

The Books of Jeremiah and Lamentations, Teacher's Guide

Lesson 7: The Broken Covenant and Plots Against Jeremiah

Jeremiah 11:1–12:17

Teaching Aim (Teacher Orientation)

Doctrinally, these chapters establish the seriousness of covenant with God: His own unwavering faithfulness to His promises, and the real consequences when His people break their commitments. The blessings and curses of the covenant (11:3–8) are not arbitrary threats but the moral structure of a real relationship. The teacher should show that idolatry (“as many gods as your cities,” 11:13) is covenant betrayal, that returning to old sins is spiritually deadly, and that God’s patience, though vast, is not endless. This is a timeless lesson about the costliness and seriousness of belonging to God, which carries forward into the New Covenant in Christ, where faithfulness is still required and falling away is still possible (Hebrews 3:12–14; 10:26–31).

The passage also presents two great pastoral realities. First, the cost of faithfulness: God’s faithful prophet is betrayed by his own kin and likened to “a gentle lamb led to the slaughter” (11:19), a clear foreshadowing of the Lord Jesus, the suffering Servant betrayed by His own (Isaiah 53:7). The teacher should draw this Christ-line carefully and worshipfully. Second, the legitimacy of honest wrestling with God: Jeremiah brings his hardest question about the prosperity of the wicked straight to God (12:1), and God receives it. The teacher should distinguish honest lament (which is faith speaking) from faithless grumbling, and show that God’s answer (“how will you compete with horses?”) grows His servant through hardship rather than exempting him from it. The closing promise of mercy to the nations (12:14–17) reveals God’s sovereignty over all peoples and the wide reach of His grace, fulfilled in the gospel going to all nations.

Beyond the doctrine, the lesson aims at the formation of the student in covenant faithfulness, in entrusting wrongs to the God who judges righteously rather than taking revenge, and in honest, faith-filled prayer in the face of injustice. The teacher’s goal is that students walk out more committed to their covenant with God, more willing to suffer faithfully like the gentle Lamb who saves them, and more ready to bring their hardest questions to God in trust.

Question 1

Student Question:

Read 11:1–8. God recalls the covenant He made when He brought Israel out of “the iron furnace” of Egypt, with its blessing for obedience and curse for disobedience, and notes that generations “did not obey.” What does this passage reveal about the seriousness of covenant with God, His own faithfulness to His promises, and the real consequences of broken commitments?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Begin with the weight of the word “covenant.” God sends Jeremiah to proclaim again the covenant made at the Exodus, when He brought Israel out of “the iron furnace” of Egypt (11:4). A covenant is a sacred, binding relationship with stated terms: blessing for faithfulness, curse for betrayal (11:3–5). This is not a casual arrangement; it is a bond as solemn as marriage.

Notice God’s own faithfulness in the passage. His purpose was “that I may confirm the oath that I swore to your fathers, to give them a land flowing with milk and honey” (11:5). God kept His word. The land was given; the blessings were real. The failure in the relationship was never on God’s side. This is crucial: the broken covenant exposes Judah’s unfaithfulness against the backdrop of God’s steadfastness.

Then mark the tragic refrain: “Yet they did not obey or incline their ear, but everyone walked in the stubbornness of his evil heart” (11:8). The covenant required one thing above all: “Obey my voice” (11:4, 7). Generation after generation refused. The curse of verse 3 falls not because God is harsh but because the people broke a relationship they had sworn to keep.

Apply it to our own covenant with God. Through Christ we are brought into a New Covenant relationship, and faithfulness is still the heart of it. God remains utterly faithful to His promises; the danger always lies in our drift. Broken commitments with God have real consequences, not because His love is fragile but because the relationship is real (Hebrews 3:12–14).

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Covenant as a sacred, binding relationship with real terms and consequences (11:3–5).
- God’s own faithfulness to His promises stands behind the whole covenant (11:5).
- The covenant’s heart is “Obey my voice,” refused by stubborn hearts (11:7–8).
- The curse falls because a real relationship was broken, not because God is harsh.
- Our New Covenant in Christ still calls for faithfulness; drift has real consequences (Hebrews 3:12–14).

Discussion Prompts

- What does the word “covenant” add to how we think about our relationship with God?
- How does God’s faithfulness in this passage highlight Judah’s unfaithfulness?
- Why are broken commitments with God serious, even under His grace?

Question 2

Student Question:

God’s requirement was simply, “Obey my voice” (11:4), yet Judah “walked... in the stubbornness of their evil hearts.” Where in your walk with God is obedience clear but your heart has grown stubborn or slow?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self-question takes the covenant's simple core, "Obey my voice" (11:4), and brings it home. Judah's problem was not that God's will was unclear but that their hearts had grown stubborn: "everyone walked in the stubbornness of his evil heart" (11:8). The same stubbornness can creep into a long walk with God.

Help students see the subtlety of drift. Covenant erosion is rarely a dramatic renunciation; it is a slow hardening in one area, a command we have quietly decided not to fully obey, a place where we have stopped inclining our ear. The clearer the command, the more telling our slowness to keep it.

Invite honest self-examination. Ask each person to finish privately: "The area where God's will is clear but my heart has grown slow or stubborn is..." The point is not to manufacture guilt but to catch the drift early, while it is still a small thing.

Point them to the remedy. Stubbornness softens through honest repentance and renewed nearness to God. The same God who is utterly faithful to His covenant is ready to restore the heart that turns back to Him.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Covenant drift as a slow hardening, not a dramatic renunciation (11:8).
- The danger is rarely unclear commands but a stubborn heart in clear areas.
- Catching drift early, while it is still small.
- Repentance and renewed nearness as the cure for a hardening heart.

Discussion Prompts

- Where is God's will clear to you, yet your heart has grown slow to obey?
- How does covenant drift usually happen quietly rather than dramatically?
- What would it look like to soften that stubbornness through repentance this week?

Question 3

Student Question:

Read 11:9–13. God says Judah "turned back to the iniquities of their forefathers" and had gods "as many as your cities," and warns that He will not listen to their cry in the day of disaster. What does this reveal about the nature of idolatry, the danger of returning to old sins, and the sobering point at which God's patience gives way to judgment?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Verses 9–13 expose the depth of the betrayal. God calls it a "conspiracy" (11:9): the people have "turned back to the iniquities of their forefathers" (11:10). This is not new sin but old sin

returned to, the very rebellion their fathers had been judged for, taken up again. Returning to forsaken sins is spiritually deadly, like a dog returning to its vomit (2 Peter 2:22).

The shocking measure of their idolatry is in verse 13: “your gods have become as many as your cities, O Judah, and as many as the streets of Jerusalem are the altars you have set up.” A god for every city, an altar for every street. Idolatry multiplies because the heart that leaves the one true God never finds rest; it keeps reaching for more substitutes that cannot satisfy.

Then comes a sobering word: “I will not listen when they call to me in the time of their trouble” (11:11, 14). Here the teacher must handle God’s patience carefully. God is immensely patient, but there is a point at which persistent, unrepented rebellion meets judgment, and the cry that comes only when disaster strikes (rather than from a turned heart) is not true repentance. This is not the end of all mercy, but the just consequence of long-refused warning.

Apply both the danger of returning to old sins and the multiplying nature of idolatry. The remedy is not to manage our idols but to return wholly to the one God who alone satisfies. Keep God-centered: His holiness makes judgment real, and His long patience makes that judgment just rather than hasty.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Returning to forsaken sins is spiritually deadly (11:10; 2 Peter 2:22).
- Idolatry multiplies: “as many gods as your cities” (11:13), because substitutes never satisfy.
- The sobering point where God’s patience gives way to judgment (11:11).
- Crisis-driven crying out is not the same as true repentance.
- God’s long patience makes His judgment just, not hasty.

Discussion Prompts

- Why is returning to an old, forsaken sin so dangerous?
- Why does idolatry tend to multiply rather than satisfy?
- How do we hold together God’s great patience and the reality of judgment?

Question 4

Student Question:

Judah had a god for every street corner (11:13), trusting many things to give what only God can give. What are the “many gods” your own heart is tempted to run to for security, comfort, or meaning instead of running to the Lord?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self-question takes the haunting image of verse 13, a god for every city, and turns it inward. We rarely build literal altars, but the human heart is, in Calvin’s famous phrase, a perpetual factory of idols. We trust many things to give us what only God can give.

Help students name their “many gods” concretely. Security from a bank balance, comfort from food or screens, worth from achievement or approval, meaning from a relationship, control from a carefully managed schedule. None of these is evil in itself; each becomes an idol when we run to it for what only God can give.

Expose the restlessness behind the multiplying. Judah kept adding gods because no idol ever delivered. Our hearts do the same: when one substitute fails to satisfy, we reach for another rather than returning to God. The very number of our idols testifies to their emptiness.

Move toward returning, not just managing. The answer is not to fine-tune our idols but to bring the deep need they promise to meet (security, comfort, worth, meaning) to the Lord who alone can satisfy it. Ask: where am I running to a street-corner god instead of to God Himself?

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The heart as a maker of many idols, running to substitutes (11:13).
- Identifying concrete modern ‘gods’: security, comfort, worth, control.
- The restlessness that drives us to add idols rather than return to God.
- Returning to God to satisfy the need, not merely managing the idols.

Discussion Prompts

- What are the ‘many gods’ your heart most often runs to?
- What do you trust them to give you that only God can truly give?
- What would it look like to bring that need to God instead this week?

Question 5

Student Question:

Read 11:18–20. The men of Anathoth plot against Jeremiah, who says, “I was like a gentle lamb led to the slaughter,” and entrusts his cause to God “who judges righteously.” How does Jeremiah’s response to betrayal model trusting God rather than taking revenge, and how does this gentle lamb foreshadow the Lord Jesus (Isaiah 53:7)?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Here the chapter turns devastatingly personal. The men of Anathoth, Jeremiah’s own hometown, his neighbors, kin, and fellow priests, plot to kill him: “Let us destroy the tree with its fruit; let us cut him off from the land of the living” (11:19). Jeremiah, who had faithfully preached God’s word to them, becomes the target of those closest to him. Betrayal from one’s own is the deepest cut.

Mark Jeremiah’s response. He did not even know of the plot until God revealed it (11:18), and when he learned of it he did not plot revenge. He says, “I was like a gentle lamb led to the slaughter,” and then he entrusts his cause to God: “to you have I committed my cause” (11:20).

He hands the matter to “the Lord of hosts, who judges righteously.” This is the path of faith: not retaliation, but committal to the God who judges rightly (Romans 12:19).

Draw the Christ-line worshipfully. Jeremiah’s words, “a gentle lamb led to the slaughter,” point unmistakably forward to the suffering Servant of Isaiah 53:7: “like a lamb that is led to the slaughter... he opened not his mouth.” The Lord Jesus, betrayed by His own, faithful to the end, committing Himself to the Father “who judges justly” (1 Peter 2:23), is the true and greater gentle Lamb. Jeremiah’s suffering faithfulness is a shadow; Christ is the substance.

Apply it tenderly. Every faithful servant of God will at some point taste betrayal, sometimes from those closest to them. Jeremiah and, supremely, Christ show the way: not vengeance, not bitterness, but committing our cause to the God who sees and judges righteously. We are freed from the exhausting work of revenge precisely because we trust a righteous Judge.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Betrayal from one’s own kin and neighbors as the deepest wound (11:19).
- Jeremiah’s refusal of revenge; committing his cause to God who judges righteously (11:20; Romans 12:19).
- “A gentle lamb led to the slaughter” foreshadows the suffering Servant (Isaiah 53:7).
- Christ as the true and greater Lamb, betrayed by His own, entrusting Himself to the Father (1 Peter 2:23).
- Faithful service will at times taste betrayal; the answer is committal, not vengeance.

Discussion Prompts

- Why is betrayal by one’s own people such a deep wound?
- How does committing our cause to God free us from the need for revenge?
- How does the ‘gentle lamb’ point us to the Lord Jesus?

Question 6

Student Question:

Jeremiah was betrayed by his own townspeople and family, yet he committed his cause to God rather than retaliating. Who has wronged you in a way you are tempted to repay, and what would it look like to entrust that situation to the God who judges righteously?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self-question presses Jeremiah’s example of committing his cause to God (11:20) into the student’s own experience of being wronged. Most of us carry a hurt we are tempted to repay, sometimes from people close to us, where the betrayal stings most.

Help students name it honestly. A friend who turned on them, a family member who wounded them, a colleague who undercut them. The temptation is either active revenge or the slow poison of resentment, which is revenge rehearsed in the heart.

Point to the freedom of committal. Jeremiah did not pretend the wrong was nothing; he named it and handed it to “the Lord... who judges righteously.” Entrusting a wrong to God is not denying it but refusing to be its judge and executioner, trusting that God sees and will set things right (Romans 12:19).

Move toward a concrete act of committal. Perhaps a prayer that hands the person and the hurt to God, a refusal to retaliate, a step toward forgiveness. The goal is not to manufacture warm feelings but to release the case into the hands of the righteous Judge, as Jeremiah and Christ did.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The temptation to repay a wrong, especially from those close to us (11:20).
- Resentment as revenge rehearsed in the heart.
- Committal to God as naming the wrong yet refusing to be its judge (Romans 12:19).
- Following the pattern of Jeremiah and Christ in entrusting our cause to God.

Discussion Prompts

- Who has wronged you in a way you are tempted to repay?
- What is the difference between denying a hurt and entrusting it to God?
- What concrete act of committal could you make this week?

Question 7

Student Question:

Read 12:1–4. Jeremiah honestly asks God, “Why does the way of the wicked prosper? Why do all who are treacherous thrive?” What does it teach us that God welcomes this raw, honest wrestling, and how is honest lament before God different from faithless grumbling against Him?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Chapter 12 opens with breathtaking honesty: “Righteous are you, O Lord, when I complain to you; yet I would plead my case before you. Why does the way of the wicked prosper? Why do all who are treacherous thrive?” (12:1). Jeremiah asks the oldest question of the suffering faithful: why do the wicked do so well while the godly suffer?

Mark how Jeremiah frames it. He begins by affirming, “Righteous are you, O Lord.” His complaint is not an accusation that God is unjust; it is a wrestling that holds onto God’s righteousness even while it cannot understand His ways. This is the posture of honest lament: it brings the hard question to God, not against Him.

Teach the difference between lament and grumbling. Faithless grumbling turns away from God in bitter complaint, as Israel did in the wilderness; honest lament turns toward God and pours out the trouble in His presence, as the psalmists do again and again (Psalm 73 is the classic parallel). God welcomes the lament of faith. He is not threatened by our honest questions; He invites them.

Apply it pastorally. Many believers suffer in silence, fearing it is wrong to question God, and so their confusion curdles into doubt or distance. Jeremiah shows a better way: bring it to God. The relationship is strong enough to hold our hardest questions, and it is precisely in bringing them to Him that we are met (Psalm 73:16–17).

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The honest question of the suffering faithful: why do the wicked prosper? (12:1).
- Lament that affirms God's righteousness even while wrestling with His ways.
- The difference between honest lament (turning toward God) and faithless grumbling (turning away).
- God welcomes and invites the hard questions of faith (Psalm 73).
- Bringing confusion to God rather than letting it curdle into doubt.

Discussion Prompts

- How does Jeremiah question God without accusing Him of being unjust?
- What is the difference between honest lament and faithless grumbling?
- Why does God welcome our hardest questions rather than forbid them?

Question 8

Student Question:

Jeremiah brought his confusion about injustice directly to God instead of nursing it in secret. When you are troubled by something God allows, do you tend to take it to Him or to stew on it alone, and what would honest prayer change?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self-question takes Jeremiah's honest prayer and asks where the student tends to go with their own troubles about God. Some take their confusion to God; many stew on it alone, where it slowly hardens into resentment or quiet distance.

Help students see the cost of stewing. A trouble nursed in silence rarely stays the same size; it grows, distorts, and feeds doubt. The very thing we are afraid to say to God festers precisely because it is never brought into His presence.

Contrast that with the freedom of honest prayer. Bringing the trouble to God does not always yield an explanation (Jeremiah did not get a tidy answer), but it does keep the relationship open

and honest, and it places the burden where it can actually be carried. The psalmists model pouring out the soul before God (Psalm 62:8).

Move toward one honest prayer. The personal-reflection question already invited students to bring a complaint to God; press it here. What is the trouble you have been carrying alone, and would you bring it honestly to God this week rather than rehearsing it in silence?

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The tendency to stew on troubles about God alone rather than bring them to Him (12:1).
- Troubles nursed in silence grow and feed doubt.
- Honest prayer keeps the relationship open even without a tidy answer.
- Pouring out the soul before God as the psalmists did (Psalm 62:8).

Discussion Prompts

- When troubled by something God allows, do you take it to Him or stew alone?
- What happens to a complaint that is rehearsed in silence rather than prayed?
- What honest prayer have you been avoiding that you could pray this week?

Question 9

Student Question:

Read 12:5–17. God answers Jeremiah not with an easy explanation but with a call to greater endurance (“how will you compete with horses?”), then closes by promising that even the nations, if they learn His ways, will “be built up in the midst of my people.” What does this reveal about how God grows His servants through hardship, about His sovereignty over the nations, and about the surprising reach of His mercy beyond Judah?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This is the heaviest block of the lesson, and it holds three great truths together. First, God’s answer to Jeremiah’s honest question is not the explanation he wanted but a bracing call to greater endurance: “If you have raced with men on foot, and they have wearied you, how will you compete with horses? And if in a safe land you are so trusting, what will you do in the thicket of the Jordan?” (12:5). God does not promise an easier road; He promises a harder one, and He summons Jeremiah to grow strong enough to run it.

Teach how God grows His servants through hardship. Sometimes the answer to our complaint about suffering is the call to deeper faith and endurance, not relief. This is the way of the cross and the pattern of Christian maturity: we are strengthened, not exempted (Hebrews 12:1–4; James 1:2–4). The teacher should present this not as cold but as kind. God is preparing His servant for what lies ahead because He loves him and has work for him to do.

Second, the middle of the chapter (12:7–13) shows God’s own grief over the judgment He must bring: “I have forsaken my house, I have abandoned my heritage; I have given the beloved of my soul into the hands of her enemies” (12:7). Even in judgment, God’s heart aches. The land mourns, the harvest fails, yet this is the just fruit of covenant betrayal. God is sovereign over these events; nothing is outside His rule, even the discipline of His own people.

Third, the chapter ends with a startling reach of mercy (12:14–17). God speaks of His “evil neighbors,” the nations who plundered Judah, and promises that after judgment, “if they will diligently learn the ways of my people... then they shall be built up in the midst of my people.” God’s sovereignty extends over all nations, and His mercy reaches beyond Judah to the Gentiles. This is the gospel in seed: the door is open to all peoples who will learn His ways and turn to Him. Note here, carefully, that the building up of the nations “in the midst of my people” is fulfilled not in a future earthly political Israel but in Christ and His church, where Jew and Gentile are made one (Ephesians 2:11–22), the true and spiritual Israel of God (Galatians 6:16).

Land all three truths on the heart. God grows us through hardship rather than around it; God remains sovereign and even grieved in judgment; and God’s mercy is wider than we imagine, reaching to all who will turn to Him. For the Christian, the call to “run with horses” is the call to follow the Lord Jesus, who endured the cross and now strengthens us to run our race looking to Him (Hebrews 12:1–2).

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- God answers complaint with a call to greater endurance, not an easier road (12:5).
- God grows His servants through hardship, strengthening rather than exempting them (Hebrews 12:1–4; James 1:2–4).
- God’s own grief in judgment: “the beloved of my soul” given to her enemies (12:7).
- God’s sovereignty over the nations, not merely over Judah (12:14).
- The surprising reach of mercy: nations “built up in the midst of my people” if they learn His ways (12:16).
- This building up is fulfilled in Christ and His church, Jew and Gentile made one (Ephesians 2:11–22; Galatians 6:16), not a future earthly political Israel.
- The call to ‘run with horses’ as the call to endure looking to Jesus (Hebrews 12:1–2).

Discussion Prompts

- Why does God answer Jeremiah’s complaint with a call to endurance rather than relief?
- What does it mean that God grows us through hardship rather than around it?
- How does the mercy offered to the nations point forward to the gospel and the church?

Question 10

Student Question:

Look back across these chapters, from the broken covenant and the plots of Anathoth to the call to run with horses and the mercy offered even to the nations. Name one specific way the Lord Jesus is using this passage to deepen your covenant faithfulness and your trust in the God who judges righteously.

Commentary and Teaching Notes

The capstone question asks students to move from study to surrender. Look back across these chapters: the broken covenant, the multiplying idols, the plots of Anathoth, the gentle lamb, the honest cry, the call to run with horses, and the mercy reaching to the nations. Two great threads call for response: covenant faithfulness, and trust in the God who judges righteously.

Resist letting this stay general. Press for one specific way the Lord Jesus is forming them: a slack commitment to renew, an idol to abandon, a betrayal to entrust to God, an honest question to bring to Him in prayer, a hard road to run with new endurance.

Tie it explicitly to Christ. Jeremiah, the gentle lamb betrayed by his own, foreshadows the Lord Jesus, the true Lamb led to the slaughter, who entrusted Himself to the Father who judges justly and who now calls us to run our race looking to Him. We deepen our faithfulness not by gritting our teeth but by gazing on the faithful Lamb who saves us and strengthens us (Hebrews 12:1–4).

Invite each person to name their “one thing” aloud or on paper and carry it into the week in prayer and obedience. The aim is a deeper covenant faithfulness and a settled trust in the righteous Judge who is forming us through every hardship.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Moving from knowledge to formation and obedience (James 1:22).
- Christ as the true gentle Lamb who entrusted Himself to the Father who judges justly (1 Peter 2:23).
- Deepened covenant faithfulness and trust in the God who judges righteously.
- The value of naming one concrete step of faithfulness or trust.

Discussion Prompts

- Which thread of these chapters is the Lord pressing on you most?
- What is one specific way you can deepen your covenant faithfulness this week?
- How does looking to the faithful Lamb, rather than gritting your teeth, change you?