

The Books of 1 and 2 Chronicles, Teacher's Guide

Lesson 22: The Fall of Jerusalem and the Promise of Return

2 Chronicles 36:1-23

Teaching Aim (Teacher Orientation)

Doctrinally, this final lesson must do two things at once: take sin and judgment with full seriousness, and present the promise of return rightly. The fall of Jerusalem is the just covenant judgment of God, not bad luck or the strength of Babylon. God had warned His people for centuries; the phrase 'till there was no remedy' teaches that divine patience, though vast, can be exhausted by persistent, scoffing rebellion. This guards against any cheap view of grace and any presumption that God will not finally act. At the same time, the promise of return must be read through the New Testament, not through premillennial or dispensational lenses. The return under Cyrus was real and was a display of God's faithfulness, but it pointed forward to the far greater restoration in Christ. The throne and kingdom of David are established now in the risen Christ reigning at God's right hand over His church (Acts 2:29-36; Hebrews 11:13-16), not in a future earthly political restoration of national Israel or a rebuilt physical temple.

This lesson also aims at the heart, and as the capstone of the whole study it aims especially high. The exile warns the student that persistent sin is deadly serious and that God's patience must never be presumed upon; the same God who kept His word in judgment will keep His word still. Yet the open door of Cyrus's decree assures the student that God is faithful, that He opens the way home, and that the deepest homecoming is found in Christ, who brings the spiritually exiled back to God forever. The aim is that each student leave both soberly awakened to the seriousness of sin and warmly drawn to the faithful God who, in Christ, has flung the door of return wide open. The study that began with Adam should end with the student standing in the gospel.

Question 1

Student Question:

What does the pattern of Judah's last kings doing evil and ignoring God's messengers reveal about the nature and consequences of persistent, unrepented sin?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Chronicles races through Judah's final kings: Jehoahaz, Jehoiakim, Jehoiachin, and Zedekiah, each reigning briefly and each doing evil in the sight of the LORD (36:5, 9, 12). The pace itself is a sermon; the kingdom is unraveling, and the recurring verdict is the same. Sin had become the settled pattern of the leadership and the nation.

Zedekiah is singled out: he did not humble himself before Jeremiah the prophet who spoke from the mouth of the LORD, and he stiffened his neck and hardened his heart against turning to the LORD (36:12–13). The language is deliberate. This was not ignorance but willful, hardened refusal in the face of clear warning.

The Chronicler is teaching the doctrine of consequence. Sin persistently chosen and warnings persistently refused do not remain without effect; they ripen into judgment. This is the harvest principle Paul states plainly: do not be deceived, God is not mocked, for whatever one sows, that will he also reap (Galatians 6:7).

The application for us is sober. A nation, a church, or a soul does not usually fall in a day. It falls by a long pattern of small refusals that harden into a settled direction. The first task of this lesson is to let the seriousness of that pattern register.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Persistent, unrepented sin ripens into judgment (Galatians 6:7).
- Hardening of heart is willful, not merely ignorant (36:13).
- A settled pattern of refusal, not a single act, leads to ruin.
- Leadership in sin drags a whole people down.

Discussion Prompts

- What verdict is repeated over Judah's last kings?
- How does Zedekiah's hardening differ from mere ignorance?
- How does sin become a settled direction rather than an isolated act?

Question 2

Student Question:

Where might you be growing comfortable with a sin or a warning that, left unchecked, hardens into the kind of persistent rebellion this chapter describes?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This question turns the pattern of hardening onto the student. The danger is not usually a dramatic rebellion but a quiet comfort with a sin or a warning we have learned to ignore. Comfort is how rebellion hides.

Help students see that conscience can be dulled by repetition. Hebrews 3:13 warns us to exhort one another daily, lest any be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. The remedy to hardening is honest, ongoing exposure to truth and to one another.

Press for specificity and a step. Which warning have you grown comfortable ignoring, and what would it look like to soften your heart toward it before it hardens further?

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Comfort with a known sin is the seedbed of hardening.
- Conscience can be dulled by repetition (Hebrews 3:13).
- Honest community and truth keep the heart soft.

Discussion Prompts

- What sin or warning have you grown comfortable ignoring?
- How might that comfort be hardening you over time?
- What would soften your heart toward it this week?

Question 3

Student Question:

Chronicles stresses that God sent messengers persistently because He had compassion, until there was no remedy (36:15–16); what does this teach about both the depth of God's patience and its limits?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This is one of the tenderest and most sobering verses in the Old Testament. The LORD sent persistently to them by His messengers, rising up early and sending them, because He had compassion on His people and on His dwelling place (36:15). The judgment that follows is set against the backdrop of God's long, compassionate patience.

But the people kept mocking the messengers of God, despising His words and scoffing at His prophets, until the wrath of the LORD rose against His people, till there was no remedy (36:16). The phrase till there was no remedy is the doctrinal center of the chapter. God's patience is real and immense, but it is not without limit when met with persistent, scoffing rebellion.

Hold both truths together. God is slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love (Exodus 34:6), and that patience is mercy, designed to lead to repentance (Romans 2:4). But that same patience can be presumed upon and finally exhausted. To mistake God's patience for indifference is a fatal error.

This guards against two opposite mistakes: thinking God is harsh, and thinking God will never act. The God of this verse is compassionate enough to warn for centuries and just enough to mean what He warned. Romans 2:4–5 says exactly this: God's kindness is meant to lead us to repentance, yet a hard and impenitent heart stores up wrath.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- God's patience is immense and rooted in compassion (36:15).
- Divine patience can be presumed upon and finally exhausted (36:16).

- 'Till there was no remedy' warns against mistaking patience for indifference.
- God's kindness is meant to lead to repentance (Romans 2:4).

Discussion Prompts

- Why does the Chronicler stress God's compassion before the judgment?
- What does 'till there was no remedy' teach about God's patience?
- How do we hold God's patience and His justice together?

Question 4

Student Question:

Who are the 'messengers' God has placed in your life, and how do you typically respond to their words of correction or warning?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This question identifies the messengers God has placed in the student's own life: Scripture, faithful preachers, elders, a spouse, a friend who loves enough to tell the truth. Judah's fall was sealed by how it treated its messengers.

Examine the typical response. Do we receive correction with gratitude, or do we, like Judah, scoff, deflect, and defend? Proverbs 9:8-9 says reprove a wise man and he will love you; the response to correction reveals the heart.

Encourage a concrete shift. Name one messenger whose words you have been resisting, and choose to listen humbly rather than defensively. Receiving correction well is a learnable, life-giving habit.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- God speaks correction through people as well as Scripture.
- Our response to reproof reveals the condition of our heart (Proverbs 9:8-9).
- Receiving correction humbly is a habit that can be cultivated.

Discussion Prompts

- Who are the messengers God has placed in your life?
- How do you typically respond to their correction?
- Whose words have you been resisting that you should heed?

Question 5

Student Question:

Why does the Chronicler describe the exile as the fulfillment of God's word and the land enjoying its sabbaths (36:21) rather than as the mere triumph of Babylon, and what does this say about God's justice and sovereignty?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

When judgment came, the Chaldeans burned the house of God, broke down the wall of Jerusalem, burned its palaces, and destroyed its precious vessels, carrying the survivors to Babylon (36:17–20). But the Chronicler refuses to read this as Babylon's triumph. He frames it theologically.

He says the exile fulfilled the word of the LORD by the mouth of Jeremiah, and that the land enjoyed its sabbaths, lying desolate to fulfill seventy years (36:21). This connects to Leviticus 26:34–35, where God warned that if the people broke covenant, the land would have its sabbath rests during their exile. Even the length of judgment was according to God's prior word.

This is crucial doctrine. The exile was not the defeat of Judah's God by Babylon's gods; it was the just covenant judgment of the one true God, executed exactly as He had warned. God is sovereign even over the instruments of His discipline (compare Isaiah 10:5–15, where Assyria is the rod of God's anger).

The application reframes how we read history and our own suffering. What looks like random catastrophe may be the faithful working out of God's word. This does not mean every hardship is direct punishment, but it does mean God is never absent from history, and His word never fails, even in judgment.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The exile was God's just covenant judgment, not Babylon's victory.
- Even the length of judgment fulfilled God's prior word (36:21; Leviticus 26).
- God is sovereign over the very instruments of His discipline.
- History is the faithful outworking of God's word, not random chance.

Discussion Prompts

- How does the Chronicler interpret the fall theologically?
- What does the land 'enjoying its sabbaths' connect back to?
- How does this guard us from seeing God as defeated in judgment?

Question 6

Student Question:

How does seeing your own losses and discipline through the lens of God's faithful word, rather than as random misfortune, change the way you respond to hard seasons?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This question moves the doctrine of God's faithful word into the student's experience of hard seasons. Seeing trials through the lens of God's character and word, rather than as meaningless misfortune, transforms how we endure them.

Be careful and pastoral. Not every hardship is punishment for sin (John 9:1-3). The point is not to read every loss as judgment but to trust that God is present, faithful, and at work even in the hardest seasons, as Romans 8:28 affirms.

Encourage a posture shift from 'why is this happening to me' toward 'God is faithful, and His word holds even here.' That trust steadies the soul when circumstances do not.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Not all hardship is punishment; God may have other purposes (John 9:3).
- Trusting God's faithful character steadies us in hard seasons.
- God is present and at work even in suffering (Romans 8:28).

Discussion Prompts

- How do you usually interpret your hard seasons?
- How would trusting God's faithfulness reframe your current trial?
- What is the difference between despair and disciplined trust?

Question 7

Student Question:

What does it mean that the same God who justly sent His people into exile also stirred up Cyrus to open the way home (36:22-23), and how does this display His faithfulness to His promises?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

The book ends not in ruin but with an open door. In the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, the LORD stirred up the spirit of Cyrus, who issued a decree that the people of God might go up to Jerusalem and rebuild the house of the LORD (36:22-23). Note who acts first: the LORD stirred up Cyrus. The return was God's doing through a pagan king.

This is God's faithfulness on display. The same God who kept His word in judgment kept His word in mercy. He had promised through Jeremiah a return after seventy years (Jeremiah 29:10-14), and He brought it to pass, moving the heart of the most powerful ruler on earth to accomplish it.

Theologically, this shows God's sovereignty over the nations for the sake of His people and His promises (Proverbs 21:1, the king's heart is a stream of water in the hand of the LORD). The God

of Israel is not a local deity but the Lord of all history, who bends even empires toward His purposes.

The application is hope grounded in God's character. Because God keeps His word in mercy as surely as in judgment, His people can trust His promises absolutely. The God who opened the way home for the exiles is the same God who, in Christ, has opened the way home for us.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- God Himself initiated the return by stirring Cyrus's spirit (36:22).
- God's faithfulness is shown in keeping His word of mercy as well as judgment.
- God is sovereign over the nations for the sake of His promises (Proverbs 21:1).
- The same faithful God who judges also opens the way home.

Discussion Prompts

- Who acted first in the return, and what does that reveal?
- How does the decree of Cyrus display God's faithfulness?
- What does God's sovereignty over Cyrus teach about His promises?

Question 8

Student Question:

How does the assurance that God keeps His word, both in judgment and in mercy, give you confidence and hope in your own walk with Him?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This question presses God's covenant faithfulness into the student's confidence and hope. If God kept His word through centuries of judgment and across seventy years of exile, His promises to us are utterly reliable.

Anchor the assurance in God's character, not in circumstances. Hebrews 10:23 urges us to hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful. Our hope rests on who God is.

Encourage students to name a specific promise of God they need to lean on, and to let the closing scene of Chronicles, an open door after long judgment, strengthen their trust that God finishes what He starts.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- God's proven faithfulness grounds the believer's confidence.
- Hope rests on God's character, not on circumstances (Hebrews 10:23).
- God finishes what He begins, even after long, dark seasons.

Discussion Prompts

- Which promise of God do you most need to lean on right now?
- How does Chronicles' ending strengthen your trust?
- Where do you need confidence that God will finish what He started?

Question 9

Student Question:

As the capstone of this whole study of Chronicles, how do the justice and faithfulness of God in the fall of Jerusalem and the promise of return display the seriousness of persistent sin and point forward to the true and greater restoration accomplished in Christ, in whom God brings the spiritually exiled home to Himself and establishes His everlasting kingdom in the church, rather than promising a future political restoration of national Israel?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Here the whole study comes to rest, and the doctrine must be handled with both weight and care. The fall of Jerusalem displays God's justice: persistent, scoffing sin, refused warnings, and a patience finally exhausted till there was no remedy (36:16). The promise of return displays God's faithfulness: He kept His word of mercy and opened the way home (36:22–23). Together they teach the seriousness of sin and the dependability of God, the two notes Chronicles has been sounding from Adam onward.

But the return must be read through the New Testament, not through premillennial or dispensational expectation. The restoration under Cyrus was real and was a true display of God's faithfulness, yet it was a shadow and signpost of something far greater. Hebrews 11:13–16 tells us the faithful were not finally seeking an earthly territory but a better, heavenly homeland, a city God prepared for them. The physical return pointed beyond itself.

The kingdom and throne of David are established now, in the risen and reigning Christ. Peter declares in Acts 2:29–36 that God raised Jesus and seated Him on David's throne at His right hand, ruling now. The everlasting kingdom promised to David is the church, over which Christ reigns today (Colossians 1:13; Hebrews 12:28). There is no future earthly political restoration of national Israel or rebuilt physical temple in God's plan; the temple now is Christ and His people (John 2:19–21; 1 Peter 2:4–5; Ephesians 2:19–22).

So the deepest meaning of the return is the gospel. Humanity's true exile is exile from God through sin, and the true homecoming is salvation in Christ, who brings the spiritually homeless back to the Father. The God who stirred Cyrus to open one door has, in Christ, flung wide the door of return for all who come to Him, who hear, believe, repent, confess, and are baptized into Him for the remission of sins (Acts 2:38; Romans 6:3–4; Galatians 3:26–27). The church is now the people of God, called out of darkness, brought home (1 Peter 2:9–10).

Press both edges as the capstone of the study. Take sin seriously: God's patience is real but not endless, and persistent rebellion ruins. Take grace seriously: the faithful God opens the way home, and in Christ that homecoming is sure and eternal. Let the class end where the whole Bible ends, with an open door and a Savior who says, come home.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The exile is God's just covenant judgment on persistent, unrepented sin (36:16).
- God's patience is real but can be exhausted; presuming on it is fatal.
- The return displays God's faithfulness to His word of mercy (36:22–23).
- The return foreshadows the greater restoration in Christ, not a political restoration of national Israel (premillennialism and dispensationalism excluded).
- David's throne and kingdom are established now in the reigning Christ and His church (Acts 2:29–36; Colossians 1:13).
- The true temple is Christ and His people, not a future physical rebuilding (1 Peter 2:4–5; Ephesians 2:19–22).
- Salvation from spiritual exile comes through Christ, entered by hearing, believing, repenting, confessing, and baptism into Him (Acts 2:38; Romans 6:3–4).

Discussion Prompts

- How do the fall and the return display God's justice and faithfulness together?
- Why must we read the return through the New Testament rather than as a political program for national Israel?
- How is the true homecoming found in Christ, and how does one come home to God through Him?

Question 10

Student Question:

Looking back over the whole sweep of Chronicles, from Adam to the decree of Cyrus, name one specific way this study has changed how you see God's justice, His faithfulness, and your own homecoming in Christ.

Commentary and Teaching Notes

The capstone of the entire study asks the student to look back over the whole sweep of Chronicles, from Adam in chapter 1 to the decree of Cyrus in the final verse, and to name what God has changed in them. This is the harvest of the journey.

Invite reflection on all three themes the book has carried: God's justice, which takes sin seriously; God's faithfulness, which keeps every word; and the homecoming in Christ, in which the spiritually exiled are brought back to God. Ask which of these the student now sees differently.

Close on Christ and a concrete response. The God of Chronicles, faithful through every king and every failure, has opened the way home in Jesus. Let students leave naming one specific way they will live as those who have come home, in awe of God's justice, resting in His faithfulness, and walking with the Savior who brought them back.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The whole study presses toward seeing God's justice, faithfulness, and our homecoming in Christ.
- Transformation requires naming one specific, concrete change.
- The faithful God of Chronicles is the God who brings us home in Jesus.

Discussion Prompts

- How has this study changed your view of God's justice and faithfulness?
- What does it mean to you to have come home to God in Christ?
- What is one specific way you will live differently because of it?