

The Books of Jeremiah and Lamentations, Teacher's Guide

Lesson 4: A Corrupt People; the Coming Judgment

Jeremiah 5:1–6:30

Teaching Aim (Teacher Orientation)

Doctrinally, this passage confronts the pervasiveness of sin and the false security that hides beneath religious comfort. Jeremiah's fruitless search for one just person (5:1) and the people's love of reassuring lies (5:31) expose how deeply and quietly sin can spread through a whole society and a single heart. The teacher must establish the holiness and justice of God, who will not finally let sin go unjudged, against the lie of 5:12 that "He will do nothing." At the same time the passage reveals God's relentless mercy, hunting for any reason to pardon, pleading with His people to walk the ancient paths, and disciplining them like a refiner so that they might still turn.

The teacher should hold up 6:16 as the heart of the lesson, drawing the timeless principle that rest for the soul is found in trusting, obedient covenant faithfulness, the well-worn way of walking with God, not in novelty or self-direction. This should be tied honestly to personal accountability: Scripture refuses to let the people blame only their leaders, since they "love to have it so," teaching that each person is responsible before God for the truth they embrace or reject (Ezekiel 18:20). The refiner's fire (6:29–30) should be pointed forward to Christ, the true refiner and Savior, the only one in whom we are purified and find the rest the ancient paths foreshadowed (Matthew 11:28–30; Malachi 3:2–3).

Beyond the doctrine, the lesson aims at the spiritual formation of the student. Every believer is tempted to underestimate sin, to surround themselves with reassuring voices, and to refuse the ancient paths in favor of an easier, self-chosen way. The teacher's goal is that students would search their own hearts honestly, renounce the false security that says God will do nothing, and gladly return to the ancient path of trusting obedience, finding in Christ the rest their souls were made for.

Question 1

Student Question:

Read 5:1–6. God sends Jeremiah to search the city for even one person who "does justice and seeks truth," promising to pardon the whole city for that one's sake (5:1). What does this search reveal about both the pervasiveness of sin and the heart of God who looks for any reason to show mercy?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Open with the drama of the search in 5:1. God tells Jeremiah to run through Jerusalem's streets and squares looking for a single person "who does justice and seeks truth," and on the strength of that one, God will pardon the whole city. This deliberately recalls Abraham's bargaining over Sodom (Genesis 18), where God agreed to spare the city for ten righteous people. The astonishing thing is how low the number drops here: not ten, but one. God's mercy is hunting for any reason to forgive.

Teach both truths the search reveals. On one hand, it exposes the pervasiveness of sin. The search comes up empty, not because Jeremiah looked in the wrong places, but because the corruption has saturated every level of society, rich and poor, leaders and people (5:4-5). On the other hand, it reveals the heart of God, who would rather pardon than punish and who looks for the smallest foothold of righteousness to justify mercy.

Guard against a wrong inference. The point is not that human beings are born guilty or incapable of any good; Scripture elsewhere knows of genuinely righteous people. The point is that this generation, by its own repeated choices, has corrupted itself so thoroughly that justice and truth have all but vanished. Sin here is chosen and cultivated, not merely inherited; each person is accountable for their own part in it (Ezekiel 18:20).

Land the application. The same God still searches, still longs to show mercy, still treasures even one person who does justice and seeks truth. The question this lesson presses is whether He would find such a heart in us, and whether we will be among those for whose sake God still shows mercy in our own time.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The pervasiveness of sin that can saturate a whole society and silence justice (5:1-5).
- God's merciful heart, willing to pardon a city for the sake of one righteous person (Genesis 18:23-32).
- Personal accountability for sin rather than inherited guilt; sin here is chosen and cultivated (Ezekiel 18:20).
- God's ongoing search for hearts that do justice and seek truth.
- The danger of assuming the corruption is only 'out there' and not in us.

Discussion Prompts

- What does God's search for even one just person reveal about His heart?
- How can sin spread so widely that justice and truth nearly disappear?
- Would God find in you a heart that does justice and seeks truth?

Question 2

Student Question:

Jeremiah could not find one truly just person in the whole city (5:1). When you honestly search your own life, where do you find that sin has spread further and quieter than you wanted to admit?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self-question turns the empty search inward. Jeremiah could not find one fully just person in the whole city. When we search our own lives with the same honesty, we discover that sin tends to spread further and more quietly than we like to admit, into our motives, our words, our private thoughts, the corners we keep curtained.

Help students move past surface self-assessment. Most of us grade ourselves by comparison with others and come away satisfied. But the searching question is not “Am I better than my neighbor?” but “What would God’s light expose if it swept every street and square of my heart?”

Affirm that honest self-examination is a healthy spiritual discipline, not morbid introspection. David prayed, “Search me, O God, and know my heart... and see if there be any grievous way in me” (Psalm 139:23–24). We invite the search not to despair but to repent, because what we name can be forgiven and changed.

Move to a concrete step. Invite each person to ask God this week to show them one quiet, overlooked area where sin has spread, a habit of speech, a hidden resentment, a small dishonesty, and to bring it honestly into His light.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Honest self-examination as a spiritual discipline (Psalm 139:23–24).
- The quiet, overlooked ways sin spreads in motives, words, and private thoughts.
- Measuring ourselves by God’s light rather than by comparison with others.
- Naming hidden sin as the path to forgiveness and change.

Discussion Prompts

- Where might God’s light expose sin you have not wanted to admit?
- Why is comparing ourselves to others a poor measure of our own hearts?
- What is one hidden area you will bring into God’s light this week?

Question 3

Student Question:

Read 5:7–19. God asks, “How can I pardon you?” and describes a people who “have spoken falsely of the LORD” and said, “He will do nothing” (5:12). What does this false security, the belief that God will never actually act against sin, reveal about the human heart, and why is it so dangerous?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Verses 7–19 expose a deadly lie at the root of the people’s sin. They “have spoken falsely of the LORD, and have said, He will do nothing; no disaster will come upon us” (5:12). This is false security, the comfortable conviction that God will never actually act against sin, that grace means consequences are off the table, that the warnings are just words. It is the lie that has emboldened sinners in every age.

Teach why this false security is so dangerous. It does not deny God; it merely defangs Him. It keeps the language of faith while removing its seriousness. People who believe “He will do nothing” feel free to keep sinning, because they have quietly stopped believing that God is holy enough to judge. The lie is comfortable precisely because it asks nothing of them.

Set against this the consistent witness of Scripture. “Do not be deceived: God is not mocked, for whatever one sows, that will he also reap” (Galatians 6:7). God is patient, slow to anger, eager to pardon, but His patience is not indifference. The same Lord who pleads with sinners will, in the end, judge sin. To presume on His patience is to mistake mercy for permission.

Bring it home. Modern hearts whisper their own versions: “Everyone does it,” “God wants me happy,” “I’ll deal with it later,” “surely this won’t matter.” Help students see that false security is not humble trust in grace; it is a refusal to take God’s holiness seriously. Real assurance rests in God’s mercy through obedience, not in the assumption that God will simply overlook persistent sin.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- False security: the lie that God “will do nothing” about sin (5:12).
- The danger of keeping the language of faith while removing its seriousness.
- God’s patience as mercy to lead to repentance, not permission to keep sinning (Galatians 6:7; Romans 2:4).
- The difference between true assurance and presumption upon grace.
- Modern forms of the lie: ‘everyone does it,’ ‘God just wants me happy,’ ‘this won’t matter.’

Discussion Prompts

- Why is the belief that ‘God will do nothing’ so dangerous to the soul?
- How is presuming on God’s patience different from trusting His mercy?
- What modern phrases carry the same lie as ‘He will do nothing’?

Question 4

Student Question:

Many today live as if God will never call them to account for sin (5:12). Where have you quietly told yourself that a particular sin “won’t really matter” or that God “won’t mind,” and how does that false security weaken your walk with Him?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self-question presses the lie of 5:12 into the student’s daily reasoning. Almost all of us have a private list of sins we have quietly decided “won’t really matter,” the small dishonesty, the cherished grudge, the compromise we have made peace with, the indulgence we tell ourselves God “won’t mind.” That whispered permission is the very false security Jeremiah confronts.

Help students see how false security weakens the walk with God. Once we decide a sin does not matter, we stop bringing it to God, stop repenting of it, stop letting His word touch it. It becomes a sealed-off room in the house of our life where He is not allowed. Over time that one room spreads its mustiness through the whole house.

Distinguish this from healthy assurance. We are not meant to live in dread, constantly fearing God’s wrath. But the cure for dread is honest repentance and trust in God’s mercy, not the lie that sin is harmless. True peace comes from sin confessed and forsaken, not from sin renamed as trivial.

Move to a concrete step. Invite each person to identify one sin they have been excusing with “it won’t really matter,” and to take it seriously before God this week, confessing it and inviting Him into that sealed-off room.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The private permissions we grant ourselves: ‘this sin won’t really matter.’
- How excused sin becomes a sealed-off room God is not allowed to touch.
- The difference between honest assurance and the lie that sin is harmless.
- Peace through confessed and forsaken sin, not through renaming sin as trivial.

Discussion Prompts

- What sin have you quietly told yourself ‘won’t really matter’?
- How does excusing a sin slowly weaken your whole walk with God?
- What would it look like to take that sin seriously before God this week?

Question 5

Student Question:

Read 5:20–31. The chapter ends with the false prophets prophesying lies, the priests ruling by their direction, “and my people love to have it so” (5:31). What does it reveal about a people when they prefer leaders who tell them comfortable falsehoods over those who tell them the truth?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

The end of chapter 5 lays bare a whole corrupt system, and then names the most disturbing fact of all. “The prophets prophesy falsely, and the priests rule at their direction; my people love to have it so” (5:31). The religious leaders are peddling comforting lies, and the people are not merely tolerating it, they love it. There is a market for false comfort, and the false prophets are simply supplying the demand.

Teach what this reveals about a people. A culture gets the prophets it wants. When people prefer to be soothed rather than corrected, they will reward the teachers who soothe them and reject the ones who tell the truth. The corruption of the pulpit is, in part, a verdict on the appetite of the pew. As Isaiah heard it, they say, “Speak to us smooth things, prophesy illusions” (Isaiah 30:10).

Apply this to personal accountability. It would be easy to lay all the blame on the false prophets, but God refuses to let the people off the hook; they “love to have it so.” Each person is responsible for the truth they welcome or refuse (Ezekiel 18:20). We are not passive victims of the voices we choose to listen to; we choose them because they tell us what we want to hear.

Make it timeless and sobering. Paul warned that a day would come when people “will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions” (2 Timothy 4:3). The danger is not only out there in a corrupt culture; it is in the human heart that would rather be flattered than warned. The test of a true teacher is not whether they make us comfortable but whether they tell us the truth of God’s word.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- A people who prefer comforting lies to hard truth (5:31; Isaiah 30:9–11).
- A culture gets the teachers it wants; the corrupt pulpit reflects the appetite of the pew.
- Personal accountability for the truth we welcome or refuse (Ezekiel 18:20).
- The warning of ‘itching ears’ and self-selected teachers (2 Timothy 4:3–4).
- The test of a true teacher: faithfulness to God’s word, not our comfort.

Discussion Prompts

- What does it reveal about people when they love comforting lies?
- Why does God hold the people, and not just the false prophets, responsible?
- How do we tell the difference between a teacher who comforts and one who tells the truth?

Question 6

Student Question:

It is easy to blame corrupt leaders, but God blames the people who “love to have it so.” Where are you tempted to seek out voices, teachers, or media that simply confirm what you already want to believe rather than tell you the truth?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self-question turns the ‘itching ears’ warning on the student. We all curate the voices we let into our minds, the preachers, podcasters, authors, friends, and feeds that shape how we think. The honest question is whether we choose them because they tell us the truth or because they confirm what we already want to believe.

Help students notice the pull toward echo chambers. It is comfortable to listen only to voices that agree with us, that flatter our side, that never challenge our assumptions or our sins. But comfort is not the same as truth, and a steady diet of agreement leaves us unchallenged and unchanged.

Affirm the value of voices that tell us what we do not want to hear. The friend who lovingly confronts us, the passage of Scripture that convicts us, the teacher who will not flatter, these are gifts. “Faithful are the wounds of a friend” (Proverbs 27:6). We should welcome, not resent, the truth that corrects us.

Move to a concrete step. Invite each person to examine their ‘information diet’ this week, and to deliberately make room for at least one voice, a Scripture, a wise friend, a faithful teacher, that tells them the truth rather than merely confirming their preferences.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The temptation to choose voices that confirm rather than challenge us.
- Echo chambers that leave us comfortable but unchanged.
- Welcoming the faithful wounds of truth that correct us (Proverbs 27:6).
- Curating an ‘information diet’ that includes voices that tell us the truth.

Discussion Prompts

- Do you choose teachers and voices because they are true or because they agree with you?
- Where might you be living in a comfortable echo chamber?
- What truthful voice could you make more room for this week?

Question 7

Student Question:

Read 6:13–21. God pleads, “Ask for the ancient paths, where the good way is; and walk in it,” but the people answer, “We will not walk in it” (6:16). What are these “ancient paths,” and what does it mean that the way to “rest for your souls” is found in returning to God’s tried and proven way rather than in something new?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Jeremiah 6:16 is the heart of this lesson, and it rewards slow attention. Picture a weary traveler at a confusing crossroads. God says, “Stand by the roads, and look, and ask for the ancient paths, where the good way is; and walk in it, and find rest for your souls.” The ancient paths are not a call to mere nostalgia or tradition for its own sake; they are the tried and proven way of covenant faithfulness, the road of trusting, obedient relationship with God that the faithful before them had walked.

Teach the crucial point that rest for the soul is found in returning, not in inventing. The people kept looking for new gods, new alliances, new securities, and found only weariness. God’s answer is not a novel program but an old road: walk again in the way of trusting obedience to the Lord. There is deep rest in stepping back onto the path you were made to walk.

Note the heartbreaking response: “But they said, We will not walk in it” (6:16). The tragedy is not that God hid the path or made it impossible. He showed it plainly, promised rest at the end of it, and they simply refused. Sin here is not ignorance but defiance, a folded-arms “we will not.” This is the deepest root of judgment in these chapters: not that God failed to call, but that the people would not walk.

Point forward to Christ without binding old covenant practices. The ancient path of trusting, obedient faith finds its fulfillment and its rest in Jesus, who says, “Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest... and you will find rest for your souls” (Matthew 11:28–29). He deliberately echoes Jeremiah 6:16. The good way the prophets pointed to leads, finally, to the One who is Himself the way (John 14:6). We do not return to old ceremonies; we return to the timeless way of trusting and obeying God, now perfectly opened to us in Christ.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The ancient paths as the tried and proven way of trusting, obedient covenant faithfulness (6:16).
- Rest for the soul found in returning to God’s way, not in novelty or self-direction.
- The tragedy of a plain call refused: ‘we will not walk in it.’
- Christ’s deliberate echo of 6:16: ‘rest for your souls’ in Him (Matthew 11:28–29).
- Returning to the timeless way of trusting obedience, now fulfilled in Christ, without binding old ceremonies.

Discussion Prompts

- What are the ‘ancient paths,’ and why is rest found in returning to them?
- Why do we so often look for rest in new things rather than the proven way?
- How does Jesus fulfill the promise of ‘rest for your souls’ in Jeremiah 6:16?

Question 8

Student Question:

God offered rest for the soul to those who would walk the ancient paths, yet the people refused (6:16). What “rest” are you currently seeking in new things or your own way, and how might it actually be found in the well-worn path of trusting, obedient faith?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self-question takes the ‘rest for your souls’ promise of 6:16 and makes it personal. We are all looking for rest, for peace, for a settled soul, and we are tempted to seek it everywhere except the ancient path. We look for it in the next achievement, the next purchase, the next relationship, the next reinvention, the next self-chosen way, and it keeps slipping through our fingers.

Help students see the irony Jeremiah exposes. The very rest they crave was offered to them on the old road they refused to walk. Often the peace we are chasing in new directions is waiting for us in the plain, well-worn path of trusting and obeying God, the path we have been avoiding precisely because it asks for surrender.

Invite specificity. What ‘new thing’ or self-directed path is each person currently counting on for rest, a career move, a change of scenery, a relationship, a purchase, a self-improvement project? And what would it look like to seek rest instead in renewed, simple obedience to God in that very area?

Move to a concrete step. Name one place where you have been seeking rest your own way, and choose this week to step back onto the ancient path there, through prayer, obedience, and trust, expecting the soul-rest God promises.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Seeking soul-rest in new things and self-chosen ways rather than in God.
- The rest we crave often waiting on the very path we have been avoiding.
- Surrender and obedience as the doorway to the rest our souls long for.
- Choosing trusting obedience in the specific area where we chase rest elsewhere.

Discussion Prompts

- What ‘new thing’ are you currently counting on to give your soul rest?
- How might the rest you crave be waiting on the path you have been avoiding?
- What is one area where you will seek rest through obedience this week?

Question 9**Student Question:**

Read 6:22–30. As the disaster from the north advances, God calls His people “rejected silver,” because the refining fire of His discipline found no purity to draw out: “Refining is in vain, for the wicked are not removed” (6:29–30). How does this picture of the refiner display God’s holiness, the purpose of His discipline, and His patient mercy, and how does it point us to the salvation and purifying we can only find in Christ?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This is the heaviest doctrinal block, and it gathers the two chapters to a sobering climax. As the disaster from the north advances (6:22–26), God describes Himself as a refiner who has labored over impure metal in vain. “The bellows blow fiercely; the lead is consumed by the fire; in vain the refining goes on, for the wicked are not removed. Rejected silver they are called, for the LORD has rejected them” (6:29–30). The image is of a smelter heating ore to draw out pure silver, but the fire finds nothing pure to recover; the whole batch is finally cast aside as worthless.

Teach first the holiness of God that the refiner image reveals. God is not indifferent to impurity; like a refiner, He cares intensely about purity and works to remove the dross. His standard is real, and He will not simply call impure metal pure. This is a God who takes sin seriously enough to put His people through the fire rather than leave them corrupt.

Teach next the purpose of His discipline. The fire is not cruelty; it is meant to purify. The whole aim of the bellows and the heat was to draw out something precious. God’s discipline in our lives, the hard providences, the painful consequences, the searching of His word, is meant to burn away the dross and leave us pure. “The Lord disciplines the one he loves” (Hebrews 12:6). The tragedy of 6:30 is not that the refiner was harsh but that the metal yielded nothing pure no matter how long the fire burned, because the people would not let the dross go.

Then hold up His patient mercy, which has run through both chapters. God searched for one just person to spare the city, pleaded against false security, pointed to the ancient paths, and now applies the refining fire, all so that His people might still be purified and turn. Even the language of ‘rejected silver’ is spoken as a warning while the disaster is still approaching, not after the city has fallen. The fire is itself a mercy meant to save.

Finally, point the whole image to Christ. We cannot finally purify ourselves; the refining fire of mere discipline, apart from a changed heart, leaves only dross. Malachi promised a coming Lord who would “sit as a refiner and purifier of silver” and purify His people (Malachi 3:2–3), and that Lord is Jesus. In Him alone are we truly purified, cleansed by His blood and renewed by His Spirit, and brought at last to the rest the ancient paths foreshadowed. The warning of ‘rejected silver’ drives us not to despair but to the Savior in whom impure metal can finally be made precious.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- God's holiness pictured as a refiner who will not call impure metal pure (6:29–30).
- The purifying purpose of God's discipline, meant to remove the dross (Hebrews 12:6).
- The tragedy of 'rejected silver': a heart that yields nothing pure no matter the fire.
- God's patient mercy: even this warning is spoken while there is still time to turn.
- Christ as the true Refiner in whom alone we are purified (Malachi 3:2–3).
- The warning driving us to the Savior, not to despair.
- True purity as God's gift through Christ, not a self-achieved cleansing.

Discussion Prompts

- How does the refiner's fire reveal both God's holiness and His purpose to purify?
- Why is even the warning of 'rejected silver' an act of mercy?
- How does this image point us to our need for Christ the Refiner?

Question 10

Student Question:

Look back across these two chapters, from the empty search for one just person to the refused ancient paths to the rejected silver. Name one specific way the Lord Jesus is calling you off the comfortable road of false security and onto the ancient path, and how He is using these verses to form His likeness in you this week.

Commentary and Teaching Notes

The capstone question moves from study to surrender. Look back across both chapters: the empty search for one just person, the false security that says God will do nothing, the people who love comforting lies, the ancient paths refused, and the rejected silver that yielded no purity. Every theme converges on a single choice between the comfortable road and the ancient path.

Resist letting this stay general. Press for one specific way the Lord is calling them off the comfortable road of false security and onto the ancient path: a sin to stop excusing, a flattering voice to turn down, a refusal to repent of, a place to seek rest in obedience rather than novelty.

Tie it explicitly to Jesus. The ancient path the prophets pointed to leads to Christ, who alone gives rest for the soul and who alone, as the true Refiner, can make rejected metal precious. We are formed into His likeness not by preferring comfortable lies but by walking the well-worn road of trusting, obedient faith with Him.

Invite each person to name their 'one thing' aloud or on paper, and to carry it into the week as a matter of honest prayer, renewed obedience, and glad return to the ancient path that leads to Jesus and to rest.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Moving from understanding the warning to actually walking the ancient path (James 1:22).
- Christ as the destination of the ancient paths and the true Refiner who gives rest.
- Spiritual formation through trusting obedience, not the comfort of reassuring lies.
- The value of naming one concrete step off false security and onto the ancient path this week.

Discussion Prompts

- Which warning in these chapters is the Lord pressing on your heart most?
- What is the one specific step from false security onto the ancient path you will take this week?
- How does walking the ancient path with Jesus give the rest your soul is seeking?