

The Books of Jeremiah and Lamentations, Teacher's Guide

Lesson 5: The Temple Sermon: Do Not Trust Lying Words

Jeremiah 7:1–8:3

Teaching Aim (Teacher Orientation)

Doctrinally, this sermon establishes that God never accepts ritual as a substitute for a holy life. The temple, the sacrifices, the feasts, and the slogans were all genuinely given by God, yet they became “deceptive words” (7:4, 8) the moment the people trusted in them while oppressing the weak and serving idols. The teacher must drive home that true religion is obedience from the heart that works itself out in justice and mercy toward others (7:5–7, 23), and that worship divorced from a changed life is not neutral but offensive to God. This is a timeless principle, and it carries straight into the New Covenant, where the Lord Jesus warns that not everyone who says “Lord, Lord” enters the kingdom, but the one who does the will of the Father (Matthew 7:21–23).

The passage also presses the holiness and justice of God. The Valley of the Son of Hinnom, where children were burned, becomes the Valley of Slaughter (7:31–32), a vivid reminder that God's patience has a limit and that sin, especially sin against the defenseless, brings real consequences. Keep this God-centered: judgment falls because of chosen, persistent rebellion, not arbitrary cruelty, and even here God holds the door open with “amend your ways” (7:3). Avoid sentimentalizing God into one who never judges, and avoid presenting judgment as anything other than His just response to real evil.

Beyond the doctrine, the lesson aims at the formation of the student. Every believer is tempted to let attendance, the right words, and familiar routines stand in for an actually surrendered life. This text confronts that temptation and calls us to a worship that is honest all the way down: obedient to God's voice and merciful to our neighbor. The teacher's goal is not merely that students understand the danger of empty ritual, but that they walk out resolved to close the gap between their worship and their daily conduct.

Question 1

Student Question:

Read 7:1–7. God commands Judah to “amend your ways and your deeds” and warns them not to “trust in these deceptive words: ‘This is the temple of the Lord.’” What does this reveal about how God evaluates worship, and why is the mere presence of true religious forms no guarantee of His favor?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Begin at the gate. God stations Jeremiah at the entrance of the temple during a feast, the very place and moment when the people felt most secure, and tells him to puncture that security. "Amend your ways and your deeds, and I will let you dwell in this place" (7:3). Notice the order: changed lives first, then the promise of dwelling. God ties His blessing to obedience, not to the building.

The heart of the rebuke is the slogan in verse 4: "The temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord." They had turned a true thing (God's presence among them) into a superstition (an automatic guarantee of safety). God calls these "deceptive words." Help the class see that the most dangerous lies are often half-truths about holy things, treated as charms.

Verses 5–7 spell out what real amendment looks like, and it is strikingly horizontal: "if you truly execute justice one with another, if you do not oppress the sojourner, the fatherless, or the widow." God measures the genuineness of their worship by how they treat the most vulnerable people in town. Worship that leaves the poor oppressed is worship God will not honor.

Land the application gently but firmly. The presence of right forms (the right building, the right words, the right attendance) proves nothing by itself. God looks past the forms to the life. This is not an attack on forms; God Himself gave them. It is an attack on trusting in forms while the heart and life are unchanged.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- God evaluates worship by the obedience and justice of the worshiper's life, not by religious forms alone (7:3–7).
- "Deceptive words": true things about God twisted into superstitious guarantees of safety.
- The horizontal test of true religion: how we treat the sojourner, the fatherless, and the widow (7:6).
- Right forms are not condemned; trusting in them while living in sin is.
- The order of grace: God ties His promise to dwell with them to genuine repentance (7:3).

Discussion Prompts

- Why is a true statement like "this is God's house" so easily twisted into a false security?
- How does the way we treat the vulnerable reveal the reality of our worship?
- What is the difference between using God's gifts and trusting in them as charms?

Question 2

Student Question:

The people treated the temple like a good-luck charm that made them untouchable. What is the religious symbol, habit, or membership that you are most tempted to lean on for security instead of leaning on a genuinely obedient relationship with God?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This first self-question turns the temple slogan toward our own hearts. We do not chant “the temple of the Lord,” but we all carry quiet equivalents: “I’ve been a member here for thirty years,” “I was raised in the church,” “I haven’t missed a Sunday,” “I gave generously.” Each can become a charm we lean on instead of leaning on a living, obedient relationship with God.

Help students feel the subtlety. None of these things are bad. Membership, upbringing, faithfulness in attendance, and generosity are good. The danger is when they migrate from being fruits of a real walk to being substitutes for one, a way of feeling safe with God while avoiding His actual claim on our lives.

Invite honest self-examination. Ask each person to finish the sentence privately: “The religious thing I most quietly count on to make me right with God is...” Naming it begins to break its spell, just as Jeremiah naming the slogan exposed it.

Point them back to the cure. The answer is not to throw away the good forms but to make sure they flow from, rather than replace, a surrendered heart. Ask the deeper question: is my trust in the form, or in the God the form was meant to serve?

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The personal equivalents of the temple slogan: membership, upbringing, attendance, giving.
- Good things become dangerous when they substitute for a living, obedient relationship with God.
- Self-examination as a discipline: naming what we secretly trust in.
- The difference between forms that flow from faith and forms that replace it.

Discussion Prompts

- What religious credential or habit are you most tempted to lean on for security?
- How can you tell whether a good practice is flowing from your walk or substituting for it?
- What would change if your confidence rested wholly in the God behind the form?

Question 3

Student Question:

Read 7:8–11. God lists their sins (stealing, murder, adultery, false swearing, idolatry) and then says they “come and stand before me in this house... and say, ‘We are delivered!’” before asking, “Has this house... become a den of robbers?” What does this expose about the danger of separating worship from daily obedience?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Verses 8–11 are devastating in their plainness. God reads the rap sheet: “Will you steal, murder, commit adultery, swear falsely, make offerings to Baal... and then come and stand before me in this house... and say, ‘We are delivered!’” The people had completely severed Sunday from Monday. They sinned all week and felt absolved by showing up.

Then comes the searching question: “Has this house, which is called by my name, become a den of robbers in your eyes?” A den is where robbers retreat to feel safe between crimes. They had turned God’s house into a hideout. The teacher should let the image land: worship had become the place they felt safe to keep sinning.

This is the verse the Lord Jesus quotes when He cleanses the temple (Matthew 21:13). The same corruption was alive centuries later, and Jesus addressed it with the same fierce holiness. Help the class see the through-line: God has never tolerated worship used as cover for injustice.

Drive the doctrine home: worship and daily obedience cannot be separated without making the worship a lie. “We are delivered” on the lips of the unrepentant is not faith; it is presumption. God is not fooled by the building or the words.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The severing of worship from conduct turns worship into presumption (7:9–10).
- “A den of robbers”: the house of God misused as a hideout for the unrepentant (7:11).
- The Lord Jesus applies this very text in cleansing the temple (Matthew 21:13).
- “We are delivered” on unrepentant lips is presumption, not faith.
- God is not deceived by buildings, words, or attendance.

Discussion Prompts

- What does it mean to treat the place of worship as a “den of robbers”?
- Why does Jesus react so strongly to the same corruption Jeremiah named?
- How can familiar worship lull us into feeling safe in unrepented sin?

Question 4

Student Question:

Jeremiah confronted people who felt forgiven on Saturday while wronging their neighbor on Monday. Where is there a gap in your own life between the worship you offer God and the way you treat the people around you?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self-question presses the den-of-robbers image into our relationships. The sin Jeremiah named was not abstract; it was theft, oppression, and wronged neighbors. The gap God hated was the gap between vertical worship and horizontal love. The same gap can run quietly through our lives.

Help students get specific. Where is there a coworker we slander, a family member we resent, a debt we have not paid, a person we have wronged and never made right, even as we sing on Sunday? The First Epistle of John is blunt: we cannot love God whom we have not seen while hating the brother we have seen (1 John 4:20).

Distinguish guilt-tripping from honest conviction. The goal is not to send people home crushed but to send them home reconciled. Worship that pleases God overflows into mended relationships and just dealings.

Move toward one concrete step: a phone call, an apology, a debt repaid, a resentment surrendered. The reality of our worship is tested at exactly these points.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The gap between worship offered to God and love shown to neighbor (1 John 4:20).
- Sin as concrete: wronged people, unpaid debts, harbored resentments.
- Worship that pleases God overflows into mended relationships.
- The difference between healthy conviction and mere guilt.

Discussion Prompts

- Where is there a gap between your Sunday worship and your weekday treatment of someone?
- Is there a relationship you need to make right before your worship can be honest?
- What is one concrete step of reconciliation you could take this week?

Question 5

Student Question:

Read 7:21-23. God says that on the day He brought Israel out of Egypt He did not merely command sacrifices but said, "Obey my voice... and walk in all the way that I command you." What does this teach about what God has always wanted most from His people, and how is ritual meant to serve obedience rather than replace it?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Verses 21-23 reach back to the Exodus to make a stunning point. God says that when He brought Israel out of Egypt, the heart of His command was not sacrifice but obedience: "Obey my voice, and I will be your God, and you shall be my people." The sacrificial system was real and God-given, but it was never the point. It was meant to serve a relationship of trust and obedience.

Teach the proper place of ritual. God is not abolishing sacrifice here; He is exposing sacrifice offered by a disobedient heart as worthless. The same truth runs through Scripture: "to obey is

better than sacrifice" (1 Samuel 15:22); God desires mercy, not sacrifice (Hosea 6:6). Ritual is the servant of obedience, never its replacement.

Point forward carefully. Under the New Covenant the animal sacrifices are fulfilled and set aside in Christ (Hebrews 10:1–10), but the principle stands unchanged: God wants obedient hearts, not religious performance. The Lord Jesus said the one who does the Father's will, not merely the one who says "Lord, Lord," enters the kingdom (Matthew 7:21).

Help the class feel the warmth in God's aim: "I will be your God, and you shall be my people." Obedience is not God's cold demand; it is the path into the relationship His heart desires. He wants us, not our performances.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- God's first and deepest desire has always been obedience, not ritual (7:22–23).
- Sacrifice was real and God-given, yet always the servant of an obedient heart (1 Samuel 15:22).
- Under the New Covenant the sacrifices are fulfilled in Christ, but the principle of heart-obedience stands (Hebrews 10:1–10).
- Doing the Father's will, not merely saying "Lord, Lord," marks the true worshiper (Matthew 7:21).
- The relational goal: "I will be your God, and you shall be my people."

Discussion Prompts

- Why has God always wanted obedience more than ritual?
- How does ritual rightly serve, rather than replace, a life of obedience?
- What does it mean that God's aim is relationship: "you shall be my people"?

Question 6

Student Question:

God's great desire was, "Obey my voice, and I will be your God, and you shall be my people" (7:23). What would it look like this week for you to move one step from religious performance toward simple, glad obedience to God's voice?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self-question takes God's great desire, "Obey my voice" (7:23), and makes it personal and immediate. Most of us are more comfortable with religious performance than with simple obedience, because performance lets us choose the terms while obedience hands the terms to God.

Help students name the actual point of obedience God is pressing. Obedience is never abstract; it is always specific: this relationship, this habit, this word to speak, this sin to put down, this

person to forgive. Ask, "Where has God's voice already been clear to you, and what is keeping you from simply obeying it?"

Guard against turning obedience into joyless duty. God's call to obey comes wrapped in promise: "I will be your God." Glad obedience flows from trusting that God's commands are for our good, not against it.

Move to one step. Not a hundred resolutions, but the single act of obedience the lesson has surfaced. Performance is easy to multiply; obedience is costly precisely because it is concrete.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The pull toward performance over obedience because performance lets us set the terms.
- Obedience is always specific, not abstract.
- Glad obedience flows from trusting God's commands are for our good.
- The value of one concrete act of obedience over many vague resolutions.

Discussion Prompts

- Where has God's voice already been clear, and what is keeping you from obeying?
- Why is religious performance often easier for us than simple obedience?
- What is the one step of obedience God is asking of you this week?

Question 7

Student Question:

Read 7:25–28. For generations God "persistently sent... my servants the prophets," yet the people "did not listen... but stiffened their neck." What does God's long patience, met by stubborn refusal, reveal about both His mercy and the hardening power of repeated disobedience?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Verses 25–28 reveal the long backstory of God's patience. "From the day that your fathers came out... to this day, I have persistently sent all my servants the prophets to them, day after day." God did not give up after one warning; He sent prophet after prophet, generation after generation. His patience is staggering.

And yet the response was equally persistent in the other direction: "they did not listen to me... but stiffened their neck. They did worse than their fathers." Here is the sobering doctrine of hardening. Sin repeated and refused does not stay still; it calcifies. Each refusal makes the next refusal easier and the heart harder.

Teach both sides honestly. God's mercy is seen in His relentless pleading; His justice is seen in finally letting persistent rebellion bear its fruit. The teacher should hold these together: a God who pleads day after day is merciful, and a people who refuse day after day are without excuse.

Apply it as warning and comfort. Warning: do not presume on God's patience by treating today's conviction as something you can safely ignore (Hebrews 3:13, lest you be hardened). Comfort: the God who sent prophets day after day is wonderfully unwilling to give up on people.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- God's relentless mercy: He "persistently sent" prophets, day after day (7:25).
- The hardening power of repeated, refused conviction (7:26; Hebrews 3:13).
- Sin does not stay still; refusal makes the heart harder over time.
- God's patience and His justice held together: He pleads long, but rebellion is without excuse.
- The danger of presuming on God's patience and ignoring present conviction.

Discussion Prompts

- What does God's sending prophets "day after day" reveal about His heart?
- How does repeated refusal of conviction harden a person over time?
- Why is it dangerous to treat today's conviction as something we can postpone?

Question 8

Student Question:

Jeremiah was told the people would not listen to him (7:27), yet he was to speak faithfully anyway. Where are you tempted to go silent or grow weary in doing right because you cannot see any result, and how does Jeremiah's example speak to that?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self-question draws on the hard reality that Jeremiah was told the people would not listen (7:27), yet he was to speak anyway. Faithfulness, not visible results, was his assignment. We feel the same temptation to grow weary or fall silent when our witness, our prayers, or our quiet obedience seem to change nothing.

Help students separate their responsibility from the outcome. Jeremiah's success was measured by faithfulness to God's word, not by how many repented. Paul tells us not to grow weary in doing good, for in due season we will reap if we do not give up (Galatians 6:9).

Locate the specific place of weariness. A wayward child prayed for with no change, a spouse who will not hear, a workplace witness that seems to fall flat, a discipline that feels fruitless. Where are you tempted to quit because you cannot see results?

Encourage perseverance grounded in God, not in visible payoff. We keep speaking and obeying because God is worthy and His word is true, trusting Him with the harvest we cannot see.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Faithfulness, not visible results, is the measure of obedience (7:27).
- The temptation to grow weary or silent when nothing seems to change (Galatians 6:9).
- Separating our responsibility (faithfulness) from God's domain (the outcome).
- Perseverance grounded in God's worth, not in visible payoff.

Discussion Prompts

- Where are you tempted to give up because you see no result?
- How does Jeremiah's call to speak to people who would not listen speak to you?
- What keeps us faithful when the harvest is hidden?

Question 9

Student Question:

Read 7:30–34 and 8:1–3. The people built high places to burn their sons and daughters in the fire, so God declares the place will be called the Valley of Slaughter, and even the bones of the dead will be exposed. What does this terrible passage reveal about God's holiness, the real cost of false worship, and the seriousness with which He regards sin (especially sin against the helpless)?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This is the heaviest block of the lesson, and it is meant to be. The sermon ends in horror. The people had built high places in the Valley of the Son of Hinnom "to burn their sons and their daughters in the fire" (7:31), a thing God says He never commanded, "nor did it come into my mind." The most vulnerable, their own children, were being sacrificed to idols. False worship had reached its monstrous end.

God's response reveals His holiness and justice. The place of slaughter would be renamed: "it will no more be called Topheth, or the Valley of the Son of Hinnom, but the Valley of Slaughter" (7:32). And in 8:1–3 even the bones of the dead, of kings, priests, and prophets, would be exposed before the sun, moon, and stars they had worshiped. The very idols they served could not save them, in life or in death. God will not be mocked.

The teacher must handle this with sober care, not sensationalism. The point is not that God is cruel but that sin, especially sin against the helpless, is unspeakably serious to a holy God. The Valley of Slaughter is the natural fruit of "deceptive words" (7:4) followed to their end: worship cut loose from obedience does not stay harmless; it eventually devours the innocent. Note too

that this same valley (Gehenna in Greek) became the New Testament picture of final judgment, a solemn reminder that God's holiness against sin is not a passing mood (Mark 9:43–48).

Yet even here, hold out the mercy that frames the whole chapter. This entire sermon began with an open door: "Amend your ways and your deeds, and I will let you dwell in this place" (7:3). God describes the coming slaughter precisely so that they might still turn and avoid it. Judgment announced in advance is judgment that still leaves room for repentance. The warning itself is an act of love.

Land it on the conscience without despair. God's holiness should make us tremble at how seriously He takes sin, and His mercy should make us run to Him while the door stands open. For the Christian, the cross is where God's holiness and mercy meet: the wrath sin deserves fell on the Lord Jesus, so that the door God held open to Judah now stands open to all who will come to Him in repentance and faith.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- God's holiness and the seriousness of sin, especially sin against the helpless (7:31).
- False worship is never harmless; it ends by devouring the innocent (the Valley of Slaughter, 7:32).
- The idols people trust cannot save them in life or in death (8:1–2).
- This valley (Gehenna) becomes the New Testament image of final judgment (Mark 9:43–48).
- Judgment announced in advance is itself mercy, leaving room for repentance (7:3).
- The cross as the place where God's holiness and mercy meet for those who come to Christ.
- The danger of a sentimental God who never judges, and of sensationalizing judgment rather than letting it humble us.

Discussion Prompts

- Why does this terrible passage actually reveal how seriously God values the helpless?
- How is even a warning of judgment a form of God's mercy?
- Where do God's holiness and mercy meet for us today?

Question 10

Student Question:

Look back across the whole sermon, from the chant at the gate to the Valley of Slaughter. Name one specific way the Lord Jesus is using this passage to move you from trusting in religious forms toward a worship that is honest, obedient, and merciful all the way down.

Commentary and Teaching Notes

The capstone question asks students to move from study to surrender. Look back across the whole sermon: the chant at the gate, the den of robbers, the call to obey rather than sacrifice,

the long patience of God, and the Valley of Slaughter. The single thread is this: God wants worship that is honest all the way down, obedient to His voice and merciful to our neighbor.

Resist letting this stay general. Press for one specific way the Lord Jesus is reshaping them: a religious form they have been trusting in, a gap between worship and conduct, a step of plain obedience, a relationship to make right, a person to show mercy.

Tie it explicitly to Christ. Jesus quoted this very sermon when He cleansed the temple, and He embodied everything Judah lacked: perfect obedience, mercy to the vulnerable, worship in spirit and truth. We are formed not by polishing our religious performance but by walking with Him until His honesty becomes ours.

Invite each person to name their “one thing” aloud or on paper and carry it into the week as a matter of prayer and obedience. The aim is not more slogans but a changed life.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Moving from knowledge to formation and obedience (James 1:22).
- Christ as the One who cleansed the temple and worshiped in spirit and truth.
- Worship that is honest all the way down: obedient to God and merciful to neighbor.
- The value of naming one concrete step of change.

Discussion Prompts

- Which part of this sermon is the Lord pressing on you most?
- What is the one specific way your worship needs to become more honest and obedient?
- How does walking with Jesus, rather than improving your performance, change you?