

The Book of Ezekiel, Teacher's Guide

Lesson 8: A Lament for Israel's Princes; Rebellion Rehearsed

Ezekiel 19:1–20:49

Teaching Aim (Teacher Orientation)

The teacher should begin by helping the class feel the weight of the lament in chapter 19. This is a *qinah*, a funeral dirge, and its form is grief over the ruin of the royal house of Judah. The lioness and her cubs are Israel and her last kings, who had the strength of young lions but used it for violence and were dragged off in chains to Egypt and Babylon (Jeremiah 22:24–30 names them). The vine that should have flourished, fit to provide scepters for rulers, is plucked up and replanted in a dry wilderness with no strong stem left. The teacher should show that God grieves over squandered potential and that the dirge mourns the failure of the kings who should have shepherded God's people. Yet even here the teacher can point beyond the ruin, for the royal hope of Judah, the scepter that would not finally depart (Genesis 49:9–10), would be raised up in a King the lament could not foresee, the Christ.

Chapter 20 calls for careful teaching on rebellion, holiness, and the name of God. When the elders come to inquire while clinging to their idols, God refuses to be inquired of, a sobering lesson that we cannot approach God while holding onto sin. Then God rehearses Israel's persistent rebellion from Egypt through the wilderness to the land, and the refrain that ties it together is that God acted for the sake of His name, that it should not be profaned among the nations. The teacher should make much of this: salvation is ultimately for the glory of God, not merely for our benefit, and this guards us against a man-centered gospel. The teacher should also handle the sabbaths rightly, explaining that the sabbath was a sign between God and Israel under the old covenant, that it is not bound on Christians today, and that the principle of setting apart holy time finds its place in the Lord's Day and the rest we have in Christ (Hebrews 4:9–11), without binding the Sabbath as law.

Finally, the teacher should bring the class to the gathering and purifying promise of 20:33–44, where God pledges to bring His people out from the peoples, purge out the rebels, gather the rest, and bring them into the bond of the covenant. The teacher must insist that this is fulfilled in Christ and His church, the chosen race and holy nation gathered out of the peoples (1 Peter 2:9–10), and not in a future earthly political nation of Israel. God's pattern is to gather a purified people for the honor of His own name, cleansing them and making them His own. The lesson should close by pressing the personal call: the God who grieves over ruin and gathers a purified people for His name calls each hearer to turn from rebellion, cast away every idol, and be wholly His.

Question 1

Student Question:

In Ezekiel 19:1–9 God laments Israel as a lioness whose cubs became young lions that devoured and were dragged off to Egypt and Babylon. Whom do these cubs represent, and what does it say about the last kings of Judah that their story is told as a funeral dirge rather than a tale of triumph?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

God commands a lamentation, a qinah, the formal funeral dirge sung over the dead (19:1). The very genre announces grief; this is a song for a death, mourning the fall of the princes of Israel. Before the kings have even fully fallen, the prophet sings their funeral as a thing already certain.

The lament opens with the image of a lioness who lay down among lions and raised her cubs (19:2). The lioness is Israel, and her cubs are her kings, drawn from the ancient picture of Judah as a lion's whelp from whom the scepter would not depart (Genesis 49:9–10). The royal house had every advantage of strength.

One cub grew into a young lion who learned to catch prey and devoured men (19:3). But the nations heard of him, took him in their pit, and brought him with hooks to the land of Egypt (19:4). This pictures Jehoahaz, who reigned briefly and was carried captive to Egypt by Pharaoh.

The strength of the young lion did not save him; it became the very thing that made the nations hunt him down. The dirge is telling the story of the royal house not as triumph but as tragedy, a strength turned to violence and ending in chains.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- God commands a qinah, a funeral dirge, over Israel's princes.
- The form itself announces grief over a certain ruin.
- The lioness is Israel and her cubs are her kings.
- The first cub, Jehoahaz, was hunted down and carried to Egypt.
- The strength of the kings ended in captivity, not triumph.

Discussion Prompts

- What does the funeral-dirge form tell us about the message?
- Whom does the lioness represent, and whom do the cubs represent?
- Why is the kings' story told as tragedy rather than triumph?

Question 2

Student Question:

The cubs were full of strength and yet ended caged and exiled (Ezekiel 19:7–9). Where have you seen strength or giftedness lead to ruin when it was not surrendered to God, and how does that warn you in your own life?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

The lioness raised up another of her cubs, and he too became a young lion (19:5). He prowled among the lions, learned to catch prey, and devoured men; he ravaged their strongholds and laid waste their cities, until the land was appalled at the sound of his roaring (19:6–7).

But the same end came upon him. The nations set against him from the provinces all around, spread their net over him, and took him in their pit (19:8). They put him in a cage with hooks and brought him to the king of Babylon, into custody, that his voice should no more be heard on the mountains of Israel (19:9). This pictures Jehoiachin, carried to Babylon.

The repetition is deliberate and crushing. One cub after another rises in strength, ravages and devours, and one after another is trapped and dragged away into exile. The pattern of the kings is a pattern of violent ambition meeting inevitable judgment.

The kings who should have been shepherds of God's flock became devouring beasts, and their roaring that terrified the land was silenced in a foreign cage. The dirge mourns not only their personal fall but the failure of the office, the ruin of a royal house that betrayed its calling.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The second cub, Jehoiachin, also became a devouring young lion.
- He too was trapped and dragged in a cage to Babylon.
- The deliberate repetition shows a pattern of ruin among the kings.
- The kings who should have shepherded became devouring beasts.
- The dirge mourns the failure of the royal office itself.

Discussion Prompts

- How does the second cub's story echo the first?
- What does the repeated pattern reveal about Judah's kings?
- Why is the silencing of the lion's roar so mournful?

Question 3

Student Question:

In Ezekiel 19:10–14 Israel is a fruitful vine plucked up, withered, and replanted in a dry wilderness, with no strong stem left for a ruler's scepter. What does this picture teach about the fall of the house of David, and how does even this lament leave room for the hope that God would raise up a different kind of King?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

The lament shifts from lions to a vine. Your mother was like a vine in a vineyard, planted by the water, fruitful and full of branches because of abundant water (19:10). She had strong stems fit

for the scepters of rulers, and she towered high above the thick boughs, conspicuous in her height and the mass of her branches (19:11). Israel had every resource to flourish and to provide rulers.

But she was plucked up in fury and cast down to the ground; the east wind dried up her fruit, and her strong stem was broken and withered, and fire consumed it (19:12). The flourishing vine is violently uprooted, and the very strength that should have furnished scepters is burned away.

Now she is planted in the wilderness, in a dry and thirsty land, and fire has gone out from her stem and consumed her branches, so that there remains in her no strong stem, no scepter for ruling (19:13–14). The royal vine is left without a king to rule. This pictures the end of the Davidic monarchy in the exile of Zedekiah.

Even so, the picture of a vine and a scepter cannot be the final word, for the ancient promise was that the scepter would not depart from Judah until Shiloh came (Genesis 49:10). The lament mourns the fall of the earthly throne, but it leaves room, almost in spite of itself, for the hope that God would raise up a different King and a kingdom no east wind could wither, the throne of Christ.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Israel was a fruitful vine fit to furnish rulers' scepters.
- She was plucked up in fury and withered by the east wind.
- No strong stem was left in her for a ruler's scepter.
- This pictures the end of the Davidic monarchy in exile.
- The royal hope leaves room for a coming King the lament could not foresee.

Discussion Prompts

- What does the vine picture teach about the fall of David's house?
- Why is it significant that no scepter is left in the vine?
- How does even this lament leave room for the hope of a coming King?

Question 4

Student Question:

The lament ends, This is a lamentation, and has become a lamentation (Ezekiel 19:14). Why is it fitting to grieve over sin and its consequences, and what place should honest mourning over sin have in your own walk with God?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

The dirge ends with a heavy refrain: This is a lamentation, and it has become a lamentation (19:14). The song does not resolve into comfort; it closes in grief, as a funeral should. God means His people to feel the full sorrow of what sin has cost the royal house.

There is a holy place for mourning over sin and its consequences. The Scriptures call us to godly sorrow, to weeping over what our rebellion has wrought, not as those without hope but as those who take sin seriously. Jesus pronounced a blessing on those who mourn (Matthew 5:4), and that mourning includes grief over sin.

This is not the same as despair. Godly sorrow leads to repentance and life; it is the worldly sorrow that leads to death. To grieve over sin rightly is to feel its weight, to refuse to make light of it, and to let that grief drive us back to God rather than away from Him.

So the dirge teaches us to mourn what should be mourned. A heart that can sin without sorrow is a hardened heart. The believer who learns to lament over sin, in himself and in the world, is a believer whose conscience is alive and whose repentance is real.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The lament closes in grief, refusing easy comfort.
- There is a holy place for mourning over sin and its consequences.
- Godly sorrow over sin leads to repentance, not despair.
- A heart that sins without sorrow is a hardened heart.
- Learning to lament sin is a mark of a living conscience.

Discussion Prompts

- Why does the dirge end in grief rather than comfort?
- What place should mourning over sin have in your walk?
- How does godly sorrow differ from despair?

Question 5

Student Question:

In Ezekiel 20:1–9 elders come to inquire of the LORD, but God refuses and instead recalls how Israel rebelled even in Egypt by refusing to cast away their idols. What does God's refusal to be inquired of teach about the seriousness of approaching Him while clinging to sin?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Chapter 20 opens with a date and a delegation. In the seventh year, certain elders of Israel came to inquire of the LORD and sat before Ezekiel (20:1). They came with the posture of seekers, but God exposes the emptiness behind it.

God twice declares, As I live, I will not be inquired of by you (20:3, 31). He refuses to give them a word while their hearts cling to sin. The outward act of seeking God is worthless when it covers an inward refusal to forsake idols. God will not be treated as a consultant by those who will not surrender to Him as Lord.

Instead of answering their inquiry, God turns to rehearse their history, beginning in Egypt. There He made Himself known to Israel, swore to bring them out to a land flowing with milk and honey, and commanded each to cast away the detestable things their eyes feasted on and not to defile themselves with the idols of Egypt (20:5–7).

But they rebelled even there. They would not cast away the idols of Egypt, so that God said He would pour out His wrath on them in the land of Egypt itself (20:8). From the very beginning, before the Red Sea, before Sinai, Israel was clinging to idols while God was preparing to redeem them. The pattern of rebellion was set from the first.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Elders came to inquire of God while clinging to their sin.
- God refused to be inquired of by an unrepentant people.
- Seeking God outwardly is worthless while the heart holds idols.
- God rehearses Israel's rebellion beginning in Egypt.
- Israel clung to Egypt's idols even as God prepared to redeem them.

Discussion Prompts

- Why does God refuse to be inquired of by these elders?
- What does this teach about approaching God while clinging to sin?
- How early did Israel's rebellion against God begin?

Question 6

Student Question:

Israel clung to the idols of Egypt even as God prepared to redeem them (Ezekiel 20:7–8). What idols from your past or your surroundings are you tempted to hold onto even as you profess to follow God, and what would it mean to cast them away?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Israel clung to the idols of Egypt even as God moved to redeem them (20:7–8), and the same divided heart tempts us. We profess to follow God while quietly holding onto the idols of our past or our surroundings, unwilling to let them go. God's word to Israel is His word to us: cast away the detestable things.

Idols are not only carved images. An idol is anything that claims the trust, love, or devotion that belongs to God alone, whether money, status, pleasure, a relationship, or our own self-will. The idols of our culture are often respectable, which makes them harder to recognize and harder to release.

The personal work is honest examination and decisive renunciation. What are we still gripping that competes with God for the center of our lives? Half-hearted following, with one hand on

God and one on an idol, is the very thing God refused to honor in the elders. He calls for whole-hearted devotion.

To cast away an idol is not loss but freedom. The hand that lets go of the idol is the hand that can take hold of God. The call is to name what we are clinging to and to put it away, so that nothing rivals the Lord for the throne of the heart.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- We are tempted to follow God while clinging to old idols.
- An idol is anything that claims the devotion owed to God alone.
- Cultural idols are often respectable and so harder to recognize.
- God calls for whole-hearted devotion, not a divided heart.
- Casting away an idol is freedom, not loss.

Discussion Prompts

- What idols are you tempted to hold onto while following God?
- Why are respectable idols so hard to recognize?
- What would it mean to decisively cast them away?

Question 7

Student Question:

In Ezekiel 20:10–26 God recounts giving Israel His statutes and His sabbaths in the wilderness as a sign between Him and them, yet they rebelled and profaned His sabbaths. What did the sabbath signify about Israel's relationship to God, and how does the principle of setting apart holy time find its place for God's people now?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

God continues the rehearsal into the wilderness. He brought Israel out of Egypt, gave them His statutes and rules, by which a person shall live if he keeps them, and gave them His sabbaths as a sign between Him and them, that they might know He is the LORD who sanctifies them (20:10–12). The sabbath was a covenant sign marking Israel as God's set-apart people.

But Israel rebelled in the wilderness, refusing His statutes and greatly profaning His sabbaths (20:13). God says He would have made an end of them, but He acted for the sake of His name. He pleaded with the next generation as well, yet they too profaned His sabbaths and went after their fathers' idols (20:16–24).

The sabbath signified that Israel belonged to God and that God sanctified them; to profane it was to despise the sign of their relationship. We should understand that this sabbath was a sign given to Israel under the old covenant, not a law bound on Christians. The New Testament does

not bind Sabbath-keeping on the church, and Paul forbids judging one another over sabbaths (Colossians 2:16–17).

Yet the underlying principle endures, that God's people set apart holy time to remember they belong to Him. For Christians this finds expression in the Lord's Day, on which the early church gathered to break bread and worship, and in the deeper rest that remains for the people of God, the rest we enter through Christ (Hebrews 4:9–11). The sign has passed; the truth it signified, that we are God's sanctified people, remains.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- God gave Israel His statutes and His sabbaths in the wilderness.
- The sabbath was a covenant sign that God sanctified His people.
- Israel rebelled and profaned the sabbaths generation after generation.
- The Sabbath was a sign for Israel, not a law bound on Christians.
- The principle of set-apart holy time endures in the Lord's Day and the rest in Christ.

Discussion Prompts

- What did the sabbath signify about Israel's relationship to God?
- Why is Sabbath-keeping not bound on Christians today?
- How does setting apart holy time find its place for God's people now?

Question 8

Student Question:

Throughout chapter 20 God says He acted for the sake of His name, that it should not be profaned among the nations (Ezekiel 20:9, 14, 22). When you consider that your salvation is ultimately for the glory of God's name and not merely for your own benefit, how does that reorder your priorities and your worship?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

A refrain runs through the whole chapter: God acted for the sake of His name, that it should not be profaned among the nations in whose sight He had brought Israel out (20:9, 14, 22). Again and again, when Israel's rebellion deserved destruction, God restrained His wrath, not because they deserved it, but for the honor of His own name.

This is a profound truth about salvation. The deepest purpose of God's saving work is the glory of God Himself. He redeems a people for the praise of His name, that the nations might know He is the LORD. Our rescue is real and gracious, but it is not ultimately about us; it is about Him.

This guards us against a man-centered gospel that makes our comfort and benefit the center of everything. When we grasp that salvation is for the glory of God's name, we are humbled and

reoriented. We exist for His glory, not He for our convenience, and even our redemption serves His honor.

Far from diminishing grace, this magnifies it. That God would act for the sake of His name to spare a rebellious people means our hope does not rest on our worthiness but on His commitment to His own glory and faithfulness. He will not abandon the people He has bound to His name, and that is our security and our summons to worship.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- God repeatedly acted for the sake of His name, not Israel's merit.
- The deepest purpose of salvation is the glory of God Himself.
- This guards against a man-centered gospel.
- It humbles us and reorders our priorities and worship.
- It magnifies grace, anchoring our hope in God's commitment to His name.

Discussion Prompts

- Why does God say He acted for the sake of His name?
- How does this guard against making ourselves the center of salvation?
- How does this truth reshape your worship and priorities?

Question 9

Student Question:

In Ezekiel 20:33–44 God promises to bring His people out from the peoples, purge out the rebels, gather the rest, and bring them into the bond of the covenant as a pleasing aroma. Drawing the chapter together, how is this promise of a gathered and purified people fulfilled in Christ and His church rather than in a future political Israel, and what does it teach about how God forms and cleanses His people?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

After the long rehearsal of rebellion, God turns to a promise of gathering and purifying. He will bring His people out from the peoples and gather them from the countries where they are scattered, with a mighty hand and outpoured wrath, and bring them into the wilderness of the peoples to enter into judgment with them face to face (20:33–36).

There He will make them pass under the rod and bring them into the bond of the covenant, purging out the rebels and those who transgress against Him (20:37–38). This is no indiscriminate gathering; it is a refining work that separates the rebels from the faithful and brings the cleansed into covenant. God forms His people by gathering and purifying them.

The chapter rises to its height: there, on God's holy mountain, all the house of Israel will serve Him, and He will accept them as a pleasing aroma and be sanctified among them in the sight of

the nations (20:40–41). They will loathe themselves for their evils and know that He is the LORD when He deals with them for His name's sake (20:42–44). The end of the gathering is a purified people who worship God and know His grace.

This promise is fulfilled in Christ and His church, not in a future political nation of Israel. The church is the chosen race and holy nation, gathered out of the peoples and made God's own (1 Peter 2:9–10), purified by the blood of Christ and brought into the bond of the new covenant. God still gathers His people from the nations, purges out rebellion, and forms a holy people for the glory of His name. The pattern Ezekiel sang is the pattern God is working now in the gospel.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- God promises to gather His people out from the peoples.
- He purges out the rebels and brings the cleansed into the covenant.
- The gathering is a refining work that forms a holy people.
- The end is a purified people who worship God for His name's sake.
- This is fulfilled in Christ and His church, not a future political Israel.

Discussion Prompts

- What does God's gathering and purging reveal about how He forms His people?
- Why should we read this promise as fulfilled in Christ and the church?
- How does God still gather and cleanse a people for His name today?

Question 10

Student Question:

Looking back across this lament and this rehearsal of rebellion, name one specific way the God who grieves over ruined potential and gathers a purified people for His name's sake is calling you to turn from rebellion and be wholly His this week.

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Looking back across both chapters, two movements stand together. Chapter 19 is a lament over ruin, the funeral of a royal house that squandered its strength in violence and pride. Chapter 20 is a rehearsal of rebellion, the long record of a people who clung to idols from Egypt onward. Together they paint an honest and sobering portrait of human failure.

Yet neither chapter is without hope. The lament over the fallen vine leaves room for a King the dirge could not foresee, and the rehearsal of rebellion gives way to a promise to gather and purify a people for God's name. The God who grieves over ruin is the God who, for the honor of His name, will not abandon His people but redeems and refines them.

The honest reckoning with failure is meant to drive us to that grace. We are not so different from Israel; we have squandered gifts and clung to idols. But the same God who acted for the

sake of His name then acts now in Christ, gathering a purified people into the bond of the new covenant. The story of rebellion is met by the story of redeeming grace.

So the response this week is to turn. Let the lament teach you to grieve over sin, let the rehearsal expose the idols you still cling to, and let the promise of gathering draw you wholly to God. The God who sings a funeral over ruined potential stands ready to gather, cleanse, and accept as a pleasing aroma every heart that returns to Him and is wholly His.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Chapter 19 laments ruin and chapter 20 rehearses rebellion.
- Both chapters leave room for hope and redeeming grace.
- God grieves over ruin yet refines and gathers a people for His name.
- Honest reckoning with failure should drive us to grace.
- The fitting response is to grieve sin, forsake idols, and be wholly God's.

Discussion Prompts

- How do the lament and the rehearsal of rebellion fit together?
- Where has God-given potential been squandered in your life?
- How is God calling you to turn from rebellion and be wholly His?