

The Books of Jeremiah and Lamentations, Teacher's Guide

Lesson 21: The Remnant, Flight to Egypt, and Final Oracles

Jeremiah 40:1–45:5

Teaching Aim (Teacher Orientation)

Doctrinally, this passage continues to display God as the sovereign Lord of history and the just Judge whose verdict is so plain that even a pagan captain can repeat it (40:2–3). At the same time, in His answer to the remnant (42:7–12), God reveals His astonishing covenant mercy: He is ready to “build and plant” even this guilty, broken remnant if they will simply trust and obey. The teacher should help the class hold both truths, the certainty of God’s justice and the tenderness of His mercy, and see that even God’s sternest warnings about Egypt are spoken in love, to keep His people from the destruction they are running toward.

The heart of the lesson, however, is a piercing study of self-deception. The remnant models the all-too-common sin of seeking God’s will while having already decided, then branding His answer a lie when it crosses their wishes. The teacher’s aim is to expose this in the class’s own hearts: how easily we “pray about” decisions we have already made, how disobedience must always call God a liar to justify itself, and how idolatry survives by rewriting our history (44:17–18). For the church of Christ teacher, this is the practical heart of obedient faith over against mere religious motion: God desires obedience, not the empty forms of seeking Him. Press also that the remnant truly fell away after knowing the truth, a sober warning against presumption.

Beyond the doctrine, the lesson aims at formation through the quiet jewel of chapter 45. To weary Baruch, tempted to want “great things” in a collapsing world, God gives both a gentle rebuke and a precious promise: seek not greatness, but I will give you your life. The teacher’s goal is that students leave examining where they reach for greatness, recognition, security, advancement, and learn the deep contentment of wanting God Himself more than any gift, trusting the Lord Jesus to be enough.

Question 1

Student Question:

Read 40:1–6. The pagan captain of the guard tells Jeremiah, “The Lord your God pronounced this disaster... because you sinned against the Lord and did not obey his voice.” What does it reveal about God’s sovereignty over history, and about the clarity of His justice, that even a Babylonian officer can rightly name why Jerusalem fell?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Begin with the remarkable scene in 40:1–3. Nebuzaradan, a Babylonian captain, releases Jeremiah and preaches him a sermon: “The Lord your God pronounced this disaster... because

you sinned against the Lord and did not obey his voice.” A pagan officer states God’s verdict more clearly than most of Judah ever would. God’s justice is so plain that even the nations can read it.

Teach God’s sovereignty over history here. Babylon imagined it conquered Judah by its own strength, but God was the true author of the judgment, using even a foreign empire as His instrument (Jeremiah 25:9). The Lord rules the rise and fall of nations; nothing in the swirl of human politics escapes His hand.

Note the clarity of God’s justice. The fall of Jerusalem was not random misfortune or mere geopolitics. It was the just and announced consequence of a people who “sinned against the Lord and did not obey his voice.” God’s judgments are never arbitrary; they are righteous responses to real sin.

Apply it soberly and warmly. If even an outsider could see why judgment came, how much more should God’s own people learn to read His hand in their lives and take obedience seriously? The God who rules history calls us, today, simply to obey His voice.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- God’s sovereignty over the nations; Babylon as His instrument (Jeremiah 25:9).
- The clarity of God’s justice, plain even to a pagan officer (40:2-3).
- Judgment as the righteous consequence of disobedience, not random misfortune.
- God as the true Lord of history behind the movements of empires.

Discussion Prompts

- What does it mean that even a Babylonian could name why Jerusalem fell?
- How does God’s rule over the nations give you confidence today?
- Why is it important that God’s judgments are just and never arbitrary?

Question 2

Student Question:

Gedaliah was a good and trusting man who was murdered by a jealous rival he refused to suspect (40:13-41:3). When has someone’s envy or treachery wounded you or someone you love, and how did you keep your heart from turning hard?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self-question grows out of Gedaliah’s murder. He was a good, generous, trusting governor who was warned that Ishmael meant to kill him and refused to believe such treachery possible (40:13-16). His openness was beautiful and it cost him his life; he was struck down at his own table by a jealous man of royal blood (41:1-3).

Acknowledge the painful realism. The world really does contain envy and betrayal, and sometimes the kindest people are the ones cut down. Students who have been wounded by another's jealousy need to know Scripture does not pretend this away.

Help them tend their hearts. The danger after betrayal is not just the wound but the hardening, the vow never to trust again, the cynicism that calcifies around the pain. Gedaliah's death is a tragedy, but bitterness would be a second one, this time in us.

Point to the only safe place to bring such wounds. We entrust our case, and our betrayers, to the God who judges justly (Romans 12:19), and we ask Him to keep our hearts tender even when others have been cruel. Forgiveness is not pretending it did not hurt; it is releasing the debt into God's hands.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The reality of envy and betrayal in a fallen world (41:1-3).
- The danger of hardening into cynicism after being wounded.
- Entrusting our betrayers to the God who judges justly (Romans 12:19).
- Keeping the heart tender without becoming naive.

Discussion Prompts

- When has someone's envy or treachery wounded you?
- How do you keep a wound from hardening into permanent cynicism?
- What does it mean to entrust a betrayer to God rather than to bitterness?

Question 3

Student Question:

Read 42:1-6. The remnant vows, "Whether it is good or bad, we will obey the voice of the Lord our God." What does this passage teach us about the difference between sincerely surrendering to God's will and merely going through the motions of seeking it while our hearts are already set?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Verses 1-6 set the trap of the whole passage, and it is a trap the remnant builds for themselves. They come to Jeremiah with words that could not sound more surrendered: "Whatever the Lord your God says, we will do it... whether it is good or bad, we will obey the voice of the Lord our God." On the surface it is a model of submission.

But teach the class to listen with discernment. The test of real surrender is not the beauty of the words before the answer comes; it is the obedience that follows after the answer arrives, especially when the answer is hard. Anyone can vow to obey an unknown command; the question is whether we will obey the known one.

Expose the subtle counterfeit. There is a way of “seeking God’s will” that is really seeking God’s signature on a decision already made. We frame it as devotion, but our hearts are not open; they are merely hoping to be confirmed. God is not fooled by the language of surrender when the heart has already chosen.

Apply it to the practice of prayer and counsel. When we pray about a decision, are we genuinely willing to hear no? Are we asking godly people for counsel ready to be corrected, or only to be agreed with? True seeking holds the hands open before the answer is known.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The test of surrender is obedience after the answer, not fine words before it (42:5–6).
- Seeking God’s confirmation versus seeking God’s will.
- The counterfeit of devotion that has already decided.
- Genuine prayer and counsel hold the hands open to a hard answer.

Discussion Prompts

- How can you tell whether you are seeking God’s will or just His approval?
- Why is it harder to obey a known command than to vow about an unknown one?
- When you ask for counsel, are you truly willing to be corrected?

Question 4

Student Question:

Have you ever asked God (or godly counselors) for direction about a decision you had, in truth, already made? What did that reveal about your heart, and what would honest seeking have looked like instead?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self-question presses the trap into the student’s own life. Most of us have done exactly what the remnant did: asked God, or a trusted friend, or a mentor, about a decision we had already secretly made, hoping to be confirmed rather than directed. It is one of the most common forms of self-deception in the believer’s life.

Help them recognize the signs. We tend to ask leading questions, to seek out the counselors most likely to agree, to keep praying until we get the answer we wanted, and to feel irritation rather than gratitude when corrected. The heart that has decided reveals itself in how it handles a “no.”

Be gentle but honest. This is not about scrupulously doubting every choice; it is about whether we are truly teachable. God is not displeased by our planning; He is grieved by the pretense of seeking Him when we have shut the door to His answer.

Move toward a practice. Invite students to think of a current decision and ask honestly: “Am I willing to hear God say no here?” If the answer is no, they have found, not a decision, but an idol of self-will to bring before the Lord.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The common self-deception of asking after deciding.
- Signs of an unteachable heart: leading questions, chosen agreement, irritation at correction.
- The difference between godly planning and pretended seeking.
- Teachability as the mark of true seeking (Psalm 25:9).

Discussion Prompts

- When have you ‘asked God’ about something you had already decided?
- What did your reaction to correction reveal about your heart?
- Is there a current decision where you are unwilling to hear God say no?

Question 5

Student Question:

Read 42:7–22. God’s answer is to stay in the land with a beautiful promise: “I will build you up and not pull you down... for I relent of the disaster that I did to you.” How does God’s patient willingness to “build and plant” this guilty remnant display His covenant mercy, and how is even His warning about Egypt an act of love?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

God’s answer in 42:7–12 is breathtaking in its mercy. To a remnant that is the guilty leftover of a judged nation, God says, “If you will remain in this land, then I will build you up and not pull you down... for I relent of the disaster that I did to you.” The God of judgment is longing to plant and to build. His mercy reaches even here.

Teach the covenant heart of God. He takes no pleasure in the death of the wicked but desires that they turn and live (Ezekiel 18:23). After all that has happened, God’s posture toward the remnant is not vengeance but a Father’s outstretched hand: stay, trust me, and I will be good to you.

Show that even the warning is love. God tells them plainly that if they go to Egypt, the sword and famine they fear will follow them there and overtake them (42:13–17). This is not a threat from a harsh God; it is a parent shouting a warning to a child running toward traffic. Stern words can be the truest mercy.

Apply it to the student’s view of God. Many imagine God as reluctant to forgive, eager to punish. This passage corrects that. God is so ready to build and plant that He relents of disaster and

warns His people away from ruin. The kindness of God is meant to lead us to repentance (Romans 2:4).

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- God's covenant mercy: His desire to build and plant even the guilty (42:10).
- God takes no pleasure in the death of the wicked (Ezekiel 18:23).
- Even God's warnings are acts of love, like a parent's shout of alarm (42:13-17).
- The kindness of God meant to lead us to repentance (Romans 2:4).

Discussion Prompts

- What does God's eagerness to 'build and plant' reveal about His heart?
- How is a stern warning sometimes the truest form of mercy?
- Where have you misjudged God as reluctant to forgive?

Question 6

Student Question:

God told the remnant their fear of Babylon was driving them toward the very destruction they were fleeing in Egypt (42:13-16). Where is fear pushing you toward a decision that feels safe but actually leads you away from God, and what would trusting Him instead require?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self-question turns on the remnant's root problem: fear. They were so afraid of Babylon's revenge that they fled toward Egypt, the very place where God said the thing they feared would catch them (42:13-16). Fear made them run from a danger into a worse one, away from the God who promised to protect them.

Help students see how fear distorts our sense of safety. The "safe" option that fear urges on us is often the one that leads us away from God, while the path of trust feels exposed and risky precisely because it requires depending on Him. Egypt looked like security; it was a tomb.

Name the modern Egypts. We flee to financial hoarding for security, to compromise for acceptance, to control for peace of mind, to a relationship or a habit for comfort. Each promises safety and quietly leads us out of the land of God's blessing.

Move to a concrete examination. Ask each student to name one decision currently being driven by fear, and to ask whether it is leading them toward God or away from Him. Trust may feel less safe in the moment, but it is the only true refuge.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- How fear distorts our sense of what is safe (42:13-16).

- The 'safe' choice that actually leads us away from God.
- Modern 'Egypt' we flee to for security: money, control, compromise.
- Trust as the only true refuge, even when it feels exposed.

Discussion Prompts

- Where is fear pushing you toward a 'safe' choice that leads away from God?
- What is your modern 'Egypt,' the refuge you run to instead of God?
- What would trusting God instead of your fear actually require this week?

Question 7

Student Question:

Read 43:1–7. The leaders accuse Jeremiah of lying, reject God's clear word, and drag the prophet and Baruch down to Egypt. What does this account teach us about the deceit of a heart that has decided to disobey, and how disobedience must always call God's truth a lie to justify itself?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Verses 1–7 of chapter 43 are the hinge of the whole episode, and they are deeply revealing. The moment Jeremiah finishes delivering God's answer, the leaders declare, "You are telling a lie. The Lord our God did not send you." They had vowed to obey whatever God said; now that they have heard it, they call the messenger a liar and do the opposite.

Teach the deceit of a heart set on disobedience. Notice the necessity here: to disobey God, they first had to discredit His word. Disobedience can never simply admit, "God said this and I refuse." It must always reframe God's truth as a lie, the messenger as untrustworthy, the command as misunderstood. Sin is a great rewriter of stories.

Show how this works in our own age and hearts. When we are determined to do what God forbids, we do not usually deny God outright; we explain the verse away, question whether it really applies, find a teacher who says otherwise, or decide the messenger has an agenda. The pattern is ancient: to keep our sin, we must first silence the truth.

Apply it as a warning and a mercy. The warning: beware the moment you find yourself needing to discredit a clear word of God to keep a course you have chosen. The mercy: the very fact that you must argue against the truth is a sign your conscience still hears it. Stop, and obey the word you are tempted to call a lie.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Disobedience must discredit God's word to justify itself (43:2).
- The deceit of a heart already set on its own way.
- How we 'explain away' clear commands to keep a chosen course.
- Needing to argue against the truth is a sign the conscience still hears it.

- The danger of branding faithful messengers as liars.

Discussion Prompts

- Why must disobedience always call God's word a lie?
- Where are you tempted to 'explain away' a clear command of God?
- How might the urge to argue against a truth reveal your conscience at work?

Question 8

Student Question:

The remnant did the very thing they had sworn not to do, the moment God's answer crossed their wishes (43:2-4). Where have you made a promise to God in a hard moment that you quietly abandoned when obedience grew costly?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self-question lands on broken vows. In the panic after Gedaliah's murder, the remnant swore total obedience; ten days later, when the answer crossed their wishes, they abandoned the vow entirely (43:2-4). The promise made in the storm evaporated when keeping it grew costly.

Help students recognize the pattern in their own lives. We make promises to God in crisis, in a hospital waiting room, a financial fright, a moment of conviction, and quietly let them go when the pressure lifts or obedience proves expensive. "If you get me through this, Lord, I will..."

Teach the seriousness of vows without crushing the class. Ecclesiastes warns, "It is better that you should not vow than that you should vow and not pay" (Ecclesiastes 5:5). God remembers what we said even when we have conveniently forgotten. Yet the door of repentance stands open for the vow we have neglected.

Move to honest recollection and renewal. Ask students to recall a promise to God they have let slip. The point is not guilt for its own sake but return: to name the abandoned vow, repent, and take it up again in the strength God supplies.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Vows made in crisis and abandoned when obedience grows costly (43:2-4).
- The seriousness of promises to God (Ecclesiastes 5:4-5).
- God remembers what we vowed even when we forget.
- The open door to repent of and renew a neglected vow.

Discussion Prompts

- What promise have you made to God in a hard moment and quietly dropped?

- Why do vows made in crisis so often fail when the pressure lifts?
- What neglected commitment might God be calling you to take up again?

Question 9

Student Question:

Read 44:15–19 with 44:24–28. The people insist on worshiping the “queen of heaven,” claiming, “When we burned incense to her... we had plenty of food and prospered.” How does this stubborn idolatry expose the way the human heart rewrites its own history to defend its idols, and what does it reveal about the deep nature of all idolatry as trusting something other than the living God?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This is the heaviest block of the lesson, and it lays the human heart bare. In Egypt, Jeremiah confronts the people’s idolatry, and instead of repenting they answer with stunning defiance: “We will do everything that we have vowed, make offerings to the queen of heaven... For then we had plenty of food, and prospered, and saw no disaster” (44:17). They will not stop worshiping their idol.

Teach how idolatry rewrites history to survive. The people claim that in their idol-worshiping days they prospered, and that trouble only came when they stopped, an outright reversal of the truth, for it was precisely their idolatry that brought the judgment. Idols cannot survive an honest look at the past, so the idolater must edit the record. We defend our idols by lying to ourselves about what they have actually cost us.

Expose the deep nature of all idolatry. At root, idolatry is trusting and loving something other than the living God for our security and joy, “our food,” our prosperity, our safety. The ‘queen of heaven’ promised the harvest; God was crowded out. And the New Testament names the modern form plainly: covetousness is idolatry (Colossians 3:5). The idol need not be a statue; it is anything we look to in God’s place.

Help students find their own ‘queen of heaven.’ What do we credit for our security and prosperity? Money, career, image, control, a relationship? And how do we rewrite our history to protect it, remembering the seasons of compromise as our good times and blaming our troubles on the very obedience that would heal us? The diagnosis must get personal.

Then hold out the gospel remedy. The cure for idolatry is not merely smashing the idol but seeing the living God as better, truer, more satisfying than anything the idol ever promised. We were made to find our security and joy in Him; in Christ, the true and living God offers Himself as the only fountain that does not run dry (Jeremiah 2:13). Repentance turns from the broken cisterns back to the spring of living water.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Stubborn idolatry that refuses to repent even after judgment (44:16–17).
- How idolatry rewrites our history to defend itself (44:17–18).
- The deep nature of all idolatry: trusting something other than the living God.
- Covetousness as idolatry, the modern ‘queen of heaven’ (Colossians 3:5).
- The cure: seeing God as better than the idol, the fountain over the broken cistern (Jeremiah 2:13).

Discussion Prompts

- How does the human heart rewrite its history to defend its idols?
- What is your own ‘queen of heaven,’ the thing you look to in God’s place?
- Why is the cure for idolatry not just removing the idol but seeing God as better?

Question 10

Student Question:

Read 45:1–5. To weary Baruch, who groans, “Woe is me... I am weary with my groaning and find no rest,” God says, “Do you seek great things for yourself? Seek them not,” yet promises, “I will give you your life as a prize of war.” Looking back over this whole passage of pretended seeking, broken vows, and idolatry, name one specific way the Lord Jesus is teaching you to seek Him rather than greatness, and to be content with the gift of Himself.

Commentary and Teaching Notes

The capstone rests on the quiet jewel of chapter 45, God’s personal word to weary Baruch, and gathers the whole passage into it. Baruch, the faithful scribe who wrote down Jeremiah’s words and shared his sufferings, groans, “Woe is me... I am weary with my groaning and find no rest.” In a collapsing world, he is tempted to want ‘great things’ for himself, and God lovingly redirects him: “Do you seek great things for yourself? Seek them not.”

Set Baruch beside the rest of the passage. The remnant grasped at their own way and lost everything; the idolaters clutched their ‘queen of heaven’ for prosperity; and now faithful Baruch is gently warned away from the same disease in its respectable form, the longing for greatness, recognition, security in a world that is passing away. The cure for every grasping heart is the same: seek God, not greatness.

Press the precious promise. God does not leave Baruch empty. “I will give you your life as a prize of war in all places to which you may go.” In a world where Baruch could keep nothing else, God promised the gift of his very life and, by implication, the gift of God’s own presence with him wherever he went. That is enough. Godliness with contentment is great gain (1 Timothy 6:6).

Tie it explicitly to Christ. The Lord Jesus calls us away from grasping for greatness and into the rest of trusting the Father, “Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you

rest" (Matthew 11:28). He emptied Himself rather than grasp at greatness (Philippians 2:5-8), and He is Himself the prize that cannot be taken from us. To have Christ is to have enough.

Bring it home to one concrete step. Ask each student to name the 'great thing' they are reaching for and one way the Lord Jesus is teaching them this week to seek Him instead, to lay the ambition down and be content with the gift of God's presence and their life in His hands. Let the lesson end not in fear of the idolaters' fate but in the deep, restful contentment of wanting God more than greatness.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Seeking God rather than greatness, the cure for every grasping heart (45:5).
- The danger of wanting 'great things' for ourselves even in faithful service.
- God's precious promise: our life and His presence as our portion (45:5; 1 Timothy 6:6).
- Christ as the One who refused to grasp at greatness and is Himself our prize (Philippians 2:5-8).
- Contentment in God as the lasting answer to a weary, reaching heart (Matthew 11:28).

Discussion Prompts

- What 'great thing' are you reaching for that God may be asking you to release?
- How is having Christ Himself a greater treasure than any greatness you crave?
- What is one way Jesus is teaching you contentment in Him this week?