

# **DISCOVERY** **TEACHER'S GUIDE**

**2 Kings, Nahum, Zephaniah, Jeremiah, Lamentations**

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### **Elisha's Ministry**

2 Kings 1:1 — 8:15

### **Kings of Israel and Judah**

2 Kings 8:16 — 17:41

### **The Reign of King Hezekiah**

2 Kings 18:1 — 20:21

### **Comparison of Manasseh and Josiah**

2 Kings 21:1 — 23:30

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2 Kings 23:31 — 25:30

### **The Prophecies of Nahum and Zephaniah**

Nahum 1:1 — 3:19 & Zephaniah 1:1 — 3:20

### **Call of the Prophet and First Pronouncements of Judgments**

Jeremiah 1:1 — 15:21

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Jeremiah 16:1 — 25:38

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Jeremiah 46:1 — 52:34

### **The Lamentations of Jeremiah**

Lamentations 1:1 — 5:22

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them what role these attributes play when we are seeking something from the Lord. Class discussion should bring out that each of them will be present to some degree if we are to receive from God, for His requirements are timeless. While He knows our personal level of understanding and spiritual maturity, and deals with each of us as individuals, the principles for receiving from God do not change.

**2.** When Elijah ascended in a whirlwind, his mantle fell from him. What did Elisha do with that mantle, and what was the significance of his action?

2 Kings 2:13-14

*Elisha took up the mantle of Elijah, which was symbolic of God's endorsement of him as Elijah's successor. He then went back to the Jordan River where he smote the water with the mantle as Elijah had done, and cried, "Where is the LORD God of Elijah?" This was an entreaty that God would verify His commission of Elisha by demonstrating His power in the same manner He had done when Elijah smote the waters, which He did by causing the waters to part.*

*Follow up this question by asking your students if we always will receive a physical manifestation of God's call and anointing upon our lives. The conclusion should be reached that most of us will not receive as dramatic a validation as Elisha did. However, while the means may vary, God's anointing and His divine call will be verified in some manner.*

**3.** Jehoram, king of Israel, and Jehoshaphat, king of Judah, joined forces with the king of Edom in an alliance against Moab. When the water supply for their combined armies ran low and the fear of defeat intensified, the kings appealed to the Prophet Elisha concerning their plight. Why did Elisha show regard for King Jehoshaphat but not for King Jehoram? (2 Kings 3:1-3; 2 Chronicles 17:3-6). What lesson can we learn from this?

*Jehoshaphat had the Lord's blessing because "he walked in his commandments" and "his heart was lifted up in the ways of the Lord." King Jehoram had no such testimony. The promise Elisha made to the kings of ample water and the defeat of Moab were due to Jehoshaphat's trust in God and his insistence that they "inquire of the Lord" through the prophet.*

*In response to the second question, your group of students should conclude that the godly influence of Jehoshaphat brought about a positive result for these other kings, who observed firsthand through this event the benefits of serving God. Some in your class may be willing to share examples from their own knowledge or experience of times when a righteous Christian life brought benefits into the lives of others.*

**4.** The first seven verses of chapter 4 describe one of Elisha's miracles. What occurred in this passage, and what lessons can we learn from it?

*The impoverished widow of one of the prophets was about to lose her two sons to slavery, as she had no means to pay back a debt. Elisha instructed her to borrow vessels from her neighbors, and oil was miraculously provided to fill all of the vessels she procured. She was then instructed to sell the oil to pay off the debt.*

*The lessons that can be learned from this account are many. For example, your group may note that this miracle is evidence of God's love and tender care toward those who serve Him. It could be pointed out that the woman went for help to the right source—the man of God—rather than appealing to others. It is notable that the miraculous oil only ceased when there were no more vessels to fill, teaching us that God's provision is as large as our faith and willingness to obey. The funds obtained when the oil was sold were enough to meet her needs, and God's provision for us will also always be enough.*

**5.** Chapter 4 goes on to record several other miracles performed by Elisha. List these miracles and describe what they have in common. 2 Kings 4:16-17, 34-35, 38-41, 42-44

*2 Kings 4:16-17 – The Shunammite woman had a son*

*2 Kings 4:34-35 – Resurrection of the Shunammite's son*

*2 Kings 4:38-41 – A poisonous stew made edible*

*2 Kings 4:42-44 – Miracle of the bread*

*After your students identify the miracles, they should conclude that in every situation God fulfilled a need. He saved from ruin, barrenness, loss, death, and hunger. The point should be made that even when Israel was filled with idolatry, God was still reaching out to those who loved Him.*

*It might be interesting to bring out to your class that many of the miracles which Elisha performed—healing of the sick, raising of the dead, and providing for those in need—were similar in nature to the miracles of Jesus. For this reason, some commentators note that Elisha and his deeds foreshadow the earthly ministry of Jesus, who also reached out to those who were sick, raised the dead, and met physical needs of those around Him.*

**6.** Chapter 5 gives the account of the healing of Naaman, a Syrian captain who was afflicted with leprosy. Give a one- or two-word description of each of the main characters who were involved in this event.

*You may wish to note your students' one-word suggestions for each character on a dry erase board; their combined ideas will provide a fairly comprehensive character study for each of the individuals, as well as giving you a format to review this incident. Their thoughts could include the following:*

*Israelite maid – witness, courageous, caring*  
*Naaman – leper, influential, proud, needy, grateful*  
*King of Syria – demanding, unbelieving*  
*King of Israel – fearful, confused*  
*Elisha – assured, trusting, obedient*  
*Naaman's servants – faithful, wise*  
*Gehazi – opportunistic, greedy, dishonest*

*As you sum up this event, you might wish to bring out that during the time of Elisha, the nation of Syria was growing in power and was Israel's greatest enemy. God's healing of this Syrian captain was no doubt intended to reinforce to both Syria and Israel that the Lord God of Israel was far mightier than the gods of the Syrians. In addition, His power and concern extended beyond the boundaries of Israel.*

**7. What four miracles were involved in the capture of the Syrian army, as related in 2 Kings 6:8-23?**

*The four miracles were as follows:*

- 1) *Elisha was miraculously aware of the plans of the Syrians as they sent raiding parties into Israel (verses 8-12).*
- 2) *The young servants' eyes were opened to the fact that the host of Heaven surrounded and protected the prophet (verses 15-17).*
- 3) *God smote the Syrian soldiers with blindness at the prayer of Elisha (verse 18).*
- 4) *The eyesight of the Syrian soldiers was restored once Elisha had led them to Samaria and they were surrounded by the army of Israel (verses 19-20).*

**8.** How is God's wonderful timing for those who trust in Him seen in the case of the Shunammite woman whose dead son had been raised to life through Elisha? 2 Kings 8:1-6

*The Shunammite woman had obeyed Elisha's advice and left her house and property to move to another land during a time of famine. Seven years later, when she returned, her property was inhabited by strangers, and it seemed all was lost. However, as she went before King Jehoram to attempt to reclaim her land, God was already working in her behalf. Providentially, just as she came into the court, Elisha's servant was telling the king about this woman's son being raised from the dead and how God had cared for her and her family. The Shunammite woman was able to tell the king of the loss of all her property. He appointed people to make sure she not only got her home and land back, but also the profit that had been gained while she was gone!*

*Make the point that God is never too late, and He is often working behind the scenes in ways that we cannot imagine. This would be a good time to*

*encourage your students to share personal experiences where God's precise timing was evident in their lives.*

**9.** As you review these eight chapters which focus on the miracles of the Prophet Elisha, what lesson from his life and ministry stands out the most to you?

*This question should provide a framework for you to sum up this lesson with your class. Lessons from Elisha's life may include the following thoughts:*

*We must be willing to follow and learn in order to be equipped to do the work God has called us to do.*

*The power of God is a necessity in our lives if we are to be effective servants for Him.*

*We should be responsive and caring to the needs of others, and use whatever gifts or talents God has given us to minister to those needs.*

*God can and will lead us as we work for Him,  
giving us specific instructions.*

## CONCLUSION

Elisha's longing and persistent desire for a double portion of his master's spirit was granted, and during Israel's darkest times, he brought help, hope, and instruction to those who were faithful to the Lord.

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## Kings of Israel and Judah

## SOURCE FOR QUESTIONS

2 Kings 8:16 through 17:41

### KEY VERSE FOR MEMORIZATION

“And the covenant that I have made with you ye shall not forget; neither shall ye fear other gods. But the LORD your God ye shall fear; and he shall deliver you out of the hand of all your enemies.”

(2 Kings 17:38-39)

## BACKGROUND

These chapters in the Book of 2 Kings cover a span of about 135 years (approximately 850 B.C. to 715 B.C.). The nation of Israel had been divided around 931 B.C. into two kingdoms: the Northern Kingdom (Israel) and the Southern Kingdom (Judah), and the narrative moves back and forth between the history of these two fragmented nations, recording the kings of both.

A total of twenty-one rulers are mentioned in these chapters: twelve kings of Israel and nine of Judah. Along with listing some of the exploits of the kings, an assessment of their devotion to God is given. They were described as righteous kings (in terms of religious leadership or reforms), evil kings (either as political or religious leaders), and kings who were overthrown or assassinated. The designation of “righteous” or “evil” was very important, for as the king went, so did the nation.

This was a tumultuous time for the divided kingdom, with many political conspiracies taking place. Yet, even in a time laced with violence, chaos, and selfish ambitions, the Lord was faithful to His people. He providentially raised up individuals to accomplish His purpose, while reminding the people that His promises to them were still valid if they would only choose to follow His statutes.

## SUGGESTED RESPONSE TO QUESTIONS

**1.** After co-reigning for a number of years with his father Jehoshaphat, Jehoram assumed full leadership of the nation of Judah when his father died. Who was Jehoram's wife? What affect did her background have upon Jehoram, and thus upon the nation? 2 Kings 8:18

*Jehoram's wife was daughter of the wicked King Ahab of Israel; her name was Athaliah. Likely King Jehoshaphat had negotiated this marital alliance for the sake of peace with Israel. Jehoram was affected by his wife's idolatrous background, for verse 18 says, "He walked in the way of the kings of Israel, as did*

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the age of seven, Joash was brought out of hiding and placed on the throne. Given his young age, to what can we attribute his commitment to God? 2 Kings 11:4, 17-18

*The fact that Joash did what was right in the sight of the Lord must be largely attributed to the influence of the priest Jehoiada. Because of Joash's young age when he assumed the throne, he needed guidance in order to make wise decisions in civil matters as well as spiritual. The priest would have been the one to help the young king, and he began his positive influence by making a covenant with the people of allegiance to the king and to the Lord.*

*How important it is to have guidance of godly people in our lives! Discuss with your class the value of correct guidance when we are young. Perhaps some of your students could share an incident of spiritual nurturing they had in their lives. If your class consists of older adults, you may wish to point out the importance of treating those under our influence with greatest care and with thought of the future.*

**5.** In chapter 13, the focus again is on the Northern Kingdom of Israel. The Lord delivered the people of Israel into the hand of the Syrians because of their wickedness. When King Jehoash (also referred to as Joash, but not to be confused with the good King Joash who ruled in Judah at the same time) sought advice from Elisha the prophet, what did Elisha tell him to do? What was Elisha's reaction to the manner in which Jehoash followed through? 2 Kings 13:14-19

*Elisha instructed Joash to open a window eastward, toward the area where Syria occupied land belonging to Israel, and to shoot an arrow. It was a sign of war to shoot an arrow toward or into the enemy's country. Elisha's placing his hands upon the king's hands was an indication of direction from God.*

*Elisha then instructed the king to take the arrows and smite them on the ground. Verse 18 says, “And he smote thrice, and stayed.” Elisha was angry because he stopped so soon, and told him that had he smitten five or six times, it would have indicated a full victory over Syria. His half-hearted response meant he would have only three victories over the Syrians. We are not told that Joash was instructed to smite a particular number of times, but it seems that he was aware of the importance of his action.*

*The point should be made that if we want to receive God's full blessing upon our lives, we must obey God's commands fully and wholeheartedly.*

**6.** Chapters 14-17 of 2 Kings provide a list and an assessment of a number of kings of Israel and Judah. Some of them did right, but most of them did evil before God. It was noted in the lesson introduction that as the king went, so went the nation. How is this fact significant to us?

*The concept of our influence on others is a reality, even though we may not be in a position of political importance. Most of us probably assume that our impact on others is fairly insignificant. However, our actions can certainly influence others to model after our behavior. And our attitude alone can strongly impact someone else's outlook. We are ultimately responsible for our own actions, but our choices will always affect someone else.*

**7.** Because of the sin of the Israelites, the Lord allowed them to be taken captive by the Assyrians. What specific sins are mentioned in 2 Kings 17:7-12? In what way did God show mercy to the Israelites, and what was their reaction? 2 Kings 17:13-17

*The people of Israel walked in the statutes (customs or manners) of the nations they had initially cast out of Canaan (verse 8). They secretly did wrong before God "from the tower of the watchmen, to the fenced city," meaning it was universal (verse 9). They built places for idol worship that included licentious activity (verses 9-12). They rejected God's statutes, testimonies, and promises, but sought out heathen practices, worshiped images, Baal, stars, and planets (verses 15-16). They committed child sacrifice, and engaged in sorceries and witchcraft (verse 17).*

*In spite of this list of transgressions, the Lord repeatedly called the Israelites, warning them in every generation by prophets, and reminding them of His love and care for them (verses 12-14). "They would not hear" must be one of the most grievous statements in all Scripture. They brought tragic consequences upon themselves, because of their determination to ignore God and follow their own ways.*

**8.** What spiritual lessons stand out to you as you review these chapters?

*Class discussion may bring out several lessons that we can learn through these chapters. Some thoughts to cover are: 1) We can please God if we want to, regardless of surroundings. 2) Our lives affect others on a daily basis. 3) Sin will not go unpunished. 4) We serve a merciful God, who offers us every opportunity to come to Him in repentance. 5) It will all come down to one thing when we stand before God: did we listen and obey, or reserve admiration and worship for other things?*

## **CONCLUSION**

Although human acts may not reap immediate retribution, these chapters in 2 Kings clearly point out that whatever a man sows, he will also reap. God is merciful, but divine justice will ultimately be satisfied. As we study these Scriptures, may we learn from Israel's hard lessons!



## The Reign of King Hezekiah

## SOURCE FOR QUESTIONS

2 Kings 18:1 through 20:21

### KEY VERSE FOR MEMORIZATION

“He trusted in the LORD God of Israel; so that after him was none like him among all the kings of Judah, nor any that were before him.” (2 Kings 18:5)

## BACKGROUND

The importance of the account of Hezekiah's reign as king of Judah is evidenced by its nearly identical mention in three separate places: 2 Kings 18-20, 2 Chronicles 29-32, and Isaiah 36-39. Some scholars suggest that the relationship of Hezekiah with the Prophet Isaiah is the reason for this extensive history. While the Books of 1 and 2 Samuel and 1 and 2 Kings record the history of the rulers of Israel and Judah from its inception through the Babylonian exile, they are much more than history alone. The account conveys spiritual and moral truths to the reader through the vehicle of objective political history. Specific kings are evaluated by a simple moral code—they either did that which was right in the sight of the Lord, or they did evil in His sight.

Hezekiah began to reign in Judah as co-regent with his father Ahaz at the age of twenty-five, around 729 B.C., and he reigned for twenty-nine years. He was identified as a good king, and took steps to eliminate idolatry in his kingdom, destroying altars, idols, and pagan temples. He cleaned out and restored the Temple in Jerusalem, and reinstated observance of the Passover.

His administration was, however, vexed with the pressures of politics. The neighboring Northern Kingdom (Israel) was conquered by Assyria during his reign and Hezekiah broke the treaty his father had forged with the Assyrians. Hezekiah attempted to bribe the Assyrian King Sennacherib, possibly in an attempt to avoid what was later to become an invasion of Judah and siege of Jerusalem.

There is also some evidence that Hezekiah made an attempt to secure a political alliance with Egypt in order to thwart the Assyrian invasion. In “The Annals of Sennacherib,” a translation of the historical record written by the Assyrian king, Sennacherib claims to have destroyed in Judah “forty-six of his [Hezekiah’s] strong, walled cities, as well as the small towns in their area which were without number.” His description of Hezekiah is, “Like a caged bird shut up in Jerusalem, his royal city.”<sup>1</sup> While this account does

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not acknowledge God’s miraculous deliverance, it does verify that Sennacherib was unable to conquer Jerusalem. Hezekiah agreed to pay a tribute (2 Kings 18:14), yet, Sennacherib treacherously invaded Judah again—a move which resulted in the divine destruction of 185,000 Assyrian soldiers. Sennacherib retreated to the Assyrian capital of Nineveh, and was later assassinated by his own sons.

Most Bible scholars agree that the 2 Kings 20 account of Hezekiah’s sickness and his reception of Babylonian diplomats actually took place prior to the Assyrian invasion. The shift in chronology matches that found in Isaiah, and possibly was used there for literary reasons and then was followed in 2 Kings.

**SUGGESTED RESPONSE TO QUESTIONS**

**1.** All the kings of the Northern Kingdom of Israel were deemed evil. Among the kings of Judah, both good and evil, only Hezekiah and Josiah gained the praise, “And he did that which was right in the sight of the LORD, according to all that David his father did” (2 Kings 18:3; 2 Kings 22:2). What actions resulted in this assessment of Hezekiah’s reign? 2 Kings 18:4-6

*Hezekiah began by removing the high places and destroying the groves which were left from the idolatrous worship during previous administrations. Even under “good” kings, these places were only shifted in use from idol worship to the worship of God, apparently as poor substitutes of the Temple. The parallel account in 2 Chronicles 29 gives details concerning the reopening of the House of the Lord and the reinstating of the worship of Jehovah in the Temple.*

*Hezekiah also recognized that the brazen serpent made by Moses nearly seven hundred years earlier (which was used by God to bring deliverance, see Numbers 21:9) had become an idol, distracting people from the true God rather than an icon drawing them closer to Him. He quickly destroyed it and named it “Nehushtan,” which means simply, “a piece of brass.”*

*Discuss with your students the importance of worship. Hezekiah was commended when he reopened the doors to the Temple and encouraged all of Judah to worship in that place. It is easy to accept less or to substitute something else for the true worship of God in the heart. We must always be on guard.*

**2.** Scripture records that Hezekiah trusted the Lord, clave to the Lord, and departed not from following Him (2 Kings 18:6). He apparently did this in the midst of extreme political, military, and economic pressure to do just the opposite. Name some ways in which we also are pressured to depart from the Lord and explain how our trust in God can help us resist.

*You could address this question with your students by compiling a list of their answers regarding ways we are pressured to depart from the Lord. Suggestions*

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**4.** How did Hezekiah respond to the threats brought first by the Assyrian diplomats and then by a letter sent directly from Sennacherib? 2 Kings 19:1

*King Hezekiah responded to the threats with a truly humble spirit. We read that “he rent his clothes and covered himself with sackcloth, and went into the house of the LORD.” He then sent his senior advisors, who had also heard the Assyrian threats, to the Prophet Isaiah requesting intercessory prayer on behalf of the remnant in Jerusalem. The response was a positive one promising the destruction of Sennacherib in his own land (see 2 Kings 19:37, which describes Sennacherib’s death some twenty years later).*

*Upon receiving the arrogant and threatening letter from Sennacherib, King Hezekiah read it and then immediately took it to the Temple and spread it before the Lord. He prayed a simple but beautiful prayer, acknowledging God's sovereignty in the universe as Creator and then requesting that God see and hear the blasphemy of the letter. He simply asked for deliverance so that all the earth would know of God's sovereignty.*

*After considering Hezekiah's response to taunting and accusatory words, discuss with your students how we should respond when we are accused or mocked. Taking these situations humbly to the Lord in prayer would be a wise response. Ultimately, we represent God and want His name to be lifted up and glorified in the world around us. Taking time to humbly pray, encouraging others to do the same, asking for intercessory prayer, asking God for guidance, etc., are all great responses.*

**5.** God sent word to Hezekiah to “set thine house in order; for thou shalt die, and not live” (2 Kings 20:1). Since we do not know when we will step into eternity, how can we “set our houses in order”?

*In Hezekiah's case, this directive no doubt meant that he was to arrange his governmental and private affairs in light of his imminent death. Tending to such details is practical for us, too, but of far greater importance is "setting our houses in order" in spiritual matters. To do that, we must first make sure we have a relationship with God through Jesus Christ. This is obtained through repentance by faith resulting in the forgiveness of our sins. Beyond this, we can make wise choices concerning our relationships, service to God, finances, and the other affairs of life. Since we only know the surety of our death and not the time frame, it is wise to keep our "houses in order" at all times. This will also keep us ready should the Lord return prior to our death.*

**6.** Hezekiah received from God what many have wished for—knowledge of the specific time of his death. How did Hezekiah respond to this information, and what was the end result? 2 Kings 20:2-3, 6

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## CONCLUSION

There are several lessons to be learned from King Hezekiah's life history. When a crisis appears, we need to humbly "spread it before the Lord" and ask Him to undertake for us. Our lives are on God's timetable and we should "set our houses in order" to be ready either for death or for the coming of the Lord. We are each entrusted with precious things from the Lord and we must be careful to guard them so we can not only finish well personally, but also pass the precious things on to those who follow us.

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the age of twenty-two. Sadly, Amon apparently was not influenced by his father's repentance, for it is recorded that he "did that which was evil in the sight of the LORD, as his father Manasseh did" (2 Kings 21:20). He served idols and forsook God. After just two years of rule, his servants conspired against him and he was assassinated in his own home.

Chapter 22 begins the account of Josiah. This ruler, commended in Scripture as a godly leader who "turned to the LORD with all his heart" (2 Kings 23:25), ascended to the throne at eight years of age, when his father, Amon, was assassinated. In contrast to his father, Josiah had an interest in the true God. The account of his life in 2 Chronicles records that he began seeking God in the eighth year of his reign, and four years later undertook reforms to stop idol worship in the nation (see 2 Chronicles 34:3-7).

At the age of twenty-six, Josiah instituted the rebuilding of the Temple, which had deteriorated and been left in a state of disrepair during the periods of idol worship in the land. While the workers were making these repairs, they found the Book of the Law. When Josiah heard the book read, he recognized with horror that his people had neglected the commandments of God, and thus stood in danger of judgment. Rending his clothes as a sign of grief and repentance, Josiah immediately set out on a campaign to obey the Lord's instructions and to lead the people of Judah in a return to the God of their fathers.

Josiah died in battle after a reign of thirty-one years in Jerusalem. In spite of his efforts toward reform, Judah reverted again to idolatry after his death.

## **SUGGESTED RESPONSE TO QUESTIONS**

**1.** King Manasseh was raised by a godly father, Hezekiah. However, he rejected his spiritual heritage and did "that which was evil in the sight of the LORD." What specific sins are attributed to Manasseh in 2 Kings 21:3-7?

*These verses list many specific sins that Manasseh committed.*

*Verse 3 – He built up the high places that Hezekiah had destroyed, erected altars for Baal, and worshipped the hosts of heaven.*

*Verse 4 and 5 – He built altars for the worship of pagan deities in the House of the Lord.*

*Verse 6 – He burned his son as a human sacrifice, practiced soothsaying, and sought counsel from mediums and wizards.*

*Verse 7 – He defamed God by setting up a graven image in the Temple.*

**2.** What spiritual concept is illustrated by the fact that Hezekiah, one of the godliest kings in the history of Judah, had a son who was one of the most wicked?

*Your students should conclude that each individual is personally responsible for the choices he or*

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*align our lives and bring them into harmony with  
God's will.*

7. Josiah sent emissaries to Huldah, a prophetess of Jerusalem, to “inquire of the LORD” concerning the fate of himself, his people, and his nation in light of the transgressions of their fathers. Briefly summarize in your own words the answer the prophetess gave. 2 Kings 22:15-20

*The prophetess' answer was in two parts. First, she announced that God would bring evil upon Judah as described in the words of the Book of the Law (see the curses described in Deuteronomy 28 and Leviticus 26). Second, she foretold that because Josiah had humbled himself before God, he would not experience the desolation, but would die in peace with God.*

**8. What did Josiah do after hearing the response of the prophetess? 2 Kings 23:1-8**

*Josiah's first act was to call together the elders of Judah, the priests, the prophets, and all the people for a public reading of the words of the Book of the Law. He then made a covenant with the Lord to walk in His ways and to keep His commandments, and the people stood to indicate their commitment to join with Josiah in this covenant.*

*He followed this with actions designed to remove the stain of idolatry from the land. He “put down” (caused to cease) the idolatrous priests and those who burned incense to Baal and the sun, moon, and planets. He broke down the places of ritual prostitution, and defiled the high places—the centers of heathen worship.*

*When Josiah's actions have been identified, class discussion could revolve around the necessity of following repentance with action. It is not enough to say we are sorry; our deeds must prove our words. Josiah not only humbled himself before God, but also took steps to change the behaviors that had incurred God's wrath. As He did for Josiah, God will guide us in what we must do, and we must follow Him in obedience.*

**9.** Josiah took steps to remove all idols from the nation. What idols could be in a person's life in our day?

*Your class members may offer a variety of specific suggestions. These could include: material possessions, education, another person, position, hobbies. The conclusion should be that anything we put ahead of God is an idol. By giving these things their rightful place in our lives, we remove the hindrances and are open to listen and obey Him.*

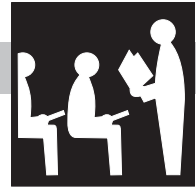
## CONCLUSION

It is important to learn from the Biblical examples given to us. The lives of these three kings illustrate that God will have mercy upon the wicked when there is sincere repentance, that He will ultimately judge the wicked, and that He always responds to repentant

and humble hearts. We learn that our actions impact others, and that this impact can last for generations. Finally, we recognize that even sweeping national reforms are of no lasting value unless there is genuine repentance and ongoing obedience to God.

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## Final Days of Judah

## SOURCE FOR QUESTIONS

2 Kings 23:31 through 25:30

### KEY VERSE FOR MEMORIZATION

“Surely at the commandment of the LORD came this upon Judah, to remove them out of his sight, for the sins of Manasseh, according to all that he did; and also for the innocent blood that he shed: for he filled Jerusalem with innocent blood; which the LORD would not pardon.” (2 Kings 24:3-4)

## BACKGROUND

These chapters review the events during the reigns of the final four kings of Judah and its last, chaotic years as an independent nation. The text begins with Jehoahaz's ascent to the throne of Judah, following the death of his father, righteous King Josiah, who was killed in battle. In spite of having a godly father, Jehoahaz immediately reverted to the evil practices of Manasseh, Amon, and other wicked kings of Judah. After just three months, he was forcibly removed from the throne by Pharaoh-necho of Egypt, who had gained control of Judah when he defeated King Josiah.

Pharaoh-necho replaced Jehoahaz with another son of King Josiah, Eliakim, who Pharaoh-necho renamed Jehoiakim. Jehoiakim reigned in Judah for eleven years, and was also ungodly. During his reign, Babylon became the new world power after overthrowing Assyria in 612 B.C. and Egypt in 605 B.C.

Today's lesson describes the captivity of Judah, which took place in three stages. The first invasion (2 Kings 24:1) took place in 605 B.C. Many people were taken captive to Babylon at this time, including Daniel and the three Hebrew children.

Three years later, King Jehoiakim rebelled against Nebuchadnezzar and Babylonian control. Judah was left vulnerable to bands of soldiers from the Chaldees, Syrians, Moabites, and Ammonites, who attacked the weakened nation as a judgment from God for the sins of Manasseh. Jehoiakim died, and was succeeded by his son Jehoiachin.

In just three months, Nebuchadnezzar again laid siege to Jerusalem. Jehoiachin, being young and inexperienced, responded to the Babylonian assault by surrendering. This second invasion of Judah (2 Kings 24:10) took place in 597 B.C. At this time thousands of people, including the prophet Ezekiel, craftsmen and artisans, strong men of war, and royal personnel were taken captive. Many of the Temple treasures

## OPENER

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been oppressed by the Assyrians. Nahum prophesied the destruction of the great city of Nineveh, which was utterly destroyed by the Babylonians in 612 B.C. Read chapter 1 of Nahum's prophecy. How would you feel if you were an Assyrian hearing this prophecy? How would you feel if you were a person from the land of Judah?

*Since the Assyrian audience received a message of judgment and condemnation, we might suppose that those receiving that message would be alarmed and fearful, and perhaps motivated to repentance. In reality, they appeared to think it was ludicrous or foolish, for they ignored the warning. However, the people of Judah no doubt felt relief and hope when they heard Nahum's message.*

*Follow up your discussion of these questions by pointing out that although the people of Nineveh had repented some one hundred years earlier at the preaching of Jonah, this time they failed to turn from their evil ways and seek God, in spite of the horrendous nature of the prophesied destruction. Ask your class: How do people today respond to the warning that Christ's coming is near, and that a time of terrible trouble awaits those who have failed to make their peace with Him? Why do you think people are so heedless of the warning?*

**2.** Nahum began his prophecy with a description of God in Nahum 1:2-7. What can we learn about God's nature and attributes from these verses? How should knowing these attributes impact our behavior and attitude toward Him?

*Class discussion may bring out the following:*

*Nahum 1:2—God is a jealous God who takes revenge on His enemies.*

*Nahum 1:3—God is slow to anger. God is great in power. God will not acquit the wicked.*

*Nahum 1:3-5—God's power is shown in and through nature.*

*Nahum 1:6—God's anger is like a fiery volcano.*

*Nahum 1:7—God is good. God is a stronghold in the day of trouble. God knows those who trust in Him.*

*Being aware of the attributes of God should cause us to view Him and His requirements with awe, utmost respect, and unquestioning obedience.*

*It might be interesting to discuss with your class some current-day examples of these timeless truths about the nature of God.*

**3.** What were God's intentions for Assyria, and why? Nahum 1:9,14; 2:13; 3:19

*These verses bring out that God was going to utterly destroy Assyria because the people were so vile and wicked.*

*Discuss with your class what this indicates about God's love and mercy. The point should be made that*

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**6.** In Zephaniah 1:12-13 the prophet said that God would punish those who were “settled on their lees,” a phrase which meant they were at ease, or apathetic. Why was this attitude worthy of God’s punishment?

*The people condemned by the prophet in this verse were not concerned about the sinful condition of Judah, nor were they concerned about the coming judgment of God. They seemed to be concerned with, and trusting solely in, their own wealth and material possessions. Such a complacent attitude was worthy of punishment because it indicated that they had stopped trusting in God and believing His prophets.*

*What parallel might we see to this behavior in our society? What warning is there for us as we ponder God's anger at such an attitude of indifference?*

**7.** Although Zephaniah's prophecy of destruction was much broader than Nahum's prophecy, it also held out more hope for the redemption of the Gentile nations. What does God promise in Zephaniah 2:3, 3:9, and 3:13?

*In Zephaniah 2:3, God promised to spare all the meek and righteous in the earth. In Zephaniah 3:9, God promised to purify the nations through His time of judgment so that all may call upon the Name of the Lord and serve Him in unity. In Zephaniah 3:13, God promised that He will cleanse the remnant of Israel from all vestiges of sinful pride, and will cause them to dwell in perfect peace and security.*

*You may wish to broaden out the concept of God's promises by asking your students to name some promises God has made to us. Ask them: How do we know God's promises to us are true, and will be fulfilled?*

**8.** Zephaniah 3:14 commands, “Sing, O daughter of Zion; shout, O Israel; be glad and rejoice with all the heart, O daughter of Jerusalem.” Why would the prophet ask the people of Judah to rejoice after pronouncing the coming wrath of God upon Judah and all the nations? (Zephaniah 3:15)

*The people were to rejoice because although Zephaniah foretold the great and terrible Day of the Lord when God's wrath would be poured out to punish sin, he also foretold that God's punishment will purify a remnant of Israel who will serve God in righteousness. (Read Zephaniah 3:11-13.) God will then be in the midst of His people, and the land of Judah will be restored. (Read Zephaniah 3:15-20.)*

*Ask your class: Though we know a time of great and terrible trouble is coming upon this world, what reason do we have to rejoice?*

**9.** What do the prophecies of Nahum and Zephaniah teach us about the way we should live our lives?

*Answers to this question may vary, but they should offer a springboard to wrapping up this lesson. The point should emerge that Nahum and Zephaniah's*

*prophecies reveal that God is displeased with dishonesty, violence, robbery, moral apathy, idol worship, self-complacency, and pride. God is pleased with those who trust in Him, who seek meekness and righteousness, and who are honest and upright. To escape God's judgment, we must purpose to listen to Him, accept His correction, obey Him, trust Him, and seek His guidance for our lives. As we do these things, we can be assured of a glorious future with Him, in spite of the calamities that will come upon this earth.*

## CONCLUSION

The prophecies of Nahum and Zephaniah were fulfilled in part when Nineveh was ransacked in the year 612 B.C. and when Judah fell to Babylon in the year 586 B.C. However, the ominous world-wide “day of the LORD” prophesied by Zephaniah, and the universal worship of the Lord which is to follow this time of trouble, has not yet come to pass.



## Call of the Prophet and First Pronouncements of Judgments

## SOURCE FOR QUESTIONS

Jeremiah 1:1 through 15:21

## KEY VERSE FOR MEMORIZATION

“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. 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 1:9-10)

## BACKGROUND

Jeremiah was the son of Hilkiah, a priest who lived in Anathoth, which was a city of priests located three miles northeast of Jerusalem. At the time of his birth, Judah was ruled by its most wicked king, Manasseh. When Manasseh died, his son Amon continued his idolatrous practices. Thus, Jeremiah grew to adulthood at a time when idolatry flourished in the land.

In 640 B.C., Amon's own servants assassinated him. Josiah, Amon's son, became king and through godly counsel sought the Lord, purged the land of idolatry, repaired the Temple, and called his nation to repentance. Josiah led the nation into revival. It was during the thirteenth year of Josiah's good reign that Jeremiah was called to be a prophet.

Jeremiah's ministry as a prophet included the time between the fall of the Assyrian Empire and the rise of Babylon. Judah's geographical position placed the country in the middle of traffic between the three great powers of that time: Assyria, Babylon, and Egypt. The hostilities between these nations were used to magnify God's call to repentance and bring judgment on Judah for her sins.

The Book of Jeremiah opens with his call from God to be a prophet, and a prophecy of destruction that would come on the nation of Judah from the north (Babylon). The first chapter closes with God's promise to be with Jeremiah and to deliver him.

Chapter 2 begins a series of discourses directed to Judah. Chapters 2 through 8 are an appraisal of Judah's apostasy, depravity, and rebellion, combined with prophecies of judgment—destruction and desolation for the people and land because of their failure to repent and return to serving God.

Chapters 9 through 15 begin with Jeremiah deeply sorrowing in vain for a people who had totally abandoned themselves to everything vile. God lamented for His chosen people who had utterly rejected their inheritance by breaking their covenant with God.

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The Lord often commanded Jeremiah to use objects as symbols to graphically illustrate His message to the people. In chapter 13, the prophet was instructed to wear a linen girdle (like those worn by the priests to secure their outer clothing). Later, he was told to hide the girdle in a hole. When God told Jeremiah to retrieve it, it was marred and “profitable for nothing.” God used this to demonstrate how good it was when Judah walked with Him. However, when the people turned to other gods, they became defiled and worse than the marred girdle.

All the pleadings of the Lord and intercession for the people by Jeremiah did not cause Judah to cry out to God for mercy. Chapter 15 ends with another promise from God that if they would return to Him, He would deliver them from their enemies.

## **SUGGESTED RESPONSE TO QUESTIONS**

**1.** How did Jeremiah respond to God calling him to be a prophet, and why? Jeremiah 1:4-6

*He was reluctant, saying, “I cannot speak: for I am a child.” Jeremiah did not feel qualified because of his age and inexperience. He was one year younger than King Josiah, who was twenty-one and had reigned for thirteen years.*

*Class discussion should bring out that since most people are saved when they are young, God’s call into areas of service may also occur when they are quite young. God has a task for each of us, no matter what our age, although obviously the nature of our assigned responsibilities will evolve as we grow older and mature spiritually.*

*You may want to ask the class to share how old they were when they first experienced the call of God to some specific task for Him. Brother George Hughes used to testify that his first task was picking up the songbooks after services in the Portland tabernacle! Like Jeremiah and Josiah, God can lead us and help us accomplish His purpose in our lives as we seek His counsel and will, no matter what our age.*

**2.** Seven verses in the first two chapters of the Book of Jeremiah contain the phrase “the word of the LORD.” What is the significance of this statement in these Scriptures?

*The seven verses where this phrase is repeated are Jeremiah 1:2,4,11,13 and Jeremiah 2:1,4,31.*

*Discussion should bring out that the words spoken and recorded were not Jeremiah’s private views or his personal Scriptural interpretations. They were divinely inspired and sent to him, the person God chose to deliver them. Jeremiah was faithful in speaking what he had been commanded by God.*

*You may want to ask your class how they can know what “the word of the LORD” is and how it is received. Lead them to understand that the Bible is divinely inspired and we can be assured of what it says.*

## **NOTES**

**3.** What two “evils” had the people of Judah committed, as recorded in Jeremiah 2:13? In your own words, explain the examples used in this verse.

*First, the people of Judah had “forsaken me the fountain of living waters.” And secondly, they had “hewed them out cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water.”*

*The people of Judah had forsaken the living God to worship idols. The fountains of living water represent God's goodness, ever pure and available. Cisterns are empty wells dug to catch runoff water from rain. A broken cistern, especially in the arid Middle East, would not hold water for any length of time. This illustration describes the total lack of help, substance, and value in serving idols.*

*As a follow-up, ask your class how people today turn to “broken cisterns” instead of the “fountain of living water.” Some examples may include the use of alcohol or drugs. They might also bring out that, like broken cisterns, worldly pleasures and pursuits are vain attempts to bring contentment and a sense of fulfillment. Those who accept a Calvinistic approach (the teaching that living above sin is impossible) are certainly trusting in a broken cistern. Ultimately, anything that is substituted for the true worship of God would fall in that category.*

**4. Why did God consider Judah's sin to be greater than the sin of Israel? Jeremiah 3:6-8**

*Judah had watched God's judgment executed against the Northern Kingdom, Israel, when it fell to the Assyrians and the people were taken into captivity. Through Jeremiah, God compared Israel's backsliding to a woman who had left her husband and become a prostitute. Israel continued this wicked lifestyle despite the repeated calls of her husband, God, to return. Israel's sister, Judah, was even more treacherous because she saw the depravity and final outcome of her sister, yet still rejected God's call to return to Him.*

*Ask the class to consider the responsibility they have because of the Gospel they have received. Lead your class to understand that we are accountable for what has been entrusted to us.*

**5.** During Jeremiah's ministry, other prophets prophesied falsely, and the priests ruled over the people by following the directions of these false prophets. According to Jeremiah 5:31, why did the people tolerate this?

*Jeremiah 5:31 reveals that the people of Judah not only accepted the false teachings, but they loved them. The people had been in a backslidden condition for so long that they became accustomed to the practice of worshiping idols and performing outward rituals rather than serving God from their hearts. In time, they no longer recognized the fact that God's blessing and favor had been removed from them.*

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*fact that we commit our lives into His Hands. We strive to obey Him in all areas of life. We look to Him for guidance in decisions, and appeal to Him for comfort and help in time of need. We have an assurance that He is in control, and even in times of adversity or trial, we have a deep settled peace that keeps us going forward.*

**8.** Why did God lament over forsaking His house and His heritage? Jeremiah 12:7-13

*God lamented because the Southern Kingdom had broken the covenant and had refused His call to repentance. Thus, God had determined to send judgment on the people. He inspired the prophet to use several different word pictures to describe the plight of Israel: a lion viciously turned against its Maker, a bird about to be attacked, and a vineyard that had been trampled and left in ruins. Judah's rebellious response to God's pleadings to return to Him caused God to ultimately allow other countries—instruments of His divine judgment—to brutally take away the remaining land that had been given to the Children of Israel for an inheritance.*

*Remind your class that in this passage it was God lamenting, not the Prophet Jeremiah. Ask your class to give examples of what causes God to grieve today as He looks on His creation.*

**9.** The prophet lived through an evil and difficult time in his country's history, and in Jeremiah 15:10, he cried out in bitter anguish of soul, feeling himself pitted against the whole world. What promise was given to him in Jeremiah 15:11? What promises give us encouragement as we face difficulties in our lives?

*The promise was, "It shall be well with thy remnant." The Lord was promising the prophet that the enemy (Babylon/Nebuchadnezzar) would treat him well at the time when the rest of the nation would be taken into captivity. (This promise was fulfilled in Jeremiah 39:11.) As you discuss this question, you may wish to refer to God's promise to Jeremiah when He called him to be a prophet (see Jeremiah 1:17-19).*

*The Lord has promised us that He will never leave us or forsake us. Remind your class that Jeremiah's account gives us assurance of the validity of God's promises. Lead the class to understand that even if we never have another day without difficulty in this life, as Christians, we have the hope and promise of eternal life.*

## CONCLUSION

Jeremiah was given the enormous task of calling an idolatrous nation back to God, knowing the people would not respond favorably. He witnessed firsthand God's longsuffering and love for His people as He pled with them to repent. We can draw comfort in knowing that we, like Jeremiah, serve a loving and merciful God.

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# The Continued Sermons of the Prophet

## SOURCE FOR QUESTIONS

Jeremiah 16:1 through 25:38

### KEY VERSE FOR MEMORIZATION

“O house of Israel, cannot I do with you as this potter? saith the LORD. Behold, as the clay is in the potter’s hand, so are ye in mine hand, O house of Israel.”  
(Jeremiah 18:6)

## BACKGROUND

As Jeremiah gave the six discourses recorded in these ten chapters, he faced many challenges. Not only were the messages delivered to an unresponsive and rebellious people, but he also dealt with personal agony, pain, and discouragement.

The domestic lives of the prophets were often used by God as examples to the people. Chapter 16 opens with several of God's commandments to the prophet regarding aspects of his personal life. Obedience brought loneliness, and Jeremiah became a social outcast.

In chapter 17, the prophet described Judah's sins, and presented a series of meditations built around the theme of the heart. After appealing to God as his place of refuge, the prophet warned the people that disregard for the Sabbath was a sign of their rebellious and idolatrous spirit.

Chapter 18 begins a three-chapter discourse centered on the sovereignty of God. Jeremiah was commanded to go to the potter's house for a spiritual lesson. God's message was that if the people would repent, He would deliver them. However, the rejection of the prophet's message was immediate, and the people formed a conspiracy against Jeremiah. Their hostility drove the prophet to the Lord, where he poured out his soul in what some writers describe as the bitterest prayer for vengeance recorded in the whole book.

In chapter 19, Jeremiah was commanded to shatter an earthen bottle to demonstrate the coming judgment and destruction. This was a sign that Jerusalem and its people would be broken because they had forsaken God, worshiped idols, desecrated the Temple, murdered the innocent, and offered their children to altar fires dedicated to Baal.

The reaction to Jeremiah's pronouncement is recorded in chapter 20. Pashur, chief governor of the Temple, was so enraged at Jeremiah's words that he had the prophet beaten and put in stocks until the next day. That night God met with Jeremiah and gave him

## OPENER

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a special message and a new name for Pashur—Magormissabib, which meant “terror on every side.” This was descriptive of the fear that would ultimately overtake Judah.

In chapters 21 and 22, the prophet gave a discourse directed against Judah’s rulers, addressing one king after another with dire pronouncements. In chapter 23, he denounced the false prophets whom he likened to shepherds that scattered the sheep. In verses 5 through 8 of this chapter, he contrasted the corrupt leaders of that day with the coming Messiah, giving one of the great Messianic prophecies of the Old Testament.

The prophet was commanded to offer another visual sign through the two baskets of figs, a vision described in chapter 24. The exiles in Babylon, who would receive God’s blessing, were represented by the good figs, while the rotten figs portrayed those who would remain with Zedekiah in Jerusalem.

The message contained in chapter 25 was a prediction of the Babylonian invasion and the captivity of the people of Judah.

**SUGGESTEDRESPONSETOQUESTIONS**

**1.** What three otherwise acceptable activities did God forbid Jeremiah from participating in? (Jeremiah 16:2,5,8) What was the spiritual message portrayed by each restriction?

*The prophet was instructed not to marry and have a family, not to mourn for the dead, and not to attend the ceremonial feasts.*

*By not marrying and having a family, Jeremiah was to be a living symbol of the coming judgment. His single and childless state provided a solemn warning to rebellious Judah that the children born into homes of that day would suffer terribly and die gruesome deaths.*

*He was not to mourn for the dead, as a sign that God had withdrawn His mercy and comfort from Judah. The coming judgment would be so terrible that the people would be unable to express their grief.*

*He was instructed not to attend the feasts of the people, portraying that there was no longer any cause for rejoicing. His absence also pictured the fact that God had long been unwelcome in the midst of the people, so His representative would also be absent from any time of festivity or gladness.*

**2.** Jeremiah used the metaphors of fishing and hunting (Jeremiah 16:16-18) to describe how God would violently punish the iniquity of His people. However, in the same pronouncement, the prophet gave a ray of hope. What was Jeremiah’s message of condolence? Jeremiah 16:14-15

*Jeremiah’s message of comfort was that even though the people had been so stubborn and rebellious, God would still show mercy. The exiles would*

**NOTES**

one day return to their land, and this return would be compared to the Exodus from Egypt.

Perhaps some in your class would be willing to share personal experiences of times when God gave them a message of comfort in a time of deep distress. In conclusion, you could point out that all of us have been recipients of a message of consolation—the knowledge of our opportunity to receive salvation through the Blood of Jesus Christ.

**3.** Jeremiah faithfully and courageously delivered his messages about Judah's sins, yet the people only hardened their hearts and stubbornly resisted God's truth. Name at least three sins that the prophet pointed out to the people in Jeremiah 17.

*The sins of the people were:*

- *Idolatry (verses 1-4). Even though God's holy law should have been written on their hearts, they turned to other gods.*
- *Lack of trust (verses 5-10). The leaders of Judah trusted their political allies and leaned on the arm of flesh. Consequently, they made unwise decisions and plunged the nation into sin.*
- *Greed (verse 11). The rich exploited the poor and became richer.*
- *Forsaking the Lord (verses 12-13). God had not forsaken His people but they had forsaken Him.*
- *Rejecting God's servant (verses 14-18). The people called Jeremiah a false prophet and continually asked when his predictions would come true.*
- *Profaning the Sabbath (verses 19-27). This was the day God had given to the Israelites as a special token of their relationship with Him. It was to be a day of rest for the people, and a time when they were to worship Him. Breaking the Sabbath revealed a rebellious spirit.*

You might wish to follow up this question by pointing out that although the people did not accept Jeremiah or his message, God still honored him. Ask your class: How should we measure success? From a human standpoint, Jeremiah's ministry was a failure, but from God's perspective he was an outstanding success. We need more Jeremiahs in the world today who will denounce sin! For those who do, there is a price to pay but a crown to win.

**4.** God had a special message for Jeremiah as he viewed the potter molding the clay. What two scenarios did the Lord present in Jeremiah 18:7-10? How could we apply these lessons today?

*The first scenario presented was that if God threatened to judge a nation and the people repented, then He would not send the judgment. The second scenario was the opposite: If God promised to bless a*

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*written list of the results of being discouraged and encouraged, do something for someone else.*

7. When King Zedekiah sent to Jeremiah to inquire whether God would grant deliverance from the king of Babylon, one could assume that a return to God was imminent. Instead of offering hope, however, the prophet made three pronouncements—one to King Zedekiah (chapter 21 verses 3-7), one to the people (verses 8-10), and another to the house of David (verses 11-14). What were these pronouncements?

*The message to King Zedekiah — The Lord was angry, furious, and of great wrath toward His own people. Not only would He refuse to deliver the city from the enemy, but He would side with the enemy and bring Jerusalem to defeat. The king and the people would be given over into the hands of their enemies, who would show them no mercy.*

*The message to the people—A choice was set before them. Those who remained in the city would die by sword, famine, and pestilence. However, those who surrendered to the king of Babylon would be spared.*

*The message to the house of David—God reminded the kings of David's dynasty of their responsibility to execute judgment and to uphold the rights of the weak and helpless. He warned them that His fury would be unleashed upon them if they failed to reign with righteousness and justice.*

*Follow-up discussion could focus on the great mercy of God. Repeatedly, He offered the rebellious people of Judah opportunities to amend their ways and turn back to Him. Ask your class how God extends mercy to people today. What are some parallels between the response of the people of Judah and the response of many in our society? Answers will likely include the thought that just as Judah refused to heed the warnings of the prophet, many today turn a deaf ear to God's warnings of eventual judgment. Today, as in Jeremiah's day, the response may come in the form of rejection of the messenger; persecution, defamatory remarks, ridicule of the message, etc.*

**8.** Chapter 22 relates the fate of four wicked kings: Zedekiah (verses 1-9); Jehoahaz, referred to here as Shallum (verses 10-12); Jehoiakim (verses 13-23); and Jehoiachin (verses 24-28). After Jeremiah had denounced all the leaders for the ruthless way they treated the helpless people, he introduced a King who would save Judah (see Jeremiah 23:5-8). Who was this King, and how would He reign?

*The King (Jesus Christ) will be righteous and will rule justly, in contrast to the rulers of Jeremiah's day who were exceedingly corrupt. The Northern and Southern Kingdoms of Israel will be reunited into one nation, and the people will live in peace and prosperity. This promise must have helped sustain the people during their difficult days of captivity.*

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Jeremiah was a faithful prophet. Instead of preaching what the people wanted to hear, he preached the truth, offering the only hope for Judah. The false prophets offered temporary comfort, with the consequence of long-term punishment. Jeremiah offered temporary correction but long-term benefit. Tragically, the people failed to heed Jeremiah's warning.

## SUGGESTED RESPONSE TO QUESTIONS

**1.** The first six verses of our text begin a message the Prophet Jeremiah was instructed to deliver to King Jehoiakim of Judah. What was the response to this message? (Jeremiah 26:7-9) What are some ways people today respond to warnings from God's Word?

*The people of Judah were angry with Jeremiah for preaching the truth to them, and they seized the prophet, intending to put him to death.*

*People today respond in various ways to the warnings of God's Word. Your class may bring out that some respond by ignoring the message. Others fight actively against it by trying to mock or discredit it. They may even persecute the messenger, as happened in Jeremiah's day. However, some respond by coming under conviction, and at times that conviction will lead to repentance.*

*As Christians who have responded to the call of God to repentance, there will be times when the Word of God will reveal spiritual ground we need to cover. When we read God's Word, listen to the preacher or Sunday school teacher, or converse with our parents or others in spiritual authority over us, it is important that we have hearts that are open to the whole truth, even if it is painful or challenging. Ask your class: What will be the indicators if our hearts truly are teachable and open to correction and instruction from the Word of God? Discussion will bring out such thoughts as a lack of resistance, a willingness to hear, and most importantly, obedient follow-through.*

**2.** In Jeremiah 26:18-24, the elders relayed historical accounts of two prophets of God. A number of years before, Micah had prophesied a similar message of destruction. Instead of harming Micah, King Hezekiah had called upon God for help and judgment was withheld. However, God's Prophet Urijah prophesied destruction and he was put to death. What can we learn from these two accounts?

*Class response should bring out that we may not always obtain earthly deliverance from our persecution or trouble. In some cases God chooses to deliver. In other cases, His people will obtain a martyr's crown. We don't understand God's ways, but we do know that He works all things for good to His chosen people. We can have peace, because the Lord will be with us in trouble or in prosperity, and whether we live or die. All that matters is that we are in His Hands.*

## NOTES

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As God instructed Jeremiah to not deviate from His words in spite of the opposition he faced, we also must never diminish or ignore what God has instructed us to do. It may not be easy or popular, but if we are faithful, we will receive God's richest blessing.



## The Consolations of the Prophet

## SOURCE FOR QUESTIONS

Jeremiah 30:1 through 33:26

### KEY VERSE FOR MEMORIZATION

“For, lo, the days come, saith the LORD, that I will bring again the captivity of my people Israel and Judah, saith the LORD: and I will cause them to return to the land that I gave to their fathers, and they shall possess it.” (Jeremiah 30:3)

## BACKGROUND

In this lesson's text, the sequence of messages telling of impending destruction is interrupted. These four chapters, a message of comfort and future hope, are frequently called "The Book of Consolation" by Bible scholars. Although Jeremiah typically announced judgment and punishment for the sins of the Jewish people, in these chapters he proclaimed God's promise of restoration. God revealed through the prophet that the people of the Northern Kingdom of Israel and the Southern Kingdom of Judah would one day return to their land and be reunited.

Although chapters 30 and 31 are not dated, it is probable that Jeremiah wrote some of this prophecy of restoration either while Jerusalem was under siege by the Babylonians or shortly thereafter. Chapters 32 and 33 took place during the siege—the tenth year of Zedekiah’s reign, while Jeremiah was imprisoned in the court of the guard. Although the Jews would shortly be led into captivity by the Chaldeans, God wanted the people of Judah to know that He still loved them and cared for them. In a merciful revelation of events to come, the Lord foretold a future time of peace and prosperity.

Most commentators agree that the prophecies of Jeremiah 30-33 refer not only to the restoration of Jerusalem after the seventy years of captivity, but also to the regathering of the Jews from all the nations in the end times. Therefore, besides bringing hope to the Jews of Jeremiah's time, these chapters should encourage all those who are looking for the coming of the Lord. In this "Book of Consolation," Christians can find promises of the coming of their King and Priest, Jesus Christ.

## SUGGESTED RESPONSE TO QUESTIONS

1. According to Jeremiah 30:14-15 and Jeremiah 32:28-35, why was God allowing His people to be taken into captivity and to experience such pain and suffering?

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## The Circumstances of the Prophet

## SOURCE FOR QUESTIONS

Jeremiah 34:1 through 45:5

### KEY VERSE FOR MEMORIZATION

“It may be that the house of Judah will hear all the evil which I purpose to do unto them; that they may return every man from his evil way; that I may forgive their iniquity and their sin.” (Jeremiah 36:3)

## BACKGROUND

Following the message of consolation contained in chapters 30-33, the Book of Jeremiah resumes the biographical narrative of the prophet. Proclamations are woven around the circumstances of the prophet during a span of time from approximately 607 B.C. to 586 B.C. This text covers Jeremiah's experiences just prior to the fall of Jerusalem (chapters 34-36), during the fall (chapters 37-39), and after the fall (chapters 40-45), although events are not presented in a strictly chronological order.

Judah had continued in a state of rebellion against God, with idolatry and heathen practices taking place in the land in spite of repeated warnings from God's prophets. God had been faithful and patient with His people, but the time for mercy had expired. The city of Jerusalem had twice been invaded by the Chaldean army, and a majority of the people had been taken captive to Babylon, along with many of the Temple treasures. As these chapters begin, the final collapse of the nation of Judah was imminent. The last two fortified cities of Judah, Lachish and Azekah, were about to fall (Jeremiah 34:7). The terrible penalty for sin that the prophet Jeremiah had foretold was coming upon the people.

## SUGGESTED RESPONSE TO QUESTIONS

1. Chapter 35 gives an account of the Rechabites, a nomadic people related to the Kenites and Jethro, Moses' father-in-law. More than two hundred years earlier, their ancestor Jonadab had commanded his sons to stay away from any type of wine. How did God tell Jeremiah to test the Rechabites's resolve to keep that instruction? How did they respond to this test? Jeremiah 35:2, 5-6

*God told Jeremiah to test the Rechabites by offering them strong drink. They refused to partake, citing Jonadab's commandment. God contrasted the Rechabites' steadfastness toward the commandment of their forefather with the unfaithfulness of Judah to the Lord.*

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people, even though it was requested? What spiritual truth can we derive from this?

*Verse 2 indicates that neither the king, nor his servants, nor the people of the land hearkened unto the words of the Lord, as spoken to them by the Prophet Jeremiah.*

*While several spiritual truths could be brought out based on this passage, focus on the fact that if we want God's blessing, we must live in obedience to Him. Ask your class what it means to "hearken" to God. Discussion should bring out that it is more than focusing on an audible sound; attentive listening must also be accompanied by responding obediently to what is heard. God's promises of blessing are conditional. King Zedekiah wanted God's blessing, but was not willing to pay the price to obtain it. People today may call on God's name and desire prosperity and blessing, yet not be willing to make a full commitment to Him. When we pay the price, God's promises of blessing will never fail.*

**4.** Jeremiah's message of coming destruction angered the princes of Judah, and he was put into a dungeon—likely a narrow cistern designed to catch rain water. He would have died except for the intervention of Ebed-melech, an Ethiopian. This man was willing to risk his life by asking for Jeremiah's removal from the dungeon. (See Jeremiah 38:7-13.) What are ways we may have to take a stand that will not be popular or may cause us damage to some degree? What will be the results of taking that stand?

*Discussion should bring up a variety of possibilities. Those in school may find it difficult to bow their heads in prayer over their lunches. Someone working in an office may have to refuse to lie for the boss. Direct your class discussion toward the types of situations that may come up for the age group you teach.*

*The one uniting factor for all types of persecution is the end result of blessing and victory for those who suffer for God. Ebed-Melech received God's special blessing for his courageous act (see Jeremiah 39:15-18), and we will be rewarded too. We may pay a price in this world—some will suffer persecution, reproach, and estrangement from loved ones. Others have even paid the price of their lives. However, for those who suffer, there will be wonderful rewards in the end.*

**5. God had not forgotten His promise to the prophet (see Jeremiah 1:8), and Jeremiah was freed from his bonds when the Babylonians overthrew Jerusalem. He was allowed to choose to go to Babylon with the exiles, or to stay in Jerusalem to care for the remnant there. What did Jeremiah choose, and why do you think he made that choice? Jeremiah 40:2-6**

*Jeremiah chose to join Gedaliah, who had been appointed governor of Jerusalem, and to dwell in Jerusalem with the remnant of Judah.*

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## CONCLUSION

Jeremiah faithfully warned the people to turn to the Lord and obey Him. We can be encouraged to faithfully fulfill our call from God and leave the results to Him. That is all He asks from us.

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**8.** Jeremiah is referred to as the weeping prophet because of his sorrow over the people's rejection of God and the punishment that was coming upon the land. In the course of his prophetic ministry, he was beaten, ridiculed, starved, imprisoned, and forced to leave his homeland. Yet he was faithful to proclaim the word of the Lord. The people refused to listen or heed, yet Jeremiah kept on with his mission. What lesson can we learn from his life?

*While no doubt many lessons from the life of Jeremiah could be mentioned, lead your group into a discussion of how we can stay faithful and encouraged in our work for the Lord. There may be times when we feel weary from the responsibilities God has given us. Maybe we do not see the results we would like. Perhaps people reject us or ignore our attempts to reach out to them. Jeremiah's life can be an encouragement to keep holding on and doing what we are called to do. Our job is to proclaim; the results belong to God. In Heaven we may be surprised by those who made it because of something we said or did in our faithful service to Him. One day it will be worth all of the heartache, sweat, and tears, for then we shall reap with joy.*

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## The Pronouncement of Judgment on the Nations

## SOURCE FOR QUESTIONS

Jeremiah 46:1 through 52:34

### KEY VERSE FOR MEMORIZATION

“Therefore thus saith the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel; Behold, I will punish the king of Babylon and his land, as I have punished the king of Assyria.”  
(Jeremiah 50:18)

## BACKGROUND

God had called Jeremiah to be a “prophet unto the nations” (Jeremiah 1:5). For more than forty years he had ministered to the Southern Kingdom of Judah. In chapters 46 through 51, Jeremiah pronounced God’s judgment on the pagan nations of Egypt, Philistia, Moab, Ammon, Edom, Damascus, Kedar, Hazor, Elam, and Babylon.

In chapter 46, Jeremiah declared God's judgment on Egypt. The text begins with a graphic description of Pharaoh-necho's defeat by Nebuchadnezzar in the Battle of Carchemish. Pharaoh-necho was the second ruler of the twenty-sixth dynasty in Egypt. He was considered one of their greatest kings, and had killed Judah's King Josiah at Megiddo in 608 B.C. Jeremiah described the army of Pharaoh-necho as very large and confident (verse 8). However, just as God had revealed, they were utterly defeated.

Philistia was the next nation to receive a pronouncement. Chapter 47 employs very descriptive imagery to declare the judgments that would come to this long-time contender with God's people. Many scholars believe the Philistines originally came from Crete (called Caphtor in verse 4). They were primarily sea merchants, with most of their major cities located on the southeastern coast of the Mediterranean Sea. Jeremiah described Babylon's army as an "overflowing flood" that would overtake their land (verse 2). The noise of the advancing army would be so terrifying that the "fathers shall not look back to their children," indicating that in their attempt to flee, they would leave their children behind (verse 3). The word "baldness" used in verse 5 indicates a funeral-like mourning for the judgment and destruction of their cities.

God's judgment of the nations continues in chapter 48, and is directed in this passage against Moab. The Moabites were descendants of Lot through his incestuous relationship with his eldest daughter. Moab had a confrontational relationship with the Children of Israel; however, Judah formed an alliance with Moab

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## SUGGESTED RESPONSE TO QUESTIONS

## NOTES

**1. Why do you think God had Jeremiah prophesy judgment against Judah's neighboring countries?**

*Your class should conclude that the countries that God pronounced judgment on had all aligned themselves against Him. They had performed evil acts, and had influenced His people toward idolatry.*

*As a follow-up question, ask your class for examples of how those surrounding countries had been influenced by Israel and were therefore responsible for the knowledge of God. All of these countries had been given the knowledge of the God of Israel: Egypt through the Exodus, the Philistines by the Judges and David, Moab by Naomi and Ruth, and Babylon by Jeremiah and the prophets.*

**2.** In Jeremiah 46:25, whom did God direct the prophet to say would be punished? Why do you think God identified each entity separately rather than simply grouping them as a nation?

*God specified that He would punish the multitude of No, Pharaoh (mentioned twice), Egypt, Egypt's gods, Egypt's kings, and all that trusted in Pharaoh.*

*Several possibilities may be mentioned in answer to the second question. Lead your class to the conclusion that God's judgment was complete: no one was exempt from the punishment that was determined against them. In reference to the phrase "and all them that trust in him," you may wish to explain that many smaller nations had sought to ally themselves with Egypt, including rebellious Judah. Others, including families from Judah, had fled to Egypt for safety, trusting in that nation's gods and military might. Rather than finding protection and safety, they suffered God's judgment against Egypt.*

*Ask your class to identify places that people run to rather than God in our day when they have problems. What is the danger in doing so?*

**3. Philistia** was located in a portion of the Promised Land west of Judah, along the southeastern end of the Mediterranean Sea. Chapter 47 prophesies of its final destruction at the time when Judah would go into captivity. What lesson can we learn from the fact that Israel never removed that nation from the Promised Land after their conquest of it?

*The class should identify several ways that the Philistines caused the Israelites serious problems during the entire time they possessed the Promised Land. The Philistines had ruled over the Jewish people at times, fought costly battles with them, and introduced them to idols and heathen and idolatrous practices. Their presence was an ongoing trial that could have been avoided if the Children of Israel had followed God's instructions. Lead the class to understand that we must follow God's instructions completely if we are to enjoy His unhindered blessings on our lives.*

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to the other idols of Babylon? What spiritual truth is revealed by this pronouncement?

*Jeremiah foretold that the god of the Babylonians, which they regarded as creator and king, was to be “taken,” “confounded [humiliated],” and “broken in pieces.” In other words, Babylon’s great god was about to be shamefully defeated by the decree of the mighty God of Israel.*

*Class discussion of the second question should bring out the thought that God alone is all-powerful. No matter what deities man may invent and worship, He alone is sovereign. God will have the last word!*

**7.** Jeremiah 52:2 says that Zedekiah, Judah’s last king, “did that which was evil in the eyes of the LORD.” His leadership resulted in the siege of Jerusalem, the spoiling of the city and Temple, and the killing and enslavement of the people of Judah. What was God’s punishment upon Zedekiah? Jeremiah 52:10-11

*King Zedekiah witnessed the slaying of his sons (Jeremiah 39:6), had his eyes put out, and was carried away to Babylon in chains, where he was kept in prison until his death.*

*Regardless of whether or not we are leaders, there is always someone looking to us as an example. What are some ways that we can provide a good spiritual example to those around us? Class responses to this follow-up question will bring out such thoughts as: demonstrate faithfulness; be prayerful, loving, kind, and encouraging; honor God in all things, etc.*

**8.** What qualities in the life and ministry of Jeremiah might help us as we attempt to live for God in a spiritually challenging society?

*This question should provide you with a good framework for summarizing this lesson and our study of the Book of Jeremiah. Class responses will likely bring out some of the following thoughts:*

- *We must be faithful in spite of adversity.*
- *Sometimes obedience to God takes courage, but He will give grace and strength.*
- *Success in the eyes of God is of far more value than success in the eyes of man.*
- *The opinion of the majority is not necessarily the way to go.*
- *Serving God does not guarantee personal ease or security.*

## CONCLUSION

God judged the nations along with His own people for rebelling against Him and not heeding His Word. As we purpose to live righteously and obediently before God, we can avoid facing the judgment of God that will certainly fall upon those who persist in refusing His mercy and rebelling against Him.

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# The Lamentations of Jeremiah

## SOURCE FOR QUESTIONS

## Lamentations 1:1 through 5:22

### KEY VERSE FOR MEMORIZATION

“It is of the LORD’s mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not. They are new every morning: great is thy faithfulness.” (Lamentations 3:22-23)

## BACKGROUND

Lamentations is the anguished outpouring of a prophet mourning the degradation of a once great nation. This book, a collection of five poems, was written by Jeremiah shortly after the destruction of the city of Jerusalem, about 586 B.C. The Babylonian conqueror Nebuchadnezzar had laid siege to the city for eighteen long months and when the city was finally taken, it was a heartbreaking time for the Jewish people. This set of poems, the first four composed in the form of ancient funeral songs or dirges, and the final one, a prayer, describe the terrifying calamity that had befallen the land. They acknowledge that the people were being punished severely for disobeying God.

At one time the people of Judah had obeyed and loved their God. Now they were physically, emotionally, and spiritually broken. Jerusalem and Solomon's Temple had been destroyed, and the people put to shame before their oppressors. But the greatest loss was the knowledge that God had turned away from them because of their rejection of Him.

In spite of the excruciating pain of the situation they were in, Jeremiah voiced his hope that God would turn His anger away if only the people would repent. *Lamentations* concludes with a prayer designed to be the penitent outpouring of a broken nation—a nation that had finally realized the cost of angering God. With desperate longing, the prophet verbalized a plea intended to guide the people to a position of humility and repentance, asking God to remember them and turn away the fierceness of His great wrath.

## SUGGESTED RESPONSE TO QUESTIONS

1. Jeremiah is known as the weeping prophet. What circumstances caused his anguish? Lamentations 1:3,6,8,15-17

*A review should bring out the following thoughts.*

- Verse 3 – Judah had been taken into captivity.
- Verse 6 – Her leaders were like malnourished deer (harts) unable to escape their hunters.

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- Verse 8 – Those who had once honored the city of Jerusalem now despised her.
- Verses 15-17 – The God who had once been their comforter had become their judge and source of punishment.

*As a follow-up, ask your class if any of them have ever felt similarly burdened. Encourage them to describe how God brought them through.*

**2.** Lamentations 2:6-10 describes the destruction of the Temple at Jerusalem. What significance did this destruction have to the people of Judah?

*The destruction of the Temple signified the departure of God's presence from a nation that had refused to follow Him. Point out to your class that this was the original Temple built by King Solomon. According to historians, it was a building of great beauty. However, more than that, this landmark was the center and hub of the Jewish faith. God had made it His holy dwelling place, a place where anointed priests could offer atonement for man's sin. People would come yearly to the Temple to bring sacrifices and pay homage to God. Tragically, the people of Judah had rejected in their daily lives what they proclaimed by their rituals of worship, and thus, their worship had become a mockery.*

*Follow up this question by discussing with your class some ways we can make sure that our worship is sincere and focused on God. Thoughts could include: asking God to prepare our hearts before we come to His sanctuary to worship, making sure the glory and honor goes to God and not to individuals, having hearts that are open to God's checks and prodding, making His house a place of prayer and not just a place of social interaction, etc.*

**3.** In spite of all the pain and sorrow inflicted upon Israel by God, what was Jeremiah's hope? Lamentations 3:31-32

*Verses 31 and 32 indicate Jeremiah's confidence that God would not stay angry forever. Even though the nation would never return to its previous condition, Jeremiah believed that God one day would again show mercy upon His children.*

*Ask your class: Why is hope so important? Discussion should bring out that, without hope, a person falls into despair and may feel that life is not worth living. As Christians, the Gospel presents the hope that no matter what trials and afflictions we face in this life, we will someday enjoy eternal life with God. Perhaps one of your students would share a time when hope sustained him/her.*

**4.** Lamentations 4:17-20 alludes to the fact that Judah had asked Egypt for help in fighting the Babylonian army. What one word is used to describe the nature of that help? What lesson can we derive from this?



*The descriptive word is “vain.” Ask your class for their definitions of the word. The point should be made that Egypt’s help was worthless and unsatisfactory. The Egyptians offered Judah false hope—they started to help but then retreated (Jeremiah 37:5-7).*

*Various thoughts may be suggested in terms of lessons we can derive from this. Your group will likely conclude that we can have no real assurance of help from any source other than God—He alone is totally reliable. He is also perfectly able to help, while other helpers, however well-intentioned, may not be able to carry through. Your group may also note that it is dangerous to put our faith in the wrong power.*

**5.** What was the condition of the sacred grounds on the Temple mount? Lamentations 5:18

*Foxes walked upon the mountain of Zion, indicating complete destruction. It must have been heart-breaking for Jeremiah to witness such desolation. Solomon had asked God to hear the people when they prayed toward this Temple (2 Chronicles 6:34-39). We can only imagine the pain felt when the people realized that the holiest place on earth was now just a pile of rubble.*

**6.** What miseries, as recited in chapter 5, had been sent by God to bring the people to a position of humility and repentance?

*You may wish to make a list with your class of the miseries described in this chapter.*

- *Lamentations 5:3 – Men had been slain, leaving widows and orphans.*
- *Lamentations 5:4 – The people were made to pay for wood, water, etc.*
- *Lamentations 5:6 – The people were forced to beg their enemies for food.*
- *Lamentations 5:11 – Women were raped and abused.*
- *Lamentations 5:12 – National leaders were dishonored.*
- *Lamentations 5:13 – Children were forced to labor.*
- *Lamentations 5:14-15 – Hearts were no longer joyful.*
- *Lamentations 5:18 – The Temple had been destroyed.*

*Bring out that these circumstances were just a small portion of what this great nation suffered by disobeying God. Ask your class: What lesson is there for us in the tremendous punishment that was meted out to this nation for rejecting God? The point should be made that even though we live in a dispensation of mercy and grace, God still demands obedience. Discuss the outcome of disobeying God today.*

**7.** What attitude or condition was the prophet encouraging in the people, as indicated by his prayer at the end of chapter 5?

*The prophet's prayer was designed to point the people toward humility and repentance. This chapter verbalizes the penitent prayer that a broken nation should pray—a nation that has finally realized the cost of angering God.*

*You might wish to discuss with your class the role that humility and repentance play when a penitent sinner comes to God for forgiveness of sin.*

**8.** How would you describe the Prophet Jeremiah after reading the Book of Lamentations?

*You may wish to list on a dry erase board the character traits identified by your students. Class discussion will likely bring out that Jeremiah had a tremendous desire to serve and please God. He also had an unconditional love for God's chosen people. This man of God was willing to stay and share the pain of the Jewish nation. Jeremiah possessed excellent leadership qualities. He spoke the truth. Talking with God was a priority with Jeremiah. We see a man who was loving and compassionate even though he knew this time of trouble could have been avoided. Jeremiah was a man God could depend upon.*

*We live in a different era and society than the Prophet Jeremiah. However, we would do well to emulate the characteristics of this man of God. What are some ways we can model his heart of compassion in our day?*

## CONCLUSION

We live in an age when people and nations are forgetting and forsaking God. We also know that there is a time of tribulation coming soon upon this earth—a time of trouble of a magnitude that has never been seen before. Let us learn a lesson from the failure of the people of Judah, and stay true to God, that we might escape that terrible time!

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# Israel Taken Captive

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## 2 Kings 17:1-23

Finally the sins of Israel's people caught up with them. God allowed Assyria to defeat and disperse the people. They were led into captivity, swallowed up by the mighty, evil Assyrian Empire. Sin always brings discipline, and the consequences of that sin are sometimes irreversible.

# Judah Exiled

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## 2 Kings 25:1-30

Evil permeated Judah, and God's anger flared against his rebellious people. Babylon conquered Assyria and became the new world power. The Babylonian army marched into Jerusalem, burned the Temple, tore down the city's massive walls, and carried off the people into captivity.

