the year that king Uzziah died.

*Uzziah* (also known as “Azariah” in 2 Kings 15:1–7) reigned as *king* of Judah for 52 years (2 Chronicles 26:3). We don’t know the exact years of his reign, but one estimate gives the range of 792–740 BC.

For much of his reign, Uzziah did “right in the sight of the Lord” and, as a result, God allowed him to experience blessing (2 Chronicles 26:4–5). However, pride led to his downfall when he entered the temple to burn incense (26:16–21).

#### 1b. I saw also the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and his train filled the temple.

At least two possibilities exist regarding the setting of *the temple*. One possibility is that the setting is the earthly temple of Solomon in Jerusalem. Another option is that Isaiah sees the heavenly temple. Given the actions of Uzziah in the Jerusalem temple (see above), some commentators suggest this setting allows Isaiah to realize that the presence of the Lord has not departed from the temple (contrast Ezekiel 11:22–23). Still, others suggest that the vision’s grandeur indicates the heavenly temple (compare Revelation 11:19). Regardless, the significance is that Isaiah sees the location where the enthroned Lord rules.

That Isaiah *saw . . . the Lord* is echoed in John 12:41. This fact does not contradict Exodus 33:20 or John 1:18. What Isaiah sees is called a *theophany*, which is a manifestation of God, not God in His actual essence (compare Genesis 28:13–15; Exodus 24:9–11; 1 Kings 22:19).

The Lord’s position *sitting upon a throne* reveals

Him as the living heavenly King. Although the earthly King Uzziah has died, the Lord still reigns! The throne’s elevated location, *high and lifted up*, reflects the exalted nature of His being (compare Isaiah 57:15; Revelation 4:2).

The expansive nature of the *train* of His garment is echoed in Revelation 1:13. Special garments marked the identity of significant figures, like priests or kings (compare Exodus 28:33–34; 39:24–26, where the word is translated “hem”). However, the garment Isaiah sees is unlike any garment worn by a human. The size of this garment *filled the temple*, leaving Isaiah incapable of giving further description.

#### 2. Above it stood the seraphims: each one had six wings; with twain he covered his face, and with twain he covered his feet, and with twain he did fly.

The word *seraphims* is a transliteration (not a translation) of a Hebrew word. That’s where a word in one language is brought over into another language simply by swapping the letters of the word in the original language into the letters that sound the same in the receptor language.

The transliteration of this word occurs only here and in Isaiah 6:6, below. This Hebrew word elsewhere refers to serpents (Numbers 21:6, 8; Deuteronomy 8:15; Isaiah 14:29; 30:6). The root of this word may come from a Hebrew word meaning “fiery” or “burning.” One possibility is that the seraphims appear as flaming, winged creatures.

### What Do You Think?

What does the covering of the seraphims reveal to us about postures of worship and prayer?

### Digging Deeper

How do physical, mental, and emotional postures affect your acts of worship?

### B. What Isaiah Heard (v. 3)

#### 3a. And one cried unto another, and said, Holy, holy, holy, is the LORD of hosts.

The proclamation of the seraphims *Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord of hosts* is similar to that of the four “beasts” in Revelation 4:8. The repetition of the



word *holy* stresses its significance: the Lord's holiness is unparalleled!

The Hebrew adjective translated "holy" appears in 34 verses in Isaiah; clearly, it's a vital concept to the writer, implying "separation" or "distinctiveness." The Lord's holiness means that He is separate from His creation in that He is morally perfect (Deuteronomy 32:4; 1 Samuel 2:2; Psalm 18:30; Habakkuk 1:12–13; etc.).

The designation *Lord of hosts* or "Lord God of hosts" appears 274 times in the Old Testament, with about 75 percent of those occurring in the prophetic books of Isaiah, Jeremiah, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi. As the timeline of history advances, God's power is increasingly stressed since the title reflects the Lord's power as king and commander of the heavenly armies (see 1 Samuel 4:4; Psalm 24:10; Isaiah 1:24; etc.).

### 3b. The whole earth is full of his glory.

No human-made structure can confine the glory of God (1 Kings 8:27). Since *the whole earth* belongs to God as its creator, it cannot but help to reflect His *glory* (Numbers 14:21; Psalm 72:19).

#### What Do You Think?

How do you describe the relationship between God's holiness and the holiness of His people (1 Peter 1:15–16)?

#### Digging Deeper

How can you help others worship God for His holiness?

### C. What Isaiah Sensed (v. 4)

**4. And the posts of the door moved at the voice of him that cried, and the house was filled with smoke.**

The seraph's *voice* has an impressive impact, causing *the posts of the door* to move. Although the text does not indicate the location of this door, it is likely at the entrance of the envisioned temple (see Isaiah 6:1b, above).

The presence of *smoke* in Scripture is sometimes associated with the presence of God (example: Exodus 19:18). That presence can be in a negative sense of divine judgment (example: Isaiah 9:18–19). Or it can be in a positive sense of divine guidance or care

(example: Isaiah 4:5). Smoke also serves to conceal the viewer from seeing aspects of the divine directly, thus preventing death (Leviticus 16:13). The smoke in the context of the verse at hand brings to mind the cloud that "filled the house of the Lord" in Solomon's time (1 Kings 8:10).

### D. What Isaiah Said (v. 5)

**5. Then said I, Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips: for mine eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts.**

Isaiah pronounces *woe* more than 20 times in his book. All but two of those are voiced against those who conduct themselves in ways that oppose God. In the remaining two uses, the prophet pronounces "woe" against himself (here and in Isaiah 24:16).

The expression *Woe is me!* reveals Isaiah's feeling of unworthiness to experience the sights and sounds before him. He knows his unholiness prevents him from being in the presence of a holy God, *the Lord of hosts*, even in a vision. The prophet confesses that his sin makes him unclean. He also admits to living among *a people of unclean lips*, but this admission is not to shift the blame to excuse his own sinful condition. In acknowledging his own unholiness, he is taking personal responsibility for it.

#### What Do You Think?

In what ways can our corporate worship include times of confession?

#### Digging Deeper

What biblical examples of corporate confession can you name?

### Majesty Approached

My first visit to Colorado was not what I expected. I was attending a conference near the base of Pikes Peak, one of the tallest mountains in the state. I looked forward to a few days of crisp air, blazing sunshine, and exhilarating mountain views.

When my friend and I arrived, a dense fog hung over the landscape like a blanket. We arrived at our hotel and parked our rental car without

catching a glimpse of Pikes Peak. But the following morning, the sky was clear, and the sun was dazzling. As we drove toward the conference center, Pikes Peak dominated our view. Of course, the mountain had been there the night before, but the fog had concealed it. What the fog had concealed was now revealed!

The sight of a towering mountain has a way of humbling me, reminding me of the majesty of its Creator. Isaiah felt unworthy to view the majesty of the holy and enthroned Lord. How do you combine that same realization with Hebrews 4:16 in approaching His throne in prayer? —N. H.

### E. What Isaiah Received (vv. 6–8)

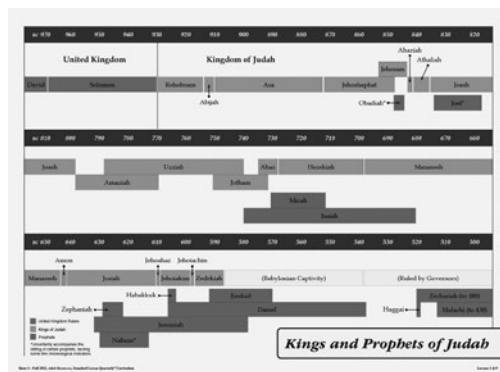
**6. Then flew one of the seraphims unto me, having a live coal in his hand, which he had taken with the tongs from off the altar.**

In response to Isaiah's admission in the previous verse, *one of the seraphims* goes into action on the man's behalf. *The altar* from which the seraph takes *a live coal* refers possibly to the altar in the temple Solomon built (1 Kings 9:25). But an altar in a temple of the heavenly environs cannot be ruled out because an altar is present there as well (Revelation 6:9; 14:18; 16:7). Isaiah undoubtedly watches with great apprehension as the scene unfolds. Having just confessed his own sinful unworthiness, is he about to be punished?

**7. And he laid it upon my mouth, and said, Lo, this hath touched thy lips; and thine iniquity is taken away, and thy sin purged.**

We can only imagine the emotions that surge through Isaiah as he witnesses the seraph approaching with a burning coal. Three of Isaiah's five senses have informed his experience thus far. By sight he has beheld the Lord (Isaiah 6:1); by hearing he has perceived the declaration of the seraphims (6:3); by sight and (assumed) smell he is aware of smoke (6:4). Now the fourth sense, touch, comes into play. We do not know if Isaiah feels any sting or pain from the red-hot coal that touches his lips. If so, it must be temporary, as the words *thine iniquity is taken away, and thy sin purged* speak not of judgment but of forgiveness.

At least four Hebrew words can be translated “(burning) coal,” so we should be rigorous in



Visual for Lessons 1 & 9. Display this visual as you discuss the prophets and kings of this quarter's lessons.

allowing context to determine meaning and significance. The act of touching this coal to Isaiah's *mouth* symbolizes his purification from *sin*. We also notice that although Isaiah's unholiness is corrected through the cleansing action taken by one of the seraphims, the prophet's own confession of unholiness comes first.

**8a. Also I heard the voice of the Lord, saying, Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?**

First, the seraphims spoke (Isaiah 6:3, above). Then Isaiah spoke (6:5). Then one seraph spoke (6:7). Now, *the Lord* Himself speaks by asking two questions. The first question deals with “sender action,” and the second deals with “servant action.” These are important questions because the Lord expects those who trust in Him to be His hands and feet at times (Romans 10:15). Sadly, that does not always happen (example: Ezekiel 22:30).

The first-person plural pronoun *us* is similar to the language used in account of creation and in response to the building of the Tower of Babel (Genesis 1:26; 11:7). The plural pronoun may refer to the Lord and the seraphim who make up His heavenly counsel (compare 1 Kings 22:19). Other commentators suggest that the plural pronoun may refer to the three persons of the Trinity: God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit.

Isaiah, however, is probably not mulling over such matters at this point; all he hears is the call for someone to *go* on the Lord's behalf. And he wastes no time in responding.

## Discerning God's Call

Charles Spurgeon, the famous nineteenth-century preacher, had no formal theological education. Yet he preached to thousands every Sunday for more than 40 years!

How did God call him to such a task? Once, when describing his call to ministry, Spurgeon said it was “an intense, all-absorbing desire for the work.” Those who like neat logical categories may be unsatisfied with that description. They may desire to have the idea of God’s calls examined in specific terms of form, content, etc.

Perhaps we may discern a more practical approach in the New Testament, where God’s calls seem to come about as character and spiritual giftedness are observed. The first-century church chose “seven men of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom” to serve in a specific capacity (Acts 6:3–5). Can we not conclude that they answered God’s call to do so? Barnabas seems initially to have simply grown into his leadership role, having been recognized by others as a “son of consolation” who led by example and spoke up on behalf of others (4:36–37; 9:27). These traits were evident before he was set apart for missionary travels by a specific directive of the Holy Spirit (13:2).

Martin Luther was on target when he described his call as “God’s voice heard by faith.” When our aptitudes, spiritual gifts, circumstances, and opportunities come together, let us make sure we are not overlooking God’s call. —C. R. B.

### 8b. Then said I, Here am I; send me.

Isaiah’s once unclean lips are ready to serve on the Lord’s behalf. He is willing to go wherever the Lord would *send* him. His willingness to be sent contrasts with the hesitancy of prophets such as Moses (Exodus 3:11) and Jeremiah (Jeremiah 1:6).

## How to Say It

Amoz	Ay-mahz.
Habakkuk	Huh-back-kuk.
Hezekiah	Hez-ih-kye-uh.
theophany	the-ah-fuh-nee.
seraphims	sair-uh-fimz.
Uzziah	Uh-zye-uh.

### What Do You Think?

What prevents believers from saying, “Here am I. Send me!” to God?

### Digging Deeper

What steps can believers take to remove these barriers?

## II. Communication with a King

(Isaiah 38:1–5)

The events of Isaiah 38:1–5 occur sometime before the deliverance of Jerusalem from Assyrian invasion, described in Isaiah 36–37. This is based on Isaiah 38:6, which describes the rescue as a future promise. By this time, Isaiah’s lengthy prophetic ministry was several decades old. The parallel accounts to Isaiah 38:1–6 are found in 2 Kings 20:1–6 and 2 Chronicles 32:24–26.

### A. Message of Death (v. 1)

**1a. In those days was Hezekiah sick unto death.**

*Hezekiah* reigned as king of Judah from 715 to 686 BC. The king’s diagnosis is untold. Part of his suffering includes a skin ailment, causing Isaiah to direct him to use “a lump of figs” as “a plaster upon the boil” (Isaiah 38:21).

**1b. And Isaiah the prophet the son of Amoz came unto him, and said unto him, Thus saith the LORD, Set thine house in order: for thou shalt die, and not live.**

We do not know whether the ailing king sent for *Isaiah the prophet* or whether the Lord directed Isaiah to appear before the king. Either way, Isaiah’s earlier proclamation, “Here I am; send me” (Isaiah 6:8b, above), is consistent with his role as God’s messenger.

The descriptor of the prophet being the *son of Amoz* appears thirteen times in the Old Testament, seven of which appear in the book of Isaiah (here and in Isaiah 1:1; 2:1; 13:1; 20:2; 37:2, 21). Scripture gives no other details regarding Isaiah’s father.

The message Isaiah brings is not of his own but from *the Lord*. Two phrases repeat the same mortal warning: Hezekiah *shalt die* and *not live*. Isaiah

gives no promise of healing. Instead, he directs the king to *set* his affairs *in order*.

### What Do You Think?

How would you support someone who has received news of a terminal diagnosis?

### Digging Deeper

In such a case, how do you discern whether or not to show your support by speaking up or remaining silent?

## B. Tears of Bitterness (vv. 2–3)

**2. Then Hezekiah turned his face toward the wall, and prayed unto the LORD.**

The prophet's somber message devastates *Hezekiah*. Perhaps the king is lying on his bed when he receives Isaiah's word. Turning *his face toward the wall* may be an attempt to hide his reaction from others present or to focus on his prayer—or both.

**3. And said, Remember now, O LORD, I beseech thee, how I have walked before thee in truth and with a perfect heart, and have done that which is good in thy sight. And Hezekiah wept sore.**

Hezekiah has reason to claim that he had *done that which is good*. As king of Judah, he has renovated the temple, overseen its purification, and restored worship practices there (2 Chronicles 29). He has removed artifacts of pagan worship throughout Judah (2 Kings 18:4). The phrase *wept sore* is a two-word summary of the anguish he expresses in Isaiah 38:9–14.

## C. Extension of Life (vv. 4–5)

**4. Then came the word of the LORD to Isaiah, saying.**

The parallel account in 2 Kings 20:4 adds more detail. It describes how Isaiah departs after giving the message but has not gone far when *the Lord* directs him to give another *word* to the king.

**5a. Go, and say to Hezekiah, Thus saith the LORD, the God of David thy father.**

The declaration *thus saith the Lord* indicates that the prophet's message is not his own. Instead, Isaiah brings it from the Lord (compare Exodus

4:22; 2 Samuel 7:5; Jeremiah 2:2). The appeal to *David thy father* highlights Hezekiah's position as David's descendant (1 Chronicles 3:10–13).

**5b. I have heard thy prayer, I have seen thy tears: behold, I will add unto thy days fifteen years.**

This message announces a reversal. The biblical record reveals that, at first, Hezekiah became prideful (2 Chronicles 32:24–25). But subsequent repentance paved the way for notable accomplishments (32:26–33).

## Conclusion

### A. Here Am I. Send Me!

Not everyone will experience the same call to vocational ministry as I described at the outset. However, God calls everyone to serve Him. Regardless of where God calls us to serve, we should answer with our version of “Here am I; send me!”

When we respond humbly and willingly, God will use us to represent Him to others. Some of us may serve God through vocational ministry. Others will serve Him via their witness through their “9-to-5” jobs, relationships with family and friends, financial support of mission work, etc. When we follow God's call, regardless of where it takes us, we are in a place of service to Him.

### B. Prayer

Heavenly Father, help us be attentive to how You have called us to go into the world and represent You. Give us the courage to speak of You to a world that desperately needs to know You and Your message of salvation. In Jesus' name, we pray, Amen.

### C. Thought to Remember

Respond to God's call!

## Visuals FOR THESE LESSONS

The visual pictured in each lesson (example: page 13) is a small reproduction of a large, full-color poster included in the *Adult Resources* packet for the Fall Quarter. Order No. 9780784739136 from your supplier.

# Involvement Learning

*Enhance your lesson with KJV Bible Student (from your curriculum supplier) and the reproducible activity page (at [www.standardlesson.com](http://www.standardlesson.com) or in the back of the KJV Standard Lesson Commentary Deluxe Edition).*

## Into the Lesson

Begin class time by offering the following imaginary scenarios:

1. You are lost in a dark cave without a companion, weapon, or light. You hear a rumbling noise deep in the cave. The sound grows louder and seems to approach you. What would you do next?
2. You open your mailbox and discover an envelope containing a cashier's check written for \$10,000. The check is made out to you, but there is no personal information regarding the source of the check. What would you do next?

*Alternative.* Ask participants to describe when they experienced an extraordinary or surprising occurrence. How did they respond?

After either activity, lead into the Bible study by saying, "When we experience something extraordinary, our response may have a lasting and powerful effect. In today's study, consider how Isaiah responded to the extraordinary call of God."

## Into the Word

Ask a volunteer to read aloud Isaiah 6:1–8. Divide participants into four groups: **Sight Group**, **Smell Group**, **Sound Group**, and **Touch Group**. Distribute a sheet of paper and a pen to each group. Ask them to write down words or phrases from the text related to their assigned sense. Then, encourage groups to use their "sanctified imagination" to add further details to the narrative regarding their assigned sense.

*Alternative.* Distribute copies of the "Four Senses" exercise from the activity page, which you can download. Have learners work with a partner to complete as indicated.

*Option 1.* Distribute copies of the "Problem and Solution" activity from the activity page. Have participants complete it in groups of three before discussing conclusions in whole-class discussion.

*Option 2.* Divide the class into two groups: **Isaiah Group** and **Jeremiah Group**. Have each group read Isaiah 6:1–8 and Jeremiah 1:4–19. Dis-

tribute handouts (you create) to each group with questions for in-group discussion.

**Isaiah Group.** 1–Describe how Isaiah reacted to God's call. 2–How did God respond to Isaiah? 3–Compare Isaiah's call with the call of Jeremiah.

**Jeremiah Group.** 1–Describe how Jeremiah reacted to God's call. 2–How did God respond to Jeremiah? 3–Compare Jeremiah's call with the call of Isaiah.

After five minutes of discussion, reconvene the groups to share their findings.

Divide the class into small groups. Have groups study Isaiah 38:1–5 and decide whether each statement below is true or false. Distribute a handout (you create) with the statements:

1. Isaiah spoke a word to King Manasseh.
2. The king rejected Isaiah's word and refused to turn to God in prayer.
3. The king requested that the Lord remember the good works of the king's ancestors.
4. Isaiah wept when he saw the response of the king.
5. The Lord promised to add five years to the life of the king.

If the statement is false, they should rewrite it to make it true. (Note: every statement is false.) Give groups several minutes, then review as a whole class.

## Into Life

Lead into the activity by saying, "Think of a time when you believed you had received a message or call from God. How did you know it was from God? How did you respond?" Ask participants to share responses with a partner. After three minutes, ask pairs to brainstorm ways to discern an authentic call of God from a mere felt need. Ask volunteers to share responses and write them on the board.

Distribute index cards and pens to participants. Read aloud Isaiah 6:8 as participants write down the phrase "Here am I; send me." Challenge participants to post the cards in a visible place as a daily reminder to pray for obedience to God's call.



# Hezekiah's Passover

Devotional Reading: Psalm 1  
Background Scripture: 2 Chronicles 30:1–27

## 2 Chronicles 30:1–9, 26–27

1 And Hezekiah sent to all Israel and Judah, and wrote letters also to Ephraim and Manasseh, that they should come to the house of the LORD at Jerusalem, to keep the passover unto the LORD God of Israel.

2 For the king had taken counsel, and his princes, and all the congregation in Jerusalem, to keep the passover in the second month.

3 For they could not keep it at that time, because the priests had not sanctified themselves sufficiently, neither had the people gathered themselves together to Jerusalem.

4 And the thing pleased the king and all the congregation.

5 So they established a decree to make proclamation throughout all Israel, from Beersheba even to Dan, that they should come to keep the passover unto the LORD God of Israel at Jerusalem: for they had not done it of a long time in such sort as it was written.

6 So the posts went with the letters from the king and his princes throughout all Israel and Judah, and according to the commandment of the king, saying, Ye children of Israel, turn again unto the LORD God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, and he will return to the remnant

of you, that are escaped out of the hand of the kings of Assyria.

7 And be not ye like your fathers, and like your brethren, which trespassed against the LORD God of their fathers, who therefore gave them up to desolation, as ye see.

8 Now be ye not stiffnecked, as your fathers were, but yield yourselves unto the LORD, and enter into his sanctuary, which he hath sanctified for ever: and serve the LORD your God, that the fierceness of his wrath may turn away from you.

9 For if ye turn again unto the LORD, your brethren and your children shall find compassion before them that lead them captive, so that they shall come again into this land: for the LORD your God is gracious and merciful, and will not turn away his face from you, if ye return unto him.

26 So there was great joy in Jerusalem: for since the time of Solomon the son of David king of Israel there was not the like in Jerusalem.

27 Then the priests the Levites arose and blessed the people: and their voice was heard, and their prayer came up to his holy dwelling place, even unto heaven.

## Key Text

*So there was great joy in Jerusalem: for since the time of Solomon the son of David king of Israel there was not the like in Jerusalem. —2 Chronicles 30:26*

# Judah, from Isaiah to the Exile

## Unit 1: Isaiah and the Renewal of the Temple

Lessons 1–4

### Lesson Aims

After participating in this lesson, each learner will be able to:

1. Identify qualities of Hezekiah's leadership.
2. Compare and contrast Hezekiah's Passover celebration with that of Josiah in 2 Chronicles 35.
3. Suggest leadership traits that are desirable for Christians today.

### Lesson Outline

#### Introduction

- A. Renewing Relationships
- B. Lesson Context: Hezekiah and Judah
- C. Lesson Context: 1 and 2 Chronicles

#### I. Renewing Passover (2 Chronicles 30:1–5)

- A. Israel and Judah (v. 1)
- B. Problem and Solution (vv. 2–3)
- C. Approval and Publicity (vv. 4–5)

*The Power of Celebration*

#### II. Returning to God (2 Chronicles 30:6–9)

- A. What to Do (v. 6)
- B. What Not to Do (vv. 7–8)
- C. Why to Do It (v. 9)

*Reason for Obedience*

#### III. Result of Celebration (2 Chronicles 30:26–27)

- A. Joyous People (v. 26)
- B. Blessed People (v. 27)

#### Conclusion

- A. The Hope of Unity
- B. Prayer
- C. Thought to Remember

## Introduction

### A. Renewing Relationships

Families, friends, and communities sometimes grow apart and become estranged. Sometimes, separation occurs due to external circumstances, such as one person moving away from the other; other times, the division results from conflict in the relationship.

When passive tensions or outright hostilities exist, meals with family during the holidays sour. High-school reunions fail to reunite old friends. There is no hope for any possibility of restarting past traditions, celebrating common values, or renewing relationships.

Following years of separation between the northern kingdom of Israel and the southern kingdom of Judah, an opportunity arose for the two to reunite. Would unified celebration and worship overcome years of hostility?

### B. Lesson Context: Hezekiah and Judah

The division of the united monarchy of Israel into the kingdoms of Israel and Judah occurred in 931 BC during the reign of Solomon's son, Rehoboam. Instead of peaceful coexistence, the two kingdoms were hostile toward each other (1 Kings 15:16, 32; 2 Chronicles 13:1–20).

Nearly 200 years later, Ahaz ascended to the throne in Judah (reigned 735–715 BC). Evil and unfaithfulness marked his reign (2 Chronicles 28:1–4). A few years before Ahaz began his reign, Assyrian forces under Tiglathpileser III (reigned 745–727 BC) had started to pressure the northern kingdom of Israel. The pressure was relieved temporarily by paying tribute (2 Kings 15:19–20). The Assyrian king, also known as “Pul,” deported members of the tribes of Reuben, Gad, and Manasseh in the process (1 Chronicles 5:6, 26).

The pressure returned after King Ahaz of Judah offered Tiglathpileser tribute in exchange for military help against Syria and the northern kingdom of Israel (2 Kings 16:7–9; 2 Chronicles 28:16–21). One thing led to another, and two eventual results were (1) the exile of the 10 northern tribes of Israel in 722 BC (2 Kings 17:5–6) and (2) the providential (but temporary) deliverance of the city of Jeru-

salem in 701 BC, during the reign of Hezekiah (2 Kings 18:17–19:36; Isaiah 37).

When Ahaz's son Hezekiah took the throne (reigned approximately 715–685 BC), the temple was in physical disrepair and spiritual defilement. As a result, Hezekiah initiated a restoration project to purify the temple so that the people might again faithfully worship the Lord (2 Chronicles 29:3). After the project concluded in only 16 days (29:17), the king held a rededication ceremony, which included rightly ordered worship (29:20–36).

### C. Lesson Context: 1 and 2 Chronicles

The books of 1 and 2 Chronicles (treated as one book in Hebrew texts) were among the last Old Testament books to be written. Authorship is uncertain. Because of this uncertainty, scholars often refer to the writer simply as “the Chronicler.”

We may wonder why the Chronicles are even needed, given that most of their material is already recorded in the books of 2 Samuel and 1–2 Kings. A clue lies in the title of the Chronicles as it appears in the Septuagint, the ancient Greek version of the Old Testament. The title of Chronicles there translates to something like “Things Omitted.” For example, compare the account of King Amaziah in 2 Kings 14:1–22 with its counterpart in 2 Chronicles 25:1–28; the latter is longer by some 40 percent. This is even more the case with today's text regarding Hezekiah's Passover—it is completely lacking in the book of 2 Kings.

## I. Renewing Passover

(2 Chronicles 30:1–5)

### A. Israel and Judah (v. 1)

**1a. And Hezekiah sent to all Israel and Judah, and wrote letters also to Ephraim and Manasseh.**

The division between *Israel and Judah*, now 200 years along, works against any chances for unified worship in Jerusalem. But given Israel's oppression at the hands of the Assyrians, *Hezekiah* perceives an opportunity to reunite the people in worship. He is eager to return the purified and consecrated temple to its intended service for all Israelites.

Hezekiah invites *all* of Israel and Judah, mentioning two tribes of Israel by name. The significance of *Ephraim* is that the designation is often synonymous with the entire kingdom of Israel (examples: Jeremiah 7:15; Hosea 5:1–3). The tribe of *Manasseh* is the largest of the 12 tribes in terms of geographic size. Its land allotment is specified in Joshua 17:7–11.

**1b. That they should come to the house of the LORD at Jerusalem, to keep the passover unto the LORD God of Israel.**

*The house of the Lord at Jerusalem* (the temple) and its predecessor, the tabernacle, was to be the focus of Israelite worship. However, following the division of the kingdom, King Jeroboam I established pagan worship practices for the northern kingdom of Israel. These practices were intended to keep his people from going to worship at the temple (1 Kings 12:25–33). His practices directly disobeyed God; the result would be the exile of the northern tribes (2 Kings 17:1–20). Over a dozen evil kings followed Jeroboam I on the throne of the northern kingdom of Israel. We wonder how much hope Hezekiah has in attracting Israelites in the northern territory to *keep the passover*.

Passover commemorates God's deliverance of His people from Egypt (Exodus 12:1–14, 21–30). The Law of Moses prescribes this yearly observance “at the place which the Lord thy God shall choose to place his name in” (Deuteronomy 16:1–6; compare 12:1–7). A well-attended Passover would be the climax of Hezekiah's restoration project (see Lesson Context).

## How to Say It

Ahaz	Ay-haz.
Assyrians	Uh-sear-e-unz.
Beersheba	Beer-she-buh.
Hezekiah	Hez-ih-kye-uh.
Ephraim	Ee-fray-im.
Jeroboam	Jair-uh-boe-um.
Josiah	Jo-sigh-uh.
Levites	Lee-vites.
Manasseh	Muh-nass-uh.
Rehoboam	Ree-huh-boe-um.
Tiglathpileser	Tig-lath-pih-lee-zer.

### What Do You Think?

How can believers celebrate God's work of deliverance and salvation?

### Digging Deeper

What steps can your class take to include such a celebration in your congregation's yearly calendar?

## B. Problem and Solution (vv. 2–3)

**2. For the king had taken counsel, and his princes, and all the congregation in Jerusalem, to keep the passover in the second month.**

The Law of Moses dictates that observance of *the passover* should begin at twilight on the fourteenth day of the first month of the Israelite year (Leviticus 23:5). The Lord allows observance *in the second month* under certain conditions (Numbers 9:9–13).

**3. For they could not keep it at that time, because the priests had not sanctified themselves sufficiently, neither had the people gathered themselves together to Jerusalem.**

The scope of the Passover observance Hezekiah envisions requires much planning and lead time. These realities reveal two obstacles that prevent the celebration from occurring on the fourteenth day of the first month (*at that time*).

The first hindrance, a shortage of sanctified *priests*, echoes the same shortage mentioned in 2 Chronicles 29:34. This is one of six places where the Chronicler mentions the issue of self-sanctification (1 Chronicles 15:12; 2 Chronicles 5:11; 29:5; 30:3, 17). What this involves for priests is outlined in Leviticus 21:1–22:16.

The second hindrance is reflected in that not everyone had *gathered themselves together* in time to observe. Some time is needed to communicate the invitation and for those accepting it to arrive in *Jerusalem*. The logistics of this is the subject of 2 Chronicles 30:4–5a, below.

## C. Approval and Publicity (vv. 4–5)

**4–5a. And the thing pleased the king and all the congregation. So they established a decree to make proclamation throughout all Israel, from Beersheba even to Dan, that they should**

**come to keep the passover unto the LORD God of Israel at Jerusalem.**

Some form of the phrase *from Beersheba even to Dan* occurs nine times in the Old Testament to reflect the entirety of the kingdom of Israel before the division of 931 BC (here and Judges 20:1; 1 Samuel 3:20; 2 Samuel 3:10; 17:11; 24:2, 15; 1 Kings 4:25; 1 Chronicles 21:2). Beersheba is about 45 miles to the south-southwest of Jerusalem, and Dan is more than 150 miles to the north. A walking pace of 3 miles per hour would require 100 hours of walking round trip to get the *proclamation* to Dan and its people. The round trip would likely require the better part of two weeks, depending on various factors.

**5b. For they had not done it of a long time in such sort as it was written.**

*A long time*, approximately 200 years, had elapsed since the united monarchy ended. The phrase *such sort as it was written* probably refers to the instructions in Deuteronomy 16:1–8.

### What Do You Think?

How might your congregation work with a congregation in another part of town to plan a revival or worship celebration?

### Digging Deeper

When was the last time that you participated in such an event?

## The Power of Celebration

I've hosted an annual Super Bowl party for friends and family for several years. While I don't care much for the game, I like hosting the party. I value the celebration, food, laughter, conversation, and community resulting from the gathering. Friends become "rivals" for the day as they cheer for their preferred team. New acquaintances become like old friends after spending several hours cheering together. The party brings us together and allows us to enjoy one another's company. And that is something I can get excited about.

Hezekiah invited people from Israel and Judah to celebrate Passover and thereby reorient their spiritual focus. The gathering would remind the people of their shared spiritual heritage. Through

the celebration, the people could put aside differences and attend to what they had in common as the people of God.

When did you last celebrate togetherness despite differences? How could you celebrate your shared spiritual heritage with the entire body of Christ that is the church? —N. H.

## II. Returning to God

(2 Chronicles 30:6–9)

### A. What to Do (v. 6)

**6a. So the posts went with the letters from the king and his princes throughout all Israel and Judah, and according to the commandment of the king, saying.**

The Hebrew word translated *posts* is actually a participle in the original language. The verb form of this word communicates the idea of running (example: 2 Chronicles 23:12). We can hardly imagine the messengers literally running the 150 miles between Jerusalem and Dan without stopping. Hence, the idea is more along the lines of “without delay.”

The fact that they are sent *throughout all Israel and Judah* necessitates that they take multiple copies of the invitation—hence the plural word *letters*. The messengers’ strategy is to take the invitation “from city to city” (2 Chronicles 30:10, not in today’s text). The content of the letters comes next.

**6b. Ye children of Israel, turn again unto the LORD God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, and he will return to the remnant of you, that are escaped out of the hand of the kings of Assyria.**

We recall that *Israel* was the name of the patriarch whose original name was Jacob (Genesis 32:28; 35:10). In the era after the division of the monarchy, the designation *children of Israel* usually refers only to those of the 10 northern tribes (examples: 2 Chronicles 13:16, 18; 31:1). And so it seems to be here.

The decree’s message is simple: *turn again to the Lord God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel*. The people had turned from the Lord through their idolatry. They had rejected the God of their ancestors—the only God there is.

As a result of this sin, the Lord would allow for-



Visual for Lesson 2. Point to this visual as you ask learners to silently reflect on ways that believers can delight in God’s ways.

eign invasion. *Kings of Assyria* took people captive (2 Kings 15:29; 1 Chronicles 5:26). Inhabitants of Israel who were left behind in the land or had escaped captivity were designated as *the remnant*.

### B. What Not to Do (vv. 7–8)

**7. And be not ye like your fathers, and like your brethren, which trespassed against the LORD God of their fathers, who therefore gave them up to desolation, as ye see.**

The problem noted in the invitation parallels Hezekiah’s previous warning to the priests and Levites (2 Chronicles 29:4–6). Centuries before Hezekiah’s day, the Lord warned the people through Moses of the devastation that would come about should the people reject the Lord (Deuteronomy 4:15–28; etc.). The Lord’s words came true. Because of the sin of the Israelites, they were conquered by the Assyrians. The remnant Israelites could *see* for themselves the *desolation* that had occurred as a result of the invasion.

#### What Do You Think?

How will you live so future generations can see you as an example of faithful living and obedience to God?

#### Digging Deeper

During the upcoming week, how will you encourage younger believers in their faithfulness to God?



**8a. Now be ye not stiffnecked, as your fathers were.**

To be *stiffnecked* is to be stubborn. The Old Testament refers to the Israelite people numerous times; several of those connect being stiffnecked across generations (2 Kings 17:14; Nehemiah 9:16; Jeremiah 7:26). This problem persists into the New Testament era (Acts 7:51).

**8b. But yield yourselves unto the LORD, and enter into his sanctuary, which he hath sanctified for ever: and serve the LORD your God, that the fierceness of his wrath may turn away from you.**

The invitation features three imperatives for returning to the Lord: *yield*, *enter*, and *serve*. The three words being translated are found together in only one other place in the Old Testament: Exodus 13:5. There, the order and the actors are somewhat different.

Exodus 13:5:	<i>give</i>	<i>bring</i>	<i>keep</i>
	↓	↓	↓
2 Chronicles 30:8:	yield	enter	serve

In Exodus 13:5, it is the Lord Himself who performs the first two actions. It's almost as if the text is saying, "The Lord took the first actions, and did His parts long ago; now it's your turn." The contexts of the two texts are the same in that both deal with the Passover celebration.

For God to exercise *the fierceness of his wrath* is not inevitable—not yet, anyway. There's still an opportunity for change so that God's anger *may turn away from* those receiving the invitation. This is the second time that Hezekiah gives awareness of divine anger; the first time is in 2 Chronicles 29:10 (compare 2 Chronicles 28:11, 13).

**C. Why to Do It (v. 9)**

**9. For if ye turn again unto the LORD, your brethren and your children shall find compassion before them that lead them captive, so that they shall come again into this land: for the LORD your God is gracious and merciful, and will not turn away his face from you, if ye return unto him.**

Sound familiar? It should, since what we see here is a relentless theme in the Old Testament. One

commentator observes that the message of the Old Testament prophets can be boiled down to three words: *Repent or die!* Some passages in regard to (re) turning to God are Deuteronomy 30:2–5; Isaiah 1:16; 55:7; Jeremiah 25:5; and Ezekiel 33:11.

The Lord's willingness to renew relationship with His people comes from His *gracious and merciful* character. Moses identified these attributes of the Lord's character after seeing the Lord on Mount Sinai (Exodus 34:6). The worship of Israel also proclaimed these attributes (Psalms 103:8; 111:4; 145:8; etc.). The Lord extends grace and mercy to those who seek Him.

**Reason for Obedience**

A few years ago, we brought home a traumatized, 90-pound rescue dog named Sam. We don't know what he experienced before we got him, but previous owners seemed to have hurt him. He would need extensive training, and the first step was earning his trust.

Our training started with simple commands like "sit" and "stay." When Sam obeyed, we gave him high-value rewards, like chicken and bacon. He became increasingly comfortable with us and began trusting us more. Eventually, he would follow our commands without the need for treats. Obedience itself had become his reward. He seemed to know that we were for his good, so he was comforted by our guidance and eager to receive it.

Watching Sam, I can't help but think how I relate to God, my trusted leader. I hasten to add that we should reject any analogy of "God is to us as we are to dogs."

God expects our obedience because He is our Creator, Ruler, and Redeemer, not because He bestows high-value earthly "treats." Is that why you obey? —N. H.

**III. Result of Celebration**

(2 Chronicles 30:26–27)

Although the king's invitation was sent throughout Israel and Judah, it was not always received positively. Some people "humbled themselves, and came to Jerusalem" (2 Chronicles 30:11); others responded with laughter and mockery (30:10). All

of Judah, some from Israel, and foreigners in Judah celebrated Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread together in Jerusalem (30:13–25).

### A. Joyous People (v. 26)

**26. So there was great joy in Jerusalem: for since the time of Solomon the son of David king of Israel there was not the like in Jerusalem.**

*The time of Solomon* is some 200 years in the past at this point. So, the *great joy in Jerusalem* is not due to any personal recall of previous Passover celebrations. Rather, the people seem to realize that they’ve received anew something they’ve been missing (see 2 Chronicles 7:8–10).

Several decades after King Hezekiah, his great-grandson Josiah became king of Judah (reigned 640–609 BC). Like his great-grandfather, Josiah “did that which was right in the sight of the Lord” (2 Chronicles 34:2). After destroying items of pagan worship (34:3–7), Josiah would oversee efforts to restore the temple. That included reinstituting Passover celebration (35:1). Comparing the animal sacrifices of 2 Chronicles 30:24 with those of 35:7–9, we surmise that Josiah’s Passover drew almost twice the number of people to Jerusalem as did Hezekiah’s. The Chronicler describes Josiah’s Passover similarly to Hezekiah’s: “There was no passover like to that kept in Israel from the days of Samuel the prophet; neither did all the kings of Israel keep such a passover as Josiah kept” (35:18).

#### What Do You Think?

How will you worship God with “great joy” in the upcoming week?

#### Digging Deeper

What is a new worship practice you can participate in during the upcoming week?

### B. Blessed People (v. 27)

**27. Then the priests the Levites arose and blessed the people: and their voice was heard, and their prayer came up to his holy dwelling place, even unto heaven.**

References to *the priests* and *Levites* remind us that all priests are Levites (that is, descended from the tribe of Levi), but not all Levites are priests

(Numbers 3; etc.). Bestowing a blessing on *the people* was one of the tasks given to the Levites by the Law of Moses (Deuteronomy 10:8; 21:5). Perhaps this blessing was modeled after the priestly blessing given by the first priest, Aaron (Numbers 6:23–27). The content of the *prayer* of the priests and Levites may reflect the same sentiment as King Solomon’s prayer at the dedication of the temple (2 Chronicles 6:21, 24–31, 34).

## Conclusion

### A. The Hope of Unity

Christians are not immune to division. Unfortunately, a brief look at social media, not to mention centuries of history itself, reveals hostilities and disputes among believers. However, when faced with these attitudes, we can look to the example of Hezekiah. His leadership in the face of sin and other dysfunction can be an example for us in the twenty-first century AD.

First, we must always turn to the Lord and repent; this requires realizing that the most important thing is to be with Him. Second, we should unite with other believers and come before God in worship as a repentant people. When these happen, blessings result.

#### What Do You Think?

What behaviors or ideologies prevent you from a life of repentance and unity?

#### Digging Deeper

What steps will you take to eliminate these barriers?

### B. Prayer

Lord God, we want to be united as Your people. Remind us to turn to You in worship. Show us how we can gather with other believers to serve You and offer our praise to You. Help us be attentive to the unifying work of the Holy Spirit in our lives. Fill us with Your love so that we can enjoy unity with other believers. In Jesus’ name we pray, Amen.

### C. Thought to Remember

Worship and serve as the unified people of God.

# Involvement Learning

*Enhance your lesson with KJV Bible Student (from your curriculum supplier) and the reproducible activity page (at [www.standardlesson.com](http://www.standardlesson.com) or in the back of the KJV Standard Lesson Commentary Deluxe Edition).*

## Into the Lesson

Distribute an index card and a pen to each participant. Ask them to write down a meaningful family tradition that is no longer observed or celebrated. Then, ask them to flip the card over and write an idea or ideas to revive this tradition or make it applicable for a modern-day context.

After one minute, invite volunteers to share their responses with the group. Be prepared to start the discussion with an example from your own experience. Ask, “Why is it important to remember traditions that have faded away?”

*Alternative.* Distribute copies of the “Passover Puzzle” exercise from the activity page, which you can download. Have learners work in pairs to complete as indicated before discussing conclusions as a whole class.

Lead into the Bible study by saying, “King Hezekiah worked to bring people back to God by celebrating the Passover. Let’s see how his leadership can help develop leadership traits for today.”

## Into the Word

Ask a volunteer to read aloud 2 Chronicles 30:1–5. Divide the class into two groups: the **Covenant Keepers Group** and the **Unity Seekers Group**. Distribute a pen and sheet of paper to each group. Ask the groups to discuss the following questions: 1–What was the purpose of Hezekiah’s invitation to observe Passover? 2–How did Hezekiah’s actions reflect a move toward religious and national unity? 3–In what ways was this Passover different from those celebrated before? After three minutes, ask a volunteer from the **Covenant Keepers Group** to share the group’s responses.

*Alternative.* Distribute copies of the “Restore the Unity” activity from the activity page. Have participants complete it individually in a minute or less before reviewing responses with a partner.

Invite another volunteer to read 2 Chronicles

30:6–9 aloud before directing both groups to discuss the following questions: 1–What does the call to return to the Lord (2 Chronicles 30:6b) imply about the spiritual state of Israel and Judah? 2–How does the invitation extend beyond a simple call to worship? 3–What can we learn from the reactions of the people and leaders to Hezekiah’s call? After a few minutes, have a volunteer from the **Unity Seekers Group** share the group’s responses.

*Option.* Instruct participants to research King Hezekiah’s life. Divide them into six groups and assign each group one of the following texts:

2 Kings 18:1–16

2 Kings 18:17–37

2 Kings 19:1–19

2 Kings 19:20–37

2 Kings 20:1–11

2 Kings 20:12–21

Have groups answer the following questions: 1–What significant act does Hezekiah undertake in this text? 2–What leadership trait does Hezekiah demonstrate? After five minutes, ask a volunteer from each group to summarize the group’s responses.

Next, have the groups silently read 2 Chronicles 35:1–19. Challenge the groups to contrast Hezekiah’s Passover celebration with Josiah’s celebration. Ask volunteers to list leadership traits evident in Hezekiah. Write responses on the board.

## Into Life

Ask the class to think about essential leadership qualities for Christians today. Direct them to use the list of leadership traits from the previous activity. Invite participants to call out a leadership quality they think is essential and write that trait on the board.

Distribute an index card and pen to each participant. Invite them to pick one trait from the board that they feel gifted in to use to serve the church. Ask them to write that on the index card. Challenge participants to pray and think about how God can lead them to use that trait in their lives.

# Hilkiah's Discovery

Devotional Reading: Romans 7:7–12  
Background Scripture: 2 Chronicles 33:1–33

## 2 Chronicles 34:15–22, 26–27

15 And Hilkiah answered and said to Shaphan the scribe, I have found the book of the law in the house of the LORD. And Hilkiah delivered the book to Shaphan.

16 And Shaphan carried the book to the king, and brought the king word back again, saying, All that was committed to thy servants, they do it.

17 And they have gathered together the money that was found in the house of the LORD, and have delivered it into the hand of the overseers, and to the hand of the workmen.

18 Then Shaphan the scribe told the king, saying, Hilkiah the priest hath given me a book. And Shaphan read it before the king.

19 And it came to pass, when the king had heard the words of the law, that he rent his clothes.

20 And the king commanded Hilkiah, and Ahikam the son of Shaphan, and Abdon the son of Micah, and Shaphan the scribe, and Asaiah a servant of the king's, saying,

21 Go, inquire of the LORD for me, and for them that are left in Israel and in Judah, con-

cerning the words of the book that is found: for great is the wrath of the LORD that is poured out upon us, because our fathers have not kept the word of the LORD, to do after all that is written in this book.

22 And Hilkiah, and they that the king had appointed, went to Huldah the prophetess, the wife of Shallum the son of Tikvath, the son of Hasrah, keeper of the wardrobe; (now she dwelt in Jerusalem in the college:) and they spake to her to that effect.

26 And as for the king of Judah, who sent you to inquire of the LORD, so shall ye say unto him, Thus saith the LORD God of Israel concerning the words which thou hast heard;

27 Because thine heart was tender, and thou didst humble thyself before God, when thou heardest his words against this place, and against the inhabitants thereof, and humbledst thyself before me, and didst rend thy clothes, and weep before me; I have even heard thee also, saith the LORD.

## Key Text

*Hilkiah answered and said to Shaphan the scribe, I have found the book of the law in the house of the LORD. And Hilkiah delivered the book to Shaphan. —2 Chronicles 34:15*

# Judah, from Isaiah to the Exile

## Unit 1: Isaiah and the Renewal of the Temple

Lessons 1–4

### Lesson Aims

After participating in this lesson, each learner will be able to:

1. Identify what Hilkiah found.
2. Contrast King Josiah's reaction to hearing Scripture read to that of his son King Jehoiakim in Jeremiah 36:20–26.
3. Make a plan to value the public and private reading of Scripture in an effort to keep God's Word from being neglected.

### Lesson Outline

#### Introduction

- A. The Dead Sea Scrolls
- B. Lesson Context

#### I. Discovering a Book (2 Chronicles 34:15–21)

- A. Reporting and Reading (vv. 15–18)  
*Sugar Cookies*
- B. Reacting and Requesting (vv. 19–21)  
*Lost in the Temple Today*

#### II. Consulting a Prophet

(2 Chronicles 34:22, 26–27)

- A. Identity and Location (v. 22)
- B. Response and Reason (vv. 26–27)

#### Conclusion

- A. Listening to God
- B. Prayer
- C. Thought to Remember

## Introduction

### A. The Dead Sea Scrolls

The world of archeology was turned upside down in 1947 after shepherds made a startling discovery in a cave near the Dead Sea: seven ancient scrolls encased in jars. Over the next 10 years, hundreds more scrolls were found in the surrounding area, most dating from the third century BC to the first century AD. The collection, called the Dead Sea Scrolls, became one of the most significant archeological finds of the twentieth century.

These scrolls shed significant light on life during the time between the testaments, the practices and beliefs of the people who lived in that region, and the reliability of the Old Testament texts. These scrolls had been “lost” for centuries, waiting to be discovered. Since their unearthing, our knowledge of the time period that Jesus walked on earth has significantly expanded.

Today's lesson details an account of a significant archeological discovery made in the temple complex in the seventh century BC. The response of Judah's king to this finding would have significant ramifications for him and the kingdom.

### B. Lesson Context

This lesson continues exploring the kings and prophets of the kingdom of Judah. As such, the context of lesson 2 also applies to this lesson.

Following the reign of Hezekiah in Judah (715–685 BC), the Jerusalem temple fell into disrepair and neglect. Much of this occurred during the reign of Judah's longest-reigning king, Manasseh (696–642 BC). His reign was marked by sin and evil. He reestablished idolatrous practices (2 Kings 21:3), shed innocent blood (21:16; 24:4), and “did that which was evil in the sight of the Lord” (21:2). His sinful acts culminated in his desecration of the Jerusalem temple (21:7), the same temple that Hezekiah had purified (see lesson 2). Scripture lists Manasseh's sinful actions as a reason Judah faced disaster, destruction, and exile (21:10–15).

Manasseh was succeeded as king by his son, Amon. He was also an evil king; he worshiped

idols and “humbled not himself before the Lord” (2 Chronicles 33:22–23). Two years into his reign, he was assassinated. His eight-year-old son, Josiah, replaced him on the throne of Judah (34:1).

Josiah’s reign (640–609 BC) differed from those of his father and grandfather. At age 16, he began to “seek after” God (2 Chronicles 34:3a). Four years later, he made efforts to cleanse both Judah and Jerusalem of idolatry (34:3b–7). Then, at age 26, in the eighteenth year of his reign, he took steps to repair the temple in Jerusalem (34:8). This act was significant because previous kings had allowed the temple complex to fall into ruin (34:11). In the years preceding the project, little faithful worship had occurred in the temple, except during a brief season (33:14–17). The temple’s restoration was the climactic reform of Josiah’s reign. Yet, it yielded an unexpected finding, as today’s lesson will show.

The parallel account of 2 Chronicles 34:15–22, 26–27 (today’s lesson) can be found in 2 Kings 22:8–14, 18–19.

## I. Discovering a Book

(2 Chronicles 34:15–21)

### A. Reporting and Reading (vv. 15–18)

**15. And Hilkiyah answered and said to Shaphan the scribe, I have found the book of the law in the house of the LORD. And Hilkiyah delivered the book to Shaphan.**

Scripture mentions at least seven individuals named Hilkiyah (1 Chronicles 26:11; 2 Kings 18:18; etc.). This particular *Hilkiyah* is the high priest during the reign of Josiah (2 Kings 22:8). He is also the great-grandfather of Ezra (Ezra 7:1).

*Shaphan* is part of the group responsible for overseeing the repairs to the temple (2 Chronicles 34:8). His work as a secretary or *scribe* likely focuses on protecting and maintaining royal documents.

The temple renovation project (see Lesson Context) likely unearthed many items that had been buried, including money (2 Chronicles 34:17, below). Hilkiyah, however, discovers something more significant *in the house of the Lord*: “a book of the law of the Lord given by Moses” (34:14).

## Don’t neglect God’s Word.



Visual for Lesson 3. Display this visual as you ask the discussion questions associated with 2 Chronicles 34:15.

Because modern bookbinding techniques had not yet been invented, this “book” may have been rolled in the form of a scroll (compare Jeremiah 36:2; Ezekiel 2:9).

The consensus among commentators is that the book was a form of Deuteronomy. The title *Deuteronomy* means “the second [giving of the] law”—a reference to the Law of Moses. There are several reasons why this book could have been a copy of Deuteronomy.

First, the phrase “the book of the covenant” in 2 Chronicles 34:30 can fit Deuteronomy, since that book is in the form of a covenant renewal treaty. However, that same phrase is used in Exodus 24:7, most likely to describe the material in Exodus 20–23.

Second, the emphasis in Deuteronomy 12 on worship in one place is consistent with Josiah’s reforms. Third, the purging of the land of pagan cultic places is found in Deuteronomy 12. This depiction could have made an impression on Josiah since that is precisely what he had been doing even before the book of the law was found. Fourth, the reference to curses in 2 Chronicles 34:24 could point to the extended curses spelled out in Deuteronomy 27:9–26; 28:15–68. Fifth, the celebration of Passover in 2 Chronicles 35 is similar to the commands of Deuteronomy 16:1–8.

A final argument in support of Deuteronomy is its emphasis that keeping the land depends on obedience to the covenant. Reading Deuteronomy



29 alone would be enough to cause Josiah to tear his clothes in anguish in this regard (see 2 Chronicles 34:19, below).

The text gives no reason why this document was lost in the first place. It is possible that most, if not all, copies were lost or hidden during the idolatrous reigns of Manasseh and Amon. Some commentators speculate that this book was deposited in a secure location during the repairs to the temple that occurred during Hezekiah's reign (2 Chronicles 29). Over time, those who served in the temple may have forgotten about the book.

What Do You Think?

What *personal* practices and habits help prevent God's Word from becoming neglected?

Digging Deeper

What *corporate* practices and habits also help in this regard?

**16. And Shaphan carried the book to the king, and brought the king word back again, saying, All that was committed to thy servants, they do it.**

The parallel account states that *Shaphan* read the book after receiving it from *Hilkiah* (2 Kings 22:8). In addition to bringing *the book to the king*, *Shaphan* reports on the status of the work on the temple. Such extensive renovation required the service of carpenters, stone masons, and other laborers (see 2 Chronicles 34:10–11).

**17. And they have gathered together the money that was found in the house of the LORD, and have delivered it into the hand of the overseers, and to the hand of the workmen.**

The text does not state the source of this *money* or where it was discovered *in the house of the Lord*. Regardless of its source, the money is distributed to *the overseers* and *the workmen* of the temple restoration project.

**18. Then Shaphan the scribe told the king, saying, Hilkiah the priest hath given me a book. And Shaphan read it before the king.**

Before revealing the contents of the *book*, its chain of custody needed to be established. *Shaphan*, whose role as a *scribe* involves handling

documents, is given the book by *Hilkiah the priest*, who discovered it. *Shaphan* then reads it aloud in the presence of *the king* (and presumably others in his court).

The book of Deuteronomy contains a directive for the public reading of “this law” before all Israel (Deuteronomy 31:9–13). Deuteronomy also stipulates that the king is to read a copy of the law “all the days of his life” (17:19; compare Joshua 1:8). As *Shaphan* reads the book, all those present—including the king—hear the law, which probably had not been read publicly for many decades.

Sugar Cookies

My grandmother's sugar cookies have been part of my family's Christmas celebration for as long as I can remember. Her memory lives on whenever we pull out her recipe card and make the same cookie dough. My grandmother's handwriting swirls across the card with peaks and dips like ocean waves.

I didn't want to lose the treasure of this tradition. Last year, I gifted my mom a glass cutting board with the recipe etched onto its surface. I didn't just want to remember the recipe; I wanted to preserve my grandmother's legacy. The cutting board serves as a lasting reminder of my family's history gathered around her table, eating her sugar cookies.

We preserve the things we treasure. That's why it's so tragic that the people in Judah lost the book

How to Say It

Abdon	Ab-dahn.
Ahikam	Uh-high-kum.
Deuteronomy	Due-ter-ahn-uh-me.
Hezekiah	Hez-ih-kye-uh.
Hilkiah	Hill-kye-uh.
Huldah	Hul-duh.
Jehoiakim	Jeh-hoy-uh-kim.
Manasseh	Muh-nass-uh.
Nahum	Nay-hum.
Noadiah	No-uh-die-uh.
Rehoboam	Ree-huh-boe-um.
Shallum	Shall-um.
Tikvath	Tick-vath.

of the law. This book reminded the people of their past: how the Lord had made them His covenant people. In this way, the book of the law is significant and worth treasuring; it was the way the people remembered their history.

What steps can you take to ensure that God's Word doesn't become "lost" to you? —N. H.

## B. Reacting and Requesting (vv. 19–21)

**19. And it came to pass, when the king had heard the words of the law, that he rent his clothes.**

The word of the Lord demands a response. Some reject it, while others submit to it. Josiah dramatically responds as *he rent* (tore) *his clothes*. The act of tearing one's clothing signals remorse, humility, and repentance (examples: 2 Samuel 1:11–12; Isaiah 36:22–37:1; Acts 14:13–15; contrast Leviticus 10:6; 21:10).

After hearing *the words of the law*, Josiah is horrified. Although he has worked to remove idolatry from Judah (see Lesson Context), he knows that Judah is far from being completely obedient to the law. Some outward reform had occurred, but Josiah recognizes the need for something else (see 2 Chronicles 34:21b, below).

### What Do You Think?

When was a time that God's Word evoked strong feelings in you?

### Digging Deeper

How did those feelings lead you to action regarding obedience to the Word of God?

**20. And the king commanded Hilkiah, and Ahikam the son of Shaphan, and Abdon the son of Micah, and Shaphan the scribe, and Asaiah a servant of the king's, saying.**

The group *the king commanded* consists of select members of the king's court. We know very little about these individuals. *Ahikam the son of Shaphan* protected the prophet Jeremiah (Jeremiah 26:24). In the parallel account of this narrative, *Abdon the son of Micah* is named "Achbor the son of Michaiah" (2 Kings 22:12). This narrative contains the only mention in Scripture of *Asaiah a servant of the king's*.

**21a. Go, inquire of the LORD for me, and for them that are left in Israel and in Judah, concerning the words of the book that is found.**

Josiah directs this group to seek a better understanding of *the Lord* in order to discern the significance and meaning of *the words of the book* of the law. The king's directive is not just for his own knowledge, but also for the good of others. The findings would affect all inhabitants of the divided kingdoms: the remnant *left in Israel* (reference absent from 2 Kings 22:13) and the residents of *Judah*.

### What Do You Think?

What further training or expertise do you need to deepen your study of God's Word?

### Digging Deeper

Who from your community will you invite to join you in studying God's Word?

## Lost in the Temple Today

My father set a good example for us. He read the Bible often, taught Sunday school from this commentary, and was otherwise very involved with fellow Christians in general and church ministry in particular. He had been church treasurer, took communion to shut-ins, and helped with interior renovations of our church building. The list goes on.

Then something changed. He stopped going to church. He would leave the room rather than discuss Christianity. He stopped reading his Bible—I heard him say once that "It's all just speculation."

In effect, the Word of God became "lost" to my father. His Bible was still just right there on the shelf within easy reach, but it might as well have been gathering dust in someone else's basement hundreds of miles away.

As we read today's text, we may wonder how a lengthy scroll of a Bible book can get "lost" within the very confines of the temple itself! But it still happens. Given that our bodies are the temple of God today (1 Corinthians 6:19; 2 Corinthians 6:16; etc.), think how easily it is for God's Word to get "lost" in there as the issues and things of

earthly life take priority. What guardrails can you erect so that you aren't one of the "stony places" that Jesus spoke about in Matthew 13:5, 20–21?  
—R. L. N.

**21b. For great is the wrath of the LORD that is poured out upon us, because our fathers have not kept the word of the LORD, to do after all that is written in this book.**

Josiah recognizes that the burden Israel and Judah continued to experience was due to disobedience to the Lord. The Law of Moses clearly specifies the results of *the wrath of the Lord* that is to befall the people because of their rebellious idolatry (Leviticus 26:14–45; Deuteronomy 28:15–68; 29:18–28; etc.).

### What Do You Think?

What is your comfort level in discussing God's anger?

### Digging Deeper

How do you resolve that God is love (1 John 4:8, 16) but that He also demonstrates wrath (Psalm 7:11; Romans 1:18–19; Ephesians 5:6; etc.)?

## II. Consulting a Prophet

(2 Chronicles 34:22, 26–27)

### A. Identity and Location (v. 22)

**22. And Hilkiah, and they that the king had appointed, went to Huldah the prophetess, the wife of Shallum the son of Tikvath, the son of Hasrah, keeper of the wardrobe; (now she dwelt in Jerusalem in the college:) and they spake to her to that effect.**

Several prophets serve in Judah during Josiah's reign, namely Jeremiah, Zephaniah, and Nahum. The king's entourage visits none of those, however, but rather seeks out *Huldah the prophetess*. Other female prophets mentioned by name in the Bible are Miriam (Exodus 15:20), Deborah (Judges 4:4), Noadiah (Nehemiah 6:14), and Anna (Luke 2:36).

The role of Huldah's husband, *Shallum*, as *keeper of the wardrobe* is not given. But perhaps he cares for the priestly garments in the temple.

(A similar role is described in 2 Kings 10:22.) The *college* where they live is likely the second district in the northern (newer) part of *Jerusalem*. This quarter is near the temple complex, thus allowing Shallum easy access to the temple. Given the probability that both Huldah and her husband are somehow connected to the temple, she is the ideal person to inquire about the book of the law.

### B. Response and Reason (vv. 26–27)

**26. And as for the king of Judah, who sent you to inquire of the LORD, so shall ye say unto him, Thus saith the LORD God of Israel concerning the words which thou hast heard.**

The first part of Huldah's prophetic response is in 2 Chronicles 34:23–24, not part of today's lesson text. It describes the disaster and curses that are to come on Judah because the people have worshiped pagan gods and rebelled against the Lord (34:25; see 33:2–9). The kingdom of Judah would experience conquest and exile from the land, as promised by the Law of Moses (Deuteronomy 28:15, 36).

The second part of Huldah's response is in the verse now before us. Whereas she had previously identified King Josiah simply as "the man that sent you to me" (2 Chronicles 34:23), she now identifies him specifically as *the king of Judah*. This casts the spotlight on Josiah personally. See the next verse.

**27a. Because thine heart was tender, and thou didst humble thyself before God, when thou heardest his words against this place, and against the inhabitants thereof, and humbledst thyself before me, and didst rend thy clothes, and weep before me.**

Huldah's response acknowledges Josiah's humble and contrite response to receiving the book of the law. First, the state of his *heart* has been demonstrated by his mourning of Judah's sin and his desiring to follow God's will. When Josiah heard the words of the book read, he submitted, grieved, and repented. Most of Judah's kings were prideful and rejected the Lord. A few, however, demonstrated humility before the Lord: Rehoboam (2 Chronicles 12:12), Hezekiah (32:26), and even Manasseh (33:12–13). Even today, God favors

those who are humble (James 4:6 and 1 Peter 5:5–6, both quoting Proverbs 3:34).

In the years to follow, Josiah's son Jehoia-kim would ascend to the throne of Judah (609–598 BC). He would lack the humility of his father. Jehoia-kim's officials would gain possession of a scroll that contains “all the words” the Lord had given to the prophet Jeremiah regarding Israel, Judah, and all the nations (Jeremiah 36:2, 21). When Jehoia-kim would hear the words, he would cut the scroll to pieces and throw them into the fire (36:22–23). Rather than repent and mourn the words of the Lord, Jehoia-kim and his officials would not express fear or would not tear their garments (36:24).

King Josiah listened to the word of the Lord, humbled himself, and obeyed. King Jehoia-kim, however, did the opposite: he exalted himself and rejected the Lord's warnings. Josiah honored the prophetess Huldah, but Jehoia-kim had the prophet Jeremiah arrested (Jeremiah 36:26). Josiah was spared the horrors of exile. Jehoia-kim, however, was not; because of his disregard for the word of the Lord, he was carried into exile in Babylon (2 Chronicles 36:5–7).

### What Do You Think?

What steps will you take to cultivate a tender heart and humble attitude before the Lord?

### Digging Deeper

What barriers prevent you from cultivating these things? How will you deal with such obstacles?

## 27b. I have even heard thee also, saith the LORD.

Josiah's actions and attitudes do not go unnoticed. Through the prophecy of Huldah, the Lord gave Josiah a promise of hope: “I will gather thee to thy fathers, and thou shalt be gathered to thy grave in peace, neither shall thine eyes see all the evil that I will bring upon this place, and upon the inhabitants of the same” (2 Chronicles 34:28). The prophecy revealed that Josiah would not experience the pending disaster of exile. However, this did not mean he lived a long and peaceful life.

Approximately 13 years later, Josiah died following a questionable decision to engage the Egyptians in battle (2 Chronicles 35:20–25).

Even so, we do not lose track of the fact that Josiah was spared the horrors of exile because of his humility and desire to obey the word of the Lord. His was a posture of humility. As such, the Lord responded with mercy and grace.

## Conclusion

### A. Listening to God

Josiah received the book of the law, heard its words, and humbly sought the Lord. His example gives us a model for responding to God's Word today. Josiah received God's words *attentively* and *submissively*.

To listen attentively assumes a posture of receptivity. We set aside our defensive tendencies, desires to deflect, and self-justifications. When we listen attentively to God's Word, we set aside our expectations. Instead, we patiently receive God's Word and let its power transform us.

After listening attentively, we submit to God's Word and let it lead us into obedience. We hear God's Word and commit to follow it. We are God's children, obedient to His Word.

We can only receive God's Word if our spiritual “ears” are prepared to “hear.” This reception occurs when we have a heart willing to repent of our sins, submit to God's word, and seek Him above all else. Only then can we listen attentively to God's words.

How do you receive God's Word? Are you like Josiah and listen to it attentively and submissively? The one who is Creator, Ruler, and Redeemer has revealed Himself through Scripture. How can we not be interested to what He has to say?

### B. Prayer

Lord God, we seek You night and day as we listen to Your voice and meditate on Your Word. Give us soft hearts so we might obey Your Word and submit to Your guidance for our lives. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

### C. Thought to Remember

Be a Josiah, not a Jehoia-kim.

# Involvement Learning

*Enhance your lesson with KJV Bible Student (from your curriculum supplier) and the reproducible activity page (at [www.standardlesson.com](http://www.standardlesson.com) or in the back of the KJV Standard Lesson Commentary Deluxe Edition).*

## Into the Lesson

Before class, look up the definition of *reform* and write it on the board. Lead a discussion by asking the following questions: 1–List examples of reform. 2–In what ways do you agree or disagree with the definition on the board? 3–In what ways does reform involve returning to core values or principles that have been neglected or forgotten?

*Alternative.* Distribute copies of the “Historical Reforms” exercise from the activity page, which you can download. Have learners complete it individually in a minute or less before discussing answers and conclusions with a partner.

Lead into the Bible study by saying, “The concept of reformation is not just a modern-day idea; we see it in the narratives of Scripture. Today, we will explore an important reform led by King Josiah. His reform teaches us the value of not neglecting God’s Word.”

## Into the Word

Divide the class into three groups: **Heart Changers Group**, **Temple Restorers Group**, and **Covenant Renewal Group**. To each group, distribute copies (you prepare) of the text of 2 Chronicles 34:15–22, 26–27, highlighters of two different colors, and handouts of the questions below for in-group discussions.

**Heart Changers Group.** Read 2 Chronicles 34:15–18. 1–Highlight in one color the key actions mentioned in these verses. 2–Highlight in a different color the individuals mentioned in these verses. 3–Draw a box around the key acts of reform in these verses. 4–How do these acts of reform demonstrate a change of heart toward God’s law?

**Temple Restorers Group.** Read 2 Chronicles 34:19–21. 1–Highlight in one color the key actions mentioned in these verses. 2–Highlight in a different color the individuals mentioned in these verses. 3–How do Josiah’s efforts to restore the temple reveal a restoration of faith?

**Covenant Renewal Group.** Read 2 Chronicles 34:22, 26–27. 1–Highlight in one color the key actions mentioned in these verses. 2–Highlight in a different color the individuals mentioned in these verses. 3–Draw a box around words or phrases that describe the key features of the covenant renewal ceremony. 4–What was the significance of this ceremony for the people?

Gather the groups together to present their findings in a whole-group discussion. Make notes on the board of key findings.

Write this question on the board:

*How is God’s Word “lost” today?*

Invite learners to brainstorm responses to this question. Write down responses on the board. After five minutes of discussion, ask, “What steps can we take to restore God’s Word to its proper place in our lives?” Allow the learners a few moments to write their ideas in response. Then, facilitate a discussion based on what they have shared.

## Into Life

Say, “God speaks to us through His Word. Today’s lesson serves as a call to reflect on our personal and collective commitment to Scripture, both in our private lives and within the body of Christ.”

Distribute an index card and pen to each learner. Direct participants to work with a partner to make a plan to value the public and private reading of Scripture in an effort to keep God’s Word from being neglected. Encourage pairs to write down the plan’s steps on their index cards and how they will follow these steps in the upcoming week.

*Option.* Distribute the “Reviving Our Roots” activity from the activity page. Direct participants to complete the activity as a take-home. Encourage completion by stating that you will ask volunteers to share about the writing experience at the start of the next class.



# The Servant's Suffering

Devotional Reading: Matthew 12:14–21  
Background Scripture: Isaiah 52:13–53:12

## Isaiah 53:1–7

1 Who hath believed our report? and to whom is the arm of the LORD revealed?

2 For he shall grow up before him as a tender plant, and as a root out of a dry ground: he hath no form nor comeliness; and when we shall see him, there is no beauty that we should desire him.

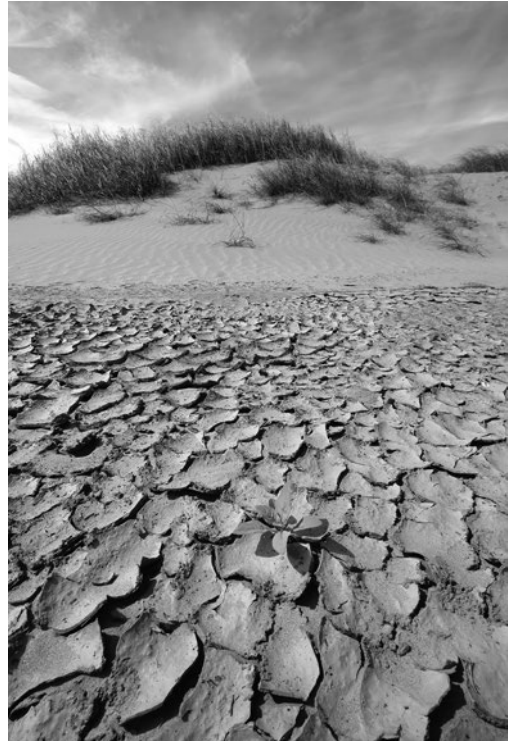
3 He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief: and we hid as it were our faces from him; he was despised, and we esteemed him not.

4 Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows: yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted.

5 But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed.

6 All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the LORD hath laid on him the iniquity of us all.

7 He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth: he is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he openeth not his mouth.



## Key Text

*All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the LORD hath laid on him the iniquity of us all. —Isaiah 53:6*



# Judah, from Isaiah to the Exile

## Unit 1: Isaiah and the Renewal of the Temple

Lessons 1–4

### Lesson Aims

After participating in this lesson, each learner will be able to:

1. Identify the suffering servant.
2. Relate the servant's suffering to the concept of substitutionary atonement.
3. Write a prayer of gratitude for what the servant's suffering accomplished.

### Lesson Outline

#### Introduction

- A. Three Discouraging Words
- B. Lesson Context

#### I. Servant's Appearance (Isaiah 53:1–3)

- A. Reported and Revealed (v. 1)
- B. Humble and Unattractive (v. 2)
- C. Despised and Rejected (v. 3)

#### II. Servant's Suffering (Isaiah 53:4–7)

- A. Stricken by God (v. 4)
- B. Punished for Us (vv. 5–6)  
*A Great Reversal*  
*Jesus Died for Me*
- C. Silent by Choice (v. 7)

#### Conclusion

- A. Three Encouraging Words
- B. Prayer
- C. Thought to Remember

## Introduction

### A. Three Discouraging Words

The following scenario has happened to most of us, likely more than once. We're watching an hour-long television program that features high drama and lots of action. We can't wait for every commercial break to end. As the conclusion approaches, we're on the edge of our seats, waiting for the exciting finish. Then, three words appear on the screen: "To be continued." We'll have to wait for another episode to learn how the plot ends!

Scripture tells us that Old Testament prophets, like Isaiah, desired to know what their prophecies meant or how they would be fulfilled. But they were told that it was not theirs to experience the fulfillment of their words, only to proclaim them faithfully (1 Peter 1:10–12). The Lord, in His own timing and His own way, would see to it that their words would be proven true and their ministries would be vindicated. He alone would determine when the words "to be continued" would no longer be necessary or relevant—though in many cases, the waiting period would be much longer than one week!

### B. Lesson Context

When we cross from chapter 39 to chapter 40 in the book of Isaiah, we enter what is commonly called "the book of comfort." The chapters therein include some of the most significant prophecies of Jesus and the impact of His life and ministry. This section begins with a word of "comfort" to God's people and assures Jerusalem that "her iniquity is pardoned" and that she has "received of the Lord's hand double for all her sins" (Isaiah 40:1–2). This likely describes how the captivity of the people in Babylon, predicted in Isaiah 39, was to end.

There was, however, another more serious and oppressive captivity affecting God's people: the captivity of sin. This captivity was the primary cause for the heartbreak of exile experienced by both the northern kingdom of Israel (to Assyria in 722 BC) and the southern kingdom of Judah (to Babylon in 586 BC).

The solution to this spiritual bondage was described by Isaiah in terms of a "servant" raised

up by the Lord to provide the needed deliverance. This is highlighted in what is often called Isaiah's "servant passages" or "servant songs" since they are written in the style of Hebrew poetry. Four passages from Isaiah are usually included among the servant passages: 42:1–9; 49:1–7; 50:4–9; and 52:13–53:12. In some cases, the length of a given passage may be subject to some variation among Bible commentators. Some commentators include Isaiah 61:1–4 as part of the servant passages. Those verses do not use the word *servant*; however, the passage was read by Jesus in Luke 4:16–21 and declared by Jesus to be fulfilled in Him.

Isaiah 53:1–7 (today's text) is found within what is perhaps the most powerful of the servant passages listed above. That passage of Isaiah 52:13–53:12 is quoted seven times in the New Testament (Matthew 8:17; Luke 22:37; John 12:38; Acts 8:32–33; Romans 10:16; 15:21; 1 Peter 2:22) and alluded to there in more than two dozen other places.

Some Bible commentators describe Isaiah as using what is called the "prophetic past tense." This means that even though Isaiah was looking centuries into the future in foretelling these events concerning Jesus, Isaiah spoke as though they had already happened. This is a way of highlighting the certainty of the prediction.

## I. Servant's Appearance

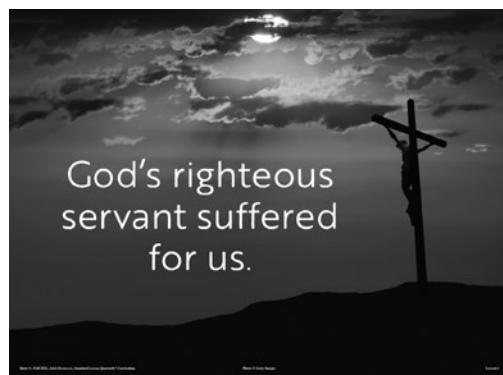
(Isaiah 53:1–3)

### A. Reported and Revealed (v. 1)

#### 1. Who hath believed our report? and to whom is the arm of the LORD revealed?

The chapter opens with two rhetorical questions. The first question indicates that the *report* from God's people would be challenging to believe. Isaiah wonders whether this message will be met with acceptance.

The phrase *the arm of the Lord* is anthropomorphic language—attributing human characteristics to God in order to aid our understanding of who God is and what God does. Even though God is a Spirit (John 4:24), Scripture speaks of Him as having physical characteristics (example: Psalm 34:15–16). Writers of Scripture often refer to the Lord's "arm" to express His power, might, and



Visual for Lesson 4. Display this visual and ask, "In what ways did Jesus Christ fulfill the prophecies in Isaiah 53:1–7?"

eternity (Deuteronomy 4:34; 5:15; 33:27; Psalm 77:15; Isaiah 52:10; etc.).

This verse is quoted twice in the New Testament. The gospel of John quotes this verse to express amazement regarding the people's rejection of Jesus despite seeing the mighty acts of God revealed through Jesus' miracles (John 12:37–38). The apostle Paul quotes part of this verse to convey his disappointment regarding Jewish unbelief of the gospel (Romans 10:16). The thread running through these passages is that people disbelieve the servant of the Lord.

### What Do You Think?

What are common barriers that prevent people from believing and accepting the message of Christ?

### Digging Deeper

How can you help people address those barriers while trusting in the Holy Spirit's power to soften hearts?

### B. Humble and Unattractive (v. 2)

#### 2a. For he shall grow up before him as a tender plant, and as a root out of a dry ground.

Disbelief regarding the servant might be due, in part, to his humble and unattractive origin and disposition. The phrase *he shall grow up before him* shows a relationship with distinction between God the Father and His servant.

The text uses two botanical metaphors to express the servant's humble origin. A *tender plant* is delicate, ready to break under adverse conditions; a *root out of a dry ground* is in danger of dying without proper water (contrast Psalm 1:3). These two metaphors highlight the perceived weakness of the servant and his questionable origin in the eyes of the world (compare Isaiah 11:1).

This description may bring to mind Nathanael's comment when he hears that Jesus came from the town of Nazareth: "Can there any good thing come out of Nazareth?" (John 1:46). The Pharisees will be skeptical along this line as well (7:41–52).

**2b. He hath no form nor comeliness; and when we shall see him, there is no beauty that we should desire him.**

Having identified the servant's humble origin, the text turns to describe his appearance and presentation. To arrive with *no form nor comeliness* predicts that the servant's physical appearance will not be the reason that anyone is drawn to him (compare Isaiah 52:14).

When we see the line *there is no beauty that we should desire him*, we remind ourselves that we are reading a form of Hebrew poetry that contains literary parallelism. Therefore, we have one thought in this half-verse, not two: nothing about the servant's appearance will cause people to notice him,

How to Say It

Assyria	Uh-sear-ee-uh.
Babylon	Bab-uh-lon.
chastisement	chas-tize-munt or chas-tize-munt.
Corinthians	Ko-rin-thee-unz (th as in <i>thin</i> ).
Ezekiel	Ee-zeek-ee-ul or Ee-zeek-yul.
Hezekiah	Hez-ih-kye-uh.
iniquities	in-ik-wu-teez.
Isaiah	Eye-zay-uh.
Leviticus	Leh-vit-ih-kus.
Nathanael	Nuh-than-yull (th as in <i>thin</i> ).
Nazareth	Naz-uh-reth.

unlike the appearances of some of Israel's kings (1 Samuel 9:2; 16:12).

C. Despised and Rejected (v. 3)

**3. He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief: and we hid as it were our faces from him; he was despised, and we esteemed him not.**

Despite outward appearances, the servant will indeed draw attention—negative attention. The treatment predicted will be far from welcoming. Two parallel thoughts also occur in this verse: to be *despised* and to be *rejected*. As history bears out, this happens not only by individuals but also by nations (Isaiah 49:7).

During His earthly ministry, Jesus faced rejection by the world and His own people: "He was in the world, and the world was made by him, and the world knew him not. He came unto his own, and his own received him not" (John 1:10–11; compare Mark 6:1–5). Crowds gathered to hear His teachings and witness His miracles. But after He was arrested and crucified, most turned their backs on Him—even His own disciples.

The servant is to experience inner turmoil as described in the next parallel: to be *a man of sorrows* is to be *acquainted with grief*. This pictures the floods of emotional pain (example: Luke 19:41).

What Do You Think?

What are some ways we do not esteem Christ as we should?

Digging Deeper

How do the directives in John 14:15 and 1 John 4:20 help us correct this problem?

II. Servant's Suffering  
(Isaiah 53:4–7)

A. Stricken by God (v. 4)

**4a. Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows.**

We continue to see parallel ideas, with the phrase *borne our griefs* equivalent to the phrase *carried our sorrows*. The description of the servant's great personal pain now includes an explanation for the suf-

fering; he bears the weight of our griefs and sorrows. Matthew 8:17 quotes this verse following a description of Jesus' healing ministry. It is clear that Matthew interprets the fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy in the healing work of Jesus. Thus, we see a connection between our sufferings and the servant's.

### What Do You Think?

What griefs and sorrows do you need to turn over to Christ today?

### Digging Deeper

In what ways can you carry the griefs of other believers so that you love others just as Christ has loved us (John 13:34)?

## 4b. Yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted.

In an inexcusable interpretation of the servant's life and ministry, the people the servant comes to rescue end up being the very ones to pronounce him *stricken, smitten of God*. People believe that his punishment is deserved. They know that God never acts unjustly, so they naturally reason that the servant must have done something to deserve the punishment (Mark 14:64).

Witnesses to Jesus' crucifixion interpret that event as a test of the servant's identity as they cry, "If he be the King of Israel, let him now come down from the cross, and we will believe him. He trusted in God; let him deliver him now, if he will have him: for he said, I am the Son of God" (Matthew 27:42b–43; compare Psalm 22:8). This implies that if God did not deliver the servant, then the servant deserved whatever pain and suffering the crucifixion inflicted on him.

The servant is indeed *smitten of God*, but not in the sense that the onlookers to the crucifixion suppose. The crucifixion of Jesus fulfills God's "determinate counsel and foreknowledge" (Acts 2:23; compare Luke 22:22; Acts 3:18; 4:27–28). Our next verse explains this further.

## B. Punished for Us (vv. 5–6)

### 5a. But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities.

The prophet turns to the physical punishment the servant experienced. This is also expressed

through parallel thoughts: *wounded* is equivalent to *bruised*, and *our transgressions* is equivalent to *our iniquities*. The critics of the servant are right in seeing God's punishment at work in the crucifixion. However, they miss the point that in the crucifixion, the servant receives and accepts the punishment for humanity's sins.

### 5b. The chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed.

We now move to the result of the servant's suffering. Through it we can experience *peace* with God and be *healed* from our sins. Such peace and reconciliation are available because of the servant's sacrifice (Romans 3:24–26; 4:25; 2 Corinthians 5:18–19; Hebrews 9:28; 10:10).

This transfer of punishment is known as the doctrine of substitutionary atonement. Christ acted as a substitute on our behalf for the result of our spiritual healing. Being the sinless Son of God (2 Corinthians 5:21; 1 Peter 2:22, quoting Isaiah 53:9), only Jesus could pay such a price. The New Testament connects being healed by the servant's *stripes* most directly in 1 Peter 2:24. Thus, the prophet Isaiah emphasizes—hundreds of years in advance—Jesus' triumph over sin and its impact on humanity.

### What Do You Think?

What is the significance of the New Testament connecting Christ's work with our being "healed"?

### Digging Deeper

What other phrases does the New Testament use to describe Christ's work on the cross?

## A Great Reversal

A few years ago, a dear friend invited me to help with a retreat for ministry leaders in India. Growing up as a missionary kid, my friend has a passion for supporting people doing ministry in challenging situations. She regularly takes teams of people overseas to pray for, listen to, and support local ministry workers. Having visited India before, I looked forward to visiting friends, ready to serve God and local ministry leaders.

Toward the end of the retreat, I fell ill, bedridden

in my room. I reported my illness to my friend, and she asked others to pray for me. But they didn't only pray; they put their prayers into action. Soon, two local leaders knocked on my door. I didn't want to open it. I was a mess. *What if I got them sick? Wasn't I supposed to be serving them?*

I felt vulnerable and embarrassed, but I opened the door. The two visitors had ordered me some soup and had called a doctor. After I stumbled back to bed, one of the visitors sat beside me, wiping my fevered forehead with a cold rag while we waited.

I vividly remember how this person was willing to "enter" into my suffering for my care! How very Jesus-like she was! When was the last time you served Jesus in this way? See John 13:1–17.

—N. H.

**6. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the LORD hath laid on him the iniquity of us all.**

People are compared to *sheep* in numerous places in the Bible (examples: 2 Samuel 24:17; Psalms 78:52; 95:7; Ezekiel 34:11–12; Matthew 9:36; John 10:1–16). The comparisons are not flattering. Sheep tend to go *astray*, and people inevitably do the same when they go their *own way* and live independently of God's guidance. Of course, the specific ways people describe their sinfulness change from culture to culture, but the fundamental problem has remained the same since Eden: we prefer our own way to God's.

Despite such rebellion, the Lord placed on the servant *the iniquity of us all*. Notice how the word *all* appears at both the beginning and the end of this verse. Everyone is guilty of sin; the sacrifice (substitutionary atonement) of Jesus, however, is provided for all by the Lord's grace and mercy. The fact that the Lord has laid on Jesus the iniquity of us all brings to mind the symbolic action carried out by Israel's high priest on the Day of Atonement. Once yearly, the high priest laid his hands on the scapegoat and placed upon it the sins of the nation (Leviticus 16:20–22); this symbolized and foreshadowed what Jesus was to do once, for all time.

We may also consider the prophet Ezekiel, who was commanded to "bear" the iniquity of the people through a series of symbolic actions (Ezekiel

4:4–6; 5:1–4; etc.). What Jesus carried out at the cross was not another symbolic act. He took upon Himself the complete punishment for human sin. In Paul's words, God "made him to be sin for us" (2 Corinthians 5:21). God did so "that he might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus" (Romans 3:26).

## Jesus Died for Me

About 18 years ago, I had a dream that changed my life. In the dream, I'm sitting on a grassy hill with Jesus; the shadow of the cross is in the distance. The air is cool and pleasant, and we are seated face-to-face. I'm fully aware that He is about to walk down that hill and give His life on the cross. And yet, He's amazingly calm. He lovingly looks at me and says, "It's time," as He stands and walks toward the cross. There is no mistake that He's about to do this for me, for my sin and shame.

For a moment, it was as if I was the only person in the world. And the reality of His love was landing squarely on me. I was filled with sorrow over the cost of my sin and amazement at His willingness to pay that price.

That dream changed my view of the cross from being an abstract doctrinal idea to something deeply personal. Of course, Jesus died for all and not just for me. And, of course, we are not to claim dreams or anything else as adding to the Scripture (Hebrews 1:1–2; Revelation 22:18; etc.). But if I focus solely on the fact that Jesus died for all, I can forget how personal His love is for me. In what ways could your faith grow by seeing the cross more personally?

—N. H.

## C. Silent by Choice (v. 7)

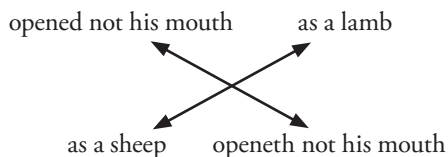
**7. He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, Yet he opened not his mouth: he is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he openeth not his mouth.**

Two more parallels now present themselves. The first is easy to see, with *oppressed* being another way to say *afflicted*, as Isaiah returns to a description of the servant. Once again, the prophet focuses on the servant's suffering.

The second parallel is actually a parallel within



a parallel. The writer combines these in the shape of an X. It looks like this:



The servant does not cry out in anger or vow to exact revenge upon those who afflict him, as the diagram reveals (compare Mark 14:60–61; 15:3–5; Acts 8:32). The servant being likened to a *lamb* may bring to mind the times Jesus is depicted as a lamb in the New Testament (John 1:29, 35–36; Revelation 21:22–23; 22:1, 3). But that isn’t what’s in view here. The idea, instead, is that of a sacrificial lamb (Exodus 12:3–6; 1 Corinthians 5:7).

The silence of Jesus during His persecution contrasts with how often He spoke during His ministry. He used words to command storms to cease, to cast out demons, to heal a wide range of diseases, and even to raise the dead. And ironically, His words silenced His enemies (Luke 14:2–6; 20:20–26). But when it came to speaking up for His own well-being, He said nothing. Jesus’ silence in the face of bitter opposition embodied His determination to fulfill His Father’s redemptive purpose. His was a “silent might.” No doubt there are times when we, in silence, should reflect on how powerfully Jesus’ silence still speaks.

### What Do You Think?

In what ways does Jesus’ powerful silence still speak to you today?

### Digging Deeper

In what ways is Jesus’ silence a model for your actions?

## Conclusion

### A. Three Encouraging Words

The Introduction called attention to the words *to be continued* as three discouraging words. In the sense of salvation history, the *to be continued* of the Old Testament has been superseded by the *it is fulfilled* of the New Testament (Matthew 26:54–56; Luke 24:44; etc.).

As we consider Isaiah’s ministry to King Hezekiah (as seen in lesson 1) and compare it with the content in Isaiah 53, we see the twofold nature of a prophet’s ministry. One may be called *forthtelling*, in which the prophet proclaimed God’s message to those of his own surroundings. The other may be labeled as *foretelling*, in which the prophet looked forward in time to declare God’s plan for the future. This plan, which included the ministry of the suffering servant, impacted not only the original audience but also the entire world. In each role, God’s prophet was “moved by the Holy Ghost” (2 Peter 1:21).

It is instructive at this point to call attention to a New Testament passage cited in lesson 1: John 12:41. In that passage, the apostle John describes Isaiah as one who “saw [Jesus’] glory, and spake of him.” In that lesson, the focus was on the glory that Isaiah saw by means of his vision of the Lord “high and lifted up” in His heavenly temple (Isaiah 6:1). In Isaiah 53, Isaiah also foresaw Jesus’ glory, but in a completely different way. This was the glory seen when Jesus was high and lifted up on the cross (John 12:32–33).

This is the glory of both God’s love and His holiness (Romans 3:21–26), demonstrated in an act that was looked upon with disdain and disgust by the people of Jesus’ day. It was, as the apostle Paul put it, one of “the foolish things of the world” that God used to “confound” the wise and the mighty (1 Corinthians 1:27).

Some commentators have proposed that the cross reveals glory to God in the *lowest*. That is the glory of Jesus that Isaiah saw in our passage today. And as a result of the servant’s suffering, death, and resurrection, we worship Him in the highest (Ephesians 1:18–23).

### B. Prayer

Father, after reading today’s passage, saying “thank You” hardly seems adequate. And it isn’t. We ask for Your help in offering ourselves in grateful service as ambassadors for Jesus, wherever we are and whenever You choose. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

### C. Thought to Remember

Jesus is the servant we serve.



# Involvement Learning

*Enhance your lesson with KJV Bible Student (from your curriculum supplier) and the reproducible activity page (at [www.standardlesson.com](http://www.standardlesson.com) or in the back of the KJV Standard Lesson Commentary Deluxe Edition).*

## Into the Lesson

Using the prompt, “We all know someone who,” describe a person in your congregation without using that person’s name. Describe the person by listing positive actions or behaviors, descriptors about appearance, or details of a time when this person impacted your life. Allow time for participants to guess who you are talking about.

**Option.** Direct learners to get in pairs and play this game, choosing other classmates or well-known figures to describe. Remind pairs to choose positive descriptors when describing this individual!

Lead into Bible study by saying, “How would you describe Jesus to someone who had never heard of Him or met Him? In today’s lesson, consider how the prophet Isaiah paints a word picture of the servant and how this word picture describes the person and work of Jesus.”

## Into the Word

Ask a volunteer to read aloud Isaiah 53:1–3. Divide the class into two groups: **Reared Group** and **Rejected Group**. Distribute handouts (you create) with the following prompts for discussion.

**Reared Group:** 1–How does Isaiah 53:1–3 describe the upbringing of the servant? 2–How are Matthew 13:54–58; Mark 6:3–4; Luke 2:39–40, 51–52; and John 1:10–14 related to Isaiah 53:1–3? 3–How did people receive and respond to Jesus?

**Rejected Group:** 1–How does Isaiah 53:1–3 describe the rejection the servant would face? 2–How are Matthew 23:37; 27:21–23; John 11:32–37; and Acts 2:22–23 related to Isaiah 53:1–3? 3–How did people receive and respond to Jesus?

After five minutes, ask a volunteer from each group to review their group’s responses. Then ask a volunteer to read aloud Isaiah 53:4–5. Ask the **Reared Group** to read Matthew 27:22–50 and the **Rejected Group** to read John 19:1–37. Direct groups to look for words and phrases that show the fulfillment of Isaiah’s prophecy. After 10 min-

utes, reconvene the class and ask each group to share their lists of words and phrases.

**Alternative.** Distribute copies of the “Fulfillment of Prophecy” exercise from the activity page, which you can download. Have participants work in pairs to complete as indicated.

After calling time for either activity, explain the concept of *substitutionary atonement*. Use the lesson commentary, if needed, to aid your explanation. Invite learners to consider and discuss how they have been impacted by the sacrifice of the servant who is Christ Jesus.

Ask a volunteer to read aloud Isaiah 53:6–7. Say, “In this section, Isaiah compares people to sheep and the servant to a lamb.” Rename the two groups from the previous activity the **Sheep Group** and the **Lamb Group**. Distribute poster-board and markers to each group. Use the following instructions to direct each group

**Sheep Group.** Use Isaiah 53:6; John 10:1–16, 26–30 to create a poster identifying the qualities of the “sheep.”

**Lamb Group.** Use Isaiah 53:7; John 1:36; 1 Corinthians 5:7; 1 Peter 1:18–19; and Revelation 5:12 to create a poster identifying the qualities of the “lamb.” Display the posters and compare the posters through whole-class discussion.

## Into Life

Invite learners to re-read Isaiah 52:1–7 and choose one significant attribute of the servant. Distribute an index card and pen to each participant so they can write a prayer of gratitude for that attribute and what the servant’s suffering accomplished.

**Alternative.** Distribute copies of the “What He Has Done” activity from the activity page. Have learners complete the first part in a minute or less. Then direct them to finish the rest of the activity at home. At the beginning of the next meeting, provide an opportunity for participants to share reflections.

# Jeremiah's Call and Arrest

Devotional Reading: Jeremiah 1:11–19

Background Scripture: Jeremiah 1:1–10; 6:10–11; 8:18; 9:2; 26:1–24

## Jeremiah 1:6–10

6 Then said I, Ah, Lord GOD! behold, I cannot speak: for I am a child.

7 But the LORD said unto me, Say not, I am a child: for thou shalt go to all that I shall send thee, and whatsoever I command thee thou shalt speak.

8 Be not afraid of their faces: for I am with thee to deliver thee, saith the LORD.

9 Then the LORD put forth his hand, and touched my mouth. And the LORD said unto me, Behold, I have put my words in thy mouth.

10 See, I have this day set thee over the nations and over the kingdoms, to root out, and to pull down, and to destroy, and to throw down, to build, and to plant.

## Jeremiah 26:8–9, 12–15

8 Now it came to pass, when Jeremiah had made an end of speaking all that the LORD had commanded him to speak unto all the people, that the priests and the prophets and all the people took him, saying, Thou shalt surely die.

9 Why hast thou prophesied in the name of the LORD, saying, This house shall be like Shiloh, and this city shall be desolate without an inhabitant? And all the people were gathered against Jeremiah in the house of the LORD.

12 Then spake Jeremiah unto all the princes and to all the people, saying, The LORD sent me to prophesy against this house and against this city all the words that ye have heard.

13 Therefore now amend your ways and your doings, and obey the voice of the LORD your God; and the LORD will repent him of the evil that he hath pronounced against you.

14 As for me, behold, I am in your hand: do with me as seemeth good and meet unto you.

15 But know ye for certain, that if ye put me to death, ye shall surely bring innocent blood upon yourselves, and upon this city, and upon the inhabitants thereof: for of a truth the LORD hath sent me unto you to speak all these words in your ears.

## Key Text

*The LORD said unto me, Say not, I am a child: for thou shalt go to all that I shall send thee, and whatsoever I command thee thou shalt speak.* —Jeremiah 1:7

# Judah, from Isaiah to the Exile

## Unit 2: Jeremiah and the Promise of Renewal

Lessons 5–9

### Lesson Aims

After participating in this lesson, each learner will be able to:

1. Summarize the context of Jeremiah's call.
2. Compare and contrast Jeremiah's reaction to God's call with that of Isaiah in reaction to his own call (Lesson 1).
3. Develop a plan to encourage congregational ministry free from age discrimination.

### Lesson Outline

#### Introduction

- A. Plucking and Planting
- B. Lesson Context

#### I. Appointed to Prophecy (Jeremiah 1:6–10)

- A. Jeremiah's Objection (v. 6)
- B. The Lord's Response (vv. 7–8)  
*Confounding the Wise*
- C. Jeremiah's Commission (vv. 9–10)  
*En Pointe*

#### II. Condemned to Death (Jeremiah 26:8–9)

- A. Unwelcome Message (v. 8)
- B. Unruly Crowd (v. 9)

#### III. Determined to Speak (Jeremiah 26:12–15)

- A. Assured Promise (vv. 12–13)
- B. Dire Warning (vv. 14–15)

#### Conclusion

- A. Each Christian's Call
- B. Prayer
- C. Thought to Remember

## Introduction

### A. Plucking and Planting

Although I want my lawn to be a healthy mix of grasses, unwelcome visitors also grow there: weeds. A particularly irksome offender is nutsedge, which initially masquerades as grass. Untreated, it can take over large sections of a lawn. While spraying with weed killers has some effect, new plants seem to return in a few days. By midsummer, the only way I have found to control nutsedge is to get on my knees and pluck out every single plant by the roots.

In the same lawn, I annually overseed sections where the grass is thin. This adds new growth and increases the lawn's thickness and health. Often, I overseed an area damaged by nutsedge and my clumsy extractions of this weed.

So the same turf area may see "plucking" and "planting" as uprooting and renewing. Such imagery is used in the book of Jeremiah to describe the Lord's control over the rise and fall of nations. Nations are "plucked" (face disaster) or "planted" (allowed to prosper) according to the Lord's plans. This lesson looks at God's purposes in the history of nations and the role of His prophets (like Jeremiah) in announcing and interpreting these events.

### B. Lesson Context

Jeremiah's prophetic ministry began in 627 BC, about 70 years after Isaiah. He was a priest at Anathoth (Jeremiah 1:1), therefore from the tribe of Levi and an educated person. About this time, the last great Assyrian king died, ending the dominance of this cruel nation over the people of Israel. But other foreign menaces came to dominate Judah: first Egypt, then Babylon. This climaxed in 586 BC when the armies of Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar captured Jerusalem and destroyed both the city walls and the temple (see 2 Kings 25:1, 8–11).

Jeremiah's career spanned the reigns of the last five kings of Judah before this catastrophe. Jeremiah is known as the "Mournful Prophet." His name contributes to the English term "jeremiad," a bitter railing against opponents. He is credited

as the author of the book that bears his name as well as the book of Lamentations.

## I. Appointed to Prophecy

(Jeremiah 1:6–10)

### A. Jeremiah's Objection (v. 6)

**6. Then said I, Ah, Lord GOD! behold, I cannot speak: for I am a child.**

The book of Jeremiah begins with God calling to him to be a “prophet unto the nations” (Jeremiah 1:5). We may compare this to other callings such as those of Moses (Exodus 3:5–10), Isaiah (Isaiah 6:1–13), Samuel (1 Samuel 3:10–21), Ezekiel (Ezekiel 2:3–8), and Amos (Amos 7:14–15).

It is common for a person the Lord is calling on to express various inadequacies. Moses claimed to be “slow of speech” (Exodus 4:10). Isaiah protested he was a “man of unclean lips” (Isaiah 6:5). Amos noted he was a farmer, not a trained prophet (Amos 7:14). Jeremiah asserts he is but a *child* and therefore cannot be expected to *speak* like a prophet. We do not know how old Jeremiah was, but given that he was already serving as a priest suggests he was not a young child. He may not have been a seasoned orator, but he was hardly a small boy. The phrase *I am a child* can also be translated “I am a young man.” Regardless of his exact age, Jeremiah appears to use his age as a reason for not being up to the task.

In Jeremiah's response, we also see a curious capitalization of “God” in the title *Lord GOD*. If translated in strict alignment with other occurrences of these two Hebrew terms, *adonai Yahweh* would be rendered “Lord LORD.” To avoid redundancy while maintaining the dual nature of this title, translators capitalize all letters of “God” to stand in for the word typically rendered “LORD.”

#### What Do You Think?

When is a time that you doubted you were capable of something you felt God asking you to do?

#### Digging Deeper

How can we move through feelings of inadequacy to respond to God more readily in obedience and faith?

## B. The Lord's Response (vv. 7–8)

**7. But the LORD said unto me, Say not, I am a child: for thou shalt go to all that I shall send thee, and whatsoever I command thee thou shalt speak.**

*The Lord* will have none of Jeremiah's objections. Jeremiah would *go* where the Lord would *send* him and would speak *whatsoever* the Lord might *command*. God was not expecting Jeremiah to venture out as an unequipped spokesman with no support. The Lord would direct his ministry and supply content for his messages.

We have come to associate prophecy with predictions of the future and prophets with those who reveal future events. This, however, is not the whole of what Jeremiah is called to do when he speaks. He is the Lord's spokesman, who goes and speaks as the Lord directs him. This message may include revealing God's plans for the future (Jeremiah 31:31–34, etc.). It may also be a denunciation of sin and a call to repentance for those of the prophet's day (8:4–7; 18:5–11, etc.).

The messages of prophets such as Jeremiah often include warnings of God's potential acts of punishment while promising blessings for those who listen, repent, and obey. Prediction of future events was something the people could evaluate and thereby judge the veracity of any prophet (see Deuteronomy 18:21–22). In Jeremiah's situation, he denounced false prophets for promising “peace” to the people because it was a message the public wanted to hear. Jeremiah knew this was a false prediction, that foreign invasion was on the horizon (Jeremiah 6:13–15, etc.).

## Confounding the Wise

As a mom of four, I referee a lot of disagreements. One day, I overheard my two youngest having an argument. My son Garrett had offered his younger sister Morgan what seemed like a good solution, but for some reason she wouldn't agree. After listening to both sides, it still seemed that Garrett's solution was reasonable.

Turning to Morgan to ask her why she wouldn't agree to it, she thought for a moment. She looked up with sad eyes and lamented, “I know it makes sense, but it's like my body won't

agree. It just can't catch up to what he is saying." I was stunned by how deep and rich her words were. I realized that instead of pushing her to move toward a solution, she just needed a little time. After being allowed that time, she and Garrett went on to enjoy their game.

The necessary wisdom to handle this tiff came from a 7-year-old. It's not always the most educated, lofty, and powerful voices that teach us. God often communicates His truth by means of humble, unlikely sources. When was the last time you encountered truth in an unlikely place? How did you receive it? —N. H.

**8. Be not afraid of their faces: for I am with thee to deliver thee, saith the LORD.**

Jeremiah likely considers that he will face opposition to his message and new vocation. This can include stiff animosity from those he is to address with words from the Lord. To be *afraid of their faces* implies anxiety over face-to-face encounters. Jeremiah will not be posting to social media, let alone sending a letter. He will be in the physical presence of people who reject his message in threatening ways.

**C. Jeremiah's Commission (vv. 9–10)**  
**9. Then the LORD put forth his hand, and touched my mouth. And the LORD said unto me, Behold, I have put my words in thy mouth.**

Because the prophet is to be God's spokesman, Jeremiah's mouth will become a symbol for his task. Here we are reminded of the prophet Isaiah. When Isaiah received his great vision of the Lord on His heavenly throne, he felt completely out of place in God's presence and protested that he was a man of "unclean lips" (Isaiah 6:5). When an angel took a burning coal from the altar in

heaven and touched it to Isaiah's mouth, he was spiritually cleansed and empowered. When God asked for a volunteer to speak to the people, Isaiah responded, "Here am I; send me" (6:8; see lesson 1).

The call of Jeremiah has similarities. Jeremiah's sense of inadequacy for his call also brings a touch to his *mouth*, this time by the Lord's *hand*. This is not to cure a speech impediment or to repair damaged vocal cords. Rather, Jeremiah is told that the Lord has *put His words in* the prophet's *mouth*. Jeremiah will never need to worry about a situation in which he thinks, "I don't know what to say." God gives him a task and will surely give him a message.

**What Do You Think?**

When was fear a barrier to obeying God's direction in your life?

**Digging Deeper**

What steps can you take to grow your faith and combat fear?

**En Pointe**

One day, feeling overwhelmed by ministry responsibilities, I reached out to a mentor for advice. She responded with an interesting fact about ballet dancers. "If they move to pointe shoes too soon," she said, "they risk breaking their ankles."

I felt the truth of her words immediately. I had taken on too much, effectively "moving to pointe" too soon. The weight of it all was about to break me. I thanked her for her wise words and considered where I could make some ankle-saving adjustments. A couple of years later, this advice came to mind again when my daughter came home from dance class, announcing that her teacher had invited her to move to pointe shoes. We celebrated with gusto, reveling in this achievement. I couldn't help but reflect on how, for me, the idea of pointe shoes had represented weightiness and struggle. For my daughter, they were a thrill and a joy.

What was the difference? It all depended on the teacher making the call. When the teacher makes

**How to Say It**

<i>adonai</i> (Hebrew)	ad-owe-nye.
Anathoth	An-uh-thoth.
Jehoiakim	Jeh-hoy-uh-kim.
Jeremiah	Jair-uh-my-uh.
Nebuchadnezzar	Neb-yuh-kud- <i>nez</i> -er.
Shiloh	Shy-low.

the call, we can trust that we are well-equipped to do the work He has given us. Consider making a list of the things you feel called to do. Do you feel equipped? Why or why not? —N. H.

**10. See, I have this day set thee over the nations and over the kingdoms, to root out, and to pull down, and to destroy, and to throw down, to build, and to plant.**

Jeremiah's call is not to be squandered on denouncing the petty sins of his community. God's plans for Jeremiah are much bigger, international in scope. We should understand this carefully, though. Jeremiah is not appointed and empowered to be a kingmaker or judge over *nations* in any way apart from God's control and plan. His role as God's spokesman is weighty, delivering the verdicts and judgments of the "King of nations" (Jeremiah 10:7).

One of the many figurative ways the book of Jeremiah illustrates this plucking and planting is the work of a potter in Jeremiah 18. The Lord is pictured as the ultimate maker of clay pots, a metaphor for nations. Jeremiah equates the divine potter's actions in shaping a pot with plucking up, pulling down, and destroying (Jeremiah 18:7).

In this verse, the actions of building and planting are also included. The founding and blessing of nations are in God's hands, as are their punishment and destruction. Even a nation that has been planted and built up by the Lord is subject to being uprooted and destroyed if it persists in disobedience (Jeremiah 18:9–10).

The act of uprooting is further described using three terms with political overtones. First, *nations* will be pulled down, which has the connotation of being overthrown. Once-powerful nations will be conquered by other nations and placed in a servile position. Second, nations will be destroyed. This is the next step beyond conquering. It means the nation ceases to exist like the northern kingdom of Israel, utterly dismantled by the Assyrians in the eighth century BC.

Third, nations will be thrown down. This can refer to the actual razing of buildings, even the complete decimation of a city. It is the opposite of the next act of the Lord Jeremiah mentions, *to*

*build*, which indicates construction. For a nation, this could be the infrastructure of buildings and fortifications that come with national longevity. We may marvel at the grand buildings of the ancient Egyptians or Mayans and the legacies they leave of defunct empires. But the Lord may leave little trace of the nations He destroys, thus allowing for reconstruction by another people.

### What Do You Think?

How might God use a person's ministry to bring both warning and blessing to others?

### Digging Deeper

What are some things such a person would need to be cautious about?

## II. Condemned to Death

(Jeremiah 26:8–9)

### A. Unwelcome Message (v. 8)

**8. Now it came to pass, when Jeremiah had made an end of speaking all that the LORD had commanded him to speak unto all the people, that the priests and the prophets and all the people took him, saying, Thou shalt surely die.**

Our lesson moves to the central section of the book of Jeremiah to give us a glimpse of how the opening verses of his call to be a prophet in chapter 1 were actualized in the events of his ministry. In chapter 26, Jeremiah goes to Jerusalem to speak God's words during the reign of King Jehoiakim (Jeremiah 26:1). This is often called the "Temple Sermon" and may be the same incident related in chapter 7 (see Lesson 6). The material in Jeremiah is not always related in chronological order. In that regard, this later account—from a slightly different perspective—may help us understand what happened in chapter 7. The thrust of Jeremiah's message in chapter 7 is that the people's expectation of future peace (7:20, 34) and their pride in the protection of the temple (7:4) are mistaken.

Jehoiakim probably became king in 609 BC, so this would be roughly 20 years after Jeremiah began his prophetic ministry. The Lord's message through Jeremiah was that the people must keep the law and turn from their evil ways (Jeremiah



26:3–4). If not, the Lord would curse them and make Jerusalem like “Shiloh,” a deserted site that lived only in memory (26:6; see also 7:12–15).

When Jeremiah finishes delivering God’s words, the reaction of *the priests, and the prophets, and all the people* is to threaten his life. They are deeply offended, having no desire to repent or return to the Law of Moses. When they say, “*Thou shalt surely die*,” we can understand this to mean, “We are going to kill you” (compare Jeremiah 26:11). Rather than obey the Lord’s word given through Jeremiah, their first impulse is to seek his death.

### B. Unruly Crowd (v. 9)

**9. Why hast thou prophesied in the name of the LORD, saying, This house shall be like Shiloh, and this city shall be desolate without an inhabitant? And all the people were gathered against Jeremiah in the house of the LORD.**

This response shows us that the people have understood Jeremiah clearly. He has promised that the temple would be *like Shiloh*, a former site of the temple’s predecessor, the tabernacle (Joshua 18:1). Shiloh was abandoned after the army of Israel was defeated by the Philistines around 1050 BC. In this battle, the ark of the covenant was captured (1 Samuel 4:4, 10–11), a national disaster for Israel.

Initially, Jeremiah’s words find no listeners who take them to heart. There is no repentance, only hostility to the messenger. Even though Jeremiah claims to speak *in the name of the Lord*, his message is rejected by *all the people*. Instead, they continue to believe the temple’s false prophets, who have assured them of future peace and prosperity (for example, Jeremiah 23:16).

#### What Do You Think?

When have you witnessed someone ridiculed or threatened for doing what was right?

#### Digging Deeper

How might you learn from the example of such people to live confidently and boldly in your own life?

## III. Determined to Speak

(Jeremiah 26:12–15)

### A. Assured Promise (vv. 12–13)

**12. Then spake Jeremiah unto all the princes and to all the people, saying, The LORD sent me to prophesy against this house and against this city all the words that ye have heard.**

Jeremiah’s courage is on display here. Although he surely expects he will be executed, he takes a last opportunity to speak the word of the Lord. He reminds his audience that his message is not his own concoction but the prophecy *the Lord sent him to deliver against this house* (the temple) *and against this city* (Jerusalem). He is not pronouncing judgment based on his own standards; he is voicing the judgments of the Lord.

**13. Therefore now amend your ways and your doings, and obey the voice of the LORD your God; and the LORD will repent him of the evil that he hath pronounced against you.**

Jeremiah’s summary advice is simple: *amend your ways* (repent) and *obey the Lord’s voice* (follow the Law of Moses). Jeremiah promises that if the people repent (change their ways), the Lord will *repent of the evil* He has planned. We refer to this as conditional or contingent prophecy. The Lord reveals, through a prophet, the future that awaits if the people do not repent. This disastrous course lies in store for the people if nothing changes in their attitudes and actions.

### B. Dire Warning (vv. 14–15)

**14. As for me, behold, I am in your hand: do with me as seemeth good and meet unto you.**

Having reiterated his message without compromise, Jeremiah submits himself to the *hand* of his enemies. He has been faithful to his call, and now he accepts the potential consequences. Implicit here is Jeremiah’s faith in the Lord. Without such faith, he would not be able to confidently hand himself over to his enemies. This does not mean that Jeremiah knows it will go well for him. Rather, despite not knowing the outcome, he has faith in the one who called him. This was the right path for him to take, regardless of how it would end.

### What Do You Think?

How have you had to entrust yourself to God's care for your well-being and safety?

### Digging Deeper

What is an example of a way God might ask you to take a risk for the sake of Christ's kingdom?

**15. But know ye for certain, that if ye put me to death, ye shall surely bring innocent blood upon yourselves, and upon this city, and upon the inhabitants thereof: for of a truth the LORD hath sent me unto you to speak all these words in your ears.**

While he offers no resistance to his would-be executioners, Jeremiah issues a warning to them. He is *innocent*, so his death would be murder and bring *blood* upon his critics, Jerusalem, and all its citizens. His only “crime” would be the speaking of *truth* given by the *Lord* who *sent* him. We should remember that the shedding of *innocent blood* is one of the greatest crimes of which Jeremiah accuses the leaders of Israel (see Jeremiah 7:6; 22:3).

Jeremiah's pleas find a sympathetic response in some of the “princes” or elders of the land (Jeremiah 26:16). They intervene, and Jeremiah's life is spared (26:24), but there is no sign the people heed his warnings and repent. The destruction of Jerusalem promised by the Lord is still on track for fulfillment.

## Conclusion

### A. Each Christian's Call

Jeremiah knew from an early age that obeying the Lord's call would be difficult, even dangerous. His messages of future destruction would be unpopular among the ruling elite of Jerusalem, and they would sway the people against him. Yet he faithfully delivered these hard words, even at the risk of his own life.

Today, you may not be called to deliver God's words to elites in places of societal power. Your roles may be confined to your church, family, school, or workplace. Nevertheless, speaking truth

may be just as challenging as it was for Jeremiah. As with Jeremiah, this may come upon you at a young age. Ministries of truth and service are not just for mature believers.

What inhibits you from assuming a more active ministry for the Lord? Do you think you are too young? Too inexperienced? Do you think you are too old? Do you think you don't know the Bible well enough? Do you think you are too busy? Are you slowed by fear of rejection?

Jeremiah likely felt many of these things. He could have lived a respectful life as a priest enjoying the quiet stability of a small village. The Lord had other plans for him. He was called to be God's spokesman of judgment to the elites of his land, even the great nations of his world. Although he did not seek or relish this responsibility, he faithfully carried it out. May we follow the example of brave Jeremiah in the calls to ministry that the Lord extends to every Christian.

### B. Prayer

Lord, You know us intimately. May we yield our hearts to this loving relationship and find ways to serve You and Your people. May we never be fearful but always faithful. We pray in the name of the innocent one who was faithful unto death, Jesus our Lord. Amen.

### C. Thought to Remember

Walk in obedient faith, not fear.



Visual for Lesson 5. Display this visual and ask participants to reflect on Jeremiah's situation and the Lord's words of comfort to him.

# Involvement Learning

*Enhance your lesson with KJV Bible Student (from your curriculum supplier) and the reproducible activity page (at [www.standardlesson.com](http://www.standardlesson.com) or in the back of the KJV Standard Lesson Commentary Deluxe Edition).*

## Into the Lesson

Begin by writing this question on the board:

*What would you do if you  
were not afraid of failing?*

Distribute an index card to each participant and ask them to write down answers to these questions: 1—What aspirations do you have? 2—How does fear of failure prevent you from achieving those aspirations?

After one minute, ask for volunteers to share their answers with the class. (Many learners may not be comfortable with sharing. Be prepared to share your own answers.) Express gratitude for the volunteers and acknowledge the diversity of ideas.

Lead into the Bible study by saying, “In the Bible, there are many stories where people first told God they couldn’t do what He asked because they were afraid. They made excuses. But God didn’t change His mind about choosing them. Today, we will talk about someone like that: the prophet Jeremiah. Let’s discover the reasons for his fear and the excuse he gave.”

## Into the Word

Divide the class into the **Prophet’s Call Group** and the **Prophet’s Challenge Group**. Distribute handouts (you create) of the following questions for in-group discussion.

**Prophet’s Call Group.** Read Jeremiah 1:6–10. 1—What was Jeremiah’s initial reaction to God’s call? 2—How does God respond to Jeremiah’s hesitation? 3—What promises does God make to Jeremiah to assure him?

**Prophet’s Challenge Group.** Read Jeremiah 26:8–9, 12–15. 1—What was the response of the officials and people when Jeremiah spoke at the temple? 2—How did Jeremiah defend his actions and message? 3—What can we learn from Jeremiah’s response to opposition and danger?

Direct each group to present their findings to

the class. Facilitate a discussion on Jeremiah’s initial apprehensions and how those fears and hesitations were transformed.

*Option.* Ask a volunteer to read Isaiah 6:1–8. In a whole-class discussion, compare Jeremiah’s reaction to God’s call with Isaiah’s response to God’s call.

Distribute highlighters and copies of the Scripture text of Jeremiah 26:8–9, 12–15. Instruct the **Prophet’s Call Group** to highlight every word spoken by Jeremiah and the **Prophet’s Challenge Group** to highlight every word spoken by the Lord.

*Alternative.* Distribute copies of the “Prophet’s Words” exercise from the activity page, which you can download. Have learners work in small groups to complete as indicated.

After calling time for either activity, have groups present their findings before the class. Ask, “At what point in the passage do you observe Jeremiah transition from speaking out of fear to speaking with conviction?”

## Into Life

Say, “Today’s lesson highlights that God can use individuals, regardless of age or natural ability.” Invite learners to brainstorm ideas for intergenerational congregational ministry. Record their ideas on the board.

Choose a ministry from the options on the board and have participants work in pairs to create a description of the ministry. Direct pairs to consider how the ministry could include youth in its leadership. After five minutes, reconvene the class and ask volunteers to share their ideas. Encourage learners to pray about their concept over the week and consider proposing it to the church’s leadership.

*Option.* Distribute copies of the “Divine Call” activity from the activity page. Have learners complete it individually in a minute or less before discussing conclusions in small groups.

# Jeremiah's Message

Devotional Reading: Luke 6:40–46  
Background Scripture: Jeremiah 7:1–26

## Jeremiah 7:1–11, 21–23

1 The word that came to Jeremiah from the LORD, saying,

2 Stand in the gate of the LORD's house, and proclaim there this word, and say, Hear the word of the LORD, all ye of Judah, that enter in at these gates to worship the LORD.

3 Thus saith the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, Amend your ways and your doings, and I will cause you to dwell in this place.

4 Trust ye not in lying words, saying, The temple of the LORD, The temple of the LORD, The temple of the LORD, are these.

5 For if ye thoroughly amend your ways and your doings; if ye thoroughly execute judgment between a man and his neighbour;

6 If ye oppress not the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow, and shed not innocent blood in this place, neither walk after other gods to your hurt:

7 Then will I cause you to dwell in this place, in the land that I gave to your fathers, for ever and ever.

8 Behold, ye trust in lying words, that cannot profit.

9 Will ye steal, murder, and commit adultery, and swear falsely, and burn incense unto Baal, and walk after other gods whom ye know not;

10 And come and stand before me in this house, which is called by my name, and say, We are delivered to do all these abominations?

11 Is this house, which is called by my name, become a den of robbers in your eyes? Behold, even I have seen it, saith the LORD.

21 Thus saith the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel; Put your burnt offerings unto your sacrifices, and eat flesh.

22 For I spake not unto your fathers, nor commanded them in the day that I brought them out of the land of Egypt, concerning burnt offerings or sacrifices:

23 But this thing commanded I them, saying, Obey my voice, and I will be your God, and ye shall be my people: and walk ye in all the ways that I have commanded you, that it may be well unto you.

## Key Text

*This thing commanded I them, saying, Obey my voice, and I will be your God, and ye shall be my people: and walk ye in all the ways that I have commanded you, that it may be well unto you. —Jeremiah 7:23*

# Judah, from Isaiah to the Exile

## Unit 2: Jeremiah and the Promise of Renewal

Lessons 5–9

### Lesson Aims

After participating in this lesson, each learner will be able to:

1. State what the Lord had commanded the people when He brought them out of Egypt.
2. Contrast the Judeans' daily activities with their temple worship practices.
3. Write a note that expresses gratitude to God for His rescue during a time of injustice.

### Lesson Outline

#### Introduction

- A. Trusting Lying Words
- B. Lesson Context

#### I. Message Introduced (Jeremiah 7:1–2)

- A. Imperative for the Prophet (vv. 1–2a)
- B. Imperative for the People (v. 2b)

#### II. Change Needed (Jeremiah 7:3–4)

- A. The Right Solution (v. 3)
- B. The Wrong Solution (v. 4)

#### III. Outcomes Desired (Jeremiah 7:5–7)

- A. Be Just (v. 5)
- B. Cease Oppression (v. 6a)
- C. Reject Idolatry (v. 6b)
- D. Dwell in the Land (v. 7)

#### IV. Hypocrisy Exposed (Jeremiah 7:8–11, 21–23)

- A. Misplaced Trust (v. 8)  
*Consequences of Blind Trust*
- B. Sin and Idolatry (v. 9)
- C. Deluded Thinking (vv. 10–11)
- D. Useless Sacrifices (vv. 21–23)  
*Comfort in God's Ways*

#### Conclusion

- A. Trusting the Wrong Thing
- B. Prayer
- C. Thought to Remember

## Introduction

### A. Trusting Lying Words

While doing short-term missions work in a foreign country, I once bought a name-brand wrist-watch for a low price. I was told by the seller that his watches were “seconds” from a factory in China that he obtained because they had minor defects. I loved that stylish timekeeper for a couple of years until it quit working. When I took it to a jeweler to have the battery replaced, he told me the watch was a fake. It was so convincing, he did not realize it until he removed its back and saw its cheap innards. Have you ever trusted in lies or deception, buying something you later realized was a fake?

Jeremiah identified the danger of trusting “lying words” as he spoke to the people of Jerusalem 2,600 years ago. The reason for his warning still holds true today, and the consequences in spiritual matters are far more serious than that of a fake watch.

### B. Lesson Context

As mentioned in Lesson 5, chapters 7 and 26 in the book of Jeremiah seem to be describing the same event, sometimes called the “Temple Sermon.” This is shortly after the death of King Josiah in a battle against the Egyptians in 609 BC (2 Kings 23:29). Various indicators suggest that Jeremiah’s message in today’s lesson was delivered early in the reign of King Jehoiakim (originally named Elia-kim), son of Josiah (Jeremiah 1:3; 26:1). Jehoiakim had been installed by Pharaohnechoh as a vassal ruler who was required to pay a steep tribute to Egypt (2 Kings 23:34–35). Jehoiakim ruled for 11 years but was eventually exiled to Babylon after he rebelled against Nebuchadnezzar (2 Chronicles 36:5–6). Jehoiakim’s evil influence is evident in the nearly two dozen mentions of his name in the book of Jeremiah.

By profession, Jeremiah was a priest who lived in the village of Anathoth (Jeremiah 1:1), about three miles northeast of Jerusalem. Regarding his appointment to be a prophet, see last week’s lesson. A trip from Anathoth to the temple would have taken him an hour or so. This made it possible for him to come quickly to the temple in his role as a prophet and deliver a message from the Lord.

# I. Message Introduced

(Jeremiah 7:1–2)

## A. Imperative for the Prophet (vv. 1–2a)

**1–2a. The word that came to Jeremiah from the LORD, saying, Stand in the gate of the LORD's house, and proclaim there this word, and say.**

The primary task of a prophet is to communicate God's *word* to whomever He directs. And Jeremiah receives direction in this regard numerous times in the book that bears his name.

*The gate of the Lord's house*, where the message is to be proclaimed, is a strategic choice of location. The content of the message that is to come establishes why this is so.

## B. Imperative for the People (v. 2b)

**2b. Hear the word of the LORD, all ye of Judah, that enter in at these gates to worship the LORD.**

The message is targeted specifically toward those Judeans who *enter in at these gates to worship the Lord*. The sheer size of the territory of Judah, encompassing some 3,400 square miles, means that not all Judeans can make it to Jerusalem on a weekly basis to worship at the temple. So we don't really know how big the prophet's audience is. If it's during a yearly pilgrimage observance, the crowd could be many times larger than the average weekly attendance (Exodus 23:14–17; Deuteronomy 16:16).

# II. Change Needed

(Jeremiah 7:3–4)

## A. The Right Solution (v. 3)

**3. Thus saith the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, Amend your ways and your doings, and I will cause you to dwell in this place.**

Jeremiah identifies the source of his message with the synonymous expressions *the Lord of hosts* and *the God of Israel*. The two are one and the same. This doubled expression is a favorite of Jeremiah's. The two designations occur together more than 30 times in this book, compared to fewer than 10 times in the rest of the Old Testament.

The *hosts* in this sense are armies (see Jeremiah 50:25), the armies of heaven. Jeremiah's message is a simple if-then statement, with the words *if* and *then* being unstated although implied at this point; both will be stated plainly a bit later.

The positive action to take is stated with the word *amend*. The evil *ways* to be amended have just been specified in Jeremiah 6. These involve oppression, wickedness, and corruption (6:6–7, 28), among other sins.

## B. The Wrong Solution (v. 4)

**4. Trust ye not in lying words, saying, The temple of the LORD, The temple of the LORD, The temple of the LORD, are these.**

The foundational change is that the people must decide where they will place their *trust*. Will the people choose what they want to hear rather than what they need to hear, or vice versa? *Lying words* characterize the messages of the false prophets (Jeremiah 5:31; 14:14–15; 23:9–32). This problem is central to Jeremiah's message throughout the book.

Apparently, the people have been told by these charlatans that *the temple of the Lord* is inviolable and eternal. Thus they place their trust in a building rather than in the one whom the building is to honor (Jeremiah 7:14). The people seem to reason that if God intended to preserve the temple, then they, too, were protected from harm, regardless of their actions. Yet Jeremiah reminded them that, as far back as the time of King Hezekiah, they had been warned that the destruction of the temple was a possibility (26:18–19).

### What Do You Think?

What attracts people to believing or trusting in lies?

### Digging Deeper

How might God's people protect against believing falsehoods?

# III. Outcomes Desired

(Jeremiah 7:5–7)

## A. Be Just (v. 5)

**5. For if ye thoroughly amend your ways and**



**your doings; if ye thoroughly execute judgment between a man and his neighbour.**

Jeremiah goes on to specify the actions (*ways* and *doings*) that must change as trust is redirected. He demands an overhaul of the people’s behaviors that have brought the Lord displeasure. Right behaviors logically involve two general categories: things *to do* and things *not to do*. To *thoroughly execute judgment* fits the first category.

**B. Cease Oppression (v. 6a)**

**6a. If ye oppress not the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow, and shed not innocent blood in this place.**

Now the prophet turns to the second category, things *not to do*. Interestingly, *oppress not* later becomes the positive action “deliver him that is spoiled out of the hand of the oppressor” (Jeremiah 21:12). God’s concern is for *the stranger* (non-Israelite foreigners who live among the residents of Judah), *the fatherless* (orphans), and *the widow* (women who have lost the financial security of having a husband). God’s concern for this triad of the most vulnerable people is seen numerous times throughout the Old Testament (Deuteronomy 27:19, etc.). All three categories of people live day-to-day, destitute and susceptible to exploitation. That Jeremiah even needs to mention them indicates the callous attitude his hearers have toward the neediest among them (compare Jeremiah 5:28).

The person who seems to have led the way in the shedding of *innocent blood* is King Manasseh, who reigned over Judah a few decades earlier (2 Kings 21:16; 24:3–4). This refers to what have been called “judicial murders”: the execution of innocent people resulting from the perversion of

the courts. This is the antithesis of justice. The fact that the courts are being used for killing indicates violation of the ninth commandment, against false testimony (Exodus 20:16) and the sixth commandment, against murder (20:13). An Old Testament example of judicial murder is that of Naboth the Jezreelite (1 Kings 21). The most obvious example of the same in the New Testament is, of course, the crucifixion of Jesus (Matthew 26:59–61; 27:4). Jeremiah himself barely escapes this fate (Jeremiah 26:12–15).

**C. Reject Idolatry (v. 6b)**

**6b. Neither walk after other gods to your hurt.**

The worship of *other gods* is warned against and condemned numerous times in the Old Testament and is the first of the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20:3; Deuteronomy 5:7). To engage in such a practice is to worship idols (Isaiah 2:8, 20). The false prophets and evil kings lead the way in this regard (2 Kings 21:1–11; Jeremiah 2:8).

The sins of King Manasseh were so great that they became the primary factor in the Lord’s decision to punish Judah (Jeremiah 15:4). Manasseh reached the depth of spiritual depravity by sacrificing his son to a false god (2 Kings 21:6). Thus the sin of shedding innocent blood (considered above) connects with idol worship (compare Psalm 106:38). As Jeremiah warns, the Lord will not overlook such horrendous wickedness. The sin of idol worship is so serious that it is likened to adultery (Jeremiah 3:6–13; Ezekiel 23).

This self-delusion results in self-*hurt* as the people miss out on blessings from the real God. Instead, the people reap a harvest of what they’ve sown (Proverbs 11:18–19; 22:8; Galatians 6:7–8).

**D. Dwell in the Land (v. 7)**

**7. Then will I cause you to dwell in this place, in the land that I gave to your fathers, for ever and ever.**

This verse completes the if-then statement. If the people repent and abandon their oppressive and ungodly behavior, a promise awaits. The Lord will allow them to continue to live in Jerusalem and the surrounding regions of Judah and Ben-

**How to Say It**

Anathoth	An-uh-thoth.
Baal	Bay-ul.
Jehoiakim	Jeh-hoy-uh-kim.
Jezreelite	Jez-ree-el-ite.
Josiah	Jo-sigh-uh.
Manasseh	Muh-nass-uh.
Nebuchadnezzar	Neb-yuh-kud- <i>nez</i> -er.
Pharaohnechoh	Fair-o-nee-kow.

jamin, *the land that the Lord gave to their fathers*. Reference to this land invites a consideration of the time scale involved: the residents of Judah have been in the promised land for over 800 years! This is more than enough time for the people to have noticed and taken to heart the consequences of disobedience and the promises of obedience. But the people continually misinterpret events.

## IV. Hypocrisy Exposed

(Jeremiah 7:8–11, 21–23)

### A. Misplaced Trust (v. 8)

#### 8. Behold, ye trust in lying words, that cannot profit.

Jeremiah's message moves to the heart of the people's moral dysfunction. They have completely believed the *lying words* of their evil leaders and false prophets. This especially indicts the false prophets who have gained influence over the people. While lives built on lies may seem rewarding in the short term, God will not allow dishonesty and corruption to thrive in the long run. Those who believe lies *cannot profit* in the end. False prophets fail to yield profits!

### Consequences of Blind Trust

Alana, a trusting young woman, met a charming young man online named Michael. They quickly forged a friendship, and soon Alana was falling deeply for him. Michael seemed genuinely interested in her. She became captivated by him.

Michael charmed her with gifts, making all types of promises of a fairy-tale future. She never questioned his stories, although some details seemed inconsistent. Michael claimed he was an only child and that his parents were dead. When asked about his friends, he gave excuses for why Alana couldn't meet them.

One day, Alana got a frantic call from Michael saying he had an emergency and needed to borrow a large sum of money. Assured that he would pay her back, Alana agreed without hesitation. She met Michael and handed over the money.

That was the last day Alana saw Michael. Weeks turned into months; he was nowhere to be found. His cell phone was disconnected. The company

that he said he worked for confirmed he was never an employee. It was all a lie. Have you ever been deceived by someone? Were there signs you missed seeing that could have cued you into the lies?

—S. S.

### B. Sin and Idolatry (v. 9)

#### 9. Will ye steal, murder, and commit adultery, and swear falsely, and burn incense unto Baal, and walk after other gods whom ye know not.

Jeremiah's indictment includes charges of breaking six of the Ten Commandments (see Exodus 20:1–17; Deuteronomy 5:7–21). These are the prohibitions against theft (eighth commandment), *murder* (sixth), *adultery* (seventh), false witness (ninth), worship of *Baal* as an idol (second), and following *other gods* (first). The charge of idolatry is the most serious, and Baal is one of those "other gods." Jeremiah refers to Baal 12 times in his book, and in two of those cases the designation *Baal* is plural (Jeremiah 2:23; 9:14). Prophesying a century before Jeremiah, the prophet Hosea warned the northern kingdom of divided Israel likewise concerning the Baals (Hosea 2:13, 17; 11:2). They didn't listen either.

#### What Do You Think?

Why is it so easy to justify sinful behavior?

#### Digging Deeper

Where do you see hypocrisy present in your own life?

### C. Deluded Thinking (vv. 10–11)

#### 10. And come and stand before me in this house, which is called by my name, and say, We are delivered to do all these abominations?

It is not hard to imagine that Jeremiah's voice crescendos to a peak with this verse. He directly calls out their hypocrisy. Coming into the temple, "the Lord's house" (Jeremiah 7:2, above), and not experiencing pangs of guilt and remorse shows the depth of their depravity. They stand in the temple court believing they *are delivered* (allowed) to continue *to do all these abominations*.

**11. Is this house, which is called by my name, become a den of robbers in your eyes? Behold, even I have seen it, saith the LORD.**

Jeremiah's word from the Lord concludes this section by repeating the temple's designation as a *house, which is called by the Lord's name*. It is the Lord's "dwelling place" (Psalm 76:2), His "holy mountain" (Joel 3:17), a place where the people of Israel come to encounter their God. But more than that, it is the "Lord's house," a place to which the Lord has allowed His name to be attached. This means God's reputation is at stake. Unfortunately, since it has become *a den of robbers*, then the Lord's name has been dishonored. Tragically, God judges this to be the case, affirming, "*I have seen it.*"

Centuries later, Jesus draws on the imagery of this verse when He cleanses the temple (Matthew 21:13; Mark 11:17; Luke 19:46). At least one issue at that time will be the same as in Jeremiah's day: the corrupt temple leadership takes advantage of the weak for their own gain. Even worse, the temple leaders of Jesus' day plot His death so that they can hold on to their own power (John 11:48).

**What Do You Think?**

What are actions you deem inappropriate for doing inside a dedicated place of worship?

**Digging Deeper**

Are such actions inappropriate in some places but appropriate elsewhere?

**D. Useless Sacrifice (vv. 21–23)**

**21. Thus saith the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel; Put your burnt offerings unto your sacrifices, and eat flesh.**

Jeremiah's repeated use of the extended title *the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel* (see Jeremiah 7:3, above) underlines the serious tone of this section as the prophet introduces sarcasm. In effect, Jeremiah is saying, "Go right on ahead and continue violating the rules about *burnt offerings*, and see how things turn out!"

Burnt offerings were sacrifices in which a whole animal was burned on the altar in the courtyard of the temple, a task that Jeremiah himself had likely

undertaken as a priest. Such a sacrifice would be fully consumed by fire (see Exodus 29:18; Leviticus 1, 6:8–13). The phrase *unto your sacrifices* refers to the general (and generally improper) way the original readers are conducting all their sacrifices, burnt offerings being only one part of those.

**What Do You Think?**

What are ways Christians might perform the right action but lack the right heart posture?

**Digging Deeper**

How can we develop a greater awareness of when we are merely "going through the motions"?

**22. For I spake not unto your fathers, nor commanded them in the day that I brought them out of the land of Egypt, concerning burnt offerings or sacrifices.**

Some have claimed that this verse nullifies the entire sacrificial system of Israel and its temple as a later addition to the duties of the people of Israel, but this is unlikely. Jeremiah has high respect for the Pentateuch (the first five books of the Old Testament), which include detailed instructions on *burnt offerings or sacrifices*. We must understand the message here in light of the next verse.

**23. But this thing commanded I them, saying, Obey my voice, and I will be your God, and ye shall be my people: and walk ye in all the ways that I have commanded you, that it may be well unto you.**

Simply put, proper sacrifices result from obeying the *voice* of God. While performing temple rituals may have quieted the consciences of some of the people, they must listen to the Lord's *voice* and walk *in all the ways* that He has commanded, not just some of them or just the ones that are most convenient. Obedience to the law is required. But that by itself isn't enough. God does not delight in insincere sacrifices (see Amos 5:22). Without the correct posture of heart and subsequent action, their sacrifices are useless and meaningless (Hosea 6:6; Matthew 9:13; 12:7).

In Jeremiah's situation, no one seems to listen and repent (Jeremiah 8:6). His numerous ene-

mies include “the kings of Judah, . . . the princes thereof, . . . the priests thereof, and . . . the people of the land” (1:18).

Some readers today may wonder whether Jeremiah holds out hope that some will heed his message, turn from their wickedness, and claim the promise of future blessing. That’s a natural question to ask, but the more important idea is that when the fair warning proves to be true, the reality of who is a true prophet of God and who is not will be established (Jeremiah 28:9).

### What Do You Think?

How does obeying God’s Word affect your relationship with Him?

### Digging Deeper

What are ways to foster obedience to God from a place of love, joy, and delight?

## Comfort in God’s Ways

When life feels full and difficult, I wrongly tend to seek comfort in control. At such times, if something doesn’t go my way, I get frustrated. Too often I find myself fighting against the Lord’s ways, insisting on my own instead.

However, as much as the allure of control may drive and attract me, eventually I realize that my actions are causing harm. Choosing my own stubbornness wreaks havoc on my closest relationships. Instead of submitting to the way of love and humility, I fume—alone—in my stubborn anger.

Once I finally yield to God’s ways, I find true comfort and peace. Taking the Lord’s way—heeding how He wants us to live our lives in relationship with Him and with one another—gives life. Along such paths, it will go well with us. When are times you struggle with submitting to God’s ways, taking your own paths instead? How can you work toward returning to His ways more readily in the future?

—J. J. S.

## Conclusion

### A. Trusting the Wrong Thing

Like Jeremiah’s audience for the “Temple Ser-



Visual for Lesson 6. *Point to this visual and ask participants to suggest ways they can walk in obedience in the upcoming week.*

mon,” Christians have been known to place their trust in things that are temporary. Individual churches rise and fall in every community. Powerful preachers and teachers do not last forever. Glorious structures once full of worshippers may become condominiums or nightclubs. How can we avoid trusting in the earthly and temporary?

The false solution held by the original hearers of Jeremiah’s sermon was a vacuous mantra, “The temple of the Lord! The temple of the Lord! The temple of the Lord!” They viewed the building itself as a kind of talisman or good-luck charm. They refused to face divine reality even after its destruction (Jeremiah 44:17–18).

The underlying themes of Jeremiah’s plea still apply. The Lord wants a relationship based on our willing obedience, not insincere ritual. The Lord wants worship that comes from sincere hearts, not just the trappings of outward devotion. While Jeremiah died 25 centuries ago, his message is timeless. We are wise to heed his call to hear the voice of the Lord and respond with repentance and obedience.

### B. Prayer

Father, may we listen to Your voice as found in Scripture and respond with repentance and obedience. We pray in the name of Jesus, who values mercy more than sacrifice. Amen.

### C. Thought to Remember

False prophets yield false profits.

# Involvement Learning

*Enhance your lesson with KJV Bible Student (from your curriculum supplier) and the reproducible activity page (at [www.standardlesson.com](http://www.standardlesson.com) or in the back of the KJV Standard Lesson Commentary Deluxe Edition).*

## Into the Lesson

Ask participants to brainstorm traditions specific to your congregation. Write responses on the board. Ask if anyone knows the history of these traditions and how they began in the congregation. Participants should be allowed to use smartphones to research the history of these traditions if needed.

As time allows, ask when people have tried to change traditions and failed. Include a discussion regarding why the attempt to make changes failed.

Lead into the Bible study by saying, “Change can be difficult. Many people find security in traditions and preferences. In today’s lesson, we will see how a refusal to change, despite God’s prompting, ultimately led to God’s judgment of Judah.”

## Into the Word

Divide participants into pairs. Ask participants to recount an instance when they only got half the story right. Then ask participants to explain what happened when they learned the “whole story” and their reaction after that realization. Encourage pairs to create a definition of *half-truth*. Reconvene the class and allow each pair to share their definitions.

Have a volunteer read aloud Jeremiah 7:1–11, 21–23. Use the following questions for whole-class discussion of how the people may have been guilty of worshiping with half-truths: 1–What did the Lord command the people when He brought them out of Egypt? 2–In what ways had the people not been obedient to this command? 3–How had the people demonstrated their trust in half-truths: “lying words, that cannot profit” (Jeremiah 7:8)? 4–How would you summarize Jeremiah’s message in this passage?

Ask a volunteer to reread Jeremiah 7:23 aloud. Conclude this section by asking the following

questions for whole-class discussion: 1–How would you describe the relationship between God and His people? 2–How could the people obey God and walk in His commands?

*Option.* Distribute copies of the “A Den of Robbers” exercise from the activity page, which you can download. Have learners work in pairs to complete as indicated. After calling time, ask volunteers to share results.

*Option 2.* Share the “rest of the story” with your participants by saying, “Not long after Jeremiah confronted the people, the Babylonians conquered Jerusalem, destroyed the temple, and placed many residents of Judah into exile. God gave the people opportunities to repent. He warned them that their disobedience would lead to their destruction. They didn’t listen.”

## Into Life

Ask participants to spend one minute in personal self-reflection about a time when God rescued them from a time of oppression or injustice. Invite them to share their examples with the whole class.

Distribute an index card and pen to each participant. Direct participants to write a note of gratitude to God for His rescue during a time of oppression or injustice. Remind your students that God warns and gives numerous opportunities for us to repent and turn back to Him. We shouldn’t take that for granted. Such a loving God deserves our love and obedience.

Conclude class time by asking for volunteers to read their prayers out loud as an act of corporate prayer.

*Alternative.* Distribute copies of the “Expression of Gratitude” exercise from the activity page. Offer the exercise as a take-home activity and encourage completion by reminding learners that they will have time to share results in the next class if they desire.

# A Family's Example

Devotional Reading: 2 Corinthians 6:16–7:4

Background Scripture: Jeremiah 35:1–19

## Jeremiah 35:5–11

5 And I set before the sons of the house of the Rechabites pots full of wine, and cups, and I said unto them, Drink ye wine.

6 But they said, We will drink no wine: for Jonadab the son of Rechab our father commanded us, saying, Ye shall drink no wine, neither ye, nor your sons for ever:

7 Neither shall ye build house, nor sow seed, nor plant vineyard, nor have any: but all your days ye shall dwell in tents; that ye may live many days in the land where ye be strangers.

8 Thus have we obeyed the voice of Jonadab the son of Rechab our father in all that he hath charged us, to drink no wine all our days, we, our wives, our sons, nor our daughters;

9 Nor to build houses for us to dwell in: neither have we vineyard, nor field, nor seed:

10 But we have dwelt in tents, and have obeyed, and done according to all that Jonadab our father commanded us.

11 But it came to pass, when Nebuchadrezzar king of Babylon came up into the land, that we said, Come, and let us go to Jerusalem for fear of the army of the Chaldeans, and for fear of the army of the Syrians: so we dwell at Jerusalem.



## Key Text

*For unto this day they drink none, but obey their father's commandment. —Jeremiah 35:14b*



# Judah, from Isaiah to the Exile

## Unit 2: Jeremiah and the Promise of Renewal

Lessons 5–9

### Lesson Aims

After participating in this lesson, each learner will be able to:

1. Identify the invitation and reply regarding wine.
2. Compare and contrast the decision to abstain from wine with similar and dissimilar decisions elsewhere in Scripture.
3. Consider a family tradition that he or she could implement to remind family members to be faithful to God's commands.

### Lesson Outline

#### Introduction

- A. Traditions for Stability
- B. Lesson Context

#### I. Ancestral Practice (Jeremiah 35:5–6)

- A. Wine Offered (v. 5)
- B. Wine Refused (v. 6)  
*Intentionally Marked*

#### II. Full Obedience (Jeremiah 35:7–10)

- A. No Houses or Crops (v. 7)
- B. No Deviations (vv. 8–10)

#### III. Necessary Relocation (Jeremiah 35:11)

- A. Avoiding the Armies (v. 11a)
- B. Sheltering in Jerusalem (v. 11b)  
*Flexibility Required*

#### Conclusion

- A. Traditions for Faithfulness
- B. Prayer
- C. Thought to Remember

## Introduction

### A. Traditions for Stability

In the musical *Fiddler on the Roof*, viewers are oriented by the first and well-known song, “Tradition.” The main character, Tevya, acts as a guide throughout the song, telling how traditions help his Jewish community maintain its sense of balance and cohesiveness. After describing one of the traditions he and his fellow Jews follow, Tevya raises a question: “How did this tradition get started? I’ll tell you. I don’t know.” Then he adds emphatically, “But it’s a tradition. And because of our traditions, every one of us knows who he is and what God expects him to do.” Later Tevya declares that, without the traditions guiding him and his fellow Jews, “our lives would be as shaky as a fiddler on the roof.”

That’s an interesting philosophy, and it can be very appealing with regard to family unity. But a given tradition’s ultimate value is validated only insofar as it aligns with God’s Word (Matthew 15:1–7; compare Luke 14:26). Today’s Scripture text from the book of Jeremiah invites us to explore this connection.

### B. Lesson Context

Today’s lesson is the third in a series of five from the book of Jeremiah. The overall context is the same as those: Jeremiah’s 40-year prophetic ministry was to warn the people of Judah of God’s judgment to come at the hands of the Babylonians. This was to happen because of the Judeans’ sinfulness and rebellion against the Lord.

Our Scripture text for today’s lesson records events that took place “in the days of Jehoiakim the son of Josiah king of Judah,” which is the period 609–598 BC (Jeremiah 35:1). To understand the significance of this time frame, we should view it against the larger backdrop of three chronological pressure points of Babylonian dominance in Palestine. Those three are the years 605, 597, and 586 BC; they are the years the Judeans were carried into exile in successive stages (2 Kings 24:1, 12; 25:1–21). The reference in Jeremiah 35:11 to a family’s relocation to Jeru-

salem due to Babylonian incursion indicates that the invasion of 605 BC is in view.

Those were indeed turbulent times. In an earthly sense, there were power struggles between the world powers of Assyria and Babylon. Nineveh, the capital of Assyria, fell in 612 BC. Babylon's victory at the epic Battle of Carchemish in 605 BC (Jeremiah 46:2) meant the passing of one oppressor only to be replaced by a new one. Is it any wonder that Jeremiah felt inadequate for his task (1:6)?

The incident in today's text occurred at roughly the halfway point in Jeremiah's 40-year efforts to convince God's people to repent of their wrongdoing and return to the Lord. These efforts included use of some rather striking visual aids as teaching tools, all commanded by God: a soiled linen "girdle" or sash (Jeremiah 13:1–11), a visit to a potter's house (18:1–11), and the wearing of a makeshift yoke to symbolize submission to Babylon (27:1–7). Today's Scripture text records yet another visual aid by which Jeremiah tried to appeal to an increasingly wayward people.

A footnote: Jeremiah 35:3 mentions "Jaazaniah the son of Jeremiah," but he is a different Jeremiah than the prophet (compare Jeremiah 1:1 with 35:3).

## I. Ancestral Practice

(Jeremiah 35:5–6)

### A. Wine Offered (v. 5)

**5. And I set before the sons of the house of the Rechabites pots full of wine, and cups, and I said unto them, Drink ye wine.**

The opening verses of Jeremiah 35 establish the time, place, and persons of the teaching illustration that is about to unfold. Jeremiah is meeting with *the sons of the house of the Rechabites* and offering them *wine to drink* because of the Lord's command to do so (Jeremiah 35:2). Other than in this chapter of Jeremiah, the Bible reveals little about the Rechabites. A genealogy listing locates them as being from the tribe of Judah (1 Chronicles 2:55), at least at first glance. A closer look, however, reveals that they are descendants of "the Kenites," whose identity, loyalty, and actions are sketched in Numbers 24:21–22; Judges 1:6; 4:11, 17; and 1 Samuel 15:6.

### What Do You Think?

Consider a recent time when your deeply held convictions were challenged. What did you do?

### Digging Deeper

Looking back on that situation, how would God have been honored or dishonored if you had acted differently?

### B. Wine Refused (v. 6)

**6. But they said, We will drink no wine: for Jonadab the son of Rechab our father commanded us, saying, Ye shall drink no wine, neither ye, nor your sons for ever.**

The Rechabites' response to Jeremiah's offer is immediate and firm: *We will drink no wine*. They base this decision on the instructions of *Jonadab the son of Rechab*, a forefather of some 200 years previous. He was a prominent leader among the Rechabites during the time of King Jehu (reigned 841–814 BC). Jonadab knew the king personally and had been invited on a "ride along" to help the king abolish idol worship in Samaria, part of the northern kingdom of divided Israel (2 Kings 10:15–17). The southern kingdom of Judah was not immune to such influences, as Jeremiah well knew (Jeremiah 11:13; 32:35, etc.).

Jonadab's specific reason for the prohibition is unknown. Wine is depicted in both positive and cautionary ways, depending on the context. In the Old Testament, wine is depicted as a source of refreshment and delight (Psalm 104:15; Zechariah 10:7) and is associated with the blessing of the Lord (Genesis 27:28; Deuteronomy 7:13; 11:14). Wine was used during celebratory occasions (Genesis 14:17–20; Isaiah 25:6), though it certainly was possible to abuse it as illustrated by Noah (Genesis 9:20–23; compare Proverbs 23:29–35; Isaiah 5:11, 22).

Wine was prohibited to those engaged in special service to the Lord (Leviticus 10:8–9) and to those who had taken a Nazarite vow (Numbers 6:1–3). At the same time, wine was included in certain offerings to the Lord (Leviticus 23:13; Numbers 15:5, etc.). Cups of wine are also used

to symbolize the wrath and judgment of the Lord (Psalm 75:8; Revelation 14:10; 16:19).

The book of Jeremiah itself illustrates this variety of approaches to wine, using it to describe scenes of both celebration (Jeremiah 31:12) and judgment (25:15). Jeremiah even compared himself to a “drunken man . . . whom wine hath overcome,” so disturbed was he at the lies being spread by the false prophets of his day (23:9).

Perhaps Jonadab desired his descendants to participate in the Nazarite vow (or something similar) in order to reflect passionate devotion to the Lord (compare Judges 13:1–7). Possibly such abstinence could serve as a deterrent to taking part in Baal worship or other pagan religious practices. Jeremiah 35:7, next, seems to offer the bigger-picture answer.

### What Do You Think?

What are examples of traditions or habits you have inherited from a family member?

### Digging Deeper

Which of these traditions or habits do you find fruitful? Which are potentially harmful?

## Intentionally Marked

My grandfather loved to be the videographer at family gatherings. I saw a few of his clips when I was a kid, and there was something distinct in all of them: his trademark. We knew the films were his because at some point during filming, he would turn the camera upside down. He was known for his shenanigans, and not just when behind the camera. This quirky tradition marks every film he made.

As my grandfather’s films bore his “trademark,” my faith is marked by the things I do with consistency. It’s often been easy for me to fall into patterns. Continued long enough, these patterns may become traditions. While these patterns can be good, at times—if I’m honest—they can be questionable. Perhaps like me, you adopt the same prayer posture or return to the same requests. Maybe you insist on doing your devotions at the same time each day. Occasionally, I wonder whether I’ve been

as eager to follow God as I’ve been to follow my routines. When I recognize this, I ask God to help me see things in a new way. As you hold your own routines and traditions before your heavenly Father, what would He say about them? —B. R.

## II. Full Obedience

(Jeremiah 35:7–10)

### A. No Houses or Crops (v. 7)

**7. Neither shall ye build house, nor sow seed, nor plant vineyard, nor have any: but all your days ye shall dwell in tents; that ye may live many days in the land where ye be strangers.**

This verse offers some insight as to Jonadab’s command to abstain from drinking wine. The restriction seems to be part of a larger pool of prohibitions to improve chances of long life. The picture of living *in tents* is that of a nomadic, easily movable lifestyle as contrasted with a settled, agrarian one. The latter would require planting *seed* for the harvesting of grain and the cultivation of a *vineyard* for making wine (compare and contrast the use of the words *house(s)* and *vineyard(s)* in Deuteronomy 28:30; Isaiah 65:21–22; Jeremiah 32:15; etc.).

To forego all the trappings that accompany a settled life carries with it the possibility of both positive and negative results. The positive is the envisioned longer life, perhaps based on the idea that there won’t be a temptation to resist an invading army to protect house and crops. In this sense the people of the tribe would be *strangers* in and to the land. There also would not be a temptation of defilement by mixing seed (Leviticus 19:19; Deuteronomy 22:9). Negatively, one can see a risk of legalism as human prohibitions add to and supersede God’s Word (compare Matthew 15:1–9; Mark 7:9–13).

Various factors may have contributed to Jonadab’s requirement of a mobile lifestyle. One should keep in mind the challenging times in which he lived in the 800s BC. The worship of Baal was heavily promoted in the northern kingdom of Israel, primarily by King Ahab, who was spurred on by his evil wife, Jezebel (1 Kings 21:25). Jezebel had no scruples whatsoever about seizing the vineyard of Naboth, a godly man whose devo-

tion to the Lord's law prevented him from selling his vineyard to Ahab, who had his heart set on possessing it (1 Kings 21:1–7). The depth of her depravity is evident in the steps she took to have Naboth executed on false charges so Ahab could have his vineyard (21:8–16). Perhaps Jonadab concluded that not owning property such as a vineyard was one way to avoid the malicious intentions of power-mad individuals such as Jezebel and Ahab. The Lord's prophets indicted ruthless men who abused their power and took houses and fields at will from those who had no ability to resist them (Micah 2:1–2, etc.). Perhaps for Jonadab and his fellow Rechabites, the philosophy was, "You can't lose what you don't have."

But there may be a simpler explanation still. Sale of property was highly restrictive in the promised land (Leviticus 25:13–34; Numbers 36). So perhaps Jonadab just decided to go with the flow that a nomadic lifestyle offered in the environment. Additionally, a nomadic lifestyle reflected that of the patriarch Abraham (Hebrews 11:9–10).

#### What Do You Think?

What about being a Christian causes you to feel like you "stand out" among others you know?

#### Digging Deeper

If asked about why your life shows these differences, how would you respond?

#### B. No Deviations (vv. 8–10)

**8–9. Thus have we obeyed the voice of Jonadab the son of Rechab our father in all that he hath charged us, to drink no wine all our days, we, our wives, our sons, nor our daughters; nor to build houses for us to dwell in: neither have we vineyard, nor field, nor seed.**

The Rechabites exhibit complete compliance to their ancestor Jonadab's desire. We don't know precisely how the Rechabites survived under such a restrictive lifestyle, but evidently they had up to that point. Perhaps Jonadab, again in deference to Abraham, taught his family to walk by faith and to trust that God would provide their daily needs.

#### What Do You Think?

What helps traditions or habits to "catch on" within a family?

#### Digging Deeper

What traditions or habits would you like to foster in your family or community?  
How would you help these "catch on"?

**10. But we have dwelt in tents, and have obeyed, and done according to all that Jonadab our father commanded us.**

More than 200 years have passed since Jonadab's lifetime, and the Rechabites remain faithful in their obedience to his requirements. The promised land had experienced much turmoil since his day, including the conquest of the northern kingdom in 722 BC. Yet the Rechabites find Jonadab's desire still valuable and workable. At some level, this can illustrate what God intends for His covenant people so that faithful obedience to Him can be passed on generation after generation.

### III. Necessary Relocation

(Jeremiah 35:11)

#### A. Avoiding the Armies (v. 11a)

**11a. But it came to pass, when Nebuchadrezzar king of Babylon came up into the land, that we said, Come, and let us go to Jerusalem for fear of the army of the Chaldeans, and for fear of the army of the Syrians.**

Here we learn why the Rechabites are in Jerusalem and available to receive the invitation to drink wine. The Babylonian king *Nebuchadrezzar* (an alternate spelling of *Nebuchadnezzar*) had begun his invasion of Judah in 605 BC, the fourth year of Jehoiakim's reign (Jeremiah 25:1). Accordingly, the Rechabites' plan of relocation described in this verse may have occurred not long after they learned that Nebuchadnezzar and his troops were on their way. The Babylonians' brutality was probably well-known throughout the territory. This verse refers to them as *the Chaldeans*, which is another name for them.

The Rechabites calculated that it would be safer for them to enter well-fortified Jerusalem rather



Visual for Lesson 7. As you discuss Jeremiah 35:10, point to this visual and ask participants to share a tradition that could point others to God.

than risk being overrun by two armies. Jerusalem would in time prove unable to resist the Babylonians; several passages make clear that the Lord was allowing the Babylonians to serve as the instruments of His judgment in attacking Jerusalem (2 Chronicles 36:15–21; Jeremiah 34:1–2, etc.).

During their invasion of Judah, the Babylonians secure the assistance of other peoples. These include those who had once been subject to the Israelites and are eager for revenge. The Syrians had faced more dealings with the now-exiled northern kingdom of Israel since their territory lay just to the northeast of Israel. Conflicts between the Syrians and the northern kingdom became especially frequent during the reign of King Ahab and the ministries of the prophets Elijah and Elisha in the 800s BC (1 Kings 20–21; 2 Kings 6:8–7:20, etc.). But the Syrians had also come under the control of King David during the expansion of his kingdom (see 2 Samuel 8:5–6). We easily imagine that they were more than willing to administer any “payback.”

## B. Sheltering in Jerusalem (v. 11b)

### 11b. So we dwell at Jerusalem.

We can see from this turn of events that Jonadab’s instructions about living as nomadic “strangers” were not considered inviolable. Should circumstances change and the Rechabites’ find themselves threatened by deadly force, they did not see themselves to be betraying Jonadab by shifting

to self-preservation mode. This may be seen as a kind of “rigid flexibility” or “flexible rigidity.”

The point of this real-life illustration is driven home in the eight verses that follow this one. God, through the prophet Jeremiah, challenges the people of Judah and *Jerusalem* to learn from the Rechabites’ example of faithfully following the instructions of their ancestor (Jeremiah 35:12–16). The message is delivered in the form of what is called an *a fortiori* argument. This kind of logical argument takes a “how much more” format, either stated or implied. Here, the idea is, “If the Rechabites can follow their ancestor’s instructions faithfully, how much more should you residents of Judah follow the instructions of your heavenly Father?”

These *a fortiori* arguments in the Bible are particularly important in Paul’s letter to the Romans for proving the reality of God’s grace (Romans 5:9–10, 15, 17; 11:24). If only God’s covenant people had followed the Lord’s instructions that faithfully! Blessings awaited for doing so. Refusal to obey was inconsistent with logic.

Because they refused to listen to and obey the Lord’s voice, judgment was inevitable. The final statement in Jeremiah’s message to the people in this chapter conveys the Lord’s disappointment: “I have spoken unto them, but they have not heard; and I have called unto them, but they have not answered” (Jeremiah 35:17).

## How to Say It

<i>a fortiori</i>	a for-she-or-eye.
Ahab	Ay-hab.
Assyria	Uh-sear-e-uh.
Babylonians	Bab-ih- <b>low</b> -nee-unz.
Chaldeans	Kal- <b>dee</b> -unz.
Jaazaniah	Jay-ah-zuh-nye-uh.
Jonadab	John-uh-dab.
Kenite	Ken-ite.
Nazarite	Naz-uh-rite.
Nebuchadnezzar	Neb-yuh-kud- <b>nez</b> -er.
Nebuchadrezzar	Neb-uh-kad- <b>rez</b> -er.
Rechabites	Reck-uh-bites.
Samaria	Suh-mare-ee-uh.
Syrians	Sear-ee-unz.



Also notable is a contrast with King Jehoiakim in the next chapter (Jeremiah 36). That chapter opens by noting the time to be the fourth year of his reign, or about 605 BC (compare Jeremiah 25:1). Here, the Lord yet again tries to get the attention and obedience of both king and people, this time via a written scroll (36:1–3). With the Babylonian invasion underway (36:9), the message on the scroll did cause fear among the people, but not changed behavior (36:16).

In contrast with the Rechabites, King Jehoiakim did not follow the godly example of his father, Josiah (see 2 Kings 23:25). Instead of heeding God’s message, Jehoiakim cut the scroll in pieces and burned them (Jeremiah 36:22–23). This demonstrated his utter contempt for God’s words. This action contrasted sharply with that of his father, who in anguish tore not the message but his clothes when he realized how far the people had strayed from the Lord’s words (2 Kings 22:11). Jehoiakim was demonstrating disrespect not only for his father, but for the Lord as well.

### What Do You Think?

When have you had to reconsider a deeply held-to tradition or habit, whether to be consistent or to change course?

### Digging Deeper

What sort of circumstances would justify the changing of a long-held tradition or habit?

## Flexibility Required

When we have tried-and-true methods that faithfully produce good results, it can be difficult—and sometimes even unnecessary—to question our ways. But occasionally, extenuating circumstances upend “the way we’ve always done it.”

This was certainly the case in education in recent years. During the initial months of the COVID-19 lockdown, remote instruction became the norm for teachers all over the world. Overnight, their tried-and-true methods no longer worked. Activities and methods always used to teach certain concepts were set aside. Faced with unprecedented

months of being unable to gather in person, it was clear that something needed to change.

Such necessary adaptations didn’t mean that the former ways were bad. Rather, new circumstances demanded a shift. We can struggle to know when to hold fast to our traditions and when we should loosen our grips due to a change in circumstances. The important qualifier is what God is asking from us, not what makes us comfortable. Is there a tradition that you need to bring before God, asking for His wisdom to evaluate? —B. R.

## Conclusion

### A. Traditions for Faithfulness

Traditions are a double-edged sword. Often the very word *tradition* carries a negative connotation. It can be associated with an old-fashioned, out-of-date practice that people adhere to with little, if any, thought about its significance. We do something a certain way because “that’s the way we’ve always done it.” In a positive sense, traditions can help us not repeat mistakes of the past as we walk in faithful obedience to the Lord’s commands.

While the Rechabites’ traditions are not necessary for us to follow today—nor were they for all people of that time—their example of faithfulness ought to serve as an inspiration. In sharp contrast to the Israelites, who lived in sin and failed to repent of their wicked ways, the Rechabites lived in obedience to the ways set down by their father, Jonadab: ways that did not conflict with God’s Word. May we follow their example when it comes to heeding God’s Word, walking in faithful obedience to how He has called us to live.

### B. Prayer

Father, grant us the courage to examine our traditions and the wisdom to know which to keep, which to modify, and which to abandon. May our traditions always be a way of serving You as You would have us. Use us to encourage the formation of families and communities who honor You. In Jesus’ name. Amen.

### C. Thought to Remember

Use traditions to foster faithfulness to God.



# Involvement Learning

Enhance your lesson with KJV Bible Student (from your curriculum supplier) and the reproducible activity page (at [www.standardlesson.com](http://www.standardlesson.com) or in the back of the KJV Standard Lesson Commentary Deluxe Edition).

## Into the Lesson

Write the following phrase on the board:

*What it means to be in my family.*

Distribute an index card and a pen to each learner and instruct them to write a sentence that describes their family's legacy. Collect the cards and select three to read aloud. As time allows, give learners time to talk about what legacy means and how essential legacies and traditions are in society—even when society seems to be quickly changing.

*Alternative.* Distribute copies of the “Family Traditions” exercise from the activity page, which you can download. Have learners complete it individually in a minute or less before discussing results with a partner.

Lead into the Bible study by saying, “In today's lesson, pay attention to what a family's legacy and traditions indicate about their beliefs and values. Consider why Jeremiah points this family out as a notable example to God's people.”

## Into the Word

Divide the class into two groups: **Context Group** and **Legacy Group**. Distribute a sheet of paper and pen to each group. Instruct the groups to list the following words as headers on their sheets of paper: *Who, What, When, Where, and Why*.

Ask a volunteer to read aloud Jeremiah 35:5–6. Direct the groups to read the following passages and use the question words to compare the passage with Jeremiah 35:5–6.

**Context Group:** Jeremiah 35:1–4.

**Legacy Group:** 2 Kings 10:15–28.

After calling time, direct learners to pair up with someone from the other group and share their notes with each other.

*Option.* Distribute copies of the “Family Tree” activity from the activity page. Have learners work in small groups to complete as indicated.

Ask a volunteer to read aloud Jeremiah 35:7–10. Direct the two groups to list the rules and traditions that Jonadab established for his family and discuss how each listed item indicates a temporary or unsettled lifestyle. Then, ask the groups to compare Jeremiah 35:7–10 with Hebrews 11:13–16.

Bring the groups back together and ask the following question for whole-class discussion: “How might the strict nomadic lifestyle of the Rechabites be an indicator of their faith in God?”

Ask a volunteer to read aloud Jeremiah 35:11. Divide learners into three groups: **Faithful Group**, **Inconsistent Group**, and **Rebellious Group**. Ask the groups to discuss how the Rechabites' decision to dwell in Jerusalem might be seen as faithful, inconsistent, or rebellious to the command given to them by their ancestor. Challenge them to develop two or three points to defend their position and share it with the class. They could include other examples from Scripture where people showed faithfulness to God through abstaining or not abstaining from wine, if that helps their arguments.

Have each group present their argument(s) before the whole class. For whole-class discussion, ask, “Why are the Rechabites used as an example of faithfulness and obedience?”

## Into Life

Ask a volunteer to read Jeremiah 35:14b aloud to the whole class. Say, “God held up the Rechabites as an example of faithfulness and steadfast obedience, honoring their ancestor and their family.”

Invite learners to brainstorm a family tradition they might establish that could be passed down to future generations. Invite learners to share their ideas with a partner. Ask, “What testimony could this tradition demonstrate to others about your family's faith and commitment to the Lord?”

Challenge learners to work on implementing their traditions during the week.

# Changes Promised

Devotional Reading: Psalm 103:17–22

Background Scripture: Jeremiah 31:1–40; John 1:17; Hebrews 8:7–13

## Jeremiah 31:29–34

29 In those days they shall say no more, The fathers have eaten a sour grape, and the children's teeth are set on edge.

30 But every one shall die for his own iniquity: every man that eateth the sour grape, his teeth shall be set on edge.

31 Behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah:

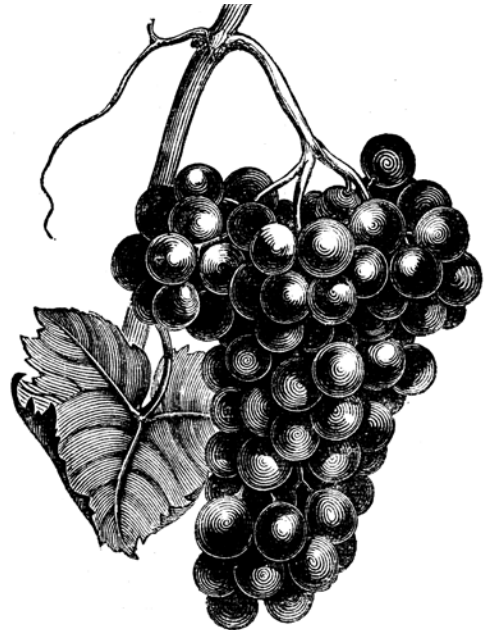
32 Not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt; which my covenant they brake, although I was an husband unto them, saith the LORD:

33 But this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; After those days, saith the LORD, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people.

34 And they shall teach no more every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the LORD: for they shall all know me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them, saith the LORD: for I will forgive their iniquity, And I will remember their sin no more.

## John 1:17

17 For the law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ.



## Key Text

*I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people. —Jeremiah 31:33b*

# Judah, from Isaiah to the Exile

## Unit 2: Jeremiah and the Promise of Renewal

Lessons 5–9

### Lesson Aims

After participating in this lesson, each learner will be able to:

1. Locate the two places in the New Testament that quote Jeremiah 31:31–34.
2. Harmonize Jeremiah 31:29–30 with Exodus 20:5; 34:7.
3. Notice the Holy Spirit’s work of bringing awareness of sin and giving desires to love God faithfully.

### Lesson Outline

#### Introduction

- A. Better than Before
- B. Lesson Context

#### I. Change in Attitude (Jeremiah 31:29–30)

- A. Old Proverb (v. 29)
  - B. New Reality (v. 30)
- Shirking Responsibility*

#### II. Change in Covenant (Jeremiah 31:31–34)

- A. Why It’s Needed (vv. 31–32)
  - B. How It’s Different (vv. 33–34)
- Action from the Heart*

#### III. Change in Mediator (John 1:17)

- A. Law (v. 17a)
- B. Grace and Truth (v. 17b)

#### Conclusion

- A. Fresh Start
- B. Prayer
- C. Thought to Remember

## Introduction

### A. Better than Before

Moving into a house with no built-in dishwasher, my father bought a used portable model, the kind that hooked up to the sink faucet with a hose. It was in good shape except for the top, a butcher block deeply scratched and stained. Dad decided to make it like new. It took him many months. Night after night, he would go out to our carport to sand it by hand. He must have sanded a half inch off the top of that butcher block to get past the deepest gouges.

When he was finally satisfied, he began to apply varnish. He would apply a coat, then sand it, and repeat. He must have applied 30 coats of varnish to that wood! When he was finished, it was clean and scratch-free, even better than new. That old butcher block was given a new life.

A vital theme of the Bible is the need and plan for a new covenant, a fresh beginning for God’s people. The gouges of sin were deep, and a thorough refresh was in order. Jeremiah was privileged to prophesy the future reality of that new covenant; we are privileged to experience it.

### B. Lesson Context

The book of Jeremiah serves more as a collection of episodes rather than a linear chronology of his ministry. As an example, the episode that begins in Jeremiah 32:1 occurs *after* the one that begins in chapter 36. Therefore we should not be surprised when tone and content change abruptly as the book moves from topic to topic. We see such an abrupt change as chapter 30 begins.

The way Jeremiah organized his material has led some to call Jeremiah 30–33 the “Book of Consolation” because its theme gives hope that the Babylonian captivity is not the final word. Today’s text takes us into the vital heart of this Book. As we consider our text, we keep in mind how it fits within the larger context: God promised to make the exiles His people once again (Jeremiah 30:22), to return them to their land (32:41), and to establish once and for all time the Davidic dynasty as originally promised (30:9; 33:15–26).

The overall theme of the Book of Consolation

is: “I will cause their captivity to return” (Jeremiah 32:44; see also 30:3, 18; 33:7, 26). The covenant theme of “Ye shall be my people, and I will be your God” is also repeated (30:22; see also 31:1; 32:38). The seemingly incurable wound (30:12, 15) could be healed only by the Lord (30:17). Chapter 31 depicts the coming restoration as a time of great blessing, when mourning would be turned into joy (31:13).

# I. Change in Attitude

(Jeremiah 31:29–30)

## A. Old Proverb (v. 29)

**29. In those days they shall say no more, The fathers have eaten a sour grape, and the children’s teeth are set on edge.**

Many changes are to characterize the forthcoming restoration (see Lesson Context), including the rejection of how a certain proverbial expression is misused. Those who are already exiled in Babylon are using this proverb to shift the blame and exonerate themselves (see Ezekiel 18:2).

The intent of this proverb’s misuse is impossible to miss. Eating a *sour grape* is unpleasant; it causes the mouth to pucker. This puckering effect is transferred from the older generation, who have eaten unwisely, to the following generation, who are seen as innocent victims of their ancestors’ actions. Thus we have a metaphor for generational blame-shifting (compare Lamentations 5:7).

The proverbial expression is actually based in the Law of Moses, where God is seen to visit “the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me” (Exodus 20:5; compare Exodus 34:7; Numbers 14:18; Jeremiah 32:18). Today we readily observe

the intergenerational consequences of parents who are sent to jail for committing crimes. Children often do suffer as a result of the sins of their fathers (compare Jeremiah 32:18–19). But the fact that the sins of one generation have consequences for another is not the same as saying that God punishes an innocent group for the sins of a guilty group.

Even so, Israelite history does indeed record instances of children dying as a consequence of their parents’ sins (see Numbers 16:23–33; Joshua 7:24–25; 2 Samuel 11:1–12:19; 21:1–9). Although there are times when the all-knowing and sovereign God deems this to be fitting, it is rare and certainly not the norm. The problem in today’s text is that when exile comes, the people will apply the proverb to disavow any culpability for their situation. Indeed, that was already happening by those who were already in exile; Ezekiel 18:1–20 records the Lord’s lengthy refutation.

### What Do You Think?

What life consequences have you been tempted to blame on a past generation’s or a family member’s sin?

### Digging Deeper

Where might there be truth in this? Where might this be a faulty assumption?

## B. New Reality (v. 30)

**30. But every one shall die for his own iniquity: every man that eateth the sour grape, his teeth shall be set on edge.**

In Jeremiah’s prophetic scenario, the shifting of blame will cease. The old proverb is replaced by a new statement about reality. Each person will be liable and, as a sinner, will *die for his own iniquity*.

In some ways, this is a hopeful promise, for it dispels any idea that the nation is cursed and incapable of thriving in the future. Each generation determines how faithful or sinful it will be based on its own actions. We should be careful to point out that this is actually a “new again” reality because the Law of Moses has consistently prohibited imposing the death penalty on children for

## How to Say It

Babylon	<i>Bab-uh-lon.</i>
Deuteronomy	<i>Due-ter-ahn-uh-me.</i>
extispicy	<i>eks-ti-spi-see.</i>
Hosea	<i>Ho-zay-uh.</i>
Jeremiah	<i>Jair-uh-my-uh.</i>
Thessalonians	<i>Thess-uh-lo-nee-unz</i> ( <i>th</i> as in <i>thin</i> ).

parental sin or vice versa per Deuteronomy 24:16. We see that prohibition honored in 2 Kings 14:6 and its parallel in 2 Chronicles 25:4.

### What Do You Think?

Under what circumstances do you struggle most to take responsibility for your own actions?

### Digging Deeper

What image or metaphor would you use to describe how it feels to face the consequences of your sin?

## Shirking Responsibility

I was a very curious child growing up. One summer when I was about 10 years old, I decided to explore the cabinet under the bathroom sink. My mom had previously given me strict instructions not to touch anything there, but I disobeyed. Exploring a packet of single-edged razor blades, I had barely opened the package before I sliced my finger. Blood gushed everywhere; I panicked. Should I tell my mom the truth, or should I lie?

While cleaning up, I planned out the story I would tell when my mother saw the two bandages on my fingers. I went into the garden, picked some roses, and put them in a vase on her dresser. When she got home, I excitedly told her that I had a surprise. I led her to the room and showed her the roses I had picked. When she saw my fingers, I said the rose thorns had cut me. She looked quite distressed about the cuts but at the same time was overjoyed at the thoughtful act I had done for her.

I never confessed this lie until I was an adult. That memory is still seared in my mind. I deliberately avoided taking responsibility for my disobedience by means of an elaborate narrative. Under what circumstances do you do the same? —S. S.

## II. Change in Covenant

(Jeremiah 31:31–34)

### A. Why It's Needed (vv. 31–32)

**31. Behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah.**

The verses that follow this new (or renewed) approach to generational culpability forms the basis for one of the most important texts in the Old Testament for anticipating the new covenant. Jeremiah 31:31–34 is quoted in its entirety in Hebrews 8:8–12 and is the longest single quotation of any Old Testament text by a New Testament author (see also Hebrews 10:16–17). It is a groundbreaking message.

The beneficiaries of the *new covenant* are to be those who broke the old one: *the house of Israel* and *the house of Judah* (Jeremiah 11:10). Correcting the blame-shifting will not be enough. The Lord is moving beyond attempts to guide people back to Him via the old covenant.

But when is this to occur? When will *the days come*? Although Jeremiah speaks of *Israel* and *Judah*, additional context in subsequent verses and later fulfillment establish that this comes with the life, death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus Christ.

**32. Not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt; which my covenant they brake, although I was an husband unto them, saith the LORD.**

Here the old *covenant* is portrayed in marriage language. *The Lord* is the *husband*, and the people, collectively, are the wife. This kind of metaphor is frequent in the prophets. Ezekiel symbolically pictures the Lord as finding Israel as an abandoned baby girl, raising her, and then entering a marriage covenant with her (Ezekiel 16:4–8). But this wife becomes a prostitute, a symbol of Israel's worship of other gods, including sacrificing their own children to idols (16:15, 20–21, 36). The book of Hosea is built around the prophet's marriage to a prostitute, whose unfaithfulness is likened to the idolatry of Israel (Hosea 1:2). Jeremiah himself pictures the Lord as married to two unfaithful sisters, Israel and Judah, who both commit spiritual adultery and must be divorced (Jeremiah 3:8).

Jeremiah pictures the very beginning of Israel as a nation like a marriage between the Lord and the people. At that time, the Lord *took them by the hand*. The Lord's rescue of the Israelites from



*the land of Egypt* was like the husband leading his new wife from the home of her father to his own home. Such imagery stirs our hearts, suggesting the care and closeness possible within the closest of human relationships.

However, the vows of this symbolic marriage between the Lord and Israel were soon and often violated. It was a *covenant they broke*, resulting in the language of adultery for their breaking of the covenant given through Moses (Exodus 19:5–8; 24:3–8). They violated this covenant before they even entered the promised land! This happened by making and worshiping a golden calf idol on the very day Moses was on the mountain receiving the terms of the covenant (32:1–8). Moses was even forewarned that after the people entered into the promised land, they would continue to break the covenant and worship false gods (Deuteronomy 31:20).

That warning proved sadly true as the Israelites proved themselves incapable of keeping the covenant. The all-too-numerous episodes that follow help us understand why the new covenant was not to be *according to the one the Lord made with their fathers*. A new method was necessary.

### What Do You Think?

When has someone overlooked a past offense and showed you undeserved grace?

### Digging Deeper

What did it feel like to receive that grace? What did it enable in that relationship?

## B. How It's Different (vv. 33–34)

**33. But this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; After those days, saith the LORD, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people.**

Jeremiah reveals a new approach. The old covenant is written on stone (Exodus 24:12; 31:18; 34:1), and the people of its era were to internalize its laws (Deuteronomy 6:4–9). The new covenant, by contrast, is written on *inward parts* and *hearts*



Visual for Lesson 8. Display this visual and ask participants to discuss what it means to have God's law "written on their hearts."

by God Himself (compare Hebrews 10:16). It is through the Holy Spirit, who indwells each and every Christian, that God does so, as indicated by Romans 8:5–11. Obedience will not depend merely on human ability. Rather, God's people will exhibit Spirit-empowered, loving obedience to His ways, which will flow from the inside out.

During Jeremiah's ministry, Israel's collective "heart" is described as uncircumcised (see Jeremiah 9:26; compare 4:4; 9:14; 11:8; 18:12). This imagery depicts self-exclusion from the covenant God made with His people. Reference to this covenant goes back even further than that of the Mosaic covenant, to the covenant with Abraham (Genesis 15, 17). The only way for a covenant with the Lord to succeed was to begin with new hearts (Ezekiel 18:31; 36:26), hearts that are spiritually circumcised (Deuteronomy 10:16; 30:6; Jeremiah 4:4; Romans 2:29).

The expression of God's law being written on their "inward parts" may be a reference to the ancient Near Eastern practice known as *extispicy*. In this practice, diviners would seek revelation from a deity, asking that the truth be written on the entrails of an animal to be sacrificed. While admittedly an odd image to us today, consider how it would be taken by an audience familiar with such a practice. God's revelation—His truth, His law, His ways—would be written on His people's own inward parts.

Note the relationship made possible through this



new covenant. The Lord says, *I . . . will be their God, and they shall be my people*. When initially establishing His covenant with Israel, the Lord told them they would be His special people, a “peculiar treasure,” if they “obey my voice . . . and keep my covenant” (Exodus 19:5–6). But as we see countless times throughout the Old Testament—particularly in the prophets—the people could not maintain what it took to be God’s very own.

### What Do You Think?

How does your life look different when you know something “by heart” instead of needing to look it up?

### Digging Deeper

What are things you do know “by heart”? In what ways do they shape how you live?

## Action from the Heart

My mother grew up Roman Catholic, but claims she came to true faith as an adult in a Protestant church setting. There she finally understood God’s grace. As a child, I took her story to heart and incidentally inherited a distaste for anything rote or ritualistic. Faith was supposed to be lively, from the heart.

Little did I know that I would one day belong to a church where liturgy is central. The liturgy I participate in week after week is not rote—quite the opposite. Our church family experiences what some might call “rules and rituals” as life-giving and grounding. They are this way for us because we engage them from our hearts. Our concern is not for performance, but for words and actions done in response to God. These are not in order to get something from Him, but because of what He has already done in and for us.

Such words and actions flow naturally and lovingly from hearts enlivened by the Holy Spirit. How might actions in your life of faith be better directed by the Holy Spirit’s work in your heart?

—J. J. S.

**34. And they shall teach no more every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, say-**

**ing, Know the LORD: for they shall all know me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them, saith the LORD: for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.**

This verse predicts a perfect state of affairs: no one is needed to teach about the Lord because everyone already has the knowledge. This seems puzzling since we understand that a teaching function does indeed exist under the new covenant (Matthew 28:19–20; Romans 12:7; etc.).

One interpretation proposes that this verse looks to the time after Jesus’ second coming when our presence with God in heaven yields our fullest knowledge of Him. Another interpretation proposes that Jeremiah’s prediction contrasts the need for human mediators under the old covenant (priests of the tribe of Levi) with the direct access to God that people have under the new covenant (1 Thessalonians 4:9; Hebrews 4:16; 10:19–22; 1 John 2:27). Either way, the time of the new covenant will be an era when the people of God include more than the peoples of ancient Israel and Judah. Knowledge of God will spread to peoples of all nations and languages (Revelation 7:9).

The paradox and tragedy of Jeremiah’s time was that many Judeans did not know the Lord or follow His ways even though they were hereditary members of God’s chosen people (Jeremiah 2:17–19, etc.). What will it be like for people with new hearts, those under the new covenant? They will *know the Lord!* The express teaching of God’s Word by a select group of priests will no longer be necessary because *they shall all* know the Lord, *from the least to the greatest*. While this statement of inclusion initially appears to refer to social class, it also points forward to the eventual inclusion of Gentiles in the new covenant (see Ephesians 3:6).

The people will not only have God’s Spirit in their hearts to guide and instruct them; they will also be a forgiven people. The Lord promises to *forgive their iniquity*, to *remember their sin no more*. This is the fresh start that the new covenant promises, beginning anew with a clean slate not encumbered by the sins and failures of the past. This brings back to mind the change indicated in Jeremiah 31:29–30, above. Not only will everyone be responsible for their own actions, but once

forgiven, those sins are remembered no more—no more to condemn us or those who come after us.

### **What Do You Think?**

What does it feel like to consider the fact that the sins you can't forget, God doesn't remember?

### **Digging Deeper**

How does knowing that you are forgiven affect how you view yourself and interact with others?

## **III. Change in Mediator**

(John 1:17)

### **A. Law (v. 17a)**

#### **17a. For the law was given by Moses.**

To understand the contrast introduced here in John 1:17a, we should consider what immediately precedes it. There, the author declares, “of [the Son’s] fulness have all we received, and grace for grace” (John 1:16). The translation “grace for grace” could be understood to signify something like “grace on top of grace already received.” Or it may carry the idea of the replacement of one kind of grace with another kind. Both ideas carry the significance of “unmerited favor” and set the stage for understanding verse 17.

*Moses* experienced God’s grace (see Exodus 33:12–17). And the law that came through him was by the initiative of the gracious God. Yet the primary characteristic of the Law of Moses is its “commandments,” “statutes,” and “ordinances.” There was nothing inherently wrong with these—quite the opposite! But the passage of time proved humans to be incapable of keeping these 100 percent of the time. So the initial grace of the old covenant received through Moses as mediator needed to be replaced by the grace of a new and superior covenant, the one about which Jeremiah 31:31–34 speaks.

### **B. Grace and Truth (v. 17b)**

#### **17b. But grace and truth came by Jesus Christ.**

This superior covenant is mediated by a far superior mediator: *Jesus Christ*, the Word become

flesh (John 1:14). Compared to the Law of Moses, His “yoke is easy” and His “burden is light” (Matthew 11:30).

Like our analysis of the word *grace*, to attribute the coming of *truth* to Jesus is not to deny that Moses received truth! The truth Jesus brings is the truth regarding the new covenant.

## **Conclusion**

### **A. Fresh Start**

Many Christians who read their Bibles faithfully struggle with understanding what to do with the commands and regulations they find in the Old Testament. Because we believe in the inspiration and value of the entire Bible, we must take these passages seriously. The prophecy in Jeremiah 31 helps us put other portions of the Old Testament into perspective. The Law of Moses revealed God’s will for the people of Israel and in so doing revealed many things about His nature and character. Jeremiah’s perspective shows that this initial covenant did not work for Israel. This was not because God failed, but because of the people’s disobedience. Eventually, Israel was punished by the destruction of Jerusalem and its temple followed by exile.

The new covenant Jeremiah speaks of is a fresh start for humanity. This new covenant defines its adherents not in terms of obedience to law, but as those who have experienced the grace of being forgiven through Jesus’ atonement for our sins.

As new covenant people, we have much we can learn from the old covenant, but we rejoice in the reality of the new covenant. What the prophets searched for diligently, we now experience (1 Peter 1:10–11).

### **B. Prayer**

Lord, we marvel at the new covenant mediated by Your Son, our Savior, Jesus Christ. We thrive because of Your grace and rejoice over Your truth. We thank You for giving us Your Spirit so we may truly know You. It is in Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.

### **C. Thought to Remember**

Jesus mediates a new covenant based on grace.

# Involvement Learning

*Enhance your lesson with KJV Bible Student (from your curriculum supplier) and the reproducible activity page (at [www.standardlesson.com](http://www.standardlesson.com) or in the back of the KJV Standard Lesson Commentary Deluxe Edition).*

## Into the Lesson

Ask volunteers to share an example of a time when they used a manufacturer's warranty to fix or replace a broken item. (Be prepared to give your own example if no one volunteers.) Discuss set-backs that would have resulted without the warranty and how having the warranty helped. Ask, "In what ways was the replacement superior to the original?"

Lead into the Bible study by saying, "In today's lesson, we will study how God offered a new covenant that would redeem His people. As we study, consider why the new covenant is superior to the old covenant."

## Into the Word

Say, "The book of Deuteronomy explains how God made a covenant with His people. By the time of the prophet Jeremiah, the people had broken the covenant. The beauty of Jeremiah 31 is that it is God Himself who establishes a new covenant that will ultimately be fulfilled in Christ."

Place participants in small groups and have each group read Jeremiah 31:31–34. Then ask the groups to locate and identify the following in the text: (a) the key verse that summarizes it all and (b) the eternal promise. After three minutes, ask the following questions for whole-class discussion: 1—When and how will this promise be fulfilled? 2—How would the promised new covenant differ from the old one? 3—What is the role of the Holy Spirit in the new covenant? See the lesson commentary for ideas to stimulate and supplement the discussion.

*Option.* Divide the class into two groups: **High Priestly Group** (Hebrews 8:1–13) and **Sacrifice Group** (Hebrews 10:11–18). Have each group read their assigned Scripture text and compare it with Jeremiah 31:29–34. Distribute a handout (you create) to each group that contains the following questions: 1—What does this passage reveal

about the new covenant? 2—How does this passage elaborate upon Jeremiah 31:29–34? After five minutes, reconvene the class and ask volunteers to share their responses.

Invite a volunteer to read John 1:17. Ask the following questions for whole-class discussion: 1—Explain how this verse expands on Jeremiah 31:29–34. 2—What is the significance of Moses in this verse? 3—How is Jesus Christ a superior mediator?

*Option 1.* Distribute copies of the "God's Covenant Promise" exercise from the activity page, which you can download. Have learners work in pairs to complete as indicated. After calling time, ask volunteers to share their findings.

*Option 2.* Distribute copies of the "Psalms of Promise" activity from the activity page. Have learners work with a partner to complete as indicated.

## Into Life

Lead into the activity by saying, "Today's study taught us that God's people have been promised the presence of God's Spirit, the Holy Spirit. The Lord promises that the Spirit will guide and instruct us."

Write the following phrases as headers on the board:

1. *Bringing Awareness of Sin*
2. *Giving Desires to Love God Faithfully*

Ask participants to work with a partner to brainstorm ways they can notice the Holy Spirit's work in each category listed. Write responses on the board under the correct header.

Ask learners to join you in a closing guided prayer. Lead learners in a prayer of praising God for His grace and salvation. Allow time for silent prayer for confession of sin. Conclude by thanking Jesus for securing our eternal life through this new covenant.

# Jeremiah's Rescue

Devotional Reading: Romans 13:1-10

Background Scripture: Jeremiah 20:1-6; 37:1-38:28; 43:1-7

## Jeremiah 38:7-13

7 Now when Ebedmelech the Ethiopian, one of the eunuchs which was in the king's house, heard that they had put Jeremiah in the dungeon; the king then sitting in the gate of Benjamin;



8 Ebedmelech went forth out of the king's house, and spake to the king, saying,

9 My lord the king, these men have done evil in all that they have done to Jeremiah the prophet, whom they have cast into the dungeon; and he is like to die for hunger in the place where he is: for there is no more bread in the city.

10 Then the king commanded Ebedmelech the Ethiopian, saying, Take from hence thirty men with thee, and take up Jeremiah the prophet out of the dungeon, before he die.

11 So Ebedmelech took the men with him, and went into the house of the king under the treasury, and took thence old cast clouts and old rotten rags, and let them down by cords into the dungeon to Jeremiah.

12 And Ebedmelech the Ethiopian said unto Jeremiah, Put now these old cast clouts and rotten rags under thine armholes under the cords. And Jeremiah did so.

13 So they drew up Jeremiah with cords, and took him up out of the dungeon: and Jeremiah remained in the court of the prison.

## Key Text

*Then the king commanded Ebedmelech the Ethiopian, saying, Take from hence thirty men with thee, and take up Jeremiah the prophet out of the dungeon, before he die. —Jeremiah 38:10*

# Judah, from Isaiah to the Exile

## Unit 2: Jeremiah and the Promise of Renewal

Lessons 5–9

### Lesson Aims

After participating in this lesson, each learner will be able to:

1. Summarize the historical context of Jeremiah 38.
2. Explain the points of view and motives of the various parties involved.
3. Identify the specific needs of someone who requires spiritual or physical rescue.

### Lesson Outline

#### Introduction

- A. Unjustly Imprisoned
- B. Lesson Context

#### I. Jeremiah's Predicament (Jeremiah 38:7–10)

- A. Noticed by an Ally (vv. 7–9)  
*Malnutrition and Dehydration*
- B. Addressed by the King (v. 10)

#### II. Jeremiah's Rescue (Jeremiah 38:11–13)

- A. Springing to Action (v. 11)  
*Urgency Required*
- B. Creative Solution (vv. 12–13)

#### Conclusion

- A. Rescuers
- B. Prayer
- C. Thought to Remember

## Introduction

### A. Unjustly Imprisoned

In 1962, Nelson Mandela was arrested and sentenced to five years' imprisonment for working to overthrow the racist regime of his country of South Africa. In 1964, justices handed down a sentence of life imprisonment. For 18 years, Mandela was kept in the notorious Robben Island prison, a former leper colony and mental asylum.

But through all those years, Mandela's voice was not stilled, and international observers continued to monitor his status. He was eventually released in 1990 and, in an abrupt turn in 1994, was elected South Africa's first Black president. Although imprisonment for political reasons is wrong, it can sometimes have an effect that the persecutors do not expect. And so it is with today's text.

### B. Lesson Context

Zedekiah was the last king of Judah before the destruction of Jerusalem in 586 BC. In 597 BC, King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon seized control of Jerusalem. He deported the then-current king—Jehoiachin—to Babylon along with the royal family, court officials, 7,000 elite fighters, and other prominent citizens (2 Kings 24:14–16). Nebuchadnezzar installed Jehoiachin's 21-year-old uncle in his place, changing his name from Mattaniah to Zedekiah, which means “the Lord is righteous” (24:17). But Zedekiah did not honor the Lord.

Zedekiah and the prophet Jeremiah had a complicated relationship. On the one hand, Zedekiah consulted Jeremiah and asked him to pray (Jeremiah 37:3). Zedekiah wanted a “word from the Lord,” seeming to trust the prophet (37:17). But Zedekiah did not like what he kept hearing. He refused to humble himself and heed Jeremiah's message (2 Chronicles 36:12).

Even under duress, Jeremiah advised surrender to the Babylonians to save lives (Jeremiah 38:2–3). This led to accusations of being a traitor, resulting in imprisonment (37:11–16). A subsequent audience with the king resulted in more lenient treatment for a time (37:17–21). Yet the enemies of Jeremiah still conspired with King Zedekiah



to have the prophet put to death (38:4–6; compare 26:11). Jeremiah has long predicted the doom of Jerusalem, and this isn't the first time he has advocated outright surrender (see 27:11). A previous king in Jerusalem had actually done just that several years prior (2 Kings 24:12).

All in all, Jeremiah is seen as a threat to the vested interests of the leaders of Judah and Jerusalem as he opposes their attitudes and practices again and again. One example is his criticism of their re-enslaving freed slaves (Jeremiah 34:8–22), a violation of the Law of Moses (compare Exodus 21:2–6; Deuteronomy 15:12). It has all led up to this point of being cast into a dungeon to die slowly of dehydration and malnutrition, the harshest punishment yet (Jeremiah 38:1–6).

# I. Jeremiah's Predicament

(Jeremiah 38:7–10)

## A. Noticed by an Ally (vv. 7–9)

**7a. Now when Ebedmelech the Ethiopian, one of the eunuchs which was in the king's house, heard that they had put Jeremiah in the dungeon.**

Jeremiah's location *in the dungeon*, where his enemies have left him to die, draws the attention of a certain *Ebedmelech the Ethiopian*. This dungeon is an underground reservoir used to collect water. Many private homes may have had their own such cisterns for collecting water in this period (see 2 Kings 18:31). But given the dire needs of the besieged city, this one has become empty and is evidently deep due to the enemies'

need to lower Jeremiah into it by use of "cords" (Jeremiah 38:6). There is no way to escape without outside help. Jeremiah was completely trapped, left to starve to death in a horrible pit where he could not even lie down. We might imagine that they got the idea from Genesis 37:18–23.

If Jeremiah's legs sank even a couple of feet into the clay, any escape would be impossible; Jeremiah was in a hopeless situation. Perhaps Jeremiah's friends might notice his disappearance, but his corpse might not be discovered for months, if ever. Psalm 40:2 offers a similar word picture and praises God for a rescue from a (figurative) "horrible pit" filled with "miry clay." It was probably of little comfort to Jeremiah that such facilities for storing water were ceremonially clean (Leviticus 11:36).

The word *Ebedmelech* means "servant of the king." Thus this may be the man's job description rather than a personal name. His country of origin is also known as the kingdom of Cush, which is south of Egypt. He may be friendly to Jeremiah because of being re-enslaved per discussion of Jeremiah 34:8–22, above (although he is not of the 12 tribes of Israel). Based on the way he acts in the narrative, he appears to be someone of authority, someone the king trusts.

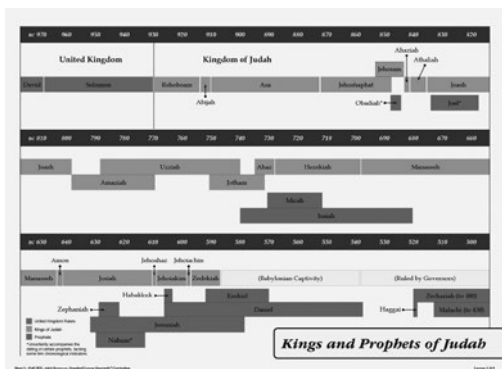
Describing him as *one of the eunuchs* might mean only that he was a royal official (not necessarily someone who has been castrated, although that is possible). The underlying Hebrew word occurs dozens of times in the Old Testament. It is translated "officer" in a variety of contexts (for instance, Genesis 39:1; 1 Samuel 8:15). While the Hebrew term for *official* might also be used in a more technical sense to describe eunuchs, it is not clear whether the kings of Israel and Judah had eunuchs in their service, as did other kings in the ancient Near East (compare 2 Kings 9:32; 20:18). The 45 occurrences of the Hebrew word at issue are translated "eunuch(s)" 38 percent of the time, with translations "chamberlains" at 29 percent, "officer(s)" at 27 percent, and as a proper name at 6 percent in the *King James Version* of the Old Testament.

**7b. The king then sitting in the gate of Benjamin.**

Ebedmelech knows the king's habits and

## How to Say It

Babylonians	Bab-ih-low-nee-unz.
Ebedmelech	Eh-bed-meh-lek.
Ethiopian	E-thee-o-pee-un ( <i>th</i> as in <i>thin</i> ).
Jehoiachin	Jeh-hoy-uh-kin.
Josephus	Jo-see-fus.
Malchiah	Mal-kye-uh.
Mattaniah	Mat-uh-nye-uh.
Nebuchadnezzar	Neb-yuh-kud-nez-er.
Zedekiah	Zed-uh-kye-uh.



Visual for Lessons 1 & 9. Display this chart as you help participants familiarize themselves with the timeline of Judah's kings and prophets.

movements. *The gate of Benjamin* is likely on the northeastern corner of Jerusalem's wall; it is the gate that Jeremiah tried to use in attempting to return to Anathoth (Jeremiah 1:1). Jeremiah had been beaten there (20:1–2), and his arrest at this same gate has led to his current confinement (37:11–17).

A city gate was more than a fortified entry point. Some gates had benches for elders of the community to sit and render judgments (see 2 Samuel 19:8; Jeremiah 26:10). Gates were gathering places for those seeking authoritative rulings on legal matters (2 Samuel 15:2). King Zedekiah was at the gate presumably to administer judgments in his official capacity. Thus his servant knows where to find him. He can go to seek an audience, like the other citizens of Jerusalem.

### 8. Ebedmelech went forth out of the king's house, and spake to the king, saying.

To travel from *the king's house* to the Benjamin gate is a distance of no more than a quarter of a mile. The royal palace, built by King Solomon some 330 years prior, is probably to the immediate south of the temple. Various details of the original palace complex are found in 1 Kings 7:1–12, but we don't know which of those are still present by Jeremiah's day.

Ebedmelech approaches the man who had given tacit approval to Jeremiah's execution (Jeremiah 38:5). The approach takes place in a public venue, where witnesses will hear an official response. It could be that Ebedmelech suspects

that the king is willing to let Jeremiah die, but admitting it publicly is another matter.

The king's servant seems to have no problem gaining an audience with King Zedekiah. Ebedmelech's case concerns a life-and-death matter, a dire need that goes beyond the usual questions of property disputes or inheritance rights (as in Ruth 4).

### What Do You Think?

When was a time you had to choose the right moment to begin an important conversation?

### Digging Deeper

What is similar and what is different about the ways that Esther approaches King Ahasuerus in Esther 5:1–8?

### 9. My lord the king, these men have done evil in all that they have done to Jeremiah the prophet, whom they have cast into the dungeon; and he is like to die for hunger in the place where he is: for there is no more bread in the city.

We speculated earlier on the reason for Ebedmelech's intervention. Now we see more of the immediate context: given that people are beginning to starve due to the siege, no one will be throwing bread down to Jeremiah (if there were anyone doing so to begin with). The fact that the prophet has been treated unjustly and does not deserve to die is summed up in the line *these men have done evil in all that they have done to Jeremiah the prophet*.

This servant of the king trusts in the legitimacy of Jeremiah's message, or at least the earnestness of the prophet's ministry. The servant seems to be persuaded that Jeremiah has spoken the truth. But even if the king were to choose not to listen to Jeremiah, it would be wicked to leave him to die in a pit by an unapproved means of execution enacted without due process.

Ebedmelech's words sound as if he believes the king to be unaware of what Jeremiah's opponents have done to the prophet. Indeed, the king's statement, "Behold, he is in your hand: for the king is not he that can do any thing against you," in

Jeremiah 38:5 almost sounds like an admission of powerlessness or at least intentional ignorance. Ebedmelech may be phrasing his appeal tactfully and diplomatically, without a specific accusation. Even if he blames Zedekiah, the servant does not accuse his *lord the king* in public, with witnesses at the gate who can overhear.

Instead, Ebedmelech chooses not to identify Jeremiah's enemies by name specifically (*these men*). A willingness to "shed innocent blood" was among the gravest charges that Jeremiah had brought against King Zedekiah and his predecessors (2 Kings 24:3–4; Jeremiah 22:3, 17). Jeremiah had warned the kings to pursue "judgment and righteousness" in order to avoid the most destructive consequences. But instead, the nobles turned against the prophet because of his willingness to speak the truth and seek the good of his city. Jeremiah's own futile ministry had become the ultimate demonstration of the cravenness of Judah's ruling powers (Jeremiah 5:20–21).

### What Do You Think?

What is an example of a time when you witnessed a person treated unfairly?

### Digging Deeper

Consider David's prayers in Psalm 72:1–2, 12–14. How does Jeremiah 38 illustrate the failure of Judah's kings?

## Malnutrition and Dehydration

Quick—place your hand over the next paragraph so you don't see the answer to this question: What word fits this definition: "An attempt to explain or justify one's own behavior or attitude with plausible reasons, even if these are not true or appropriate"?

The word being defined above is *rationalize*. We humans are good at doing that, aren't we? Think about nutritional guidelines. On the one hand, there are many such guidelines and standards that we acknowledge as being healthy and reasonable. But on the other hand, our reasons for violating them are often little more than transparent rationalizations.

The same is true in a spiritual sense—perhaps

more so. Instead of seeking the bread of life (John 6:48), people rationalize reasons for feeding themselves impure spiritual bread made "with old leaven, . . . the leaven of malice and wickedness" (1 Corinthians 5:8). Instead of seeking the one who provides living water (John 4:10–14; 7:38), people favor "broken cisterns, that can hold no water" (Jeremiah 2:13).

Who in your circle of influence needs living water and the bread of life today? —R. L. N.

### B. Addressed by the King (v. 10)

**10. Then the king commanded Ebedmelech the Ethiopian, saying, Take from hence thirty men with thee, and take up Jeremiah the prophet out of the dungeon, before he die.**

We notice that the king's orders are to stop the damage that is in progress, not to find and punish those responsible. Of course, readers understand why the king does not seek those who are responsible, because he gave them permission in the first place (see Lesson Context)! He was caught in the difficulty of his own making with a failed attempt on Jeremiah's life now exposed to public scrutiny. So the king gives orders to show that he is doing something about the situation. He will be able to claim that he saved Jeremiah's life.

The king is likely surrounded by bodyguards, and they are likely the source of the *thirty men* Ebedmelech is to take *from hence*; this is the suggestion of Josephus, the first-century Jewish historian. Or they may merely be men of the city who have some role in the city's defense. A band of this size will be sufficient to overcome anyone who tries to stop them from freeing the prophet. The wording *before he die* paints a picture of urgency.

### What Do You Think?

Have you been tempted to take credit for an idea that wasn't yours? When have you witnessed this in others?

### Digging Deeper

Jesus says the "heart" is where evil thoughts begin (Matthew 15:19). Why do we do the right thing for the wrong reasons?

## II. Jeremiah's Rescue

(Jeremiah 38:11–13)

### A. Springing to Action (v. 11)

**11a. So Ebedmelech took the men with him, and went into the house of the king under the treasury.**

An earlier place of Jeremiah's confinement was "the court of the prison" (Jeremiah 32:2, 8; 33:1; 37:21). He is now in the same area, but below ground in a reservoir for water. We were previously told that the "dungeon" chosen for Jeremiah's captivity was under the house of Malchiah. This house was part of the "court of the prison," meaning it bordered on an open area given that name (38:6). *Hammelech* can be either a proper name or it can mean "the king." However, even if Malchiah is "son of the king," he is not the son of Zedekiah. He is one of the "princes" who are pressuring the king and seeking Jeremiah's death. Malchiah was the father of Pashur, one of four named individuals who confronted Zedekiah in the first place, demanding Jeremiah be killed (38:1, 4).

Before proceeding to the cistern itself, Ebedmelech and his men go to a room in the king's palace. This is identified as being *under the treasury*, a different room in the palace on a higher level. The reason they go here comes next.

**11b. And took thence old cast clouts and old rotten rags, and let them down by cords into the dungeon to Jeremiah.**

They find *old cast clouts* as well as *old rotten rags* in the storage area. "Clout" is an old English term that refers to a cloth or leather patch used to repair clothes. What the men were gathering was a bundle of worn-out clothes, patched and ragged.

Archaeologists have found dozens of ancient cisterns around Jerusalem, some 100 feet deep. One, known as the "Great Cistern," is estimated to have the capacity of two million gallons of water, although this cavity seems to have been built after Jeremiah lived. We can easily imagine the relief that Jeremiah experiences: the cover of his prison is removed, he is able to hear friendly voices at the top, and soon a soft bundle is lowered from above.

### What Do You Think?

Have you ever struggled to deliver help to someone in need? What made it difficult?

### Digging Deeper

What is a practical way that you might fulfill a need without being noticed or credited?

### Urgency Required

When I was a sophomore in college, I received a phone call that no one wants to receive: my dad was being rushed to the hospital. My dad was eating a sandwich when he accidentally swallowed part of his dentures. It lodged in his throat and began to obstruct his airway.

Paramedics came immediately and rushed my dad to the hospital. Preparations were underway in the event that surgical removal was required. Swelling in his esophagus was life-threatening. Just before the decision to perform surgery, an emergency room doctor was able to remove the obstruction. My dad could breathe again! His voice took time to return, but he eventually made a full recovery.

Likewise, when the king's servant noticed Jeremiah's need, he didn't linger. He sought an immediate solution and brought the right people to help. If those around us are in need of rescue, we may not have the skills or experience to perform surgery, but we can set everything aside to make ourselves available. For spiritual needs, we can always point our friends and neighbors to the Savior, who is an expert rescuer!

If immediate action is required, are you prepared to respond? —B. R.

### B. Creative Solution (vv. 12–13)

**12. And Ebedmelech the Ethiopian said unto Jeremiah, Put now these old cast clouts and rotten rags under thine armholes under the cords. And Jeremiah did so.**

The purpose behind the collection of old clothes is now revealed. They are to serve as padding for the *cords*. Ropes or cords of antiquity would be rough

and could cut into Jeremiah's skin as he is hauled to the surface, possibly ending his life through a nasty infection. Perhaps Jeremiah is bare-chested or was stripped naked before being placed in the cistern. If so, his skin could be made raw as the cords are used to tug and pull him out of the mud. The men have to bring him up slowly and carefully, with the rope rigged around his body under his arms. Fortunately, they are not too late. Jeremiah has not lost consciousness; he is able to do what they tell him and arrange his padded harness.

**13. So they drew up Jeremiah with cords, and took him up out of the dungeon: and Jeremiah remained in the court of the prison.**

Pulling the prophet *out of the dungeon* is surely a long and nerve-racking procedure. With his rescue complete, Jeremiah does not attempt to flee the city. He remains where he was previously confined, the *court of the prison*. He may be intentionally remaining in a type of "protective custody" so that he can steer clear of rearrest or assassination from the nobles and false prophets who are after him.

The epilogue to this story is that, later, Jeremiah calls Ebedmelech back to the court of the prison where he is confined. The courageous official is told that he shall escape unharmed from Jerusalem's impending destruction when the Babylonians breach the walls. The Lord's message to this deliverer is that, because of his trust in the Lord, on that day, "I will surely deliver thee" (Jeremiah 39:18). On that day, the rescuer would be rescued.

**What Do You Think?**

Why do you imagine that Ebedmelech risked so much to save the life of Jeremiah?

**Digging Deeper**

Compare how God spared Ebedmelech here and Rahab in Joshua 6:22–23. What about God's character is revealed in these two stories?

## Conclusion

### A. Rescuers

The story of Jeremiah, Zedekiah, the plotting

princes, and Ebedmelech teaches several lessons. For Jeremiah, as with many of God's prophets, the task of accurately reporting the word of the Lord was a difficult path to walk. Jesus Himself would later travel to Jerusalem and experience deadly resistance, like the prophets of Israel's past (see Matthew 23:37). Jesus warns those who wish to be His disciples that they too shall face resistance, shall be asked to "take up [a] cross" in order to follow Him (Matthew 16:24). In the example of Zedekiah, we glimpse the consequences of cowardice, of caring only about a public perception instead of seeking truth. God's plans may have disrupted the self-serving actions of Jerusalem's nobles, but a just king should have stepped in to protect Jeremiah and listen to God's message.

Ebedmelech is an example of a courageous rescuer, one who risked the disapproval of his own boss to save the life of God's servant. And God responded to this individual's faithfulness, protecting him in the middle of a war zone. God is faithful to individuals, which is especially clear to those who are in desperate situations (see Joshua 6:22–23; 1 Samuel 23:26–29; Ruth 4:13–17).

Modern "rescuers" may take the form of professionals with high-tech equipment and training. When someone needs physical rescue, we are taught to call these emergency services. But there are many other opportunities for believers to perform small acts of deliverance for one another: giving financial assistance, offering care for children, and sitting with those experiencing tragedy or loss. A faithful rescuer should not give up. Ebedmelech risked his favorable position, perhaps even his life, to confront the king at the gate and direct Jeremiah's deliverance. He did what was right for someone who needed his help, and he did not look away.

### B. Prayer

Lord God, give us spiritual sight to see those who are struggling and whom we can help. May we never look away when we see suffering and injustice. We pray in the name of Jesus, our rescuer from the powers of sin and death. Amen.

### C. Thought to Remember

God might ask us to take risks to help others.



# Involvement Learning

Enhance your lesson with KJV Bible Student (from your curriculum supplier) and the reproducible activity page (at [www.standardlesson.com](http://www.standardlesson.com) or in the back of the KJV Standard Lesson Commentary Deluxe Edition).

## Into the Lesson

Write the following phrase on the board:

*If you can't say anything nice,  
don't say anything at all.*

Ask volunteers to give examples of when they followed or did not follow that advice. Encourage them to elaborate on the consequences of saying something or remaining silent in their examples. Be prepared to share an example from your life to start the discussion.

Lead into the Bible study by saying, "Today, we will learn how one man stood up to the king and the officials. Because this man chose to speak up, Jeremiah's life was saved. As we study, consider how today's lesson can guide us in helping others who need rescue or intervention."

## Into the Word

Before class, choose a volunteer to give a five-minute presentation on the historical and biblical context of today's Scripture text. The volunteer can use the Lesson Context section and other commentaries in preparation. Ensure that the presentation includes an explanation of Jeremiah's proclamation (Jeremiah 38:2–3), the directives of King Zedekiah (38:4–5), and the actions of the officials (38:6).

Divide participants into three groups: **Jeremiah Group**, **Ebedmelech Group**, and **Zedekiah Group**. Direct each group to read Jeremiah 38:7–13 and create a presentation on the group's namesake. Encourage groups to use online resources in their presentation. Ensure that each presentation addresses the following questions: 1—What are the words and actions of your character in today's Scripture? 2—What word(s) best describes your character? 3—What other passages from Scripture, if any, mention your character? 4—In what ways can we learn from the words and actions of your character?

After 15 minutes of in-class preparation, reconvene the groups and direct each group to pres-

ent their findings for the class. Ask each group to share any conclusions they have about their assigned character.

*Option 1.* Distribute copies of the "Prophet Puzzle" activity from the activity page, which you can download. Have learners complete it individually in a minute or less before reviewing answers with a partner.

*Option 2.* Ask a volunteer to read Jeremiah 38:7–13 aloud. Have three volunteers play the roles of Jeremiah, Ebedmelech, and King Zedekiah, each one taking turns telling the story from their perspective. (It's best to recruit these actors in advance.) Allow opportunities for reactions and feedback.

## Into Life

Write the following phrases as headers on the board: *Physical Needs* / *Spiritual Needs*. Lead into the activity by saying, "We too can be bold and stand up for those in spiritual and physical need." Conduct a whole-class brainstorming session by challenging learners to suggest ways your class or congregation can meet the physical needs and spiritual needs of members of the community. Write responses under the appropriate header.

Divide learners into groups of three or four. Ask groups to identify one way they can meet either a physical or spiritual need listed on the board. Challenge groups to create a specific plan to accomplish this in the upcoming weeks. If they plan to address a physical need, is there a related spiritual need they can also address?

Conclude class time with small-group prayer, asking God for wisdom and insight to meet the physical and spiritual needs of others.

*Option.* Distribute copies of the "Prayer Practice" exercise from the activity page. Have learners work with a partner to complete as indicated. After calling time, ask for several volunteers to share their prayer list.

# Jerusalem's Fall

Devotional Reading: Lamentations 1:18–22

Background Scripture: 2 Kings 23:1–25:21

## 2 Kings 24:18–20

18 Zedekiah was twenty and one years old when he began to reign, and he reigned eleven years in Jerusalem. And his mother's name was Hamutal, the daughter of Jeremiah of Libnah.

19 And he did that which was evil in the sight of the LORD, according to all that Jehoiakim had done.

20 For through the anger of the LORD it came to pass in Jerusalem and Judah, until he had cast them out from his presence, that Zedekiah rebelled against the king of Babylon.

## 2 Kings 25:1–9

1 And it came to pass in the ninth year of his reign, in the tenth month, in the tenth day of the month, that Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came, he, and all his host, against Jerusalem, and pitched against it; and they built forts against it round about.

2 And the city was besieged unto the eleventh year of king Zedekiah.

3 And on the ninth day of the fourth month the famine prevailed in the city, and there was no bread for the people of the land.

4 And the city was broken up, and all the

men of war fled by night by the way of the gate between two walls, which is by the king's garden: (now the Chaldees were against the city round about;) and the king went the way toward the plain.

5 And the army of the Chaldees pursued after the king, and overtook him in the plains of Jericho: and all his army were scattered from him.

6 So they took the king, and brought him up to the king of Babylon to Riblah; and they gave judgment upon him.

7 And they slew the sons of Zedekiah before his eyes, and put out the eyes of Zedekiah, and bound him with fetters of brass, and carried him to Babylon.

8 And in the fifth month, on the seventh day of the month, which is the nineteenth year of king Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, came Nebuzaradan, captain of the guard, a servant of the king of Babylon, unto Jerusalem:

9 And he burnt the house of the LORD, and the king's house, and all the houses of Jerusalem, and every great man's house burnt he with fire.

## Key Text

*For through the anger of the LORD it came to pass in Jerusalem and Judah, until he had cast them out from his presence, that Zedekiah rebelled against the king of Babylon. —2 Kings 24:20*

# Judah, from Isaiah to the Exile

## Unit 3: Ezekiel and the Exile of Judah

Lessons 10–13

### Lesson Aims

After participating in this lesson, each learner will be able to:

1. Summarize the life and fate of King Zedekiah.
2. Explain the circumstances that led to the exile.
3. State one way he or she will reflect on God's patient mercy in the coming week.

### Lesson Outline

#### Introduction

- A. Foreseen Disaster
- B. Lesson Context

#### I. Another Evil King (2 Kings 24:18–20a)

- A. Zedekiah's Reign (vv. 18–19)
- B. The Lord's Anger (v. 20a)

#### II. Another Reckless Rebellion

(2 Kings 24:20b–25:5)

- A. Siege Begins (24:20b–25:1)  
*What's in Your Playbook?*
- B. Siege Ends (vv. 2–3)
- C. Siege Aftermath (vv. 4–5)

#### III. Another Harsh Result (2 Kings 25:6–9)

- A. Zedekiah Sentenced (vv. 6–7)  
*Our Blindness*
- B. Jerusalem Burned (vv. 8–9)

#### Conclusion

- A. Hope Beyond Disaster
- B. Prayer
- C. Thought to Remember

## Introduction

### A. Foreseen Disaster

Most of our unwelcome experiences are unforeseen. An accident, a negative medical diagnosis, a conflict with a loved one—if we could foresee such events, we would likely take steps to avoid them.

Some things, however, we *can* reasonably foresee or predict. Failure to fix a leak in the roof will result in more and more damage. A poor diet will lead to a variety of illnesses. “I should have known better” is what we say when a foreseeable disaster befalls us. We experience the pain of regret and shame, thinking of what we could have done to avoid it. We may try to shift the blame. But our experiences in that regard are nothing new to the human condition, as today's lesson makes clear.

### B. Lesson Context

Today's text takes us to the time frame of 597–586 BC. Many centuries had passed since Moses warned the Israelites of the consequences of breaking God's covenant (Deuteronomy 29:9–28; 30:15–18). The prophets reminded Israel and Judah of the coming judgment (2 Kings 24:2). The exile of the northern kingdom of Israel in 722 BC had proven the prophets' warnings true (17:3–23). Now Judah too would face God's judgment.

The blame for the tragedy in today's text is most directly traced to the nation's line of leadership. Were we to draw a “good and evil” timeline of Judah's 20 rulers since the beginning of the divided monarchy in the tenth century BC (1 Kings 12), we would see startling swings from evil to good and back again to evil. Today's lesson introduces us to the last in that line of 20 kings, a man named Zedekiah.

Zedekiah's father, Josiah, was the last godly king of Judah (2 Kings 22:1–23:28). Josiah had four sons, Zedekiah being the third of those (1 Chronicles 3:15). Zedekiah might never have been king were it not for the untimely death of his father in battle (2 Kings 23:29–30; 2 Chronicles 35:20–24; compare Jeremiah 46:2).

Following Josiah's death, his ungodly son Jeho-

ahaz (also known as Shallum, 1 Chronicles 3:15; Jeremiah 22:11–12) ruled briefly before being deported to Egypt by Pharaoh (2 Kings 23:30–33). Concurrently, Pharaoh installed Eliakim—another son of Josiah—as king, changing his name to Jehoiakim (23:34). When Jehoiakim died 11 years later, he was succeeded by his son Jehoiachin (24:1–6).

By that time the Babylonians were on the march, overtaking Jerusalem a scant three months after Jehoiachin’s ascent to the throne. The Babylonians installed one of his relatives, Mattaniah, in his place as king (2 Kings 24:8–17), renaming him Zedekiah. The first three verses of our lesson’s text are worded almost identically to that of Jeremiah 52:1–3 and are very similar to 2 Chronicles 36:11–13.

## I. Another Evil King

(2 Kings 24:18–20a)

### A. Zedekiah’s Reign (vv. 18–19)

**18. Zedekiah was twenty and one years old when he began to reign, and he reigned eleven years in Jerusalem. And his mother’s name was Hamutal, the daughter of Jeremiah of Libnah.**

The four kings who reigned over the final days of Judah were all very young by today’s standards when ascending to the throne: Jehoahaz (23), Jehoiakim (25), Jehoiachin (18), and Zedekiah

## How to Say It

Babylonians	Bab-ih-low-nee-unz.
Chaldeans	Kal-dee-unz.
Chaldees	Kal-deez.
Eliakim	Ee-lye-uh-kim.
Hamutal	Ha-mu-tal.
Jehoahaz	Jeh-ho-uh-haz.
Jehoiachin	Jeh-hoy-uh-kin.
Jehoiakim	Jeh-hoy-uh-kim.
Josiah	Jo-sigh-uh.
Mattaniah	Mat-uh-nye-uh.
Nebuchadnezzar	Neb-yuh-kud- <i>nez</i> -er.
Nebuzaradan	Neb-you- <i>zar</i> -a-dun.
Pharaoh	Fair-o or Fay-roe.
Zedekiah	Zed-uh-kye-uh.



Visual for Lesson 10. Display this visual as you discuss the consequences of evil actions unaccompanied by repentance.

(21). Some modern studies have proposed that the human brain does not fully mature until about age 25. Thus impulse control is often lower until that point of development.

We may be tempted to blame the sins of the kings on the impulsiveness of youth. After all, it was a preference for the advice of “young men” over that of “old men” that had led to the division of Israel’s monarchy centuries before (1 Kings 12:1–19). But lest we be too hasty in that regard, we remind ourselves that King Josiah, one of Judah’s godliest rulers, was only 8 years old when he became king. He began to seek God by age 16. And in the twelfth year of his reign, at age 20, “he began to purge Judah and Jerusalem” of their idolatry (2 Chronicles 34:1–3).

*Hamutal* was the mother of Jehoahaz (see Lesson Context) and of *Zedekiah* (2 Kings 23:31). This *Jeremiah of Libnah* is not the same man as the more familiar prophet Jeremiah who was from Anathoth (Jeremiah 1:1; 29:27).

**19. And he did that which was evil in the sight of the LORD, according to all that Jehoiakim had done.**

The disheartening evaluation of having done *evil* or being wicked *in the sight of the Lord* occurs about 50 times in the Old Testament; the vast majority of those instances occur in 1–2 Kings and 1–2 Chronicles. By contrast, the evaluation of having done “right in the sight of the Lord” occurs less than half as often—King Josiah having

been the last to be acknowledged in that manner (2 Kings 22:2; see Lesson Context).

For Zedekiah to conduct himself in evil ways carries a certain sad but pointed irony. His very name means “the Lord is righteous.” The irony intensifies as we see that this name was imposed on him by a pagan king (2 Kings 24:17)!

The scope of Zedekiah’s sin is revealed in the phrase *according to all that Jehoiakim had done*. Similar copycat behavior is attributed to Jehoiakim himself as well as to Jehoahaz and Jehoiachin (2 Kings 23:37; 23:32; and 24:9, respectively; see also Lesson Context). The expression “according to all that his father(s) had done” repeated in 2 Kings suggests not merely passive tolerance of evil but active promotion of it.

On Zedekiah’s reign, personality, fate, and interactions with the prophet Jeremiah, see Jeremiah 21:1–7; 24:8–10; 27:1–12; 32:1–5; 34:21–22; 37:1–39:7 (compare 2 Chronicles 36:11–13).

### What Do You Think?

How do you think watching his father Jehoiakim’s evil behavior impacted King Zedekiah?

### Digging Deeper

How can we break patterns of generational sin in our own lives and families?

## B. The Lord’s Anger (v. 20a)

**20a. For through the anger of the LORD it came to pass in Jerusalem and Judah, until he had cast them out from his presence.**

Historians often point to political and military causes for Judah’s ruin. When the people of Israel in the north seceded from the united kingdom under Jeroboam (1 Kings 12), Solomon’s son Rehoboam was left only the small territories of Judah and Benjamin in the south. This little kingdom sat between two regions of great power: Egypt to the west and Mesopotamia to the east. Great empires sought to subdue Israel on their way to conquering other great kingdoms. Seen through this lens of relative military and political power, the kings of Israel and Judah did their best to navigate these treacher-

ous waters by means of treaties to play one power off against another.

But the biblical authors do not see the falls of the northern and southern kingdoms as inevitable results of rebellion against superior military powers. Instead, they attribute these falls to *the anger of the Lord*. When God defends His people, they need no human allies (compare Isaiah 7:1–12; 30:1–5; 31:1; 36:6). When He withdraws His protection, then comes their defeat.

God’s anger is not selfish or petulant, as human anger often is. Rather, God’s anger is a reaction to rebellion and idolatry (Deuteronomy 9:7–9; 11:16–17; Judges 3:7–8; 1 Kings 16:33; 22:53; etc.). God’s covenant with Israel had conditions for Israel to meet; failure to meet those conditions would result in promised consequences (Deuteronomy 28:15–68). For the residents of Judah, it is their violation of the covenant that results in God’s wrath (4:25–27).

## II. Another Reckless Rebellion

(2 Kings 24:20b–25:5)

### A. Siege Begins (24:20b–25:1)

**20b. That Zedekiah rebelled against the king of Babylon.**

Now we learn the specific action that triggers Judah’s ultimate exile. The book of Jeremiah records straightforward talks between king and prophet (Jeremiah 37:6–10, 17–20; 38:14–26; etc.). Jeremiah warned of the coming exile, but the king chose to be persuaded by influential advisors and false prophets. They claimed that Judah could escape Babylon’s control by aligning with Egypt (Jeremiah 28; 37:5; Ezekiel 17:15; contrast Deuteronomy 17:16). Rebellion had already been tried against Babylon a few years earlier, and it had failed (2 Kings 24:1). It would fail again.

### What Do You Think?

In what ways do our sins drive a wedge between God and His people?

### Digging Deeper

How can we honor God’s heart by taking care of the innocent and the vulnerable in our societies?



## What's in Your Playbook?

Sally worked for a prestigious firm where she had oversight of a major account. One day she inadvertently gave a client incorrect information. She debated whether to keep silent or go to her boss, Jeff, to explain what she had done. She chose the latter. As she explained the error to him, she burst into tears, aware that she could be fired.

But that's not what happened. At the end of the explanation, Jeff told Sally that they would call the client. He allowed her to take the lead in apologizing for her error. Jeff himself assured the client that he shared the responsibility. He affirmed that the company would accept loss of revenue or termination of business relationship as necessary.

The client was upset but also deeply impressed by Jeff's humility in taking responsibility. In the end, the client decided to stay with the company and pay the correct billing amount. As Sally rose through the ranks of the company, she used that experience as an example of how leaders act humbly.

The Bible makes clear in many passages that humility and pride are opposites, such as in Proverbs 3:34 (quoted in both James 4:6 and 1 Peter 5:5). Pride says we are self-sufficient; humility admits our need. Trusting God's word for needed action was not in King Zedekiah's playbook (2 Chronicles 36:12–13). Is it in yours? —S. S.

**25:1. And it came to pass in the ninth year of his reign, in the tenth month, in the tenth day of the month, that Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came, he, and all his host, against Jerusalem, and pitched against it; and they built forts against it round about.**

The siege of Jerusalem likely began on January 15, 588 BC, as the Babylonian king takes extreme action to squash the rebellion (see also next week's lesson). What is described is the beginning of a siege against a walled city. The Babylonians were skilled at such warfare, and their abundant artwork celebrating successful sieges shows the pride they took in their cruel skill.

The plan of a siege is simple: seal off the city from any outside source of food and water (compare Isaiah 3:1; Ezekiel 4:16), then wait until the

defenders give up due to starvation. Deuteronomy 28:53–57 and Jeremiah 19:9 predicted that parents would eat their own children. This gruesome prediction came true (2 Kings 6:24–29). To begin the siege, the Babylonians (Chaldeans) build encircling *forts*; these are siege works and include battering rams (Ezekiel 4:2; 21:22).

## B. Siege Ends (vv. 2–3)

**2–3. And the city was besieged unto the eleventh year of king Zedekiah. And on the ninth day of the fourth month the famine prevailed in the city, and there was no bread for the people of the land.**

A siege of Jerusalem in 701 BC had failed (2 Kings 19:32–36), but this one does not. Jerusalem falls *on the ninth day of the fourth month of Zedekiah's eleventh year* of reign, computed to be July 18, 586 BC. Thus the siege takes a bit longer than two and a half years before it succeeds. Sieges gradually weaken the defenders and their defenses. Starvation and dehydration are deadly, and we may wonder how Jerusalem could have held out for more than 30 months!

Various factors contributed to the length of this siege. Previous kings of Judah had built cisterns for holding water supplies and had improved Jerusalem's defenses (2 Chronicles 26:9–10). Furthermore, Jerusalem may have had a source of water within its walls (2 Kings 20:20; Isaiah 22:9–11). But undoubtedly the biggest contributing factor to the siege's length was that it was lifted temporarily in order for the besiegers to deal with a threat from the Egyptian army (Jeremiah 37:5, 11). This respite undoubtedly allowed food and supplies to be restocked. We should also not discount pure human resilience as another factor.

### What Do You Think?

During the two-year siege, do you think Zedekiah sought the Lord?

### Digging Deeper

How can we learn to see and take advantage of the opportunities God gives us to change?

### C. Siege Aftermath (vv. 4–5)

**4. And the city was broken up, and all the men of war fled by night by the way of the gate between two walls, which is by the king's garden: (now the Chaldees were against the city round about:) and the king went the way toward the plain.**

The text of Jeremiah 52:7–8 repeats the narrative we see here, while Jeremiah 39:2–5 adds detail. The three narratives in general and the phrase *the city was broken up* in particular do not indicate that Zedekiah surrendered the city or otherwise capitulated (contrast 2 Kings 24:10–12). Instead, a violent breaching of a wall or gate is in view.

Earlier, the prophet had warned that only two outcomes were possible: (1) if Zedekiah surrendered to the Babylonians, then he and the city would be spared; but (2) failure to surrender would result in the opposite (Jeremiah 38:17–23). As *the king* and *all the men of war* flee, they belatedly seem to realize that Jeremiah was right, and they know the fate that awaits them should they stay.

A knowledge of Jerusalem's topography helps us understand the escape route the defeated soldiers use. Valleys border Jerusalem to the east, the south, and (to a lesser extent) the west. Such areas are virtually unusable for an attacking army wishing to launch a direct assault against the city. So an attack has to come from the north. And although *the Chaldees were against the city round about*, the main strength of their force is undoubtedly located in that northerly direction. Indeed, the additional information in Jeremiah 39:3 regarding “the middle gate” indicates just that.

Piecing together various texts reveals that the king's escape route was not quite the same as that of his soldiers. Although this text states that the soldiers flee *by night by the way of the gate between two walls, which is by the king's garden*, it does not say that King Zedekiah did likewise. We find the king's escape route prophesied in Ezekiel 12:12: he would exit via a hole dug through the wall.

Presuming that the king would want to stay near his remaining soldiers, this hole is probably close to “the gate . . . by the king's garden.” This serves to place the exit points at and near the gate of the fountain, which is at the extreme

southeastern end of the city, near what came to be called the Pool of Siloah (Nehemiah 3:15).

Travel during the darkness of *night* was very difficult in a preindustrial era. At the same time, the lack of light pollution from cities allowed the stars and moonlight to better illuminate the landscape. The defenders of Jerusalem thus likely had some light for sneaking through this thinly guarded section of the Babylonian lines. We speculate that the king and his entourage hoped to obscure their identities and so perhaps escape death or exile.

On the location of *the plain*, see the next verse.

#### What Do You Think?

Why do you think the army fled at this pivotal moment?

#### Digging Deeper

How do we receive courage to face difficult situations in our own lives?

**5. And the army of the Chaldees pursued after the king, and overtook him in the plains of Jericho: and all his army were scattered from him.**

*The Chaldees* (Babylonians) know what they're doing, and their pursuit of *the king* ends successfully *in the plains of Jericho*. This area is also mentioned in Joshua 4:13; 5:10. More commonly, however, the area is known as “the plains of Moab” “by” or “near Jericho” (Numbers 22:1; 26:3, 63; etc.). It is located in the Jordan River valley to the east of Jerusalem. The capture of Zedekiah in this area means that the king and others have traveled some 15 miles and negotiated an elevation drop of some 3,300 feet only to have their escape attempt foiled. The prophecies of Jeremiah 21:7; 32:4–5; and Ezekiel 12:12–13 are thus fulfilled in this verse and the next two, below.

### III. Another Harsh Result

(2 Kings 25:6–9)

#### A. Zedekiah Sentenced (vv. 6–7)

**6. So they took the king, and brought him up to the king of Babylon to Riblah; and they gave judgment upon him.**

*Riblah* is a city that is well known to the res-

idents of Judah: it is the very place where King Jehoahaz had been imprisoned by Pharaoh some two decades prior (2 Kings 23:33). The distance to be covered to get there is nearly 300 miles. Zedekiah has several days to ponder his fate and why he didn't learn from the result of Jehoiachin's rebellion (2 Kings 24:15–16).

**7. And they slew the sons of Zedekiah before his eyes, and put out the eyes of Zedekiah, and bound him with fetters of brass, and carried him to Babylon.**

The Babylonian king exacts a vicious and gruesome price for Zedekiah's disloyalty. Such punishments were to serve as vivid examples to others contemplating rebellion. Also executed are all those of high standing in Judah (Jeremiah 39:6; 52:10).

## Our Blindness

A titan of the computer industry once said that people tend to overestimate where technology will take us in two years and underestimate where it will take us in ten years. I like that observation and find it useful—to a point.

All observations that are based on human wisdom can be wrong (notice the waffling in the phrase “tend to”). We need only to think about the stock markets to see the truth of that: no one is able to pick all the right stocks to invest in all the time, despite various predictive tools at the trader's disposal. Our foresight into the future just isn't what God's is. Neither was Zedekiah's, whose spiritual blindness resulted in physical blindness.

The choice is stark: to determine where we end up in eternity, we can either trust the eyes of our personal experience or trust God's eyes, which see the certainties of the eternal future. Note that it's “either-or,” not “both-and.” And today is the day to make your choice.

—R. L. N.

## B. Jerusalem Burned (vv. 8–9)

**8. And in the fifth month, on the seventh day of the month, which is the nineteenth year of king Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, came Nebuzaradan, captain of the guard, a servant of the king of Babylon, unto Jerusalem.**

Our narrator now shifts from naming the year of Zedekiah's reign to naming that of the Babylo-

nian king, *Nebuchadnezzar*. Judah is vanquished. Babylon is utterly in charge. As historians correlate the dates of the kings' reigns, a month or less has passed since Jerusalem fell.

**9. And he burnt the house of the LORD, and the king's house, and all the houses of Jerusalem, and every great man's house burnt he with fire.**

Having made an example of Zedekiah, the Babylonians now make an example of the entire city of Jerusalem. The prophets had predicted this outcome (Amos 2:4–5; Micah 3:9–12), and the speaker in Psalm 74:3–8 laments it.

### What Do You Think?

How do we determine whether punishments are just or unjust?

### Digging Deeper

How do we seek God's justice in our own lives and communities?

## Conclusion

### A. Hope Beyond Disaster

The story of the fall of Jerusalem attests to God's patience and justice. God told His people what would happen if they broke His covenant (Deuteronomy 28:15–29:29). He saved them from their enemies and gave them time to repent (Judges 2:10–23). Because they failed to repent, the covenant curses fell on Judah (2 Kings 24:1–4).

But judgment was not the last word. God also promised to restore His people and bring them into full relationship with Him (Jeremiah 31:31–34). He sent Jesus Christ to keep that promise (Luke 22:20; 2 Corinthians 3:6). And God is still patient with us (2 Peter 3:9).

### B. Prayer

God of justice, we acknowledge You are right in all Your ways. Your righteousness shows us our wickedness, and so we come to You in repentance. Empower us to seek, learn, and apply lessons from Bible history. In the name of Jesus we pray. Amen.

### C. Thought to Remember

God means what He says!

# Involvement Learning

Enhance your lesson with KJV Bible Student (from your curriculum supplier) and the reproducible activity page (at [www.standardlesson.com](http://www.standardlesson.com) or in the back of the KJV Standard Lesson Commentary Deluxe Edition).

## Into the Lesson

Before students arrive, write the words *Justice* and *Mercy* as headers on the board.

Begin class time by asking learners to brainstorm attributes of justice and mercy. Write responses on the board under the correct header.

Lead into Bible study by saying, “Today’s lesson will look at a terrible story describing how a king of Judah was violently removed from his home. We’ll consider why this was an act of God’s justice and why believers today can also see God’s patient mercy.”

## Into the Word

Before class, ask a volunteer to prepare a five-minute presentation to explain the setting and context for today’s lesson. Encourage the volunteer to use the Lesson Context of this lesson and other lessons from this unit. Ask the volunteer to share that presentation at this point in the class time. The presentation should address the following questions: 1—Who was Zedekiah? 2—What was the nature of his relationship with Jeremiah? 3—How did Zedekiah respond to Jeremiah’s various warnings regarding the future of Judah and Jerusalem?

Have two participants read the 12 verses of today’s lesson aloud, alternating with each verse. Afterward, announce a closed-Bible pop quiz on how much learners remember about those verses. State that you won’t collect the quizzes and that everyone will grade their own. Then distribute handouts (you prepare) with the following multiple-choice questions. *Time limit: one minute!*

- 1—How old was Zedekiah when he began to reign?  
a. 11   b. 12   c. 21
- 2—How long did Zedekiah’s reign last?  
a. 10 years   b. 11 years   c. 12 years
- 3—Which Babylonian king marched against Jerusalem?  
a. Nebuchadnezzar   b. Nebuzaradan   c. Darius
- 4—Which of the following is said to have occurred on the “ninth day of the fourth month”?  
a. plague   b. hailstorm   c. famine

5—Who was killed in front of Zedekiah?

- a. his wife   b. his sons   c. his daughters

6—Who is said to have burned down the house of the Lord in Jerusalem?

- a. Nebuchadnezzar   b. Nebuzaradan   c. Darius

[Answers: 1-c; 2-b; 3-a; 4-c; 5-b; 6-b]

*Option.* Distribute copies of the “Many Warnings” exercise from the activity page, which you can download. Have learners work together in pairs to complete as indicated. (This exercise will be more time-consuming than it appears at first glance.) After calling time, ask for volunteers to share responses. Ask learners to consider how the warnings describe some of the events of today’s text.

Conclude either activity by asking the following questions for whole-class discussion: 1—How do the events in today’s Scripture text reveal God’s anger? 2—What was God’s anger a response to? 3—How does today’s text reveal God’s patience and justice?

## Into Life

Ask the class: “When have you seen God’s patient mercy on display, even amid punishment?” Allow time for the class to give examples.

Lead a brainstorming session on how believers can reflect on God’s patient mercy today, especially in the face of disobedience. Write their responses on the board.

Distribute an index card and pen to each participant. Invite them to write one way they will reflect on God’s mercy throughout the week.

*Alternative.* Distribute copies of the “Diary of My Devotion” activity from the activity page. Have learners complete the chart as a take-home activity. To encourage completion, say that you will review responses at the beginning of the next class time.

Conclude class time by reading aloud Lamentations 3:22–23. Close with a prayer expressing gratitude to God for His patient mercy.

# Ezekiel's Sign

Devotional Reading: 2 Corinthians 1:2–6  
Background Scripture: Ezekiel 1:1–3; 2:1–3:27; 8:1–4;  
11:22–25; 24:15–24; 33:30–33

## Ezekiel 3:10–11

10 Moreover he said unto me, Son of man, all my words that I shall speak unto thee receive in thine heart, and hear with thine ears.

11 And go, get thee to them of the captivity, unto the children of thy people, and speak unto them, and tell them, Thus saith the Lord GOD; whether they will hear, or whether they will forbear.

## Ezekiel 24:15–24, 27

15 Also the word of the LORD came unto me, saying,

16 Son of man, behold, I take away from thee the desire of thine eyes with a stroke: yet neither shalt thou mourn nor weep, neither shall thy tears run down.

17 Forbear to cry, make no mourning for the dead, bind the tire of thine head upon thee, and put on thy shoes upon thy feet, and cover not thy lips, and eat not the bread of men.

18 So I spake unto the people in the morning: and at even my wife died; and I did in the morning as I was commanded.

19 And the people said unto me, Wilt thou not tell us what these things are to us, that thou doest so?

20 Then I answered them, The word of the LORD came unto me, saying,

21 Speak unto the house of Israel, Thus saith the Lord GOD; Behold, I will profane my sanctuary, the excellency of your strength, the desire of your eyes, and that which your soul pitieth; and your sons and your daughters whom ye have left shall fall by the sword.

22 And ye shall do as I have done: ye shall not cover your lips, nor eat the bread of men.

23 And your tires shall be upon your heads, and your shoes upon your feet: ye shall not mourn nor weep; but ye shall pine away for your iniquities, and mourn one toward another.

24 Thus Ezekiel is unto you a sign: according to all that he hath done shall ye do: and when this cometh, ye shall know that I am the Lord GOD.

27 In that day shall thy mouth be opened to him which is escaped, and thou shalt speak, and be no more dumb: and thou shalt be a sign unto them; and they shall know that I am the LORD.

## Key Text

*Moreover he said unto me, Son of man, all my words that I shall speak unto thee receive in thine heart, and hear with thine ears. —Jeremiah 3:10*



# Judah, from Isaiah to the Exile

## Unit 3: Ezekiel and the Exile of Judah

Lessons 10–13

### Lesson Aims

After participating in this lesson, each learner will be able to:

1. Describe the status of the inhabitants of Judah in general and Ezekiel in particular.
2. Explain the role of a prophet as a “visual aid” that God uses to communicate difficult truths.
3. Suggest ways that Christians can become a “visual aid” to proclaim the gospel of Jesus.

### Lesson Outline

#### Introduction

- A. Shaken to Our Senses
- B. Lesson Context: Ezekiel, the Man
- C. Lesson Context: Ezekiel, the Book

#### I. Two Imperatives (Ezekiel 3:10–11)

- A. Listen Carefully (v. 10)  
*Believing in What You “Sell”*
- B. Speak Carefully (v. 11)

#### II. Unusual Reaction (Ezekiel 24:15–18)

- A. God’s Command (vv. 15–17)
- B. Ezekiel’s Obedience (v. 18)

#### III. Sobering Prophecy (Ezekiel 24:19–24, 27)

- A. People’s Inquiry (v. 19)
- B. Jerusalem’s Fate (vv. 20–23)
- C. Ezekiel’s Role (vv. 24, 27)  
*Glowing in the Dark*

#### Conclusion

- A. Delivering a Hard Word
- B. Prayer
- C. Thought to Remember

## Introduction

### A. Shaken to Our Senses

John Newton (1725–1807), author of the beloved hymn “Amazing Grace,” had a dishonorable past. Infamous among his misdeeds was his involvement in the slave trade. Even prior to this, he lived far from what would be considered a moral life. At age 11, he lost his mother and was sent off to sea to live with his father. There he soon succumbed to sinful behavior and immoral habits.

After several years as a mariner, he encountered a life-threatening storm. Biographies point to this experience as marking the start of his journey to a committed life of faith. The fear and pain of the near-death experience caused him to struggle with who and what he had become. The result was a conversion experience that marked a shift in the direction of his life and his view of God. Newton repented of his role in the slave trade and joined England’s abolition movement.

Sometimes it takes pain and suffering to bring an awareness of our sin. At times, God chooses to allow such circumstances to awaken His people and remind us of who He is and who we are not: God.

### B. Lesson Context: Ezekiel, the Man

The prophet Ezekiel was a contemporary of the prophet Jeremiah. Both lived at the time of the Babylonian captivity in the mid-sixth century BC. Ezekiel was 30 years old in “the fifth year of king Jehoiachin’s captivity,” which was the year 592 BC (Ezekiel 1:1–2; compare 2 Kings 24:8–15).

The Babylonian captivity occurred in three stages: the deportations of 605, 597, and 586 BC (2 Kings 24–25; 2 Chronicles 36). Ezekiel’s involuntary relocation to Babylon was a part of the second stage of exile in 597 BC. He was among the 10,000 of the elite citizenry taken at that time (2 Kings 24:12–14). Daniel and other Jews who had been deported in the first stage ended up serving “in the king’s palace” (Daniel 1:4). While Ezekiel, coming in the second stage, found himself in a completely different setting. He was “among the captives by the river of Chebar” in Babylon (Ezekiel 1:1).

Ezekiel is introduced as “the priest” (Ezekiel

1:3). And that is what he would have remained had it not been for the divine wrath that was to be visited on the southern kingdom of Judah at the time. His call to be a prophet is described in Ezekiel 2, which is not part of today's study.

### C. Lesson Context: Ezekiel, the Book

The book of Ezekiel is commonly and most simply outlined in terms of three sections:

- I. Judgment on the covenant people (chapters 1–24)
- II. Judgment on foreign nations (chapters 25–32)
- III. New hope for God's people (chapters 33–48)

Today's study occurs in the first of these three sections.

One important feature of this book is its many references to exact dates. These are found in Ezekiel 1:1–3; 8:1; 20:1; 24:1; 26:1; 29:1, 17; 30:20; 31:1; 32:1, 17; 33:21; 40:1. Most of these dating formulas introduce a communication from God to the prophet. One example relates news of the fall of Jerusalem from a man who had escaped that carnage (Ezekiel 33:21; compare 4:16–17; 5:10–12). Today's study concerns God's communication before that event happens.

## I. Two Imperatives

(Ezekiel 3:10–11)

### A. Listen Carefully (v. 10)

#### 10a. Moreover he said unto me, Son of man.

This verse and the next offer us just a small part of Ezekiel's commissioning to be a prophet of God. That lengthy commissioning is described in all of chapters 2 and 3! The idea is that the man Ezekiel must be prepared for his new role.

If we are familiar with the phrase *Son of man* as a self-designation of Jesus, we may be surprised to see it used here to refer to Ezekiel. In fact, of the nearly 200 occurrences of this phrase in the Bible, close to half are found in the book of Ezekiel. Its use here may be to stress Ezekiel's mortality. It is in that light that the prophet is to measure himself against God.

#### 10b. All my words that I shall speak unto thee receive in thine heart, and hear with thine ears.

In Ezekiel 2:8–3:3, the prophet-in-training was commanded to eat a message contained on a “roll

of a book” (a scroll) and to fill his “belly” and “bowels” with its words. When we place that command alongside the instruction here for Ezekiel to *receive in his heart* what he hears with his *ears* that God has to say, the picture is one of complete and total acceptance of the Lord's message (contrast the people's response in Isaiah 6:9–10).

### Believing in What You “Sell”

When I see celebrities or social-media influencers endorse various products, I always wonder if they really believe in and use the products themselves. Are those spokespersons true believers, or are they just taking a paid gig?

The Bible has a lot to say about beliefs and practices that spring from both self-centered and God-centered motives (1 Samuel 12:3–4; Acts 8:18–19; 16:16–21; 2 Corinthians 2:17; 4:1–2; etc.). The cure for wrong motives is to be so thoroughly permeated with the Word of God that there is no room for them.

Here's a challenge in that regard: read the Bible cover to cover, word for word every year for at least 10 years. Having done just that myself, I'm always alert to the danger of substituting my word for God's. Will you take the challenge? —R. L. N.

### B. Speak Carefully (v. 11)

**11. And go, get thee to them of the captivity, unto the children of the people, and speak unto them, and tell them, Thus saith the Lord GOD; whether they will hear, or whether they will forbear.**

To this point in the book, the Lord has spoken of the audience Ezekiel will be addressing as “impudent,” “stiffhearted,” and “hardhearted” (Ezekiel 2:4; 3:7). As such, they are “briers,” “thorns,” and “scorpions” (2:6). Ezekiel won't have to travel far to address them because he lives right among *them of the captivity* (see Lesson Context: Ezekiel, the Man).

In sharing in the fate of *the children of the people*, it will be natural for Ezekiel to speak with compassion. But Ezekiel's compassion must not be allowed to soften the Lord's message. *Whether they will hear, or . . . forbear* is irrelevant in that regard (compare Ezekiel 2:5, 7). The prophet's duty is to remain faithful to the Lord's message.

His listeners must decide for themselves whether they will do the same.

### What Do You Think?

Why do you think God told Ezekiel to speak His word whether the people listened or not?

### Digging Deeper

When might God call you to speak, whether or not it seems likely people will receive it?

## II. Unusual Reaction

(Ezekiel 24:15–18)

### A. God's Command (vv. 15–17)

**15–16a. Also the word of the LORD came unto me, saying, Son of man, behold, I take away from thee the desire of thine eyes with a stroke.**

The prophet has obeyed God without fail in communicating *the word of the Lord* to the people. Much of this communication has involved him using himself in and as illustrations of God's wrath to come against the covenant people (Ezekiel 4:1–13; 5:1–12; etc.). Another illustration is coming: the loss of *the desire of the prophet's eyes*, the death of Ezekiel's wife. What this death is designed to illustrate is revealed in Ezekiel 24:21, below.

**16b–17. Yet neither shalt thou mourn nor weep, neither shall thy tears run down. Forbear to cry, make no mourning for the dead, bind the tire of thine head upon thee, and put on thy shoes upon thy feet, and cover not thy lips, and eat not the bread of men.**

In a series of nine commands, God directs that Ezekiel's outward, visible and audible reaction to his loss is to be strictly countercultural. Mourning the death of another can involve lengthy and demonstrative behavior in various cultures, both ancient and modern (compare Genesis 37:34–35; 50:1–14). The funeral and accompanying days of mourning would involve all friends and family who could attend. Musicians might be hired to sing laments or play instruments (Matthew 9:23–24, etc.). The volume of sound would be quite high (Mark 5:38, etc.).

The phrases *put on thy shoes upon thy feet, and*

*cover not thy lips* indicate a shared expectation regarding proper “mourning attire” (compare 2 Samuel 14:2; Jeremiah 6:26). Similarly, the phrase *eat not the bread of men* points to food that is customary at funeral meals (compare 16:7).

There is a certain overlap in the meanings of these nine prohibitions, and it's tempting to examine each of the nine in minute detail. It's more valuable, however, to focus on the bigger picture: the larger task of prophetic communication must take precedence over all else.

### What Do You Think?

When has God asked you to go through something difficult, such as the loss of a loved one?

### Digging Deeper

Has God used difficult events in your life to speak to someone else?

### B. Ezekiel's Obedience (v. 18)

**18. So I spake unto the people in the morning; and at even my wife died; and I did in the morning as I was commanded.**

Ezekiel obeys God—period. Even so, we can't help but notice that the text is striking for what it does not say and the obvious questions it does not answer. The timeline of *in the morning . . . at even[ing]* . . . *in the morning* indicates a period of many hours' duration between Ezekiel's receiving God's instruction, the death of the prophet's wife, and the man's divinely commanded visible non-reaction to it. What did Ezekiel do during the hours between those three events? Did he tell his wife about her pending death? Did he pray to God that death would not happen? Had his wife been at the point of death anyway due to illness? The text simply does not say.

## III. Sobering Prophecy

(Ezekiel 24:19–24, 27)

### A. People's Inquiry (v. 19)

**19. And the people said unto me, Wilt thou not tell us what these things are to us, that thou doest so?**

*The people* notice Ezekiel’s odd behavior. He exhibits none of the typical actions, emotions, or postures of grief. Interested curiosity is a good first step toward understanding something. But as we move from curiosity to investigation to understanding, we must be aware of what we use as a “filter” in reaching conclusions. Another way to say this is that we must acknowledge our presuppositions. Then we must be prepared to change them as the evidence requires.

This challenge repeats itself throughout the book of Ezekiel as God labors to change the mindset of His people. That mindset is one of rebellion against God, a fact stressed about a dozen times in this book (Ezekiel 12:2–3, etc.). God’s repeated technique is to catch people’s attention through certain actions or inactions of His prophet (compare 12:9; 17:12). If the explanation for those behaviors doesn’t match what the people expect to hear (that is, it doesn’t line up with their presuppositions), then the explanation is rejected or twisted in some way (compare 20:49).

## B. Jerusalem’s Fate (vv. 20–23)

### 20. Then I answered them, The word of the LORD came unto me, saying.

The author’s frequent use of the words *I* and *me* leaves no doubt that Ezekiel himself was writing of his personal experiences regarding his interactions with God. As the prophet passes along divine communication, he is fulfilling his role as a watchman (Ezekiel 3:16–27; 33:1–20). The phrase *the word of the Lord* makes clear that what the prophet is about to say does not originate with himself.

The numerous uses of this introductory formula in the Bible usually don’t specify exactly how the communication occurred. Those cases where that “how” is specified include communication by dreams or visions (1 Kings 3:5; Daniel 2:19; etc.), through an angel (Judges 6:12, etc.), and from a burning bush (Exodus 3). But the method is not important here. What’s important is that the prophecy proves to be true.

#### 21a. Speak unto the house of Israel.

People are more open to learning something new if they themselves open the discussion. That

seems to be the technique here as Ezekiel has waited for the people to ask, “Why?” before he gives the answer that begins in this verse.

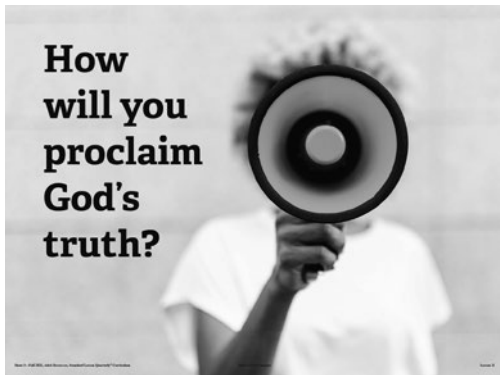
The response *unto the house of Israel* invites a review of the terminology used to identify God’s covenant people of the Old Testament era. Shortly after the death of King Solomon in 930 BC, the united kingdom of Israel’s 12 tribes divided into two kingdoms (1 Kings 11:41–12:20). After that happened, the word *Israel* often became associated with only the 10 northernmost tribes (1 Kings 12:21, etc.). Even so, that distinction had also been used before the monarchy divided (2 Samuel 19:41–43, etc.). Concurrently, the designation *Judah* often was shorthand for the 2 southern tribes of Judah and Benjamin (Jeremiah 6:1; compare Ezra 4:1 with Ezra 4:4). The tribe of Benjamin was much smaller than that of Judah (Numbers 1:20–46; 26:1–51; Judges 20–21; 1 Samuel 9:21).

But that distinction in sense and reference was not always airtight after the monarchy divided. In the text before us, for example, the word *Israel* does not seem to include the 10 northern tribes since the audience is those of Judah (and Benjamin) who were in Babylonian exile; the 10 northernmost tribes had been taken into Assyrian exile over 130 years prior (2 Kings 18:9–12). That conclusion harmonizes with the way the writer refers to Israelites in Ezekiel 2:3; 3:7; 6:5; etc. (compare Ezekiel 9:9).

We also should investigate differing ways the covenant people are identified as we consider the first part of the phrase *the house of Israel*. The Hebrew translated *house* describes the people group as a single family. But the Old Testament describes the Israelites in several other ways as well: as “sons of Israel,” “people of Israel,” etc. In referring to the residents of Judah, Ezekiel prefers

## How to Say It

Assyrians	Uh-sear-e-unz.
Babylonians	Bab-ih-low-nee-unz.
Chaldeans	Kal-dee-unz.
Chebar	Kee-bar.
Pharaoh	Fair-o or Fay-roe.



Visual for Lesson 11. *Point to this visual as you conclude the lesson and consider the question in this visual as a class.*

to use some form of the word *Israel* rather than *Judah* by a ratio of nearly 11 to 1.

**21b. Thus saith the Lord God: Behold I will profane my sanctuary, the excellency of your strength, the desire of your eyes, and that which your soul pitieth; and your sons and your daughters whom ye have left shall fall by the sword.**

This is the answer to the “Why?” question of Ezekiel 24:19, above. The prophet’s audience is expected to see that his reaction (or, more precisely, his lack of reaction) to the death of his wife as an analogy:

- I. Loss of Ezekiel’s wife = loss of temple (*the desire of your eyes*);
- II. Ezekiel = the people;
- III. Ezekiel’s reaction = people’s reaction to the destruction and death.

As the Assyrians were God’s tool to exile Israel’s 10 northern tribes in 722 BC (2 Kings 17:3–6; Isaiah 7:18–25), so also the Babylonians (Chaldeans) would be to the southern kingdom of Judah in 586 BC (Ezekiel 24:1–2; 33:21). The temple is not some kind of good-luck charm that protects evil people (Jeremiah 7:1–4; see also Lesson 6).

Although Ezekiel’s audience in Babylon would not personally experience the destruction to be wrought by Nebuchadnezzar, they would share in the horror of that event nonetheless. They would experience the dismay expressed in texts such as

Psalms 79, 137, or Lamentations 2. This would be the punishment for their sin of idolatry.

**22–23. And ye shall do as I have done: ye shall not cover your lips, nor eat the bread of men. And your tires shall be upon your heads, and your shoes upon your feet: ye shall not mourn nor weep; but ye shall pine away for your iniquities, and mourn one toward another.**

The prophet now drives home the analogy. No one can miss the “this will be like that” connections between his reactions (and lack of reactions) to his wife’s death and those that will characterize the people when they hear of Jerusalem’s fall. As Ezekiel speaks, it is January 15, 588 BC (Ezekiel 24:1); Jerusalem would fall on July 18, 586 BC. Thus Jerusalem has only a bit longer than two and a half years before it will be destroyed.

We may wonder how a city could survive a siege that lasts more than 30 months. The answer is found in Jeremiah 37:11—the siege was lifted temporarily while the Babylonian (Chaldean) army dealt with a threat regarding Pharaoh’s army.

### What Do You Think?

What do you think it was like for the Israelites, being unable to mourn openly for the loss of their loved ones and their city?

### Digging Deeper

What does mourning communicate about the people we have lost?

### C. Ezekiel’s Role (vv. 24, 27)

**24. Thus Ezekiel is unto you a sign: according to all that he hath done shall ye do: and when this cometh, ye shall know that I am the Lord God.**

We dare not miss the point here! False prophets and their false prophecies are rampant in this era (Ezekiel 13:1–7; 22:28). Their messages contradict those of the true prophets of God. So, how are the people to know who is a true prophet and who is a false prophet? The obvious answer is to wait and see whose prophecies come true. It is in that sense that the prophet *Ezekiel* will be a *sign* (compare 4:3; 12:6, 11; and 24:27, below).



### What Do You Think?

What do you think God wanted the Israelites to realize through the prophecy?

### Digging Deeper

In what ways do you struggle to recognize that God is in control and the one that we should go to for help?

## Glowing in the Dark

My children have always loved glow sticks—the kind you can find at dollar stores. Glow sticks are meant to be enjoyed in the dark. And for them to work at all, they have to be broken. It can seem counterintuitive to break a brand-new item. But that's what makes glow sticks work. Without breaking them, they cannot glow.

For a person to come to (or return to) God requires a certain “breaking” of one's spirit or attitude (Psalms 34:18; 51:17; Isaiah 57:15; 66:2; etc.). It's only when we're broken that we realize our need for Him (compare Luke 18:9–14). Our glow can serve to light the world best when we're in our darkest hour. The prophet Ezekiel is a prime example still today. In his darkest times, Ezekiel was a shining light for the Lord.

Everyone is broken at some time and in some way. The resulting darkness can be lonely and frightening. But it is at such times that our character can shine brightest. Consider the differing outlooks in Job 2:9 and Matthew 5:14–16. Which will you pick when disaster strikes? —B. R.

**27. In that day shall thy mouth be opened to him which is escaped, and thou shalt speak, and be no more dumb; and thou shalt be a sign unto them; and they shall know that I am the LORD.**

This verse signals a shift away from God's address to the people (through Ezekiel) and toward the prophet himself. The time frame signified by *in that day* is the time of Jerusalem's predicted fall.

A feature of Ezekiel's being *a sign* is that he was to react to his grief by not reacting to it per Ezekiel 24:16b–17, above. That reaction was to include

silence. This verse reverses that, as the prophet's *mouth* is to *be opened* and he is allowed to *speak, and be no more dumb* (compare Ezekiel 3:26–27). The phrase *to him which is escaped* refers to a man in Ezekiel 33:21–22; that passage also lifts the prophet's silence.

### What Do You Think?

How do you think the people felt when events occurred just as Ezekiel and other prophets had said?

### Digging Deeper

How can we take care to listen to what God has to say to us?

## Conclusion

### A. Delivering a Hard Word

The prophets often brought words of warning or imminent destruction and pain due to the people's lack of faithfulness to God. We see this time and time again in Scripture. The prophets were also responsible for bringing the word of God to people, whether they listened or not. Both the messages and the messengers were often rejected (Luke 11:47–51). God even predicted that such things would happen (Jeremiah 7:27; Ezekiel 3:7).

It's probably safe to say that few, if any, of us will be asked to do something quite like Ezekiel was required to do. Even so, we all face times when speaking difficult truths to people is uncomfortable. Although the gospel is good news, it is also a stumbling block. As it tells us that we can have forgiveness in Christ, it also tells us we are sinners in need of a Savior. To speak this is our task.

### B. Prayer

Heavenly Father, we struggle to pay attention during times of crisis because we do not want to face the need for change in our own lives. Empower us to make the changes we need in order to be better followers of Your Son, Jesus Christ. In His name we pray. Amen.

### C. Thought to Remember

Know the message. Live the message.  
Be the message.



# Involvement Learning

*Enhance your lesson with KJV Bible Student (from your curriculum supplier) and the reproducible activity page (at [www.standardlesson.com](http://www.standardlesson.com) or in the back of the KJV Standard Lesson Commentary Deluxe Edition).*

## Into the Lesson

Write this prompt on the board for class members to see as they arrive:

*An example that made a difference to me . . .*

Distribute a slip of paper and a pen to each class member and ask them to jot down a phrase or a sentence to respond to the prompt. They should not sign their slip. Collect the slips and read them back to the class.

Ask the following questions for whole-class discussion: 1—What do these examples have in common? 2—How would you define a “difference maker”? 3—What would motivate you to be a difference maker?

Lead into Bible study by saying, “Today begins a three-week study on the life of Ezekiel: a prophet who became a ‘visual aid’ for God’s message. In today’s study, we’ll consider the message of Ezekiel and how we can serve as a ‘visual aid’ for the gospel.”

## Into the Word

Before class, recruit a volunteer to present a brief overview of the life and call of Ezekiel. Direct the volunteer to use the Lesson Context and other commentaries. Ask the volunteer to begin the presentation by asking, “What do you know about Ezekiel?” Write answers on the board. Have the volunteer present their overview at this point.

Divide the class into pairs and direct each pair to read Ezekiel 3:10–11; 24:15–24, 27. Distribute pens and copies of the handout (you create) with the following questions: 1—Describe Ezekiel’s mission. 2—Describe Ezekiel’s context. 3—Where was Ezekiel when he received the call? 4—What is significant or surprising about his call? 5—How did Ezekiel communicate God’s warnings? 6—What challenging command did God give to Ezekiel? 7—Why did God give this command?

After no more than 10 minutes, reconvene

the class and ask for volunteers to share their responses. After whole-class discussion, direct participants to work with their partners to write a short diary entry for Ezekiel on the day he received this command from God. After five minutes, ask volunteers to share their diary entries.

*Alternative.* Distribute copies of the “Ezekiel’s Challenging Mission” exercise from the activity page, which you can download. Have participants work in pairs to complete as indicated.

After either alternative, have groups present their findings for whole-class discussion. Ask the following question: “How was Ezekiel a ‘visual aid’ to communicate God’s message of promises and judgments?”

## Into Life

Write the following words as headers on the board: *Home / Work / Community*. Ask the following for whole-class discussion: “How can we live as a ‘visual aid’ to proclaim the gospel of Jesus at home, at work, and in our community?” Conduct a whole-class brainstorming session by challenging participants to complete the columns on the board.

Distribute index cards and pens to learners. Have them work in pairs to write down their choices of how they will be “visual aids” to proclaim the gospel of Jesus throughout the week.

*Alternative.* Mount large sheets of blank butcher paper on your classroom walls. Instead of using index cards, ask pairs to sketch a picture to illustrate how they will be “visual aids” to proclaim the gospel. Let pairs explain their pictures to the whole class. Consider writing a label under each picture to remind class members of the explanations.

*Alternative.* Distribute copies of the “Worship Only God” activity from the activity page. Have learners complete the first section individually in a minute or less before discussing the rest of the page with a partner. After several minutes, allow pairs to share with the whole class.

# Ezekiel's Responsibility

Devotional Reading: Jeremiah 17:5–10  
Background Scripture: Ezekiel 18:1–32; 33:1–20

## Ezekiel 33:7–16a

7 So thou, O son of man, I have set thee a watchman unto the house of Israel; therefore thou shalt hear the word at my mouth, and warn them from me.

8 When I say unto the wicked, O wicked man, thou shalt surely die; if thou dost not speak to warn the wicked from his way, that wicked man shall die in his iniquity; but his blood will I require at thine hand.

9 Nevertheless, if thou warn the wicked of his way to turn from it; if he do not turn from his way, he shall die in his iniquity; but thou hast delivered thy soul.

10 Therefore, O thou son of man, speak unto the house of Israel; Thus ye speak, saying, If our transgressions and our sins be upon us, and we pine away in them, how should we then live?

11 Say unto them, As I live, saith the Lord GOD, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live: turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways; for why will ye die, O house of Israel?

12 Therefore, thou son of man, say unto the children of thy people, The righteousness of the righteous shall not deliver him in the day of his transgression: as for the wickedness of the wicked, he shall not fall thereby in the day that he turneth from his wickedness; neither shall the righteous be able to live for his righteousness in the day that he sinneth.

13 When I shall say to the righteous, that he shall surely live; if he trust to his own righteousness, and commit iniquity, all his righteousnesses shall not be remembered; but for his iniquity that he hath committed, he shall die for it.

14 Again, when I say unto the wicked, Thou shalt surely die; if he turn from his sin, and do that which is lawful and right;

15 If the wicked restore the pledge, give again that he had robbed, walk in the statutes of life, without committing iniquity; he shall surely live, he shall not die.

16a None of his sins that he hath committed shall be mentioned unto him:

## Key Text

*So thou, O son of man, I have set thee a watchman unto the house of Israel; therefore thou shalt hear the word at my mouth, and warn them from me. —Ezekiel 33:7*

# Judah, from Isaiah to the Exile

## Unit 3: Ezekiel and the Exile of Judah

Lessons 10–13

### Lesson Aims

After participating in this lesson, each learner will be able to:

1. Identify righteous and unrighteous behavior.
2. Compare and contrast Ezekiel's role as a watchman with the New Testament's imperatives in that regard.
3. Make a plan to speak the truth in love and warn others of danger, even when the news is unwelcome.

### Lesson Outline

#### Introduction

- A. Learning about Hot Stoves
- B. Lesson Context

#### I. Watchman to the Exiles (Ezekiel 33:7)

- A. Commissioned (v. 7a)
- B. Commanded (v. 7b)
- What to Watch First*

#### II. Warning the Unrighteous (Ezekiel 33:8–9)

- A. Guilt and Accountability (v. 8)
- None of Your Business?*
- B. Guilt and Immunity (v. 9)

#### III. Warning the Israelites (Ezekiel 33:10–16a)

- A. Irrelevant Past (vv. 10–12)
- B. Reversible Present (vv. 13–16a)

#### Conclusion

- A. Living as a Watchman
- B. Prayer
- C. Thought to Remember

## Introduction

### A. Learning about Hot Stoves

Philosophies regarding learning styles go in and out of fashion. Categorizing people as visual learners, auditory learners, or kinesthetic (physical activity) learners has its adherents. Categorizing learning theories as cognitive, behaviorist, constructivist, humanist, and connective holds sway in some quarters. The list goes on and on.

Let's try a simpler approach by proposing that there are two general ways to learn things: by *wisdom* and by *experience*. Wisdom is when you learn from the mistakes of others; experience is when you learn from your own mistakes. Parents readily see these two learning styles in their children. The mother warns that the stove is hot. One child heeds the warning and doesn't touch it (wisdom); the other child puts his hand on the stove anyway, only to withdraw it quickly in pain (experience).

We've all heard the old saying, "Experience is the best teacher." But we easily see the fallacy of this axiom when the alternative is to be taught by wisdom. In today's lesson, the residents of Judah now in Babylonian exile continue to learn the hard way (by experience) the consequences of disobeying God; they are also reminded of the alternative.

### B. Lesson Context

References to "the twelfth year" of the Babylonian exile bracket today's lesson text of Ezekiel 33:7–16a (see Ezekiel 32:1, 17; 33:21). That exile happened in three stages, with deportations taking place in the years 605, 597, and 586 BC (2 Kings 24:1–25:21). "The twelfth year" dates from 597 BC (Ezekiel 1:2). Thus our lesson today takes us into the year of the fall of Jerusalem, in 586 BC. The residents of Judah who had been in exile already for 12 years and longer were about to experience another wave of their countrymen joining them in captivity.

Regarding literary context, the text for today's lesson is part of the larger unit of Ezekiel 33:1–20. This unit examines and illustrates Ezekiel's role as a prophet, the messages he is to convey, what mindset to expect from his audience, and how to respond to wrong thinking. Ezekiel 33:1–

20 is something of a condensed version of Ezekiel 18, in which the prophet corrects an exaggerated view of group responsibility that sees its members as children suffering for the sins of their parents.

## I. Watchman to the Exiles

(Ezekiel 33:7)

### A. Commissioned (v. 7a)

**7a. So thou, O son of man, I have set thee a watchman unto the house of Israel.**

This half-verse offers three phrases that are familiar by this point in the book of Ezekiel. Regarding the 93 uses of the phrase *son of man* to designate Ezekiel, see commentary on Ezekiel 3:10 in last week's lesson. Regarding the initial designation of the prophet as *a watchman*, see Ezekiel 3:17. Regarding the use of the phrase *the house of Israel*, see commentary on Ezekiel 24:21 in last week's lesson (compare Jeremiah 36:2).

The word *watchman* appears in the *King James Version* a total of 19 times; 5 of those 19 are in the book of Ezekiel. In a physical sense, a watchman is a sentinel whose observation post is at the top of an elevated tower. From there he can relay information regarding the approach of enemy forces (2 Kings 9:17, etc.). He is the ancient version of an electronic early warning system. God calls Ezekiel to be a spiritual watchman over His people.

### B. Commanded (v. 7b)

**7b. Therefore thou shalt hear the word at my mouth, and warn them from me.**

The second half of the verse leaves no doubt regarding Ezekiel's role as watchman: he is to *warn* the people of approaching consequences for sinful behavior. Again, this is nothing new to Ezekiel; the command seen here reinforces the one already given in Ezekiel 3:17.

## What to Watch First

A friend's young daughter overheard her father telling the neighbor something that wasn't 100 percent accurate. And with all the boldness of a 6-year-old, she confronted her father about his lie. She reminded him of his own words to her about lying and why it was wrong.

Adults seem to become less bold in that regard as the years pass. When witnessing sin, it's often easier just to remain silent. We don't want to "make waves." We justify our silence by misinterpreting the "judge not" of Matthew 7:1. We fear the various repercussions that can ensue (compare John 7:13; 9:22; 12:42; 19:38; etc.). One repercussion for Ezekiel was to be treated dismissively (Ezekiel 20:49).

We move toward a godly solution by pausing to realize what we should watch first and foremost: ourselves (Luke 17:1–2; Galatians 6:1; 1 Timothy 4:16). Failure to do so results in hypocrisy. And in our continuous self-watch, we make certain we are using God's Word as the standard for the evaluation (2 Timothy 3:16; Hebrews 4:12; contrast 2 Corinthians 10:12). What steps can you take today to watch yourself more faithfully? —S. S.

## II. Warning the Unrighteous

(Ezekiel 33:8–9)

### A. Guilt and Accountability (v. 8)

**8. When I say unto the wicked, O wicked man, thou shalt surely die; if thou dost not speak to warn the wicked from his way, that wicked man shall die in his iniquity; but his blood will I require at thine hand.**

A repeated theme in this book is that of personal responsibility for sin (compare Ezekiel 33:14, 20; 18:4). And for the prophet Ezekiel to turn a blind eye toward such sin will result in his bearing some level of responsibility for the resulting deaths (*his blood will I require at thine hand*). In a spiritual sense, we would place such intentional blindness in the category of a "sin of omission"—failing to do something required by God (Numbers 9:13, etc.). In an earthly sense, this might be similar to "negligent homicide," where a person's conduct disregards the life and safety of others (compare 35:22–23). The attitude of the runaway prophet Jonah is informative here.

The Hebrew verb translated *warn* here occurs frequently in the book of Ezekiel compared with the rest of the Old Testament. What may be implied regarding the responsibility of other biblical prophets is stated to Ezekiel clearly and often.

### What Do You Think?

Do you think it is fair that Ezekiel will be responsible for the blood of those he does not warn? Why or why not?

### Digging Deeper

What are ways we might be called to warn those around us?

## None of Your Business?

Imagine this situation: you are standing on the platform of a commuter train station. You look up and see someone standing on the railroad tracks, blissfully unaware that a train is approaching. Would you not instinctively yell at your loudest to warn that person to get off the tracks?

Now change that scene to be spiritual in nature as you imagine that the train is God's wrath as it approaches an unrepentant sinner who isn't aware of the danger. Shouldn't you likewise shout a warning, or would you merely think, *How sad, but that's none of my business?*

Let's push this further. If in either situation you shout the warning, but the endangered person shouts in reply, "Where I'm standing and what I'm doing is none of your business!" What would you do next? —R. L. N.

### B. Guilt and Immunity (v. 9)

**9. Nevertheless, if thou warn the wicked of his way to turn from it; if he do not turn from his way, he shall die in his iniquity; but thou hast delivered thy soul.**

This verse repeats Ezekiel 3:19. The prophet will not bear any responsibility for the death of the unrepentant if Ezekiel has done his job of communicating the divine will. We may wonder why such a prophetic warning is even necessary! Have the covenant people not had the Ten Commandments and the Law of Moses for centuries at this point? Indeed, they have. But things can get "lost in the shuffle" in various ways (2 Kings 22:8–13, etc.). And we humans seem to have a desire to interpret actions and attitudes in sinful ways (Isaiah 5:20, etc.).

## III. Warning the Israelites

(Ezekiel 33:10–16a)

### A. Irrelevant Past (vv. 10–12)

**10a. Therefore, O thou son of man, speak unto the house of Israel.**

See commentary on Ezekiel 33:7a, above, regarding these two phrases.

**10b. Thus ye speak, saying, If our transgressions and our sins be upon us, and we pine away in them, how should we then live?**

God anticipates an if-then response from the people, and He begins to prepare His prophet to answer it. The *if* part indicates that the truth of the people's personal responsibility for their *transgressions* and *sins* is beginning to sink in.

When a person is in a very negative situation, there's typically an attempt to discover why. Often this involves "playing the blame game," as others are seen to be responsible. But, as Ezekiel 18 also tells us, God will have none of this! As the people begin to "get it" in this regard, they will wonder what they can do to reverse the situation. Change will seem hopeless given the fact that they now are low on strength (*pine away*) to change things as they languish in exile. Their experience of pining away was itself part of the covenantal curses (Leviticus 26:39; compare Ezekiel 4:17; 24:23.)

How Ezekiel is to respond to the if-then question is established in the next verse.

### What Do You Think?

Why do you think it was hard for the Israelites to turn away from their sins, even when they knew that their sins were killing them?

### Digging Deeper

What sins do we find especially hard to turn from as individuals? As a community?

**11. Say unto them, As I live, saith the Lord GOD, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live: turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways; for why will ye die, O house of Israel?**

The oath-phrase *as I live* occurs 16 times in

Ezekiel—far more than in any other book of the Bible. With its use, God takes an oath in the only worthy name: His own. Since people swear oaths by something higher than themselves and nothing is higher than God, God swears an oath in His own name (Hebrews 6:13; compare Matthew 5:33–37; 23:16–22). This solemn oath is God’s assurance that He is willing and able to reclaim the repentant person’s life. But there must be a permanent turning from sin.

The one who created us takes no delight in our suffering, even when it is deserved. As 2 Peter 3:9 puts it, God is “longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance” (compare Ezekiel 18:23, 32). Unlike Jonah, who wanted sinners destroyed, Ezekiel agrees with God. The prophet’s words aim to help the people change, not merely to condemn. He holds out hope that God’s words can again be honored.

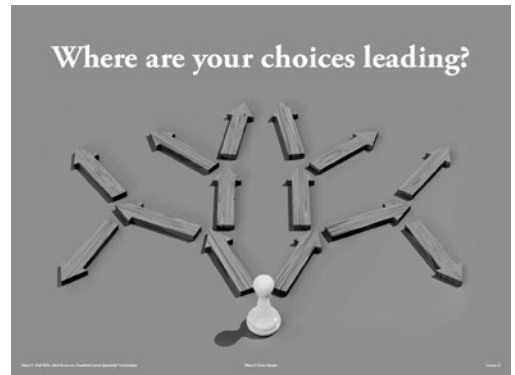
This hope extends not just to individuals, but to the people as a whole. The rhetorical question *why will ye die* becomes both an invitation to live and a recognition that change is possible.

### 12a. Therefore, thou son of man, say unto the children of thy people.

On the designation *son of man*, see the discussion above and of last week. The phrase *children of thy people* is a near-literal translation of the underlying Hebrew; a very literal translation would be “sons of thy people.” The phrase is interesting because of its rarity. The exact Hebrew lettering occurs only eight times in the Old Testament, and six of those eight are in Ezekiel—and four of those six are here in chapter 33. (For all eight, see Leviticus 19:18; Ezekiel 3:11; 33:2, 12, 17, 30; 37:18; Daniel 12:1.) The idea seems one of all-inclusiveness; the word of God applies to multiple generations.

## How to Say It

Deuteronomy	Due-ter-ahn-uh-me.
Ezekiel	Ee-zeek-ee-ul or Ee-zeek-yul.
Leviticus	Leh-vit-ih-kus.
Zacchaeus	Zack-key-us.



Visual for Lesson 12. Display this visual as you discuss the commentary associated with Ezekiel 33:13–16a.

**12b. The righteousness of the righteous shall not deliver him in the day of his transgression: as for the wickedness of the wicked, he shall not fall thereby in the day that he turneth from his wickedness.**

This verse can be summed up this way: whichever way you turn, the past doesn’t count. If a *righteous* person rebels, his past life of *righteousness* won’t count. If a *wicked* person repents, her past life of wickedness won’t count. The phrase *the righteousness of the righteous* is interesting because of its rarity; it is found only here and in Ezekiel 18:20 in the Old Testament.

For its part, the Hebrew word translated *righteous* is rendered differently in other passages, depending on context. In Ezekiel 45:10, it is translated three times as “just” (as in “fair”). In Proverbs 8:15, it is translated “justice.” In all instances, the reference is to something positive.

**12c. Neither shall the righteous be able to live for his righteousness in the day that he sinneth.**

The prophet’s earlier use of this vocabulary in the lengthy chapter of Ezekiel 18 adds a nuanced, realistic view of human affairs. Proper treatment of others and devotion to God can break cycles of injustice and impiety. Those cycles do exist and have real power unless vigorously identified and resisted.

### B. Reversible Present (vv. 13–16a)

**13. When I shall say to the righteous, that**



**he shall surely live; if he trust to his own righteousness, and commit iniquity, all his righteousnesses shall not be remembered; but for his iniquity that he hath committed, he shall die for it.**

This verse stresses a contrast that has been previously sketched (Ezekiel 18:24; etc.). It will be stressed again centuries later in the era of the new covenant (Hebrews 10:38; 2 Peter 2:20–21). As we see God promising life to *the righteous*, we hasten to stress that the phrases *shall surely live* and *shall die for it* refer primarily to eternal life and eternal condemnation, respectively. The pages of the Bible bear witness to many instances of godly, righteous people who were persecuted to the point of losing their earthly lives as they lived out Matthew 10:28.

Digging deeper into the intent of this verse, we may wonder what kind of sin the phrase *commit iniquity* refers to, and it's easy to draw the wrong conclusions. A righteous person will still sin, but less and less so as spiritual maturity progresses. But people don't actually *become* righteous under either the old or new covenant; the reality of sin prevents that. Rather, God has a plan that allows us to be *counted as if* we were righteous. Romans 4, quoting Genesis 15:6 and Psalm 32:1–2, explains this. For those in Christ, the debt for all our sins—past, present, and future—has been paid by the blood of Christ (Romans 3:21–26; 1 John 1:9). What God speaks through Ezekiel, rather, seems to deal with a decisive change in allegiance by a person, the new allegiance being to wickedness and iniquity (1 John 2:15–17).

#### **What Do You Think?**

What do you think it means that righteous people can “trust” in their righteousness and still “commit iniquity”?

#### **Digging Deeper**

How can we guard against acting as though they were above the law?

**14. Again, when I say unto the wicked, Thou shalt surely die; if he turn from his sin, and do that which is lawful and right.**

These two verses revisit a topic already dis-

cussed; in this case the reference is to Ezekiel 18:27; 33:8, above. A choice of taking the path of *the wicked* is not an irreversible one. For the wicked to switch to the path of the righteous is possible, as it involves both attitude and action. The attitude is to *turn from sin* as the person renounces that path. The action embraces positive behaviors that are consistent with those of a righteous person according to God's expectations.

The words *lawful* and *right* are translations of two common Hebrew words that appear together about 100 times in the Old Testament. Together in the phrase *that which is lawful and right*, they occur only 7 times, all in this book (Ezekiel 18:5, 19, 21, 27; 33:14, 16, 19). In this regard, the two words seem to be used as synonyms or near-synonyms, such as they are used together in poetic passages (Psalms 36:6; 72:1; etc.). The word translated *lawful* is also translated “judgments” in Ezekiel 20:11; there it is teamed up with the word *statutes* to identify the path of life.

#### **What Do You Think?**

If a person may repent and receive mercy, what does this tell us about how God feels about people who do evil things?

#### **Digging Deeper**

How should this change how we feel about or treat such people?

**15. If the wicked restore the pledge, give again that he had robbed, walk in the statutes of life, without committing iniquity; he shall surely live, he shall not die.**

We can't miss the mirror image of Ezekiel 33:14–15 as these two verses reflect 33:13. This verse deals with some wrongs to be made right as the formerly wicked person walks the new path. *The pledge* refers to collateral or security taken for something that is on loan to someone else.

This issue is addressed in at least a dozen Old Testament passages. Regarding the nature of the collateral, six passages speak of an article of clothing (Exodus 22:26; Deuteronomy 24:17; Job 22:6; Proverbs 20:16; 27:13; Amos 2:8). Three passages identify the collateral or security deposit in terms

of a millstone (Deuteronomy 24:6), an ox (Job 24:3), and a child (Job 24:9). Those in Ezekiel 33:15; 18:12, 16 have an uncertain reference.

The observation “the borrower is servant to the lender” (Proverbs 22:7) reflects the fact that the lender has a lot of power over the borrower. This power is subject to abuse (compare 6:1–5; 11:15; 17:18). In an era without banks or other lending institutions, loans were person to person for purposes of survival, not for raising capital to start businesses. This tempted lenders to use failure to repay as an excuse for oppression.

The wicked pay no attention to restrictions in the Law of Moses either as they relate to retaining a pledge or to requirements for restitution (Exodus 22:1–4; Leviticus 6:2–5; Numbers 5:5–8). The phrase *give again that he had robbed* is another indicator of the right behavior of one who changes from the path of death to the path of life. This reminds us of the repentant attitude and promised action of Zacchaeus (Luke 19:8).

### What Do You Think?

Repentance in this passage involves giving back what was taken. What might a person do when this is not possible?

### Digging Deeper

What is an example of amends you have made when repenting of past sin?

## 16a. None of his sins that he hath committed shall be mentioned unto him.

God’s wrath awaits the unrepentant. But once repentance comes, God holds no grudges (Isaiah 43:25; Ezekiel 18:22), unlike people (compare Leviticus 19:18). Divine forgiveness is not a “one and done” feature of God’s love. It is ongoing, and its “talk” must be accompanied by its “walk” for a God-honoring outcome.

## Conclusion

### A. Living as a Watchman

As members of the new covenant, today we continue to ponder the connection between sin and suffering for those living under the old covenant (compare Job 21:19; Luke 13:1–5; John

9:2). Righteous people do indeed suffer because of realities beyond their control. But today’s lesson says that the path of the righteous is the one to travel nonetheless. Walking the path of the wicked results in destruction. Considering God’s charge to Ezekiel to be a watchman, how might we live out a watchman role?

At the outset, it is important to understand that Ezekiel received his call to serve as a prophetic watchman by direct revelation from God. Ezekiel filled this role at a particular time in history, to a particular group of people, in ways that were relevant to his time, place, and audience. We are not prophets in the same sense that Ezekiel was. Those who claim today to be commissioned by God to be prophets in the sense of being able to foretell the future may well be proven wrong (Deuteronomy 18:22; Hebrews 1:1–2).

Even so, there are opportunities for us to speak a watchman’s words of warning and wisdom to those around us. God doesn’t desire that anyone should perish (2 Peter 3:9). He punishes disobedience justly, but He is also gracious, merciful, and patient. He invites sinners to repent and turn from their wicked ways to find life in His Son. We have this good news to proclaim!

Moreover, it is not up to us whether people heed our words. Like Ezekiel, our responsibility is to tell the story of the good news of the gospel (Matthew 28:19–20). Whether that good news is accepted or rejected is not within our control. However, our own faithfulness in proclaiming it is.

### B. Prayer

O God our Father, who does not desire anyone to be lost in sin or crushed by despair, speak good news into our broken world so that we may make wrongs right and restore relationships to a state of health. Keep us from the path of eternal death. Grant us strength as we continue on the way of the One who is “the way, the truth, and the life,” Your Son, Jesus. It is in His name we pray. Amen.

### C. Thought to Remember

Speak and act as a watchman!

# Involvement Learning

*Enhance your lesson with KJV Bible Student (from your curriculum supplier) and the reproducible activity page (at [www.standardlesson.com](http://www.standardlesson.com) or in the back of the KJV Standard Lesson Commentary Deluxe Edition).*

## Into the Lesson

Display images of various “warning signs.” For each image, ask participants to answer the following questions: 1—Why is the sign needed? 2—What would happen if the sign wasn’t there? 3—What would happen if a person ignored the sign?

*Alternative 1.* Divide the class into small groups, ensuring each group includes at least one member with a smartphone. Have groups complete an internet search for pictures of warning signs. Direct groups to choose one image and use it to answer the questions above. After calling time, bring groups together to share their signs and responses.

Lead into the Bible study by saying, “We all know that warnings are valuable and maybe necessary. Today, we’ll study one of God’s spokesmen who God charged to warn His people. We’ll see how the man’s actions might be an example for us.”

## Into the Word

Help students understand the setting for today’s study by summarizing material found under the Lesson Context for this lesson and lesson 11. Include information regarding Ezekiel, his ministry, and the historical events occurring during his ministry.

*Option.* Distribute copies of the “Standing on Our Own” exercise from the activity page, which you can download. Have learners work in small groups to complete as indicated. After five minutes, ask volunteers to share how Ezekiel 18 gives further context to today’s lesson.

Ask a volunteer to read Ezekiel 33:7–16a aloud. Divide students into equal groups. Distribute a handout (you create) with the following questions for in-group discussion: 1—What are the if-then statements in Ezekiel 33:7–16a? 2—Which statement(s) describe(s) the consequences of righteous behavior? 3—Which statement(s) describe(s) the consequences of unrighteous behavior? 4—What is the role of the “watchman” in this text?

After calling time, reconvene the class to review their findings. After groups have shared, ask volunteers to read aloud Matthew 18:15–19; Galatians 6:1–5; and Ephesians 4:11–16, 25. Distribute a handout (you create) with the following questions for in-group discussion: 1—How do these texts explain the Christian’s role as a “watchman” or “lookout” for sin? 2—How would you define the role of a spiritual “watchman” or “lookout”? 3—What are the challenges believers face in filling this role? After calling time, reconvene the class to review their findings.

## Into Life

Ask participants to brainstorm modern-day situations that require a spiritual “watchman” or “lookout.” Write responses on slips of paper, one response per slip. Ask for volunteers to role-play these situations. Call the volunteers to the front of the class and allow them to choose one of the slips of paper. After allowing one minute for the volunteers to prepare, call on them to role-play the situation.

After the activity, ask the following questions for whole-class discussion: 1—What are some motivations to have a similar difficult conversation? 2—How do these conversations require speaking truth in love? 3—Why is it essential that these conversations come from an attitude of love rather than hostility?

Distribute a pen and index card to each learner. Challenge participants to identify a situation requiring them to speak the truth in love and warn others of danger, even when the news is unwelcome. Direct learners to write down a plan for doing so. Conclude class with small-group prayer for grace and boldness to act on the identified concerns.

*Option.* Distribute copies of the “Letter to a Friend” activity from the activity page. Have learners complete it individually in a minute or less before discussing conclusions with a partner.

# Ezekiel's Vision

Devotional Reading: Revelation 7:9–17

Background Scripture: Ezekiel 47:1–12

## Ezekiel 47:1–9, 12

1 Afterward he brought me again unto the door of the house; and, behold, waters issued out from under the threshold of the house eastward: for the forefront of the house stood toward the east, and the waters came down from under from the right side of the house, at the south side of the altar.

2 Then brought he me out of the way of the gate northward, and led me about the way without unto the utter gate by the way that looketh eastward; and, behold, there ran out waters on the right side.

3 And when the man that had the line in his hand went forth eastward, he measured a thousand cubits, and he brought me through the waters; the waters were to the ancles.

4 Again he measured a thousand, and brought me through the waters; the waters were to the knees. Again he measured a thousand, and brought me through; the waters were to the loins.

5 Afterward he measured a thousand; and it was a river that I could not pass over: for the waters were risen, waters to swim in, a river that could not be passed over.

6 And he said unto me, Son of man, hast

thou seen this? Then he brought me, and caused me to return to the brink of the river.

7 Now when I had returned, behold, at the bank of the river were very many trees on the one side and on the other.

8 Then said he unto me, These waters issue out toward the east country, and go down into the desert, and go into the sea: which being brought forth into the sea, the waters shall be healed.

9 And it shall come to pass, that every thing that liveth, which moveth, whithersoever the rivers shall come, shall live: and there shall be a very great multitude of fish, because these waters shall come thither: for they shall be healed; and every thing shall live whither the river cometh.

12 And by the river upon the bank thereof, on this side and on that side, shall grow all trees for meat, whose leaf shall not fade, neither shall the fruit thereof be consumed: it shall bring forth new fruit according to his months, because their waters they issued out of the sanctuary: and the fruit thereof shall be for meat, and the leaf thereof for medicine.

## Key Text

*By the river upon the bank thereof, on this side and on that side, shall grow all trees for meat, whose leaf shall not fade, neither shall the fruit thereof be consumed: it shall bring forth new fruit according to his months, because their waters they issued out of the sanctuary: and the fruit thereof shall be for meat, and the leaf thereof for medicine. —Ezekiel 47:12*

# Judah, from Isaiah to the Exile

## Unit 3: Ezekiel and the Exile of Judah

Lessons 10–13

### Lesson Aims

After participating in this lesson, each learner will be able to:

1. List some key features of Ezekiel's vision.
2. Explain the nature of prophecy, whose fulfillment can arrive in unexpected or surprising ways.
3. Identify one image of the vision that he or she finds most encouraging and explain why it gives hope.

### Lesson Outline

#### Introduction

- A. Mirage or Hope?
- B. Lesson Context

#### I. Guiding (Ezekiel 47:1–2)

- A. East and South (v. 1)  
*Speaking Compass*
- B. North and East (v. 2)

#### II. Wading (Ezekiel 47:3–5)

- A. First Thousand Cubits (v. 3)
- B. Second Thousand Cubits (v. 4a)
- C. Third Thousand Cubits (v. 4b)
- D. Fourth Thousand Cubits (v. 5)

#### III. Learning (Ezekiel 47:6–9, 12)

- A. Numerous Trees (vv. 6–7)  
*The Blackberry Bush That Could*
- B. Flourishing Fish (vv. 8–9)
- C. Productive Trees (v. 12)

#### Conclusion

- A. Hope for Abundant Life
- B. Hope for Eternal Life
- C. Prayer
- D. Thought to Remember

## Introduction

### A. Mirage or Hope?

A character in a movie is alone in a hot and arid place. He is parched with thirst and nearing heat exhaustion from the blazing sun. Suddenly, he sees a glimmering pool near a tree. Water and shade! The character experiences a surge of hope. But hopes are dashed when he eventually realizes that he has been fooled by a shimmering illusion. What seemed to support life turned out to be only a mirage.

The presence of water is a sign of life. This incapable fact invites powerful comparisons and imagery in the Bible (examples: Jeremiah 2:13; John 7:37–39). Today's lesson offers one of the most powerful of those.

### B. Lesson Context

Most of the contextual information in the previous lessons from Ezekiel still applies and need not be repeated here. What's changed about the context is a shift from addressing the Judahites's then-present situation in Babylon to a vision of the future. All of Ezekiel 40–48, about 20 percent of the entire book, relates this vision. Understanding the meaning and significance of the vision is crucial to appreciate this great book fully. The imagery of the “water of life” river and its surroundings has parallels elsewhere in the Bible. Revelation 22, in particular, offers several points for fruitful comparison.

The vision is meant to encourage God's people. The exile had decimated their homeland. Their capital had been razed. Their temple was destroyed. The exiles now lived in a strange land under a foreign power. While the prophets had predicted a return (Jeremiah 29:10–14), many feared they would never see Judah again. Ezekiel's visions offer these exiles reason to hope. The visions concern a new city and a transformed homeland. The glory of this new Jerusalem and Judah will be greater than what was lost.

The vision opens in Ezekiel 40:1 with a record of the date. By comparison with various texts and calendars, that date would likely be around 573 BC. As the reader moves through the text from 40:1,

Ezekiel is seen to receive details concerning a restored city and temple. These prophetic images include particulars regarding the officials to serve in the new temple, allotment of land, and instructions regarding offering procedures for Passover and other special days. Then we arrive at chapter 47.

## I. Guiding

(Ezekiel 47:1–2)

### A. East and South (v. 1)

**1. Afterward he brought me again unto the door of the house; and, behold, waters issued out from under the threshold of the house eastward: for the forefront of the house stood toward the east, and the waters came down from under from the right side of the house, at the south side of the altar.**

The pronoun *he* refers to the “man” (perhaps an angel) who has been guiding Ezekiel’s visionary tour from the beginning (Ezekiel 40:3). Previously, the man had taken Ezekiel to the temple’s “porch” (40:48–49) and “door” (41:1–2). Now they are back again *unto the door of the house* (the temple). Like Solomon’s temple before it, Ezekiel envisions this temple facing *toward the east*, the direction from which the sun rises (compare with the prophet’s vision of the old temple in Ezekiel 8:16).

On arrival, Ezekiel witnesses a bizarre sight: water flowing *from under the threshold of the house eastward*. We think of a threshold as the small gap between the bottom of a closed door and the floor. That flow of water is to the south side of the altar (south is to Ezekiel’s *right side* if he is facing east, watching the water flow away from the door). Apparently the waters are flowing in a southeasterly direction. We will see why shortly.

### Speaking Compass

I “speak compass,” but my wife doesn’t. On our way to work together one day, we encountered a road-blocking hazard as we traveled south. So, I immediately turned east into a neighborhood that was completely unfamiliar to us. Soon, we turned south and I began trying to decide the best street to turn west on.

When we did turn west, we had driven a

few blocks when my wife exclaimed, “I have no idea where we are!” No sooner had those words escaped her lips than we found ourselves right where we should be: at the driveway entrance to our workplace.

Not everyone “speaks compass” in a physical, earthly sense, and GPS can make it unimportant to be able to do so. But what about the spiritual sense? The book of Ezekiel uses the four compass directions about 150 times—far more than any other book in the Bible. Here’s a challenge for your spiritual growth: look up those 150 times and study them to discern their spiritual purposes.

—R. L. N.

### B. North and East (v. 2)

**2. Then brought he me out of the way of the gate northward, and led me about the way without unto the utter gate by the way that looketh eastward; and, behold, there ran out waters on the right side.**

The guide now leads the prophet outside the envisioned Jerusalem. To get to the outside of the *gate . . . that looketh eastward*, they first head north to exit the city by *the gate* there. They then move clockwise until they reach their destination. We may wonder why they don’t just go out the east gate rather than take a long way around. The answer is in Ezekiel 44:1–3: the Lord has closed that gate.

In his new location, the prophet notes consistency in the direction the water flows.

#### What Do You Think?

How can water, in its various contexts, illustrate the character or actions of God?

#### Digging Deeper

How do Psalms 23:1–2; 24:1–2; Isaiah 43:20; 48:18; and John 7:37–39 inform your response?

## II. Wading

(Ezekiel 47:3–5)

### A. First Thousand Cubits (v. 3)

**3. And when the man that had the line in his hand went forth eastward, he measured a**



**thousand cubits, and he brought me through the waters; the waters were to the ankles.**

*The man* leads Ezekiel *eastward*, the direction toward which the waters flow. The man has a *line in his hand* for measuring. This may be the same “line of flax” mentioned at the beginning of the vision (Ezekiel 40:3).

Walking a distance of *a thousand cubits*, the two find themselves in ankle-deep water. If the cubits mentioned are the standard ones of 18 inches, they have walked about 500 yards, a little short of three-tenths of a mile. If the cubit used is the 21-inch long cubit of Ezekiel 43:13, then the distance is one-third of a mile. Walking at a rate of two miles per hour requires 10 minutes or less to cover the distance.

### **B. Second Thousand Cubits (v. 4a)**

**4a. Again he measured a thousand, and brought me through the waters; the waters were to the knees.**

The computation of possible distances is the same as in the previous verse. Wading through the water at a rate of one mile per hour means it takes 17 to 20 minutes, depending on the cubit-length used (see above), to reach this segment of the visionary tour.

### **C. Third Thousand Cubits (v. 4b)**

**4b. Again he measured a thousand, and brought me through; the waters were to the loins.**

By this point, it is surely apparent that the source of the water cannot be Jerusalem’s Gihon Spring or any other naturally occurring flow! And this contributes to an issue of what to expect. Some commentators believe that the imagery of Ezekiel 40–48 depicts a literal, physical temple that is yet to be rebuilt. In that case, Ezekiel is foreseeing God’s plans to alter the topography (landscape) and hydrology of Jerusalem miraculously.

Other commentators believe, however, that the vision of the restored temple and its changed surroundings are figurative. This position may be supported by how Luke 3:4–6 uses the changed topography of Isaiah 40:4 as a metaphor for the ministry of John the Baptist (compare Matthew

3:3; Mark 1:3; John 1:23). The leveling of the terrain could refer to the change of peoples’ hearts, receptivity, etc. Images of a temple in Revelation 11:19; 14:15; 15:5–8; etc. are also interpreted as figurative since Revelation 21:22 says that no temple was seen in the heavenly city of Jerusalem.

Another support for this position is that although numerous dimensions are given for the restored temple (and some of its furnishings and surroundings) in Ezekiel’s vision, the height of the temple itself is never specified (contrast Ezekiel 40:5, 12, 42; 43:13).

### **D. Fourth Thousand Cubits (v. 5)**

**5. Afterward he measured a thousand; and it was a river that I could not pass over: for the waters were risen, waters to swim in, a river that could not be passed over.**

With walking and wading a total distance of 4,000 cubits now, the prophet and his guide have covered a distance of between 1.14 and 1.33 miles in the vision, depending on cubit length (see above). But now the two must turn back because of the river’s increasing depth as the flow of water continues unchecked.

## **III. Learning**

(Ezekiel 47:6–9, 12)

### **A. Numerous Trees (vv. 6–7)**

**6. And he said unto me, Son of man, hast thou seen this? Then he brought me, and caused me to return to the brink of the river.**

On the address *Son of man*, see commentary on Ezekiel 3:10 in lesson 11. The guide’s question may be posed as an exclamation of wonder: “Son of man, look at this! Isn’t all this something?”

After an unspecified time of experiencing their amazement, Ezekiel and his guide seemingly head back to the point where they had begun wading into *the river*. They are back on dry land.

**7. Now when I had returned, behold, at the bank of the river were very many trees on the one side and on the other.**

The book of Ezekiel speaks of trees in about 30 verses—more than any other Bible book; about half of those 30 verses are in the prophet’s vision of

Ezekiel 40–48. The imagery of *trees* in this verse finds a parallel in the vision of Revelation 22:2, given more than 600 years later. The author of Revelation envisions the trees of Ezekiel’s vision as trees of life (Genesis 2:9). Verse 12 will provide the reason for this connection.

Taking the book of Ezekiel as a whole, the prophet’s reference is usually to ordinary trees (examples: Ezekiel 15:2, 6). But the prophet also refers to the trees of Eden (31:16, 18). Tree imagery occurs extensively in Jesus’ teachings centuries after Ezekiel (examples: Matthew 7:15–20; Luke 13:6–9).

The Babylonians’ devastation of the land during the siege of Jerusalem included the cutting of trees for the building of siege ramps (Jeremiah 6:6). The Israelites were constrained in the use of trees for such purposes (Deuteronomy 20:19–20), but the Babylonians knew no such constraint. Since Ezekiel’s vision speaks to renewal of the land, that includes renewal of trees, both those that produce fruit and those that don’t, as signs of recovery.

### What Do You Think?

How can you use tree imagery to illustrate an aspect of Christian faith?

### Digging Deeper

Which of Scripture’s uses of tree imagery is the most compelling to you? Why?

## The Blackberry Bush That Could

My sister-in-law’s massive, flourishing garden surprised us. When she was first getting it started, someone gave her a blackberry bush. It was small and seemingly lifeless. Without much planning or research, she planted it off to the side with hardly a thought for its growth. She was far more concerned about her peppers and tomatoes, which grew in abundance.

One day, we went to visit so my husband could see the results of her work. We immediately noticed something striking: the blackberry bush had overtaken nearly an entire corner of her garden! It was thriving to the point of encroaching on the sweet potatoes and green beans. The plant was loaded with sweet, juicy blackberries.



Visual for Lesson 13. Display this visual as you ask the discussion questions associated with Ezekiel 47:9.

Ezekiel’s vision reminds us that our current circumstances do not determine the future God has or desires for us. Things as they are now are not permanent. New life can come to those experiencing an arid deadness of spirit. New life comes when we connect with the source of living water: Jesus (John 7:37–38). Whether in Old Testament times or New, the need for living water doesn’t change. Before you choose your source, read Jeremiah 2:13.

—B. R.

## B. Flourishing Fish (vv. 8–9)

**8. Then he said unto me, These waters issue out toward the east country, and go down into the desert and the sea: which being brought forth into the sea, the waters shall be healed.**

The two-word phrase *east country* is unique in the Old Testament. The Hebrew word translated *country* is quite rare. In two of its four occurrences elsewhere, it designates general areas of non-Israelite habitation (Joshua 13:2; Joel 3:4). In Ezekiel’s vision, however, the territory must be Israelite. This is because *the sea*, which is the Dead Sea, is receiving water flowing from Jerusalem. The *desert* that intervenes is Israelite territory.

The city of Jerusalem lies at almost exactly the same latitude as the northernmost tip of the Dead Sea. Therefore, the waters flowing from Jerusalem’s temple toward this sea have to flow a bit to the south as well as east in order to go into the

sea rather than end up connecting with the Jordan River.

The Dead Sea is several times saltier than the oceans. The vast majority of aquatic creatures cannot survive in an environment such as that of the Dead Sea. In Ezekiel’s vision, however, the waters become fresh, allowing life to flourish not only in the water but all around its banks. The sea that symbolizes sterility and death comes to symbolize vibrant life (compare 2 Kings 19–22).

Picking up on the image of water flowing from Jerusalem is Zechariah 14:8. That passage foresees “living” waters flowing not only toward the Dead Sea but also westward into the Mediterranean Sea (compare Joel 3:18; John 7:38; Revelation 22:1–2).

**9. And it shall come to pass, that every thing that liveth, which moveth, whithersoever the rivers shall come, shall live: and there shall be a very great multitude of fish, because these waters shall come thither: for they shall be healed; and every thing shall live whither the river cometh.**

A consequence of the healing that occurs *whithersoever the rivers shall come* is that marine life is able to exist and flourish where it previously could not, especially in the once “dead” sea. We could say that the “River of Life” has created the “Sea of Life.” Fish, which could not have survived in the overly salty waters of the old Dead Sea, are now described as *a very great multitude*. Fresh water will yield abundant life in the formerly brackish water and on the land that is near the water.

### What Do You Think?

In addition to salty water, what other images—biblical and otherwise—strike you as illustrations of one’s spiritual deadness before coming to Christ? Why?

### Digging Deeper

What images strike you as illustrations of one’s spiritual life in Christ?

## C. Productive Trees (v. 12)

**12. And by the river upon the bank thereof, on this side and on that side, shall grow all trees for meat, whose leaf shall not fade, nei-**

**ther shall the fruit thereof be consumed: it shall bring forth new fruit according to his months, because their waters they issued out of the sanctuary: and the fruit thereof shall be for meat, and the leaf thereof for medicine.**

Ezekiel’s “tour guide” now returns to describing the trees seen earlier in the vision. Here they are described as *all trees for meat* (or food, which in this case is fruit). That their produce will not *be consumed* speaks to the fact that the fruit will not be susceptible to disease or anything else that would make it inedible. The prediction that each tree *shall bring forth new fruit according to his months* means that these trees will bear fruit every month—quite unlike ordinary trees, with their dormant cycles—because of the effect of the *waters* flowing from *the sanctuary*. The leaves of the trees have life-giving properties, just as the waters do. All this reminds us of the presence of “the tree of life” in the Garden of Eden (Genesis 2:9), only here there are numerous trees of life!

There is much here that is also reflected in Revelation 22:1–2, 14, 19. Like Ezekiel, John points toward a world made Eden-like, fit for the redeemed as their new home. Both use the imagery of a perfect place that is connected with a restored and perfected relationship between God and His faithful people. Revelation 22:1–2 also says that the tree of life will provide fruit for God’s people, and its leaves will bring healing.

In a figurative sense, the prophet Ezekiel sometimes sees trees as valuable symbols of the return to wholeness that awaits God’s people. An example is the extended vision of renewal in Ezekiel 34:11–31. There, the revival of forests, fields, and pastures accompanies the end of the Babylonian domination

## How to Say It

Assyrian	Uh-sear-e-un.
Babylonian	Bab-ih-low-nee-un.
Deuteronomy	Due-ter-ahn-uh-me.
Ezekiel	Ee-zeek-ee-ul or Ee-zeek-yul.
Jerusalem	Juh-roo-suh-lem.
Mediterranean	Med-uh-tuh-ray-nee-un.
Tabernacles	Tah-burr-nah-kulz.

of the land of Israel and the return of the people to their homeland. In part, this was because invading Assyrian and Babylonian armies systematically and deliberately felled trees in order to oppress the local populations they attacked (see comments to Ezekiel 47:7, above). The fruitful nature of the trees reflects God's pleasure to provide for the repentant and faithful. The fruit does not run out before the next crop comes along, so abundant is it. Ezekiel attributes this great abundance of the stream flowing *out of the sanctuary*. The temple becomes the symbol of God's great generosity.

## Conclusion

### A. Hope for Abundant Life

The most significant word picture in today's passage is that of *water*. The Old Testament uses water imagery to convey the message that God's "water of life" is never stagnant but always available, active, and life-giving (Psalms 1:3; 36:8; 84:5–6; Isaiah 12:3; 41:18; 43:19; 66:12; Jeremiah 31:9). Jesus used the imagery of water on various occasions to depict the abundant life He came to bring. When He attended the Feast of Tabernacles in Jerusalem, He declared, "If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink. He that believeth on me, as the scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water" (John 7:37–38; compare 4:10, 14).

Jesus was not quoting a single, particular Old Testament passage, but the general message derived from several passages, including our text for today. Interestingly, the climax of the Feast of Tabernacles featured the pouring out of water as part of the symbolism. It was in such a setting—perhaps during the pouring-out ceremony itself—that Jesus made His promise of living water.

One observer noted that the water-pouring ceremony at this feast in Jesus' day was interpreted in various Jewish traditions as a symbolic anticipation of the outpouring of the Spirit in fulfillment of various Scriptures, including Ezekiel 47:1–9. The Gospel of John says that Jesus used "living water" to refer to the Spirit (John 7:39). This means that we can now enjoy the benefits of the spiritual refreshment from the Holy Spirit.

### What Do You Think?

How will you be a source of "rivers of living water" (John 7:38) in the upcoming week?

### Digging Deeper

How will you be attentive to the Holy Spirit's leading in this regard?

### B. Hope for Eternal Life

We see Ezekiel's vision reaching its clearest and ultimate expression in Revelation 22. There the apostle John saw a certain river as the source of life. Trees on either side of John's river were fruitful, just like Ezekiel's. And the leaves of the trees that John saw were a source of healing, again just like Ezekiel's. Such parallels indicate how Ezekiel's great vision should be understood. It does not appear that the temple layout shown to that prophet was ever intended to be followed by the exiles who returned or by any other group of God's people. Since the vision portrays something unique and miraculous, we must allow God Himself to declare how its fulfillment is to be understood. That is what the New Testament does for us. It points to a fulfillment initiated by Jesus' first coming and climaxed by His second coming. At Jesus' return, His holy city will become inhabited for eternity by His people. It is a city built by God Himself (Hebrews 11:10).

### What Do You Think?

How does today's text encourage you regarding the hope for eternal life?

### Digging Deeper

In what ways will you worship God as a response to that hope?

### C. Prayer

O God, we see a world both broken and beautiful. Help us to see Your new world, not only in time and space but also in human souls deeply connected to You, our Creator. Help us find ways to live in that world dawning because of Your Son. Amen.

### D. Thought to Remember

Our current situation isn't permanent.

# Involvement Learning

Enhance your lesson with KJV Bible Student (from your curriculum supplier) and the reproducible activity page (at [www.standardlesson.com](http://www.standardlesson.com) or in the back of the KJV Standard Lesson Commentary Deluxe Edition).

## Into the Lesson

Announce a game to identify benefits and problems related to the use of water in its liquid and solid (ice) forms. Allow one minute of silent reflections before you start.

Begin the game by randomly pointing to a learner as you say one of these four phrases: *liquid benefit*, *liquid problem*, *solid benefit*, or *solid problem*. That person has five seconds to come up with an answer in that regard. They then get to call on another person while voicing one of the four phrases. Jot responses on the board to make sure they are not repeated.

When learners run out of answers, lead into Bible study by saying, “Although water isn’t always beneficial in either form, today’s lesson uses an image of water that is of great benefit.”

## Into the Word

Today’s lesson format will be guided instruction through the text. Ask volunteers to read the text aloud, as it is sectioned below. Some discussion starters are suggested, but it will be important to follow each discussion starter with this question: “What impact could this section of text have had on the original audience exiled in Babylon?” Expected and possible responses are in italics. Write responses on the board.

Verses 1–2: Identify the source of the water and to which direction it flows. (*The temple is the immediate source, but learners may note that God must be the ultimate source. The water flows eastward.* **Original impact:** *Exiles made aware that the temple is to be renewed in some sense, etc.*)

Verses 3–5: Explain what is happening in the progression of these three verses. (*The flowing water gets deeper and deeper as the distance increases.* **Original impact:** *This must be supernatural since there is no river in that area.*)

Verses 6–7: Identify a result of the river flowing. (*Trees begin to be visible.* **Original impact:**

*The presence of trees implies a reversal of homeland devastation.*)

Verses 8–9: Explain the effect the flowing river has on things in its path. (*The waters of the Dead Sea become fresh, able to sustain a fishing industry.* **Original impact:** *Implies more than the homeland merely reverting to its status before the exile; this is a supernatural improvement to the area.*)

Verse 12: Explain the relationship between the river and the trees. (*The river makes it possible for the trees to grow; trees, in turn, provide a continual source of food and medicine.* **Original impact:** *Divine healing of both land and people.*)

Conclude this segment by asking learners how today’s text reminds them of other sections of Scripture. (*Possible responses are Genesis 2:8–10 and Revelation 21:1–2; 22:1–3.*)

*Alternative.* Distribute a handout (you create) with the following words as headers across the top: *Verse / Vision / Verbiage / Meaning*. Under the *Verse* heading, add six rows labeled: *verse 1, verse 2, verses 3–5, verse 6, verses 7–9, verse 12*. Ask participants to work in small groups to complete the chart using Ezekiel 47:1–9, 12. After 10 minutes, ask groups to compare responses in whole-class discussion.

*Option.* Distribute copies of the “A River Runs through Scripture” activity from the activity page, which you can download. Discuss insights after completing in small groups.

## Into Life

Review the list created after either activity of Into the Word. Divide learners into pairs and ask them to identify at least one item from the list that encourages them about their future.

*Option.* Distribute copies of the “Meditations for Others” activity from the activity page. Have learners complete it as a take-home activity. Remind learners that you will ask volunteers to share at the beginning of the next class.



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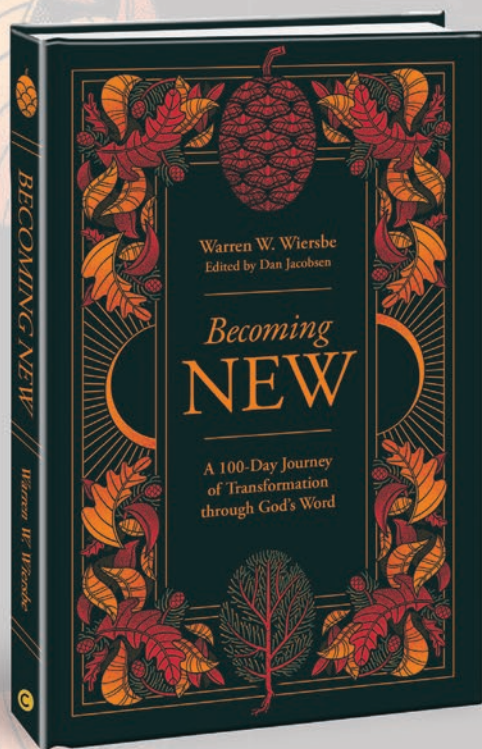


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