

## The Books of Jeremiah and Lamentations, Teacher's Guide

### Lesson 10: The Broken Flask and Jeremiah's Anguish

#### Jeremiah 19:1–20:18

##### Teaching Aim (Teacher Orientation)

Doctrinally, these chapters press God's holiness and justice to a solemn point. The smashed earthenware flask (19:10–11) pictures a judgment that, unlike the reworkable clay of chapter 18, "can never be mended." The teacher should let this land: persistent, unrepented sin can bring a people past the point of reshaping. Yet keep it free of fatalism. Judah reached this point by their own repeated, willful refusal, even sacrificing their children in the Valley of Hinnom (19:4–5); the irreparability is the fruit of their chosen hardness, not an arbitrary decree. The New Testament sounds the same warning to us, that we not harden our hearts 'today' (Hebrews 3:12–15) and that there is a falling away from which it is hard to be renewed (Hebrews 6:4–6), refuting any 'once saved, always saved' presumption while never denying God's mercy to all who truly turn.

Second, these chapters teach the cost of faithfulness and the compulsion of God's word. Jeremiah is beaten and put in the stocks by Pashhur, a priest, showing that opposition often comes from within the religious establishment. Yet he cannot stay silent, for God's word is 'a burning fire shut up in my bones' (20:9). The teacher can connect this to the apostles who 'cannot but speak' (Acts 4:20) and to every Christian called to faithful, costly witness, while pointing to Christ, who supremely suffered for the truth.

Third, and pastorally vital, these chapters validate honest lament. Jeremiah holds faith and anguish together, declaring God a 'dread warrior' with him (20:11) and yet cursing the day of his birth (20:14–18). That the Holy Spirit preserved such raw grief teaches us that God welcomes our honest sorrow; lament is a form of faith, not its failure. The teacher should help students bring their pain to God rather than performing false cheer or drifting into silence, and should anchor that hope finally in Christ, who cried out in anguish yet entrusted Himself to the Father, and whose endurance is our pattern and strength (Hebrews 12:2–3).

##### Question 1

##### Student Question:

*Read 19:1–13. Jeremiah breaks the potter's flask and declares, "So will I break this people and this city... so that it can never be mended." How does the smashed flask differ from the reworked clay of chapter 18, and what does it teach about the point at which persistent, unrepented sin brings irreparable judgment?*

##### Commentary and Teaching Notes

Open by contrasting this sign with the one before it. In chapter 18 the clay was spoiled and reworked; the potter could start over. Here in chapter 19 Jeremiah takes a fired, finished earthenware flask, hard and brittle, and smashes it where it can never be mended (19:10–11). The two signs together teach a sobering progression: there is a season for reshaping, and there can come a point past it.

Teach the seriousness of irreparable judgment without flinching, and without fatalism. The flask is broken because Judah persisted in sin past every warning, even filling the Valley of Hinnom with the blood of their own children (19:4–5). The irreparability is the fruit of their long, willful hardness, not an arbitrary divine whim. God had pleaded, warned, and waited; the smashed flask is the just end of refused mercy.

Guard against two errors here. Do not present a God too sentimental to ever let consequences become final; the flask refutes that. And do not present a fatalism in which God simply decreed their ruin apart from their choices; the text roots the judgment in their evil deeds. Hold both: God is patient and merciful, and God is just, and sin persisted in long enough can pass the point of mending.

Bring it home soberly to us. The New Testament warns Christians not to harden their hearts ‘today,’ for there is a hardness from which it is hard to return (Hebrews 3:12–15; 6:4–6). This is not to terrify the tender but to wake the careless. The mercy that warns is real; the danger it warns of is also real.

### **Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues**

- The fired flask, once smashed, cannot be mended, unlike the reworked clay of chapter 18 (19:10–11).
- Irreparable judgment as the just fruit of persistent, willful sin (19:4–5).
- Guarding against both a sentimental ‘God never judges’ view and a fatalistic decree.
- The New Testament warning not to harden our hearts ‘today’ (Hebrews 3:12–15; 6:4–6).
- God’s patience and justice held together, refuting ‘once saved, always saved’ presumption.

### **Discussion Prompts**

- How does the smashed flask differ from the reworked clay of the chapter before?
- What brings a person or people past the point of being reshaped by God?
- How is even this severe warning still a form of mercy toward us?

### **Question 2**

#### **Student Question:**

*The sign was given in the Valley of Hinnom, where Judah had sacrificed their children to idols (19:4–5). What ‘unthinkable’ things has sin made acceptable in our own culture, and how can you keep your conscience tender rather than letting evil become normal to you?*

## **Commentary and Teaching Notes**

This self-question takes the horror of the Valley of Hinnom and turns it toward our own consciences. Judah had reached the point of burning their children to idols (19:4–5), an unthinkable evil that had become, to them, acceptable. Sin always works this way: it makes the unthinkable thinkable, then ordinary.

Help students see the pattern without self-righteousness. Every culture, including ours, has evils it has normalized, things that once shocked the conscience and now barely register. The danger is that we grow accustomed to what God hates, our sense of sin dulled by constant exposure.

Teach the guarding of a tender conscience. We keep our consciences sensitive by staying close to God's word, which names sin truly, and by refusing to let repeated exposure to evil numb us. A seared conscience (1 Timothy 4:2) is one that has been hardened by ignoring its warnings.

Make it personal. Ask each person where they sense their own conscience growing dull, where they have started to shrug at something God calls sin, and what would help them recover a tender heart toward His holiness.

## **Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues**

- Sin's power to make the unthinkable acceptable (19:4–5).
- The cultural normalizing of what God hates.
- Guarding a tender conscience through God's word.
- The danger of a seared, numbed conscience (1 Timothy 4:2).

## **Discussion Prompts**

- What 'unthinkable' things has our culture come to accept?
- Where do you sense your own conscience growing dull toward sin?
- How can you keep your heart tender toward what God calls evil?

## **Question 3**

### **Student Question:**

*Read 19:14–20:6. Pashhur, a priest and temple officer, beats Jeremiah and puts him in the stocks for faithfully delivering God's word. What does this reveal about the cost of faithfulness, and why does opposition so often come from within the religious establishment itself?*

## **Commentary and Teaching Notes**

Verses 19:14 through 20:6 lay bare the cost of faithfulness. Jeremiah delivers God's word in the temple court, and Pashhur, 'the chief officer in the house of the LORD,' strikes him and puts him in the stocks (20:1–2). A priest beats a prophet. The religious establishment punishes the very word it should have welcomed.

Teach honestly that faithfulness often costs. Jeremiah did nothing wrong; he spoke exactly what God gave him, and for it he was beaten and publicly shamed in the stocks, body bent and exposed. The world, and sometimes the religious world, does not reward truth-telling with comfort. We must not promise students an easy road for faithfulness.

Note where the opposition comes from. It is not pagans but a priest, an insider, who attacks Jeremiah. Often the sharpest resistance to God's truth comes from within religious institutions invested in their own comfort and reputation. Jesus Himself was opposed most fiercely by the religious leaders of His day.

Point to Christ and the apostles. The Lord warned that servants are not above their master (John 15:20), and the apostles rejoiced to be 'counted worthy to suffer dishonor for the name' (Acts 5:41). Jeremiah's stocks foreshadow the cross and the long line of faithful sufferers who follow it. Suffering for truth is not a sign that God has abandoned us; often it is a sign that we are in good company.

### **Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues**

- The real cost of faithful witness (20:1–2).
- Opposition arising from within the religious establishment.
- Faithfulness bringing shame and suffering, not comfort.
- Christ and the apostles as the pattern of suffering for truth (John 15:20; Acts 5:41).
- Suffering for righteousness as fellowship with God's faithful, not abandonment by God.

### **Discussion Prompts**

- Why does opposition to God's truth so often come from within religious circles?
- What does Jeremiah's beating teach us about the cost of faithfulness?
- How does knowing Christ and the apostles suffered for truth steady us?

### **Question 4**

#### **Student Question:**

*Jeremiah suffered publicly for telling the truth God gave him (20:2). Where has standing for God's truth cost you something, even rejection or ridicule, and how do you keep from either growing bitter or backing down?*

### **Commentary and Teaching Notes**

This self-question presses the cost of faithfulness into the student's own experience. Most of us will not be put in literal stocks, but standing for God's truth still costs: a strained relationship, mockery, being passed over, the loss of approval.

Help students name the two opposite temptations under that cost. One is bitterness, letting the wound curdle into resentment toward those who hurt us. The other is backing down, softening or silencing our convictions to avoid the cost. Jeremiah felt both pulls and yet kept speaking.

Point to the way through: keeping our eyes on God rather than on our persecutors. Jeremiah could endure because he knew ‘the LORD is with me as a dread warrior’ (20:11). When God’s approval matters more than people’s, we can stand without growing hard.

Make it concrete. Ask each person to recall a place where standing for truth has cost them, to examine their heart for bitterness or compromise, and to name one way they will keep standing in love and trust this week.

### **Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues**

- The cost of standing for God’s truth in ordinary life.
- The twin temptations of bitterness and backing down.
- Keeping our eyes on God rather than our opponents (20:11).
- Standing for truth without growing hard-hearted.

### **Discussion Prompts**

- Where has standing for God’s truth cost you something?
- Which pulls at you more under that cost, bitterness or backing down?
- How can God’s approval become more real to you than people’s disapproval?

### **Question 5**

#### **Student Question:**

*Read 20:7–9. Jeremiah says God’s word is “a burning fire shut up in my bones,” so that though he wants to quit, “I cannot.” What does this teach about the nature and power of God’s word in those who carry it, and how is it both a burden and a gift?*

### **Commentary and Teaching Notes**

Verses 7–9 give us one of the most vivid descriptions of the power of God’s word in a human life. Jeremiah is so worn by the cost that he resolves to quit: ‘I will not mention him, or speak any more in his name.’ But he cannot. ‘There is in my heart as it were a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I am weary with holding it in, and I cannot’ (20:9).

Teach the nature of God’s word as a living, compelling force. It is not inert information; it burns. When God’s truth takes hold of a person, it cannot be permanently smothered. Jeremiah tried to bottle it up and found it consumed him from the inside until he had to speak.

Show that this is both burden and gift. It is a burden because it will not let him rest in silence even when speaking costs him everything. It is a gift because it means God's word in him is alive and unkillable; he is not preaching a dead letter but carrying a fire.

Connect it to the New Covenant. Peter and John, told to stop preaching, answered, 'We cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard' (Acts 4:20). The same fire still burns in those gripped by the gospel. Where the word of Christ dwells richly, it presses out in speech and life. This is the holy compulsion of all true witness.

### **Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues**

- God's word as a living, burning fire that cannot be smothered (20:9).
- The holy compulsion to speak when God's truth grips us.
- God's word as both burden and gift in the faithful servant.
- The same fire in the apostles who 'cannot but speak' (Acts 4:20).
- True witness as the overflow of a word that lives in us.

### **Discussion Prompts**

- What does it mean that God's word was a 'fire shut up in' Jeremiah's bones?
- How is this fire both a burden and a gift?
- Where have you felt God's truth pressing you to speak?

### **Question 6**

#### **Student Question:**

*Have you ever tried to stay silent about God or your convictions, only to find you could not? Where is God's truth pressing on your heart now in a way you have been resisting, and what would faithfulness look like?*

### **Commentary and Teaching Notes**

This self-question takes the fire in the bones and makes it personal. Most believers have known a moment when they tried to stay silent, about their faith, about a conviction, about a truth someone needed, and found they could not rest until they spoke.

Help students recognize that holy pressure. It is not anxiety or compulsiveness; it is the Spirit working God's truth in us until it must come out. Where is God's word pressing on a student now, a witness to give, a wrong to address, an obedience to render, that they have been resisting?

Distinguish faithful boldness from mere impulsiveness. The fire is to be spoken in love and wisdom, at the right time, but it is not to be permanently smothered. Resisting it indefinitely brings the very weariness Jeremiah describes, 'weary with holding it in.'

Make it concrete. Ask each person to name one place where God's truth is pressing on their heart and they have been holding it in, and one faithful, loving step they will take to let it out this week.

### **Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues**

- The Spirit pressing God's truth out of us.
- The difference between holy compulsion and mere impulsiveness.
- The weariness of permanently suppressing God's word.
- Faithful, loving, timely obedience to that pressing.

### **Discussion Prompts**

- Have you ever tried to stay silent about God and found you could not?
- Where is God's truth pressing on your heart now that you have been resisting?
- What faithful step would let that fire out in love this week?

### **Question 7**

#### **Student Question:**

*Read 20:11–13. In the middle of his pain Jeremiah declares, “But the LORD is with me as a dread warrior,” and even calls others to “sing to the LORD.” How can genuine faith and real anguish coexist in the same heart, and what does this teach us about trusting God's presence in the fight?*

#### **Commentary and Teaching Notes**

Verses 11–13 reveal something remarkable about a heart of faith: in the very middle of his pain, Jeremiah declares, ‘But the LORD is with me as a dread warrior; therefore my persecutors will stumble’ (20:11). Even here, beaten and worn, he knows that God stands beside him like a mighty champion, and that the fight is finally God's.

Teach that faith does not require the absence of anguish. Jeremiah is not pretending the pain away; he is anchoring himself to a truth larger than the pain, that God is present and powerful. The ‘dread warrior’ is the same God who promised at his call, ‘I am with you to deliver you’ (1:8, 19). His presence is the ground of endurance.

Notice the astonishing turn in verse 13: ‘Sing to the LORD; praise the LORD! For he has delivered the life of the needy.’ In the same passage as his deepest complaint, he summons praise. This is the rhythm of biblical lament: the sufferer turns toward God, not away, and finds that worship and grief can occupy the same heart.

Apply it for the fight we are in. We are not promised the absence of opposition but the presence of the Warrior. ‘If God is for us, who can be against us?’ (Romans 8:31). Trusting God's presence in the battle does not deny the battle; it changes who we believe will have the last word.

## **Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues**

- God present as a 'dread warrior' beside His servant (20:11).
- Faith and anguish coexisting in the same heart.
- Lament that turns toward God and even into praise (20:13).
- God's presence, not the absence of opposition, as the ground of endurance (1:8; Romans 8:31).
- Trusting that God will have the last word in the fight.

## **Discussion Prompts**

- How can genuine faith and real anguish live in the same heart?
- What does it mean that God is with us 'as a dread warrior' in our struggles?
- How can you turn toward God in worship even while you hurt?

## **Question 8**

### **Student Question:**

*Jeremiah praised God and grieved bitterly almost in the same breath (20:13–14). When you are in pain, how do you keep turning toward God in honest worship rather than away from Him, and who helps you do that?*

### **Commentary and Teaching Notes**

This self-question takes the rhythm of verse 13, praise rising in the midst of pain, and presses it into the student's own habits of grief. When we hurt, we tend toward one of two unhelpful patterns, and this question gently exposes both.

Name the two patterns. Some perform a false cheerfulness, slapping a smile on the pain because they think faith means never admitting sorrow. Others go silent and distant, pulling away from God and His people in their hurt. Jeremiah did neither; he brought the whole storm, complaint and praise alike, straight to God.

Teach turning toward God rather than away. Honest lament keeps talking to God even when the words are raw. The Psalms model this constantly, moving from 'How long, O LORD?' to 'I will sing to the LORD' (Psalm 13). The point is direction: keep facing God with the pain.

Stress the help of others. Ask each person who helps them keep turning toward God when they hurt, a friend, a spouse, the church family, and encourage them not to grieve in isolation. Make it concrete: name one way to bring a current hurt honestly to God and one person who can help you do it.

## **Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues**

- The temptation toward false cheer or toward silent withdrawal in pain.



- Turning toward God rather than away when we hurt (Psalm 13).
- Honest lament as a form of faith, not its failure.
- The help of the church family in our grief.

### **Discussion Prompts**

- When you hurt, do you tend toward false cheer or toward distance from God?
- What would it look like to bring a current pain honestly to God?
- Who helps you keep turning toward God when you are grieving?

### **Question 9**

#### **Student Question:**

*Read 20:14–18. Jeremiah curses the day of his birth and asks why he was ever born to see “toil and sorrow.” Why would God preserve such raw, despairing words in Scripture, and what does this teach about honest lament, the place of grief before God, and the hope that holds even when feelings collapse?*

#### **Commentary and Teaching Notes**

This is the heaviest block of the lesson, and it is heavy not with doctrine alone but with raw human anguish. The chapter ends with Jeremiah cursing the day of his birth: ‘Cursed be the day on which I was born!... Why did I come out from the womb to see toil and sorrow, and spend my days in shame?’ (20:14–18). This is the same man who, verses earlier, called others to sing. Faith and despair stand side by side in one chapter, and the Holy Spirit let both stand.

Begin by sitting with how startling it is that God preserved these words. He did not tidy up His servant’s grief or cut it from the record for the sake of appearances. He let Jeremiah’s anguish stand in Scripture forever. That alone preaches: God is not scandalized by our honest sorrow. He would rather have our raw lament spoken to Him than a polished silence that hides from Him.

Teach the place of lament in the life of faith. A third of the Psalms are laments; Job cursed his birthday too (Job 3); even the Lord Jesus cried from the cross, ‘My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?’ (Matthew 27:46). Lament is not the opposite of faith; it is faith refusing to pretend, faith that brings its real pain to the real God. The teacher must give students permission to grieve honestly before God, especially those carrying private sorrows they have felt they must hide.

Hold the tension wisely. Jeremiah’s words are honest, but they are not the last word, nor are they prescriptive theology; we do not build a doctrine of despair from them. The hope of the passage is not in Jeremiah’s feelings, which collapse, but in the God who remains ‘a dread warrior’ with him even when his feelings give way (20:11). Feelings are real and may be voiced, but they are not the final truth about our situation; God is.

Land it with Christ-centered hope. The Lord Jesus entered this very darkness, crying out in anguish yet entrusting Himself to the Father, 'Father, into your hands I commit my spirit' (Luke 23:46). Because He bore our sorrows and rose again, our laments are never the end of the story. We may grieve out loud, honestly and fully, and still belong to the God who holds us, who keeps the broken-hearted, and who will wipe away every tear (Revelation 21:4). Honest lament and unshakable hope can, by grace, live in the same heart, as they did in Jeremiah and supremely in Christ.

### **Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues**

- God preserving Jeremiah's raw, despairing words rather than editing them out (20:14–18).
- Lament as a legitimate, faith-filled response to suffering (Psalm 13; Job 3; Matthew 27:46).
- Permission to grieve honestly before God rather than hide from Him.
- Feelings voiced honestly but not treated as the final truth; God, not our feelings, is the last word (20:11).
- Not building a doctrine of despair from a lament; holding grief and hope together.
- Christ entering our anguish and entrusting Himself to the Father (Luke 23:46).
- The hope that holds when feelings collapse, anchored in God who keeps the broken-hearted (Revelation 21:4).

### **Discussion Prompts**

- Why do you think God preserved such raw, despairing words in Scripture?
- How is honest lament a form of faith rather than its failure?
- How do we voice real grief while still letting God, not our feelings, have the last word?

### **Question 10**

#### **Student Question:**

*Look back over the whole passage, from the unmendable flask, through Jeremiah's beating and imprisonment, to the fire in his bones and his raw lament. Name one specific way the Lord Jesus, who Himself suffered for the truth and cried out in anguish yet trusted the Father, is forming endurance, honesty, or courage in you this week.*

### **Commentary and Teaching Notes**

The capstone gathers the sweep of these chapters: the unmendable flask, the beating and the stocks, the fire that would not be smothered, the faith and the anguish held in one heart. Each is an invitation to be formed into the likeness of Christ.

Resist abstraction. Press for one specific work the Lord is doing: an endurance to strengthen, a tender conscience to recover, a fire to stop suppressing, or a grief to bring honestly to God. Ask each person to choose their one thing.

Tie it directly to the Lord Jesus, who suffered for the truth, who cried out in anguish, and who yet entrusted Himself to the Father and rose victorious (Luke 23:46; Hebrews 12:2–3). We are formed not by pretending to be strong but by enduring with Him and bringing our whole hearts 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 trust, asking the Lord to make them faithful, honest, and courageous like His servant Jeremiah, and finally like Christ Himself.

### **Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues**

- Moving from study to formation and surrender (James 1:22).
- Christ as the One who suffered for truth, lamented honestly, and entrusted Himself to the Father (Luke 23:46).
- Endurance, honesty, and courage formed by walking with Jesus (Hebrews 12:2–3).
- The value of naming one concrete step of faithfulness.

### **Discussion Prompts**

- Which theme is the Lord pressing on you most: endurance, a tender conscience, the fire to speak, or honest lament?
- What is the one specific step of faithfulness or honesty you will take this week?
- How does walking with the suffering, risen Christ change the way you endure?