

# Jeremiah (2) and Lamentations

## Listed Scriptures

Jer 45-46

## Lesson Aim

- 1) Students will recognize that in times of suffering, we need to turn to the source of hope, the Lord Jesus.
- 2) To enable students to know the importance of obedience in times of trials.
- 3) Students will learn of the importance of repentance.

## Memory Verse

"Through the Lord's mercies we are not consumed, because His compassions fail not. They are new every morning; great is Your faithfulness." (Lam 3:22-23)

## Bible Reading For This Week (for students and teachers)

Jer 45-46, Lem 1-4

## B I B L E B A C K G R O U N D



When Jeremiah finally made his way to Babylon, he found the Hebrew people in far better condition than most of us might imagine. There were no concentration camps and no slave labor. Instead the exiles enjoyed royal protection and a great amount of self-government. They married, kept in touch with Jerusalem (Jer 29:1) and some enjoyed special prerogatives such as owning their homes and land (Jer 29:5, 7; Ezek 8:1; 12:1-7). Jeremiah 29:5-7 indicates that they were so successful financially that they were able to send money to Jerusalem, and when the exiles were given permission by Cyrus to return home, some preferred to remain in Babylon. Yet the experience was a bitter one for many of the exiles. After the destruction of Jerusalem and its temple, when all hopes of return

seemed gone, the people of Israel began to realize how much they had lost. The birthright they had so lightly traded away for pagan Baals and Asherahs suddenly seemed precious. Israel realized at last that if they were not God's people, they had no identity. If they no longer retained the promises, life had no meaning. This sense of loss is communicated in the brief book of Lamentations.

## W A R M U P



### The Signal

The young man sat alone on the bus and most of the time stared out the window. He was in his mid-twenties, nice looking with a kind face. His dark blue shirt matched the color of his eyes. His hair was short and neat. Occasionally he would look away from the window and the anxiety on his young face touched the heart of the grandmotherly woman sitting across the aisle. The bus was just approaching the outskirts of a small town when she was so drawn to the young man that she scooted across the aisle and asked permission to sit next to him.

After a few moments of small talk about the warm spring weather, he blurted out, "I've been in prison for two years. I just got out this morning and I'm going home." His words tumbled out as he told her he was raised in a poor but proud family and how crime had brought his family shame and heart-break. In the whole two years he had not heard from them. He knew they were too poor to travel the distance to where he had been in prison and his parents probably felt too uneducated to write. He had stopped writing to them when no answers came.

Three weeks before being released, he desperately wrote one more letter to his family. He told them how sorry he was for disappointing them and asked for their forgiveness. He went on to explain about being released from prison and that he would take the bus to his hometown – the one that goes right by the front yard of the house where he grew up and where his parents still lived. In his letter, he said he would understand if they wouldn't forgive him.

He wanted to make it easy for them and so he asked them to give him a sign that he could see from the bus. If they had forgiven him and wanted him to come back home, they could tie a white ribbon on the old apple tree that stood in the front yard. If the signal wasn't there, he would stay on the bus, leave town and be out of their lives forever. As the bus neared his street, the young man became more and more anxious to the point he was afraid to look out the window because he was so sure there would be no ribbon.

After listening to his story, the woman asked simply, "Would it help if we traded seats and I'll sit near to the window and look for you?" The bus traveled a few more blocks and then she saw the tree. She gently touched the young man's shoulder and choking back tears said, "Look! Oh, look! The whole tree is covered with white ribbons." And is this not our Heavenly Father's response when we repent and return to Him?

## B I B L E S T U D Y



### Part 1

### *Jeremiah the Prophet*

What is success? Most definitions include references to achieving goals and acquiring wealth, prestige, favor and power. Successful people enjoy the good life – financially and emotionally secure, surrounded by admirers, and enjoying the fruits of their labors. They know who they are, and where they are going.

By these standards, Jeremiah was a miserable failure. For 40 years, he served as God's spokesman to Judah; but when Jeremiah spoke, nobody listened. Although he urged them consistently and passionately with tears, nobody moved. And certainly he did not attain material success. Throughout his life, Jeremiah stood alone, declaring God's messages of doom, announcing the new covenant, and weeping over the fate of his country. Certainly, in the eyes of the world, Jeremiah was not a success. But in God's eyes, Jeremiah was a great success – he fully obeyed God and was faithful in proclaiming His words. In today's lesson we will look at Jeremiah's trials and struggles of being a prophet of God and how he was successful in the eyes of God.



## A. The Calling of Jeremiah

During the 13th year of Josiah's reign, Jeremiah was called to be a prophet of God at the tender age of about 20. He was God's spokesman for about 40 years, right up to the time the people were taken into captivity. Even then, Jeremiah continued to preach God's words. But Jeremiah's calling as a prophet did not begin at 20. In Jeremiah 1:5 and 1:10, God told Jeremiah, "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you; I appointed you a prophet to the nations." Samson the judge (Judg 13:2-5), John the Baptist (Lk 1:15), the apostle Paul (Gal 1:15) were also called from the womb and separated for the work of God. Each Christian has a purpose in life, but some are appointed for specific assignments. Jeremiah was chosen for his generation and for the work that God wanted to accomplish. Similarly, in each generation, God will raise workers to meet the needs of each generation. Let us not be discouraged when we look around and see that there are not enough workers. Instead, let us pray that God will inspire His workers, beginning with ourselves.



## B. The Trials of Jeremiah

### a. Jeremiah's physical trials

The commission that God gave to Jeremiah was a heavy and difficult one. His mission was twofold; Jeremiah was sent to Judah not only to build and to plant: he was to pluck up, break down, destroy, and overthrow (Jer 1:10). When Jeremiah loudly and publicly prophesied concerning the destruction of the temple and the end of David's kingship, the people and leaders could not tolerate it. In their eyes, Jeremiah was a traitor who had to be silenced. Out of all the prophets, Jeremiah was one who suffered and was persecuted the most. Besides a smattering of kings, priests and people, everyone else hated, opposed, and persecuted him; particularly, the priests and false prophets. Jeremiah was beaten (20:1-2), mocked (20:7-8), put in stocks (20:2-3), bounded, threatened with death (26:8), imprisoned (21:1,3; 37:11-17; 37:21; 38:7-28; 40:1,6; 43:6-7), and several times came close to death.

### b. Jeremiah's inner trials

What was perhaps greater than Jeremiah's physical suffering was the intense inner struggles and frustration that he faced. On the one hand, Jeremiah had committed his whole life to serve the people, yet, it was these very people who cursed and rejected him. His faithfulness to God brought nothing but hatred, isolation, and persecution. He felt God had made him a prophet

against his will and instead of glory and honor, his life was filled with rejection, disappointment and shame. Yet, at the same time, Jeremiah felt the heartache of a father who could only stand and watch as his beloved child continued in his stubborn and destructive ways. At times, Jeremiah's struggle becomes so intense that like Job, he wished he had not been born (20:14-18). When Jeremiah decides that he will no longer speak for God, a burning in his heart moves him to speak which ultimately brings him further rejection from his people (Jer 20:7-10). Despite the hardships and his frustration with God, Jeremiah plodded on. God had called him to endure and he must continue to do God's work. Eventually Jeremiah was able to rise above his struggles to see a God who would execute justice, and administer mercy afterwards. We may be able to identify with Jeremiah's weakness, doubts and frustrations in our work for God. Workers of God are not supermen or women. As we carry out God's purpose, we will meet with inner challenges and struggles, but we need to realize that Jeremiah's life is an encouragement to us to be faithful in God's work regardless of what we come up against. God promises us that His grace will carry us through.



## C. The Sacrifice of Jeremiah

Throughout his prophetic ministry, Jeremiah was asked to deny his own desires and make certain sacrifices in order to fulfill the plan of God.

### a. Jeremiah was not to marry

No matter which generation, denying the desire to marry and have a family is painful, but even more so in Jeremiah's time. The Jews recognized God's will for them to marry and to have children (Gen 1:28; 2:24). In the Talmud, it records that if a man is not married by the age of twenty he will be cursed. Getting married and having children was seen as a blessing from God and to be without children was seen as a curse from God. Without children, a man's inheritance could not be secured, and his name would discontinue. Despite this, God asked Jeremiah to refrain from marriage (Jer 16:1-2). Through Jeremiah, God wanted to illustrate to the Judahites how close judgment was and that there was no time to establish a family (1 Cor 7:26). When Jerusalem is besieged, children would die of disease, famine, or the sword; and, there would be no time to bury the dead (Jer 16:4).

### b. Jeremiah was prohibited from entering the house of mourning or to the house of feasting

God instructed Jeremiah not to enter the house of mourning to show Judah

that on the day of calamity, God too will not mourn their deaths. God also prohibited Jeremiah from entering the house of feasting because the time will come when there will no longer be the voice of mirth and gladness in Jerusalem (Jer 16:5,8). By refraining from mourning or feasting with his people, Jeremiah could not share in the people's grief or joy. This meant that Jeremiah became more and more isolated from his friends and acquaintances. This was a great sacrifice that Jeremiah had to make.

## **D. Jeremiah's Merits**

### **a. He prayed for his enemies**

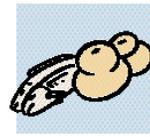
Jeremiah is often known as the weeping prophet who for 40 years, pleaded, warned, and exhorted the people to depart from their evil ways. Although they often sought to harm Jeremiah, he continued to pray for them with tears. This is one of the finest examples of Christian love. How many of us would pray for our enemies? If we do, how many of us can pray with tears for them? When Jeremiah saw that his people would die of the sword, famine, and starvation (14:17-18), he pleaded earnestly for them. No matter how they hated him, he continued to love them and did not wish harm upon them. May we pray, earnestly and unceasingly for those who hate and persecute us, as Jeremiah did (Heb 13:3).

### **b. Faithful spokesman of God**

Jeremiah obeyed God's commands fully. He performed whatever God wanted him to do, and he preached whatever God wanted him to say. Jeremiah does not speak of his own accord. Every utterance begins with, "Thus says the Lord." In the first chapter alone, this phrase is used 11 times (chapter 2, 10 times; chapter 3, 10 times and likewise for subsequent chapters). This proves that Jeremiah was literally the mouthpiece of God.

### **c. He did not emphasize on the results**

Although Jeremiah labored his entire life, the people did not change and the country was still invaded. It seemed as if his efforts were a flop. Despite the results, Jeremiah did not lose heart - he continued to convey God's message regardless. Let us also learn not to emphasize on the results when we do God's work. All we need to do is to faithfully accomplish what God has given us and leave the outcome to God.



## Part 2

# The Lamentations of Jeremiah

## **A. Author**

Although Jeremiah is not named in the text, the book of Lamentations has traditionally been attributed to him.

## **B. Date**

According to tradition, Lamentations was composed shortly after the destruction of the Holy City and the temple between 584-586 B.C.

## **C. Themes**

While the book of Jeremiah predicts the destruction of Jerusalem, Lamentations looks back on it. The five chapters of Lamentations consist of five mournful poems, describing the funeral of a city. It is a tear-stained portrait of the once-proud Jerusalem, now reduced to rubble by the Babylonians. It is written during the years which Judah spent in exile in Babylon, and shares the inmost feelings of the Jews who had been torn from their land and separated from the now-destroyed temple because of their sins. But in the middle of the book there shines a ray of hope. God's compassion is ever present. The book shows us the serious consequences of human sin and how in the midst of tragedy we can still have hope in God if we pray for forgiveness and turn to Him for deliverance.

## **D. Teachings from the Book of Lamentations**

### **a. The effects of sin**

When God created the world, He saw that everything was good. However when sin came in, the world was cursed. In history, no matter how splendid or strong a nation and its people were, sin became the cause of its destruction. Although Judah and Israel were God's very own people, although Jerusalem was THE holy city, but due to the rebelliousness of the people and their reluctance to obey God or his prophets, they too were punished and destroyed. Their land was invaded (1:3,5-6,18,14; 2:9; 4:18,19), Zion laid desolate (1:1,4; 2:5,8; 4:2) and God's name was disgraced (1:7,8,10;

2:13,15,16,20; 4:7,8; 5:15-18). These are the consequences of sin. The author of Lamentations grieves over sin and its devastating effects (4:5,6; 1:5,9 8,18,20,14).

**b. God's faithfulness**

From the Lamentations of Jeremiah we can learn that God is not to be mocked (Gal 6:7). In Isaiah 46:9-11 God says, "My counsel shall stand, and I will accomplish all my purpose...I have spoken, and I will bring it to pass; I have purposed, and I will do it." For 40 years Jeremiah had warned the people that this would happen, but the kings, priests and prophets regarded Jeremiah's message as nonsense. However, through time, every word of doom and promise was fulfilled. This confirmed that Jeremiah was God's faithful prophet, and that God's words will never fall away empty.

**c. Hope amidst despair**

The disaster that befell Jerusalem was great. She that was once a princess had now been reduced to a widow. All her glory had gone and her friends had become her enemies. No one walked on the road to Zion, foreigners trampled in the temple of God and her enemies prospered and ruled over her (1:16; 2:1; 2:11; 3:48, 49; 2:18, 19, 10, 3:42, 18, 44).

Although Jeremiah was in bitter despair, his hope towards God remained strong. Although the dark clouds hid the sun, yet with eyes of faith, he could see the sun's rays (3:21-23; 3:24,25,26,40,41,31,32,50; 5:21). Jeremiah understood that God is just and He will punish the sinners. However, in judgment Jeremiah could see God's mercy and grace. Jeremiah remembered that not only was he instructed to pluck up, break down, destroy and overthrow but also to build and plant. When Jeremiah was reminded that "the steadfast love of the Lord never ceases and His mercies never come to an end" (Lam 3:22-23), his hope in God was reaffirmed. God's compassion is ever present. His faithfulness is great. Jeremiah realizes that it is only the Lord's mercy that has prevented total annihilation. Therefore, when we face storms of life and times of deep despair, let us remember that God is abundant in love; "He has plans for our welfare and not for evil, to give us a future and a hope" (Jer 29:11).

**C H E C K F O R U N D E R S T A N D I N G**



- 1 Have you ever been too timid to take on a task presented to you?
- 2 What are your thoughts regarding God's selection of His workers?
- 3 What can we learn from the trials of Jeremiah?
- 4 What is your understanding of God's treatment towards the gentile nations and His people?
- 5 How can we see God's love in the midst of punishment?
- 6 How can we buoy our hope in a helpless and despairing situation? Share an experience.

**L I F E A P P L I C A T I O N**



**Return to Me**

In the history of Israel, sin was always the cause of her downfall. The prophet Isaiah pointed out to the people why God seemed so distant to them: "Your iniquities have separated you from your God" (Is 59:2). Our fellowship with God can likewise suffer as a result of our sins. If we do nothing about our sins, our hearts becomes hardened and we turn away from the living God. Therefore, the Lord offered the Israelites a way to restore their relationship with Him. God cried out to them, "Return to me, and I will return to you." In our daily lives we constantly commit sins in our thoughts, speech and actions. We may repent, but find that our relationship with God is not as sweet as it was. In the exercise below, we will examine what true repentance is.

Bible Passage	Sin	Action Taken	Consequences
2 Sam 12:1-15			
Mt 27:3			
Lk 19:1-10			
Lk 18:10			

1. What happens to our hearts if we do nothing about our sins?
2. What is your understanding of true repentance?
3. Think of a time that God has called you to repentance. How did He do it?  
What was your response?
4. Fill in the following:

Benefits of repenting	Consequences of not repenting

5. Fill in the following:

Things that can prevent me from repenting	Ways that I can overcome them

6. Action Steps:  
Make a short list of some of the areas in our lives that need repenting (i.e., what you could improve upon or change your mind and actions about).

Things that need repenting	Actions that I will take

**Possible teacher Answers:**

1. If we sin and do not repent, sin will deceive our hearts (Heb 3:12-13).
2. Dictionary definition: to feel or express sincere regret or remorse about one's wrong doing or sin.  
Biblical definition: Repentance means recognizing and turning from the wrongful behaviors that we have. We must be determined to turn from our evil ways (Prov 28:13b), make restitution for our wrongs, change our values, walk in righteousness and bear fruit worthy of repentance (Mt 3:7-8).
3. Ways that God may call us to repentance:  
The word of God (Heb 4:12; Jon 3:1-5)

Holy Spirit (Jn 16:8)  
Through visions or dreams (Joshua 7:10ff)  
Conscience (Prov 20:27)  
Repentance is brought about through God's chastisement such as sickness or adversity  
Through witnessing miracles  
Through the people around us such as sermon-speakers, peers, teachers, parents, etc.

- 4.

Benefits of repenting	Consequences of not repenting
a. Find mercy and forgiveness of sins (Prov 28:13d) b. God's wrath is removed and He will withdraw His punishments (Joel 2:12-13) c. To receive peace and blessings d. Leads to salvation (2Cor 7:10)	a. Prayers hindered (Lk 13:1-9; 1Jn 1:8-9) b. Severe judgement (Ps 7:12; Mt 11:20-24) c. Rotting in the bone and burning and no peace inside (Ps 32:3-5) d. Lose salvation e. No way to accept God's word & kingdom (Mt 3:2) f. Without repentance we cannot progress or improve spiritually

- 5.

Things that can prevent me from repenting	Ways that I can overcome them
a. Insensitive to sin (Jer 8:4-8) b. Our pride - fear of losing face (Acts 17:30) c. Complacency d. Self-righteousness (Jer 2:35; Lk 18:9-12) e. When we believe that our sins are too great for God's forgiveness (1Jn 1:8-9), (Lk 15:7,10) f. When we fear punishment	a. Student answers

6. Student answers

## REFLECTION & PRAYER



*The journey of faith is an endless struggle. In our spiritual battle we are often caught in the lust of our flesh and we often fail to be watchful. We ask the Lord to search us so that we may know ourselves – and Him – in fuller measure. The sacrifices that God desires are not tens of thousands of oxen and sheep or rivers of oil, but rather a broken and contrite spirit. May God grant us the courage to see ourselves clearly and the boldness to change.*