Tears for Shattered Lives

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TEARS FOR SHATTERED LIVES: JEREMIAH AND LAMENTATIONS
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Contents

How to Use *Life Design* 5

Preface 7

Resources for This Course 8

Lesson 1 A Prophet in Perilous Times 9

Lesson 2 A Call to a Challenge 19

Lesson 3 Repentance or Ruin. 28

Lesson 4 Weeping and Wisdom 36

Lesson 5 Hard Times Ahead 44

Lesson 6 Staying on Target 51

Lesson 7 The Potter's Hands 59

Lesson 8 Following the Leaders 66

Lesson 9 Wait for God's Time 74

Lesson 10 New and Improved 82

Lesson 11 His Truth Is Marching On 90

Lesson 12 A Time for Weeping 98

Lesson 13 When All Else Fails 106

Answers to Bible Study Questions. 113

How to Use *Life Design*



LIFE DESIGN: Bible Study Designed for the Life You Live. These Bible study materials are designed to engage adult learners in inductive Bible study and in applying the truths of that study to their daily lives.

As you prepare to teach these lessons, keep these two factors in mind:

- The FOCUS of productive adult Bible learning is the learner. The intent of teaching is not teaching, but learning—the learner's learning.
- The GOAL of productive adult Bible learning is an appropriate life-response to Biblical truth. You do not teach simply to impart information; you teach so that the Holy Spirit of God can use the truths of the Word of God to change the child of God into the image of the Son of God.

The Lesson Plan

Each *Life Design* lesson has three distinct parts. GETTING STARTED is the attention-getter. The questions and activities "set the table," as it were, for the Bible study. SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES is the heart of the lesson. A series of inductive Bible study questions leads the teacher and learners through the Biblical text. MAKING IT PERSONAL applies the truth to life.

As is true of any teaching experience, you can adapt the parts of the lesson to fit your particular class. You may choose to alter the beginning activities or change the focus of the application. You will find more material in the Bible study than you can cover in one class session. Ask God to help you as you tailor the lesson for your learners.

The Study Book

This leader's guide is designed to accompany the Bible study book. As the teacher, you will want a copy of the Bible study. Commit to working through the questions before you plan your lesson. We encourage you to distribute Bible study books to your learners. Urge them to complete the study before class. The more your learners have studied on their own, the better the class discussions will be. When a question in the leader's guide is picked up from the Bible study book, you will notice the question number in parentheses. The answers to the questions are usually in the lesson commentary. They are also grouped together in the back of this book.

Other Resources

If you want to use transparencies as you teach, a packet of sixteen full-color transparencies is available. If you prefer to use PowerPoint, the resource CD includes a PowerPoint presentation for each lesson.

Some teachers stay very close to the outline as they teach. If this is true of you, and if you want your learners to capture that outline, reproducible in-class worksheets are included on the CD. The same worksheets may be downloaded from the Web and photocopied for class members. Visit www.regularbaptistpress.org/downloads or www.rbpadultministries.org. Thank you for choosing *Life Design* teaching materials. May God richly bless you and your learners as you study and apply His Word.

Preface

God's Word deals with every aspect of human life. In the Bible we find words of wisdom, songs of joy, and visions of future glory. But the Scriptures also describe the lowly feelings of pain, grief, and failure common to us all. Jeremiah and Lamentations, two of the less familiar books of the Bible, deal with such human emotions.

Set in hard times, these books describe the final years of Judah before her destruction by Babylon. After years of arrogant wickedness, God's inevitable judgment finally fell on his people. Like a desert storm from the north, the Babylonian army swept down and invaded Judah, destroying her cities, plundering her treasures and taking her people captive, leaving a ravaged countryside in its wake.

Under these appalling circumstances the Lord raised up Jeremiah to relate His truth to a sinful nation. Jeremiah's ministry was both strenuous and unrewarding, for the people of Judah rejected not only the prophet's message, but the man himself. Many times Jeremiah cried out to the Lord in frustration and failure. But the Lord reassured Jeremiah that it was the Judaean people, not the prophet, who had failed. Jeremiah drew strength from the Lord and remained faithful to his task despite overwhelming odds and indescribable feelings of self-doubt.

Hand-in-hand with the book of Jeremiah is the book of Lamentations, which records Jeremiah's songs of mourning over Jerusalem's destruction. The prophet wept as he watched Judah's sin plunge her into ruin. From a human perspective, Judah's situation was, indeed, hopeless. Nevertheless, Jeremiah clung to God's faithfulness and found confidence for the future.

Although written about 2,500 years ago, the words of Jeremiah and Lamentations still ring true in today's sinful world. As you teach your class this quarter, help your learners appreciate that God can overcome our great failures by His greater faithfulness.

Resources for This Course

The transparency packet for this course (RBP0007) includes a transparency on which to record the summary statements from each lesson on Jeremiah and Lamentations. The transparency will help you track and review these lessons. Starting with lesson 1, use transparency 1 at the end of each lesson or at the beginning of the next lesson to record the summary statement for each lesson. You may use the suggestions in this leader's guide or ask your learners to suggest summary statements.

The Resource CD (RBP0008) for this course includes a PowerPoint presentation for each lesson. All of the transparencies are part of the PowerPoint presentation. The transparencies are also included on the CD as printable PDFs. If you would like to make your own transparencies or PowerPoint slides, the CD includes backgrounds ready for your own text.

To help in your promotion of this course, the CD includes a PowerPoint slide, posters, and a flyer. You can add your group's information to all of the promotional material.

The CD also provides in-class worksheets. Each in-class worksheet has a fill-in-the-blank outline that follows the corresponding outline in this leader's guide.

Other classroom resources on the CD include visuals and handouts. The leader's guide refers to each visual as a resource. Each resource is included in the corresponding PowerPoint presentation. Instructions on when to use the handouts are included in this leader's guide.

The CD also offers supplemental case studies. Each case study can be used as an in-class review, as material for a midweek Bible study, or as an e-mail attachment to your learners. E-mailing the case studies to your learners will emphasize living out the truth in daily life. You may want to enlist a learner to handle collecting e-mail addresses and e-mailing the case studies each week.

You will also find two supplemental application ideas on the CD. Use these ideas as handouts at the end of the appropriate lessons or as e-mail attachments. Both ideas could form the basis for class projects. Read through the ideas before you begin teaching this course so you can plan ahead how you will use them.

In addition, the CD includes a printable verse card for each lesson's key verse or verses. Blank verse cards are also included so you can enter different or additional verses for your learners to memorize. For your convenience, the verse cards are set for printing on Avery business cards. Use the Avery product number 8869 to avoid cutting apart the verse cards. You can find Avery business cards at avery.com. You could also simply print the verse cards on heavy paper and cut them apart using a paper cutter. Or you could e-mail the verse cards to your learners and have them print and cut their own.

LESSON 1

A Prophet in Perilous Times

Scripture Focus

Jeremiah Overview

Key Verse

"Woe is me for my hurt! my wound is grievous: but I said, Truly this is a grief, and I must bear it" (Jer. 10:19).

Overview

Jeremiah is one of the longest and most challenging books in the Bible. The prophet Jeremiah ministered to the nation of Judah during the final forty years of its history. Though his own people hated and persecuted him for proclaiming God's coming judgment, Jeremiah courageously lived for God and spoke His message. Jeremiah is a worthy pattern for the dedicated servant of the Lord who lives in a world increasingly hostile to the things of God.

Topic

Dedication to God

Theme

Difficult times call for dedicated people.

Desired Learner Response

The learner will write a summary statement based on Jeremiah that encourages him or her to stay dedicated to God even when times become difficult.

Outline

I. The Man
  A. His personal background
  B. His character
    1. Compassionate
    2. Courageous
    3. Distressed
    4. Honest
  C. His calling
II. The Nation
  A. Ruled by Josiah
  B. Conquered by Egypt
  C. Conquered by Babylon

Materials

- Transparencies 1–3
- A potted plant
- Packet of seeds
- Blocks
- Lesson 1 case study from resource CD
- Jeremiah 10:19 verse card from resource CD

1. Captivity
2. Zedekiah the vassal
3. Third siege of Jerusalem

III. The Book
A. Theme
1. Sin and judgment
2. Blessing and hope
B. Structure
1. Jeremiah's ministry
2. Judgment on Judah
3. Judgment on the Gentiles
4. Epilogue

Getting Started

Jeremiah Quick Quiz

As students enter the classroom, divide them into two teams. Explain that you will give a quiz about Jeremiah. Teams may confer within their groups before answering. Answers must be given within 30 seconds. (Note: Questions may have more than one correct answer. Teams must give all correct answers to a question to be awarded points.)

Direct the questions to each team alternately. Correct answers receive 100 points. If a team answers incorrectly, the other team has an opportunity to answer for 50 points. Keep score and award the winning team members.

1. Jeremiah was a
(a) prophet (b) priest (c) judge (d) king.
Answer: a.

2. Jeremiah lived during a time of
(a) peace (b) political upheaval.
Answer: b.

3. Jeremiah spoke God's word to
(a) Judah (b) Israel (c) Gentile nations.
Answer: a and c.

4. Jeremiah's message was one of
(a) judgment (b) hope.
Answer: a and b.

5. Jeremiah's message was generally
(a) received (b) rejected.
Answer: b.

I Want to Quit!

Have the learners pair up and describe a time to their partners when they were doing an important task that became difficult (perhaps working on a car or raising a child). Have them talk about how they responded to the difficulty. (Questions 1, 2)

Understanding the book of Jeremiah as a whole will promote understanding of its message. This lesson introduces Jeremiah by looking at the prophet who wrote the book and the dangerous times he lived in. Jeremiah's key theme combines judgment with hope by pointing beyond the painful present to a glorious future. Jeremiah teaches how believers dedicated to God can keep standing during difficult times. A solid grasp of this book is crucial for today's believers.

Searching the Scriptures

I. The Man

Of all of the Biblical prophets, Jeremiah is described most completely. Throughout his book, Jeremiah revealed what he was like and what he did.

A. His personal background

Jeremiah was born into a priestly family in Anathoth, just outside Jerusalem. However, like Ezekiel, he did not function as a priest. Instead, the Lord chose him and commissioned him as a prophet. Even before Jeremiah was born, God appointed him to be His spokesman both to Judah and to the nations (Jer. 1:5–10). From early in his life Jeremiah knew clearly the special calling that God had given to him.

His career was very long, probably over forty years. During that time Jeremiah spoke God's word to the nation of Judah as it was spinning out of control. He saw his people go into captivity, and he himself went to Egypt, under duress, with a group of the survivors. Through all this time when he served as a voice crying in the wilderness, Jeremiah was prohibited from having a wife (16:1–4). His career was as lonely as it was long.

ASK: Who would have cared if Jeremiah had decided to quit his prophetic ministry? What does that fact reveal about what motivated Jeremiah to keep going? (Questions 3, 4)

B. His character

In Jeremiah, we find much detail about the man himself, what he was like, what he felt, the struggles he faced. Jeremiah is a personal book.

1. Compassionate

READ: Jeremiah 9:1. **ASK:** What did Jeremiah show about himself by the figures of speech he used in this verse? **DISCUSS:** Why is compassion so essential to staying dedicated to ministry in difficult times? (Questions 5, 6)

Jeremiah was first a man of compassion. He felt things deeply, so his messages of judgment on Judah brought him enormous pain. Jeremiah wept as

he prophesied the coming punishment (9:1), for he was sensitive to people and their hurts. His stern message did not make him a rigid, uncaring person, but throughout his long ministry, he felt pain along with people.

2. Courageous

Jeremiah was also a man of great courage. As the Lord's prophet, Jeremiah faced countless challenges. His ministry required him to confront the priests, false court prophets, and even the king. Invariably Jeremiah had to reprove them for their sins, knowing that they would likely become angry with him.

This pressure would have overwhelmed most people. However, Jeremiah showed great courage. Knowing that God had commissioned him and knowing what God wanted him to say, he went straight at the challenge. Along with his tender heart, Jeremiah had a tough hide! He stood for God with great fortitude instead of shrinking away from opposition.

READ: Jeremiah 1:17–19. **ASK:** What did God tell Jeremiah to do as he prepared for his difficult ministry? What was the source of Jeremiah's courage? (Questions 7, 8)

The same courage that Jeremiah drew from God's presence is available to us today as we take on difficult ministry tasks.

3. Distressed

READ: Jeremiah 10:19; 11:19.

Jeremiah knew personal distress too. He struggled with his own emotional reactions to the rejection and distress he faced. Standing in the middle between the holy Lord and an unholy nation, Jeremiah faced opposition from without and turmoil from within. He understood that Judah deserved only divine judgment, yet he continued to plead with God for mercy on their behalf. In spite of his prayers for them, the people rejected him. Jeremiah accepted the great pain of this rejection as part of being God's prophet.

DISCUSS: What will happen to a person's ministry if he or she makes trying to please everyone his or her main goal? (Question 9)

4. Honest

Jeremiah was amazingly honest in expressing what was going on in his life. Repeatedly he uttered his doubts, questions, and pains as he tried to understand what God had brought across his path.

READ: Jeremiah 12:1–4.

In several prayers—often called Jeremiah's confessions—he gave unvarnished accounts of his anger and frustration. Despite his powerful feelings and unanswered questions, Jeremiah kept living for the Lord and serving Him faithfully.

C. His calling

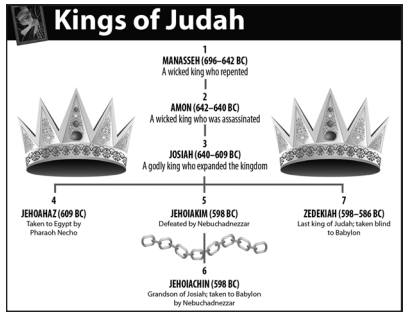
Despite the pressures he faced, Jeremiah performed his ministry with excellence and proved the validity of his calling. He lived up to the requirements for a prophet of God, according to Deuteronomy 18. As a prophet, he spoke for God to the people. Many times he introduced his prophecies by saying, "The word of the Lord came to me." He faithfully declared God's word rather than manufacture his own message.

ASK: How might Jeremiah have changed God's message to make it more acceptable? **READ:** 2 Timothy 4:1, 2. **ASK:** What is one of the most important reasons a preacher of God's Word needs to stay faithful to the message of God's Word? (Questions 10, 11)

II. The Nation

Jeremiah's prophetic ministry lasted from 627 BC to about 582 BC, a span of roughly forty-five years. During that time, Judah was fading spiritually, morally, and politically. Jeremiah preached to a nation that was well on its way to defeat and disaster.

TRANSPARENCY: Display transparency 2 as you mention each of the following kings to show the relationship between the final kings of Judah.



A. Ruled by Josiah

Jeremiah's ministry began around the middle of the reign of Josiah, the last of Judah's God-fearing rulers. Narrated in 2 Kings 22:1—23:20, Josiah's reign (640–609 BC) was characterized by his efforts to bring religious reformation to the nation. Spurred on by the discovery of the lost book of the Law during renovation of the temple, Josiah tried to unite Judah and the remaining people of the northern kingdom of Israel in worshiping the Lord according to the law of Moses.

Josiah made a valiant effort to overturn the decades of paganism that had dominated Judah before him. However, in 609 BC at the age of thirty-nine, Josiah was killed when he tried to oppose Pharaoh Necho of Egypt. After his death, Judah proceeded quickly to her final collapse.

B. Conquered by Egypt

Josiah's son Jehoahaz did not follow in his father's footsteps. After just three months, this evil king was deposed by Pharaoh Necho (2 Kings 23:31–33) and taken to Egypt, where he died. Necho then took a second son of Josiah, Eliakim, changed his name to Jehoiakim, and required him to pay an annual tribute of silver and gold. During the eleven years of his reign (609–598 BC), Jehoiakim did evil in the sight of the Lord. As a result, God brought marauding bands against Judah to punish the wicked nation.

C. Conquered by Babylon

In 605 BC Babylon defeated Egypt, so Jehoiakim then became a vassal to the Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar (2 Kings 24:1–7). At that time Nebuchadnezzar took captive Daniel and other members of the noble families (Dan. 1:1–7). Jehoiakim decided to rebel against Babylon in 601 BC.

1. Captivity

Nebuchadnezzar returned to Jerusalem and besieged the city. Jehoiakim died during the siege, and his son Jehoiachin took over the throne in 598 BC. He reigned for only three months until he surrendered to Babylon. Nebuchadnezzar took the king, the soldiers, the wealthy people, and the skilled artisans into captivity; he also plundered the royal treasures and the temple (2 Kings 24:12–16). He left only the poorest people in Jerusalem.

2. Zedekiah the vassal

To rule over this ragged remnant, Nebuchadnezzar took a third son of Josiah, Mattaniah, changed his name to Zedekiah, and placed him on the throne as a vassal of Babylon (2 Kings 24:17, 18). Many of Jeremiah's prophecies were given during the reign of Zedekiah. The king seemed to have had some good intentions, but he had little godly or political backbone. Like his brothers and his nephew, he did evil in the sight of the Lord. In the eleven years of his reign, he provided little spiritual leadership for Judah, and he repeatedly made foolish decisions.

ASK: How do you explain the fact that Jeremiah's clear warnings along with the examples of the downfall of wicked kings before him didn't cause Zedekiah to seek God? (Question 12)

3. Third siege of Jerusalem

When Zedekiah rebelled against Babylon in 589, Nebuchadnezzar returned to Jerusalem for a third and final time. After a brutal siege that drove the city into starvation, Nebuchadnezzar breached the walls, burned the city and the temple, and took nearly all of the remaining people into captivity (2 Kings 25:1–21). Zedekiah was captured as he tried to flee the city and, after being blinded, was taken as a prisoner to Babylon.

The royal line of David was finished. Nebuchadnezzar appointed Gedaliah to serve as a governor. After just a few months, Gedaliah was assassinated by Ishmael, a man who belonged to the royal family (2 Kings 25:22–25). The people feared that the Babylonians would return again, so they fled to Egypt, taking Jeremiah with them (2 Kings 25:26; Jer. 40—44).

It was against this chaotic backdrop that Jeremiah prophesied to Judah. He preached to a nation heading straight toward disaster.

DISCUSS: Given Jeremiah's fortitude in a distressing time, can anyone ever rightly say that his or her ministry situation is too difficult to bear? Explain. (Question 13)

III. The Book

The book of Jeremiah is arranged as a collection of what Jeremiah did and said over his long ministry. The reader needs to look at the book as a whole in order to understand Jeremiah's major themes.

OBJECT LESSON: Set up two displays at the front of the room. Inform students that these two displays represent the theme of Jeremiah. Illustrate as outlined below, then have students suggest theme ideas based on your presentation.

Display One—Show a small potted plant and a packet of seeds. Uproot the potted plant; then plant the new seeds in its place.

Display Two—Show a crooked tower made from toy building blocks. Knock it down; then build a straight one.

A. Theme

Jeremiah 1:10 summarizes the theme of the book in two sets of contrasts. The Lord called Jeremiah to uproot and to plant, to break down and to build. These contrasts pointed to Jeremiah's responsibility to preach both punishment and hope.

1. Sin and judgment

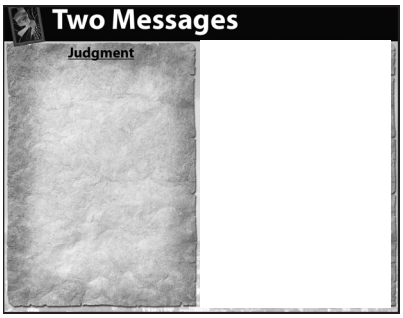
Like all of the Old Testament prophets, Jeremiah spoke of sin and judgment. He denounced the many sins in Judah, pointing out how repeatedly the nation had fallen short of God's righteous standard. He charged them with turning away from Yahweh, the true God, to idolatry.

Because Judah had sinned, the Lord was going to judge His people. Jeremiah, prophesying the last days of the nation, said that divine judgment was inevitable. He warned of the approach of the enemy, Babylon, from the north. He also spoke of captivity and exile in a foreign land after the destruction of Jerusalem.

The thought of this dreadful disaster to come brought intense grief to Jeremiah. Numerous times he cried out to the Lord on behalf of his people. Although he knew that the people deserved God's judgment, his compassionate heart made it difficult for Jeremiah to accept this reality. He did not merely preach at the nation, but he sorrowed with them.

READ: Jeremiah 8:18, 19. **ASK:** When was the last time you felt deeply or even cried for the disobedience of a fellow believer? (Question 16)

TRANSPARENCY: Display transparency 3 with the right half covered. **ASK:** What effects should God's message of judgment on sin have on believers? (Question 17) Record learners' answers on the transparency.

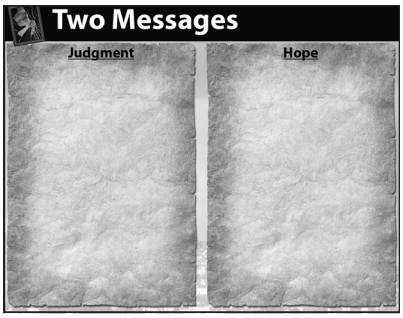


2. Blessing and hope

In addition to preaching sin and judgment, Jeremiah also prophesied of hope. With the prospect of the collapse of the nation and the destruction of the temple, the question arose whether the Lord would abandon His chosen people of Israel. Jeremiah repeatedly reminded them that the Lord would be faithful to His covenant with them. Even though they would go into exile, the Lord had already planned for their return and restoration.

READ: Jeremiah 29:11. **ASK:** Imagine you were one of the captives reading the message of this verse. How do you think the message would have affected you? (Question 18)

Judah's ultimate hope lay in the Messiah. Using several descriptions such as the shepherd, the branch, and the king, Jeremiah foretold of Christ's glorious future work. He would institute a new covenant in which God's law would be written in the heart. The Messiah would bring true righteousness to the sinful nation, true joy to a people in sorrow, and true hope for those who despaired. The sinful nation would have to endure painful judgment, but after the judgment was finished, God would bring the blessing He had intended for them all along.



TRANSPARENCY: Display transparency 3. **ASK:** What effects should God's message of hope have on believers? (Question 19) Record learners' answers on the transparency.

B. Structure

1. Jeremiah's ministry

At first the book of Jeremiah seems difficult to follow, because it does not follow an orderly, logical argument. Instead, Jeremiah gathered his material in a thematic way, much like a literature textbook is divided into short stories, poems, plays, and essays.

The first chapter introduces the book by describing how God called Jeremiah to be a prophet. The general thrust of his ministry was twofold: to uproot the sin of Judah and to plant the seeds of hope in God's future restoration of the people.

2. Judgment on Judah

The largest section of the book, chapters 2—45, contains prophecies of judgment on Judah. This sober warning was spelled out in thirteen messages by Jeremiah in chapters 2—25, which led to a series of four conflicts in chapters 26—29. In chapters 30—33, Jeremiah looked ahead to the future spiritual and national restoration of Israel. Then he returned to the present judgment on Jerusalem in chapters 34—45.

3. Judgment on the Gentiles

In chapters 46—51, Jeremiah turned his gaze toward the surrounding

Gentile nations, pronouncing God's coming judgment on them. In doing so, Jeremiah pointed out that the holy God punishes sin wherever He finds it. Judah would not receive preferential treatment from God, and neither would the Gentiles be able to avoid their responsibility. The Lord would use the Gentiles to punish sinful Judah, but He would also hold people such as the Babylonians accountable for their sins.

4. Epilogue

The final chapter is an epilogue describing Jerusalem's fall and the restoration of king Jehoiachin. Because it narrates events down to about 561 BC, someone besides Jeremiah may have written it. This chapter confirmed that Jeremiah's prophecies were directly fulfilled by God, thus demonstrating that he was a genuine prophet of the Lord. His fearless commitment to the Lord was authenticated.

Making It Personal

Although Jeremiah spoke specifically to the people of his own day more than 2,500 years ago, what he said is still relevant.

Closing Prayers

Use the case study for lesson 1 as desired.

Ask three volunteers to lead in prayer about the three principles (below) that believers can apply from Jeremiah as you present them.

Jeremiah looked past the appearance of religion to probe the genuineness of righteousness. He challenged the people to genuine commitment to the Lord, rather than perfunctory worship.

Ask the first volunteer to pray about genuine righteousness and commitment of believers. (Question 20)

Jeremiah also made it clear that the holy God cannot and will not tolerate sin. Jeremiah's warnings of coming judgment should motivate modern men and women to change their ways. If not, they too will have to feel the pain of divine judgment.

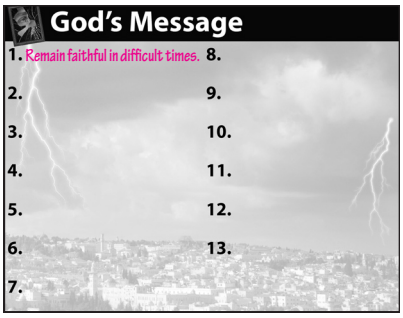
Ask the second volunteer to pray about repentance among God's people. (Question 21)

However, Jeremiah lifted the eyes of his nation to the promise of restoration and renewal. In doing that, he pointed the way to God's gracious work, which offered them a future and a hope. In the same way, Christians today can look beyond the struggles of today to the eternal inheritance, which God has reserved in Heaven for them (cf. 1 Pet. 1:4).

Ask the third volunteer to thank God for our future hope. (Question 22)

When the Going Gets Tough

Ask: Write a summary statement about Jeremiah and his ministry that encourages you to remain faithful when ministry gets tough. (Question 23)



Review Transparency

Use transparency 1 to review the message for this lesson: Remain faithful in difficult times.

Memory Verse

Distribute copies of the Jeremiah 10:19 verse card from the resource CD.