

The Books of Jeremiah and Lamentations, Teacher's Guide

Lesson 8: The Ruined Loincloth and the Drought

Jeremiah 13:1–15:21

Teaching Aim (Teacher Orientation)

Doctrinally, these chapters hold together two truths the teacher must keep in tension. First, God is intimately covenantal: He made His people to cling to Him for nearness, glory, and praise (13:11), and the whole tragedy is a relationship spurned, not a rule merely broken. Second, God is holy and just: persistent, unrepented sin really does harden a people and a season, to the point that even Moses and Samuel could not turn His heart (15:1). Teach this seriousness without turning it into fatalism. The hardening is the fruit of real, chosen, repeated sin (Ezekiel 18:20), not an arbitrary decree, and the door of personal repentance is never theoretically shut by God; here it is shut by a people who “would not listen.”

Guard the flock against two errors. On one side, a sentimental view that says God will never let consequences fall; chapter 14's drought and chapter 15's judgment refute that. On the other side, a Calvinistic fatalism that reads the hardening as God unconditionally choosing to reprobate; the text roots the hardening in the people's own refusal. Hold the line: God is merciful and just at once, and human beings remain responsible.

Beyond doctrine, aim at the heart. The loincloth presses every student to ask whether they are clinging to God or quietly drifting to some far-off Euphrates. The drought speaks to dry seasons and the temptation to dig our own cisterns. And the renewal of Jeremiah (15:19–21) is sheer pastoral gold: discouraged believers and weary servants need to hear that God restores those who return and makes them “as my mouth” again. Point all of this forward to Christ, who calls us to abide in Him (John 15) and who is the living water no drought can dry up.

Question 1

Student Question:

Read 13:1–11. God explains the ruined loincloth: “as the loincloth clings to the waist of a man, so I made... Israel and... Judah cling to me... that they might be for me a people, a name, a praise, and a glory” (13:11). What does this reveal about the purpose of God's covenant with His people, and what ruins that closeness?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Begin by letting the strangeness of the sign-act do its work. God tells Jeremiah to wear a new linen loincloth, never washing it, then to bury it far away by the Euphrates and later dig up the rotted thing. The loincloth is the most intimate garment, worn against the skin, hidden, close.

That is the picture God chooses for what He wanted with His people: not formality, not distance, but nearness.

The key verse is 13:11: “as the loincloth clings to the waist of a man, so I made... Israel and... Judah cling to me, that they might be for me a people, a name, a praise, and a glory.” The purpose of the covenant is relationship and shared glory. God’s people were meant to bring Him renown the way a fine garment honors the one who wears it. This is covenant love, not bare law.

Then comes the ruin. What destroys a loincloth is not staying on the waist; it is being buried in foreign soil. Judah’s wandering toward Babylon’s idols, away from God, is exactly what rotted them. Sin is not first the breaking of rules; it is the leaving of a Person to whom we were made to cling.

Land it warmly and for all of us. Under the New Covenant, Christ says the same thing in different words: “Abide in me, and I in you... apart from me you can do nothing” (John 15:4–5). We were made to cling. The question for every heart is whether we are pressed close to God or slowly being buried somewhere far off.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The covenant purpose of nearness, belonging, and shared glory (13:11).
- Sin understood relationally as leaving the God we were made to cling to, not merely breaking rules.
- The intimacy God desires, pictured by the most personal garment.
- The New Covenant fulfillment in Christ’s call to abide in Him (John 15:4–5).
- What “ruins” God’s people is distance and idolatry, not faithful closeness.

Discussion Prompts

- Why does God choose such an intimate picture, a loincloth, for His relationship with His people?
- What does it mean that sin is leaving a Person, not just breaking a rule?
- How does Christ’s call to “abide in me” echo the meaning of the loincloth?

Question 2

Student Question:

The loincloth was ruined not by clinging to the waist but by being buried far off by the Euphrates (13:4–7). Where in your own life do you sense you have let distance grow between you and God, and what “Euphrates” quietly buried you there?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self-question takes the loincloth's ruin and turns it gently toward the student. The garment did not fail by clinging; it failed by being buried far off. Drift, not dramatic rebellion, is how most of us are slowly ruined.

Help people see that distance from God rarely happens by decision. No one announces, "Today I will love God less." It happens by a thousand small relocations, a neglected prayer life, a compromise tolerated, a busyness that crowds Him out, until one day we look up and we are by the Euphrates, far from where we belong.

Invite specific naming. What is the "Euphrates" that has quietly carried you away? For one it is a screen, for another an ambition, a relationship, a resentment, a comfort. Naming the place is the first step back.

Keep hope in view. The story of these chapters ends with God restoring a worn servant (15:19). The God who buried no one means to ruin us; He calls the drifting back to the waist, back to closeness.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Spiritual drift as the ordinary path away from God.
- The difference between dramatic rebellion and slow relocation of the heart.
- Self-examination: naming the specific "Euphrates" that buries us.
- God's readiness to draw the drifting back into closeness.

Discussion Prompts

- What is the "Euphrates" that has quietly created distance between you and God?
- How does drift differ from a deliberate decision to turn from God?
- What would one concrete step back toward closeness look like this week?

Question 3

Student Question:

Read 13:15–17. Jeremiah pleads, "Hear and give ear; be not proud, for the LORD has spoken," and warns of darkness coming if they will not listen. How does pride keep a person or a people from hearing God, and how does God's holiness make this warning an act of mercy rather than cruelty?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Verses 15–17 sound the warning beneath the sign: "Hear and give ear; be not proud, for the LORD has spoken. Give glory to the LORD your God before he brings darkness." Pride is named as the great barrier. A proud heart cannot receive correction because it has already decided it knows best.

Teach how pride deafens. The proud do not lack information; they refuse to bow to it. “Be not proud, for the LORD has spoken” means the issue is not whether God has made Himself clear but whether we will humble ourselves to hear. This is as true in the church today as it was in Judah.

Show that the warning is mercy. God tells them what is coming, “before he brings darkness,” so they might still repent. A God who warns is a God who has not yet closed the door. His holiness, which makes judgment certain if they persist, is the same holiness that moves Him to plead first.

Note Jeremiah’s tender heart in verse 17: even as he warns, his soul will “weep in secret” for their pride. Truth and tears belong together. This is the pattern fulfilled in Christ, who wept over Jerusalem even as He pronounced its judgment (Luke 19:41–44).

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Pride as the great barrier to hearing God (13:15).
- God’s holiness expressed in a warning that still leaves room for repentance.
- Warning as an act of mercy, not cruelty.
- Truth and tears held together, fulfilled in Christ weeping over Jerusalem (Luke 19:41–44).
- The danger of a heart so proud it cannot receive correction even when God has spoken plainly.

Discussion Prompts

- How does pride keep us from hearing what God has clearly said?
- Why is a warning of judgment actually a form of God’s mercy?
- What does it look like to speak hard truth with tears, as Jeremiah did?

Question 4

Student Question:

Jeremiah says that if they still will not listen, “my soul will weep in secret for your pride” (13:17). Whose stubbornness or hardness grieves your heart right now, and how can you carry that grief to God instead of letting it turn into contempt?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Verse 17 gives us a model for how to carry another person’s hardness: “my soul will weep in secret for your pride.” Jeremiah does not grow cold or contemptuous toward stubborn people; he grieves over them in private prayer. That is a discipline worth teaching.

Help students see the danger. When someone we love refuses God again and again, our hearts can curdle. Grief turns to irritation, irritation to contempt, contempt to writing them off. Jeremiah shows another way: take the grief to God and let it stay grief, soaked in love.

Make it personal and concrete. Ask each person to picture the one whose hardness most weighs on them, a child, a spouse, a parent, a friend, and to consider whether they are praying for that person or merely frustrated with them.

Point to the cross. The Lord Jesus carried the hardness of His own people all the way to a prayer of forgiveness. We are formed into His likeness when we weep for the stubborn rather than despise them.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Grieving over others' sin rather than growing contemptuous (13:17).
- Intercessory weeping as a spiritual discipline.
- The drift from grief to irritation to writing people off.
- Christ-likeness in loving the hard-hearted instead of despising them.

Discussion Prompts

- Whose hardness toward God most grieves your heart right now?
- How can you keep that grief from turning into contempt or resignation?
- What would it look like to "weep in secret" for that person in prayer this week?

Question 5

Student Question:

Read 14:1–9 and 14:19–22. In the drought, the people pray, "Though our iniquities testify against us, act, O LORD, for your name's sake... we set our hope on you." What does it look like to appeal to God on the basis of His own name and mercy rather than our worthiness?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Chapter 14 gives us a stunning prayer in the drought. The people confess, "Though our iniquities testify against us, act, O LORD, for your name's sake... we set our hope on you" (14:7, 22). This is the right ground of every appeal to God: not our worthiness, but His name, His character, His mercy.

Teach the difference between bargaining and biblical pleading. We do not come to God saying, "Look how good I've been." We come saying, "For your name's sake, for your steadfast love, act." This is how Moses prayed, how David prayed, and how we pray in Jesus' name, appealing to who God is and what Christ has done, not to our record.

Note the honesty of the confession: "our iniquities testify against us." Real prayer does not hide sin; it owns it and then casts itself on mercy. "We set our hope on you" is the posture of faith even in a dry land.

Apply it to the New Covenant. We now appeal to God through the name of Jesus (John 14:13–14), the fullest revelation of God’s name and mercy. To pray “for your name’s sake” finds its deepest answer at the cross, where God’s righteousness and mercy meet.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Appealing to God on the basis of His name and mercy, not our worthiness (14:7).
- Honest confession of sin as part of true prayer.
- Hope set on God even in a dry and barren season.
- The New Covenant fulfillment of praying in the name of Jesus (John 14:13–14).
- The difference between bargaining with God and pleading His character.

Discussion Prompts

- What is the difference between appealing to your own goodness and appealing to God’s name?
- How does honest confession actually strengthen rather than weaken a prayer?
- What does it mean for us to pray ‘for your name’s sake’ in the name of Jesus?

Question 6

Student Question:

The drought left even the cisterns empty and the doe abandoning her fawn (14:3–5). When a season of life feels dry and God seems silent, where are you tempted to dig your own “broken cisterns,” and what would it mean to seek the living God instead?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self-question presses the drought into our own dry seasons. The land had empty cisterns, no water, even the doe abandoning her fawn (14:3–5). Most of us know seasons when the heavens feel like brass and God seems far.

Recall Jeremiah’s earlier indictment: the people “have forsaken me, the fountain of living waters, and hewed out cisterns for themselves, broken cisterns that can hold no water” (2:13). In dry times we are tempted to dig our own cisterns, our own substitutes for God: distraction, indulgence, control, escape.

Help students name their broken cisterns. When God feels distant, where do they run? Food, screens, work, a numbing habit, a relationship leaned on too hard? These cisterns always crack and leave us thirstier.

Point to the living water. Jesus said, “Whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty again” (John 4:14). The answer to a dry season is not a better cistern but a return to the fountain Himself.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Dry seasons as part of the life of faith.
- The temptation to dig “broken cisterns” as substitutes for God (Jeremiah 2:13).
- Self-examination: where we run when God feels distant.
- Christ as the living water who alone satisfies (John 4:14).

Discussion Prompts

- When a season feels spiritually dry, where are you tempted to run instead of to God?
- What “broken cisterns” in your life have promised water and left you thirsty?
- What would it look like to seek the fountain Himself in this dry season?

Question 7

Student Question:

Read 15:1–9. God says, “Though Moses and Samuel stood before me, yet my heart would not turn toward this people.” What does this sobering word teach about the seriousness of persistent, unrepented sin and the reality that hearts and seasons can be hardened past the point of pleading?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This is a sobering doctrinal moment. God says, “Though Moses and Samuel stood before me, yet my heart would not turn toward this people” (15:1). Moses and Samuel were Israel’s mightiest intercessors, men whose prayers had turned back judgment before. Now even they could not move God, because the people “would not listen.”

Teach the seriousness of persistent, unrepented sin. There is such a thing as a season or a people hardened past the point of pleading. This is not God being arbitrary; it is the just outcome of long, willful refusal. The warnings were spurned, the loincloth was buried, the drought ignored. Sin, indulged long enough, can harden a heart and a generation.

Here the teacher must guard carefully against Calvinistic fatalism. This text does not teach that God unconditionally decreed certain individuals to destruction. It teaches that a particular generation, by their own repeated refusal, reached a point where judgment on the nation was now fixed. Ezekiel 18:20 keeps the truth clear: guilt is personal, and “the soul who sins shall die,” while the one who turns shall live. The door of personal repentance is shut here by the people’s hardness, not by an eternal divine decree.

Hold the New Testament parallel honestly. Hebrews warns Christians, “Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts” (Hebrews 3:7–15), and that some can fall away past renewal (Hebrews 6:4–6). This is not “once saved, always saved,” nor is it fatalism; it is a solemn call to keep our hearts soft and to repent today, while it is still called today.

Land it as urgent mercy. The very fact that God records this warning is itself a kindness, a flare sent up so that we will not presume on grace or trifle with repeated refusals of His voice.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The seriousness of persistent, unrepented sin (15:1).
- Hardening as the just fruit of willful, repeated refusal, not an arbitrary decree.
- Guarding against Calvinistic fatalism; guilt is personal and the door of repentance is shut here by the people, not by an eternal decree (Ezekiel 18:20).
- The New Testament warning against hardening our hearts 'today' (Hebrews 3:7–15) and the real danger of falling away (Hebrews 6:4–6).
- Rejecting both a sentimental 'God never judges' view and a fatalistic 'once saved, always saved' view.
- The warning itself as an urgent mercy that calls us to repent now.

Discussion Prompts

- What does it mean that even Moses and Samuel could not turn God's heart here?
- How do we hold the seriousness of hardening together with the truth that repentance is always open to the one who turns?
- Why is the warning 'do not harden your hearts today' an act of mercy toward us?

Question 8

Student Question:

Intercession is precious, yet here even the greatest intercessors could not turn God's heart because the people would not turn (15:1–7). Who are you praying for that has so far refused to repent, and how do you keep praying faithfully without despairing or presuming on God?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self-question takes the hard word about intercession and turns it pastoral. Even the greatest intercessors could not turn God's heart when the people refused to turn. That can tempt us to despair over the people we pray for who keep refusing God.

Help students avoid two ditches. One is despair: "My prayers are useless; they'll never change." The other is presumption: assuming our prayers obligate God to override another person's stubborn will. Jeremiah 15 keeps both in check. We pray faithfully, but we also reckon with the reality that others must themselves turn.

Encourage persistence anyway. Jesus told a parable that we "ought always to pray and not lose heart" (Luke 18:1). We keep interceding, entrusting the outcome to God, while never excusing the person from their own responsibility to repent.

Make it concrete. Ask each person to name the one they have prayed for longest with the least visible change, and to renew that prayer, surrendering the timing and the outcome to God while refusing to give up.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Faithful, persistent intercession even without visible results (Luke 18:1).
- Avoiding both despair and presumption in prayer.
- Respecting that others must themselves turn to God.
- Entrusting outcomes and timing to God's wisdom.

Discussion Prompts

- Who have you prayed for longest with the least visible change?
- How do you keep praying without slipping into either despair or presumption?
- What does it mean to entrust the outcome to God while refusing to give up?

Question 9

Student Question:

Read 15:15–21. Worn out and bitter, Jeremiah says God has become “like a deceitful brook,” and God answers, “If you return, I will restore you... If you utter what is precious, and not what is worthless, you shall be as my mouth.” How does God deal with a discouraged servant, and what does this teach us about repentance, renewal, and the grace that calls us back to usefulness?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This is the heaviest block of the lesson, and it is surprisingly tender. After all the judgment, the chapter ends with the prophet himself, exhausted and bitter. Jeremiah complains that he is “a man of strife and contention to the whole land,” that he has been faithful and gotten only pain, and then he says the unthinkable to God: “You are to me like a deceitful brook, like waters that fail” (15:18). He accuses God of being like a dry creek bed, promising water and giving none.

Notice first that God lets him say it. Jeremiah's honesty is not punished. Like the Psalms of lament, this raw complaint is brought into the relationship, not nursed in secret. There is a kind of bitter prayer that is still prayer, still spoken to God rather than away from Him. Teach students that God is big enough for our honest anguish.

Then notice how God responds in verse 19: “If you return, I will restore you, and you shall stand before me. If you utter what is precious, and not what is worthless, you shall be as my mouth.” God does not coddle the bitterness, but He does not crush the man either. He calls him to return, to repent of the self-pity and the accusation, and He promises restoration and renewed usefulness. There is repentance even for the discouraged servant, and on the far side of it, the astonishing privilege of being “as my mouth.”

Mark the phrase “take the precious from the worthless.” Jeremiah is to separate what is truly God’s word from his own worthless self-pity and complaint, and speak the precious. Renewal involves sorting our hearts, letting go of the bitterness, and taking hold again of what is from God. This is the path back to fruitfulness for any worn-out believer.

Then God re-arms him for the battle (15:20–21): “I will make you to this people a fortified wall of bronze; they will fight against you, but they shall not prevail over you, for I am with you to save you and deliver you.” The same promise from his call (1:18–19) is renewed. God restores the discouraged not to ease but to the work, with His presence as the guarantee. This is grace upon grace: He calls us back, cleans us up, and sends us out again with Himself at our side, the very pattern Christ works in His servants today.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Honest lament brought to God, not nursed away from Him (15:18).
- God’s patience with a discouraged, even bitter, servant.
- Repentance and renewal: ‘if you return, I will restore you’ (15:19).
- Separating ‘the precious from the worthless,’ letting go of self-pity to speak God’s word.
- The renewed promise of God’s sustaining presence for the work (15:20–21; cf. 1:18–19).
- Restoration that leads back to usefulness, not merely to comfort.
- The grace that calls weary believers back and re-arms them for service.

Discussion Prompts

- What does it mean that God let Jeremiah speak so honestly, even bitterly, to Him?
- How does ‘if you return, I will restore you’ offer hope to a discouraged believer?
- What is the ‘worthless’ self-pity God may be asking you to let go of so you can speak the ‘precious’?

Question 10

Student Question:

Look back over the whole passage, from the loincloth made to cling, through the drought and the hardening, to God’s restoring of a weary prophet. Name one specific way the Lord Jesus is using these chapters to draw you closer to Himself this week, whether by exposing pride, by deepening honest prayer, or by renewing you for His service.

Commentary and Teaching Notes

The capstone gathers the whole sweep: the loincloth made to cling, the pride that buries us far off, the drought, the hardening, and the tender restoring of a weary prophet. Each theme is an invitation to be formed into the likeness of Christ.

Resist abstraction. Press for one specific work the Lord is doing: exposing a pride that needs humbling, calling out a drift that needs reversing, naming a broken cistern to abandon, or renewing a discouraged heart for service. Ask each person to choose their one thing.

Tie it to Christ directly. He is the living water no drought dries up (John 4:14), the vine we are made to abide in (John 15), and the One who restores His weary servants, as He restored Peter and sent him to feed the sheep. We are formed not by gritted effort but by clinging to Him.

Invite each person to name their one thing aloud or on paper and to carry it into the week as a matter of prayer and obedience, asking the Lord to draw them closer to Himself.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Moving from study to formation and surrender (James 1:22).
- Christ as living water, true vine, and restorer of weary servants.
- Clinging to Christ as the heart of spiritual growth (John 15:4-5).
- The value of naming one concrete step of closeness or repentance.

Discussion Prompts

- Which theme of these chapters is the Lord pressing on you most: pride, drift, dryness, or discouragement?
- What is the one specific step toward closeness with Christ you will take this week?
- How does 'clinging' to Jesus differ from merely trying harder on your own?