

The Books of Jeremiah and Lamentations, Teacher's Guide

Lesson 12: Two Baskets of Figs; Seventy Years; the Cup of Wrath

Jeremiah 24:1–25:38

Teaching Aim (Teacher Orientation)

Doctrinally, these chapters display God's sovereignty over individuals, nations, and time itself. The teacher should help students see that God evaluates the heart, not the circumstances (the two baskets), that His discipline aims at restoration and a heart that knows Him (24:7), and that He governs history to the very year, raising up and tearing down empires, even calling a pagan king "my servant" while still holding that king accountable (25:9–14). God is neither distant nor defeated; He is the Lord of the nations.

The chapters also press the certainty and justice of judgment. God's patience is real, twenty-three years of pleading, but it is not endless; persistent refusal to listen brings the cup of wrath, and no nation, however proud, escapes it (25:15–29). The teacher must keep this God-centered and never fatalistic: judgment falls on real, chosen, unrepented sin, and the same passage that warns of wrath holds out the hope of a softened heart and a return. Point forward, where natural, to the One who drank the cup of wrath in our place (Matthew 26:39).

Beyond doctrine, the lesson aims at formation. Students need to stop reading circumstances as God's final verdict, on themselves or others, and start asking whether suffering is softening them toward God. They need to take seriously a call to change they may have been resisting for years, and they need the deep steadiness that comes from trusting a God who holds history, and their own hard seasons, securely in His hands.

Question 1

Student Question:

Read 24:1–10. God shows Jeremiah two baskets of figs and calls the exiles "good" and those remaining in the land "bad," the reverse of how people judged them. What does this reveal about how God evaluates people compared with how we judge by circumstances?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Set the scene. The good figs are gone, already in Babylon with King Jehoiachin; the bad figs remain in Jerusalem under Zedekiah, feeling like the survivors who beat the odds. Then God flips the whole scorecard. The exiles are the good figs He will care for; the comfortable remnant are the bad figs He will make "a horror to all the kingdoms of the earth" (24:9). It is a stunning reversal of every human assumption.

Here is the doctrine: God does not judge by appearances. The world reads success, comfort, and security as signs of blessing, and loss, exile, and suffering as signs of curse. God reads the heart. Samuel learned the same lesson: "The LORD looks on the heart" (1 Samuel 16:7). What looks like ruin can be the very path of God's care.

Notice that God's evaluation is tied to direction, not just condition. The exiles will "return to me with their whole heart"; the remnant will keep trusting in themselves, in Egypt, in the temple building as a lucky charm. God sees where a heart is heading.

Apply it with care. This does not mean every suffering person is a 'good fig' and every comfortable person a 'bad' one; that would just flip the same error. It means circumstances are not verdicts. The real question is always the heart's direction toward or away from God.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- God evaluating the heart rather than outward circumstances (1 Samuel 16:7).
- The reversal of human assumptions about blessing and curse (24:5–9).
- Circumstances, whether comfort or suffering, as poor measures of God's favor.
- The heart's direction, toward God or away, as what God truly sees.
- The danger of simply inverting the error and reading all suffering as virtue.

Discussion Prompts

- Why does God's verdict on the two baskets surprise our normal way of thinking?
- How do we wrongly read comfort or suffering as signs of God's favor or displeasure?
- What does it mean that God looks at the heart's direction rather than our circumstances?

Question 2

Student Question:

The exiles looked cursed and the survivors looked blessed, yet God saw it the other way around. Where are you tempted to read your own circumstances, or someone else's, as God's final verdict, and how does this vision correct that?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self-question turns the two baskets into a mirror. We are constant interpreters of circumstance. A hard diagnosis, a lost job, a wayward child, and we quietly conclude God is against us. A run of success, and we assume He is pleased. The vision warns us that we are often reading the figs exactly backward.

Help students name the verdicts they have pronounced. Where have they decided, based on circumstances, that they are failing, cursed, or forgotten by God? Where have they looked down on someone whose life looks like a mess, assuming God must be against them too?

Bring the comfort. The exiles who looked abandoned were the ones on whom God set His eyes “for good” (24:6). Your hardest season may be the very place God is doing His deepest, kindest work. Circumstances are not the scoreboard.

Move toward repentance and trust. Invite each person to release one false verdict they have been carrying, about themselves or another, and to ask instead, “Lord, what are You doing in this, and where is my heart heading?”

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Reading circumstances as God’s final verdict on ourselves or others.
- The tendency to despair in hardship and presume in comfort.
- God setting His eyes ‘for good’ even on lives that look ruined (24:6).
- Replacing verdicts with the question of the heart’s direction.

Discussion Prompts

- What verdict about yourself have you reached based on your circumstances?
- Where have you assumed God is against someone whose life looks like a mess?
- How would it change things to ask ‘where is my heart heading?’ instead of reading the scoreboard?

Question 3

Student Question:

Read 24:5–7. God says of the exiles, “I will give them a heart to know that I am the LORD... for they shall return to me with their whole heart.” What does this teach about God’s purpose in discipline and the kind of heart He is after?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

God states His purpose for the exiles plainly: “I will give them a heart to know that I am the LORD, and they shall be my people and I will be their God, for they shall return to me with their whole heart” (24:7). The discipline of exile was never God giving up on His people; it was God going after their hearts. The goal of the painful pruning was a people who truly knew Him.

Teach the purpose of godly discipline. God does not afflict to destroy but to restore (Hebrews 12:10–11). The exile would burn the idolatry out of Judah and bring forth a people who, generations later, would never again chase after the foreign gods that had ruined them. Discipline is the severe mercy of a Father.

Notice the phrase ‘with their whole heart.’ God is not after partial, hedged, divided devotion. He wants the whole heart. The half-hearted religion of the remnant, trusting the temple while serving other gods, is exactly what He rejects.

Apply it tenderly. The hard things God allows in our lives are often aimed at the same target: a heart that knows Him, wholly and not partly. Help students see their own trials as possible instruments of this deep, restoring work.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- God's purpose in discipline as restoration, not destruction (Hebrews 12:10–11).
- Discipline aimed at producing a heart that truly knows God (24:7).
- God's desire for whole-hearted, not divided, devotion.
- Exile as a severe mercy that purged Judah's idolatry.
- Our own trials as possible instruments of God's restoring work.

Discussion Prompts

- What does it tell us that God's goal in the exile was 'a heart to know that I am the LORD'?
- How is God's discipline an act of mercy rather than abandonment?
- Why is God not content with partial or divided devotion?

Question 4

Student Question:

God's aim was a people who would "return to me with their whole heart." What in your own heart is still held back from God, and what would whole-hearted return look like for you?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self-question takes God's longing for whole-hearted return and makes it personal. Most of us are not in open rebellion; we are in quiet reservation. We have given God most of our hearts but fenced off a room or two: a relationship, a habit, a fear, an area of money or ambition we would rather He not touch.

Help students locate the fenced-off room. Ask gently, "If God put His hand on one part of your life and said, 'Give Me this too,' what would it be?" The whole-hearted return God praised in the exiles begins with surrendering exactly that.

Distinguish whole-hearted from perfect. God is not asking for flawless performance but for an undivided 'yes,' a heart that holds nothing back even while it is still growing. The widow who gave two coins gave wholly, not perfectly.

Move toward a concrete act of surrender. Invite each person to name the one held-back area and to take a first step of giving it to God this week, in prayer, confession, or a changed decision.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The difference between open rebellion and quiet reservation.

- Identifying the fenced-off area we withhold from God.
- Whole-hearted surrender as undivided, not flawless, devotion.
- Taking a concrete first step of giving God the held-back area.

Discussion Prompts

- If God asked for one more part of your life, which part would you least want to give?
- What would whole-hearted return look like for you in that specific area?
- What is the difference between giving God a perfect heart and giving Him an undivided one?

Question 5

Student Question:

Read 25:1–11. For twenty-three years Jeremiah warned the people, “Turn now, every one of you,” and they would not listen, so God announces seventy years of Babylon. What does this reveal about God’s patience, and about the seriousness of refusing His repeated call?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

God recounts His own patience: “For twenty-three years... the word of the LORD has come to me, and I have spoken persistently to you, but you have not listened” (25:3). Add the other prophets God sent “persistently,” and the picture is of a God who pleaded for decades. Only after this long patience does He announce the seventy years of Babylon.

Teach the patience of God. He “is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance” (2 Peter 3:9). The judgment, when it comes, is never hasty; it falls only after long, spurned mercy.

But teach also the seriousness of refusing that call. God names their sin precisely: “you have not listened... you have not inclined your ears to hear” (25:4). The issue was not ignorance but unwillingness. Decades of warning, deliberately ignored, finally ripen into judgment.

Apply it soberly and hopefully. God’s patience is not permission. The same patience that has given us time is meant to lead us to repentance, not to lull us into thinking the call can be ignored forever (Romans 2:4–5).

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The long patience of God before judgment falls (2 Peter 3:9).
- God’s repeated, persistent call through His prophets (25:3–4).
- Sin as unwillingness to listen, not mere ignorance.
- The seriousness of refusing God’s repeated call.
- God’s patience meant to lead to repentance, not presumption (Romans 2:4–5).

Discussion Prompts

- What does twenty-three years of warning tell us about God's heart?
- Why is the refusal 'you have not inclined your ears to hear' so serious?
- How can God's patience be misread as permission to keep ignoring Him?

Question 6

Student Question:

God says the people "have not listened" and "have not inclined your ears to hear" through decades of warning. Where have you been hearing God's call to change for a long time without yet obeying, and what keeps you from listening?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self-question presses the people's 'you have not listened' into the student's own life. Most of us have at least one area where God has been speaking the same word for a long time, through Scripture, through conscience, through wise friends, and we keep not listening. The seventy years began because a nation would not incline its ear.

Help students name the long-resisted call. A reconciliation they keep postponing. A sin they keep negotiating with. A step of obedience, generosity, or service they keep meaning to take 'someday.' The danger is that 'someday' becomes 'never.'

Expose what blocks listening. Often it is not doubt about what God wants but unwillingness to pay its cost, or the comfortable assumption that there is always more time. Both are exactly the posture God judged in Judah.

Move toward obedience now. Invite each person to take one concrete step this week on the very thing they have long been hearing and avoiding, turning hearing into doing (James 1:22).

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- A long-resisted call we have heard but not obeyed.
- The assumption of 'someday' that becomes 'never.'
- Unwillingness, not ignorance, as the usual barrier to obedience.
- Turning hearing into doing without further delay (James 1:22).

Discussion Prompts

- What has God been saying to you for a long time that you keep not obeying?
- What is really keeping you from listening, the cost, or the assumption of more time?
- What is one concrete step of obedience you could take this week instead of 'someday'?

Question 7

Student Question:

Read 25:8–14. God calls pagan Nebuchadnezzar “my servant” and uses Babylon to discipline Judah, yet promises to punish Babylon too “for their iniquity.” What does this teach about God’s sovereignty over the nations and over the whole course of history?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This is a staggering claim: God calls pagan Nebuchadnezzar “my servant” (25:9). The Babylonian king, who would never bow to the LORD, is nonetheless an instrument in God’s hand to discipline Judah. God is so sovereign that even those who do not acknowledge Him serve His purposes. He governs the nations as surely as He governs His own people.

Yet God’s sovereignty does not erase Babylon’s guilt. In the same breath He promises, “I will punish the king of Babylon and that nation... for their iniquity” (25:12). Babylon is used by God and still accountable to God. His use of a wicked nation does not excuse that nation’s wickedness. Both truths stand: God rules over the nations, and the nations answer for their sin.

Teach God’s rule over history. He sets the seventy years and the end of the seventy years. He raises Babylon and brings Babylon down. History is not chaos and not blind fate; it is governed by a holy God working out His purposes through the rise and fall of empires (Daniel 2:21; 4:17).

Apply it for assurance. The same God who held the seventh-century world in His hands holds ours. Tyrants, elections, wars, and collapses do not catch Him off guard or wrench history out of His control. He is the Lord of the nations still.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- God’s sovereignty so complete that even a pagan king is ‘my servant’ (25:9).
- God using a wicked nation without excusing its wickedness (25:12).
- God’s rule over the rise and fall of empires (Daniel 2:21; 4:17).
- History as governed by God’s purposes, not chaos or blind fate.
- Both truths held: God rules the nations, and the nations answer for their sin.

Discussion Prompts

- How can God call a pagan conqueror ‘my servant’ and still punish him for his sin?
- What does God’s setting of the seventy years teach about His rule over history?
- How does God’s sovereignty over empires comfort you about today’s world?

Question 8

Student Question:

If God is truly sovereign over empires, headlines, and the rise and fall of powers far bigger than you, how should that steady you when the world around you feels chaotic or out of control?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self-question takes God's sovereignty over nations and brings it down to the student's anxious heart. We live in a time of alarming headlines, and it is easy to feel that history is a runaway train and our small lives are at the mercy of forces beyond anyone's control. These chapters say otherwise.

Anchor the comfort in the text. The God who named the exact length of the exile, who wielded Babylon and then judged Babylon, is not wringing His hands over the news. 'The Most High rules the kingdom of men' (Daniel 4:17). Nothing on the world stage has slipped His grip.

Distinguish trust from denial. God's sovereignty does not mean nothing bad will happen; Judah really did go into exile. It means even the bad is held within His purposes and cannot finally thwart His good ends for His people. We are steadied not by pretending the storm is mild but by trusting the One who rules the storm.

Move toward peace and action. Invite each person to name one global or personal fear that feels out of control and to consciously place it in the hands of the God who rules the nations, choosing trust over anxious despair this week.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- God's sovereignty as an anchor against anxiety over world events (Daniel 4:17).
- Trust that holds even when real hardship is not removed.
- The difference between faith in God's rule and denial of danger.
- Placing specific fears into the hands of the God who governs history.

Discussion Prompts

- When the headlines alarm you, what does God's rule over the nations say to your fear?
- How is trusting God's sovereignty different from pretending nothing bad will happen?
- What specific fear could you hand over to the God who governs history this week?

Question 9

Student Question:

Read 25:15–29. God hands “the cup of the wine of wrath” to nation after nation, and none escape drinking it. What does the certainty of this judgment reveal about God's holiness and His response to persistent, unrepented sin?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

The cup of wrath is one of Scripture's most sobering images. God tells Jeremiah, “Take from my hand this cup of the wine of wrath, and make all the nations to whom I send you drink it” (25:15). Nation after nation is named, Egypt, the Philistines, Edom, Moab, Tyre, and on through the list, and the chapter is emphatic: they will drink, they cannot refuse, and Babylon itself drinks last of all. No one escapes.

Teach the certainty and justice of judgment. This is not arbitrary divine temper; it is the holy response of a righteous God to persistent, unrepented sin. A God who could look at the cruelty, idolatry, and bloodshed of the nations and simply shrug would not be good. His wrath is the measure of how seriously He takes the evil that destroys His world. 'Shall not the Judge of all the earth do what is just?' (Genesis 18:25).

Resist two distortions. Do not portray a God of mere fury detached from love; the same God wept over Judah and promised to restore the exiles. And do not soften the wrath into something painless; the cup is real, and the warning is meant to make us tremble and turn. Holiness and love are not at war in God.

Now lift the eyes to the gospel. There came a night when the sinless Son of God knelt in a garden and prayed, 'Father... let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will' (Matthew 26:39). The cup He faced was this cup, the cup of wrath against sin, and He drank it to the dregs in our place. The certainty of judgment in Jeremiah 25 is the dark backdrop that makes the cross blaze with grace. The wrath we deserved, He absorbed.

Apply it with sober hope. Because Christ drank the cup, all who are united to Him by faith and baptism need not drink it (Romans 5:9; 6:3-4). The certainty of judgment is real, but so is the escape God has provided. The right response to the cup of wrath is not despair but flight to the Christ who drank it for us.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The certainty of God's judgment on persistent, unrepented sin (25:15-29).
- God's wrath as the holy response of a righteous Judge, not arbitrary fury (Genesis 18:25).
- Holding God's holiness and love together, neither softened nor severed.
- Christ drinking the cup of wrath in our place (Matthew 26:39).
- Escape from wrath for those united to Christ by faith and baptism (Romans 5:9; 6:3-4).

Discussion Prompts

- Why would a good and loving God have wrath against persistent sin?
- How does the certainty that 'all the nations' must drink reveal God's holiness?
- How does the cup Jesus prayed about in Gethsemane change the way you read this passage?

Question 10

Student Question:

Look back over both chapters, the two baskets, the seventy years, and the cup of wrath. Name one specific way the Lord Jesus is using this sobering passage to deepen your trust in God's sovereignty or your seriousness about sin this week.

Commentary and Teaching Notes

The capstone gathers the whole lesson, the two baskets, the seventy years, and the cup of wrath, and asks the student to respond. The aim is not just to understand God's sovereignty and judgment but to be changed by them, drawn into deeper trust and a more serious reckoning with sin.

Press for specifics. Perhaps the Lord is using the two baskets to free someone from reading their hard season as a curse. Perhaps the seventy years are pressing someone to finally listen to a long-resisted call. Perhaps the cup of wrath is awakening fresh gratitude for the Christ who drank it, and fresh seriousness about sins they have been excusing.

Tie it explicitly to Jesus. Every thread of this passage points to Him: He is the one who fulfills the heart that knows God, He reigns over the nations whose rise and fall He governs, and He drank the cup of wrath so we never have to. We are formed by trusting and treasuring Him, not by trying harder.

Invite each person to name one concrete way they will respond this week, a fear surrendered, a call obeyed, a sin forsaken, a thanksgiving offered, and to carry it into prayer and action.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Moving from understanding to transformation (James 1:22).
- Deeper trust in God's sovereignty over our hard seasons and the world.
- Greater seriousness about sin in light of the cup of wrath.
- Christ as the one who fulfills, governs, and rescues throughout this passage.

Discussion Prompts

- Which part of this passage is the Lord pressing on you most this week?
- How is God deepening your trust in His sovereignty or your seriousness about sin?
- What is the one concrete response you will carry into this week?