

# BIBLE BACKGROUND

JOURNEY 12: “A Rotten Sash, a Broken Pot”

*Jeremiah, the Weeping Prophet*

## Key Passage:

Jeremiah 13:1–14;  
18:1–17; 19:1–13

## Key Verse:

*“For I know the plans I have for you. . . to give you a future and a hope.”*

—Jeremiah 29:11

## Key Word:

*Future*

## Key Thought:

I can trust God with my future.

## A “WEEPY” PROPHET

Jeremiah was one of Judah’s greatest prophets prior to and after the Exile. He became known as the “weeping” prophet because he grieved over the sins of Judah’s people. He had been reluctant to accept God’s call. God countered his objections by telling him that when he was formed in his mother’s womb, God had designated him as a “*prophet to the nations.*” Jeremiah complained that he was only a young man, but God promised to be with him. As a sign of His presence, God touched Jeremiah’s mouth to signify that the words he would speak would come from the mind and the heart of God Himself.

Jeremiah prophesied to Judah during the reigns of five different kings. He had helped young King Josiah bring revival to Judah. He lived at the same time as Daniel and Ezekiel, two other great prophets. After Josiah’s tragic death in a war with Egypt, the end of Judah seemed eminent. Within 12 years, Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon marched his troops into Judah, burning Jerusalem to the ground and deporting many of the rich and wealthy to Babylon. Daniel and his friends were among this first deportation. Jeremiah witnessed this devastation firsthand including the destruction of the temple in 587 B.C. No wonder Jeremiah cried so often. All that he loved and valued lay in ruins.

## JEREMIAH'S MESSAGE

God told Jeremiah to walk up and down the streets of Judah to find one righteous person. When this proved impossible, God told Jeremiah to tell the people that the enemies of Judah would soon overpower the nation (Jeremiah 15). The charges against the people were like those Isaiah had spoken:

- The people had forsaken the true worship of God.
- They served foreign gods by worshipping idols.
- They made alliances with nations that hated God.

Judah's punishment would be to serve foreigners in a land that was not their own (Jeremiah 5:19). The people did not like what Jeremiah said so they persecuted him often (Jeremiah 11:18–20). Since the message was not to their liking, they decided to kill the messenger. One time he barely escaped with his life (26:7–16) and another time he was beaten and put into prison (37:11–16), but God spared his life.

## ONE PICTURE: A THOUSAND WORDS

Jeremiah effectively used visual aids and images to pique the curiosity of his listeners. He used these objects to illustrate God's displeasure with their sin.

### **A Ruined Loincloth: Jeremiah 13:1–14**

A loincloth was a wide, long strip of linen men wrapped around the waist and between the legs. God told Jeremiah to purchase a new one and to wear it for a while without washing it. He then told Jeremiah to take it off, bury it in a crack in some rocks beside the Euphrates River and leave it there for a while. Jeremiah retrieved the cloth at God's command. It was rotting and had a terrible odor. Jeremiah was to show the cloth to the people and explain what it represented. Just as a loincloth is worn close to a man's skin, so God wanted Israel and Judah to remain close to Him, but they refused. Their disobedience and idolatry were as revolting to God as the rotten cloth was to Jeremiah. Unless they repented, God had no choice but to destroy them.

### **A Broken Pot, A Shattered Jar: Jeremiah 18:1–19:15**

God told Jeremiah to go to a potter's shop. As Jeremiah looked on, the potter had difficulty making the clay take the shape he wanted. The potter stopped and reworked the clay to make a new vessel. God told Jeremiah that Israel was like a clay pot. Why

couldn't God do the same thing to His people that the potter had done to the clay? Unless repentance occurred, the end for Judah would be tragic.

God told Jeremiah to buy a clay jar and gather the elders and the older priests in the Hinnon valley just outside the city walls. Jeremiah was to throw the pot down so that it would shatter. He told the men God was going to break the people of Judah and their cities just like the pot. Jerusalem would be filled with rotting bodies. Still, the priests and elders did not repent.

## **Two Baskets of Figs: Jeremiah 24:1–10**

God showed Jeremiah two baskets of figs sitting in front of the temple. The basket of good figs represented the people the Babylonians had first carried into exile. God would protect these and allow them to return to the land after 70 years (25:11–12). This occurred under the leadership of Ezra and Nehemiah.

The other basket was full of rotten fruit. This represented the people who were left behind to wander through the streets of their destroyed cities. These people God would scatter throughout the nations of the world; they would know disease, famine and violent deaths.

## **A Heavy Yoke: Jeremiah 27:1–22**

God told Jeremiah to assemble representatives from the nations surrounding Judah. Jeremiah was to wear a yoke like the ones placed around the necks of oxen. He told the nations that unless they put themselves under the yoke of the king of Babylon, they would be punished. They were not to listen to their own prophets or diviners. God had spoken and He was the sovereign ruler of all. Jeremiah told King Zedekiah of Judah that he was not to fight against the Babylonians. If he submitted to their rule, then Judah's destruction would be prevented and eventually the people could return. In the end, Zedekiah revolted and tried to fend off Nebuchadnezzar's onslaught. The land and the city of Jerusalem were destroyed and Zedekiah was taken prisoner.

## **A FUTURE AND A HOPE**

God's plan for his people had included special protection in Babylon while the empires of Assyria, Egypt and Babylon struggled for world dominance. God controlled this struggle among nations. He would resolve it in His own way in His own time. He was

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sovereign. Jeremiah sent a message to the Jews in Babylon who had been deported first in Jeremiah 29:4–7.

- Do not despair.
- Build houses there and live in them.
- Plant crops and eat the produce.
- Give your sons and daughters in marriage and multiply.
- Seek the welfare of your captors and pray for them so that things may go well for you.
- After 70 years I will bring you home.
- *“For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans for wholeness and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope” (29:11).*

The people received the message with resignation and hope. They settled into the new land and did as Jeremiah suggested.

## LAMENTATIONS

Jeremiah remained behind in Jerusalem where he walked through the streets weeping for all that had been lost. Solomon’s beautiful temple lay in ruins. How he lamented a fate that repentance could have so easily prevented! Eventually, he was forced to go to Egypt where he lived until his death.

The book of Lamentations is a collection of five poems in which Jeremiah pours out his heart in grief. Yet, he anticipates the goodness and mercies of God he knows are new every morning. “Great is your faithfulness. The Lord is my portion. . . therefore I hope in Him!” (Lamentations 3:23–24)

## PICTURES OF CHRIST FROM THE PROPHET

Jeremiah believed one day God would reunite Israel and Judah in the land of promise (23:1–8). A king would rise up from the house of David and shepherd the flock of Israel again. His name would be “The Lord Our Righteousness” (Jeremiah 23:6). He would establish a new covenant (31:31–34) to fulfill the covenants made with Abraham, Moses and David. The New Testament contains that new covenant established by Jesus, the Son of God.

## TEACHING PLAN

JOURNEY 12: "A Rotten Sash, a Broken Pot"  
*Jeremiah, the Weeping Prophet*



<p><b>Key Passage</b>          Jeremiah 13:1–14;          18:1–17; 19:1–13</p>	<p><b>Key Word</b>  <i>Future</i></p>
<p><b>Key Verse</b>  <i>"For I know the plans I have for you... to give you a future and a hope."</i>          —Jeremiah 29:11</p>	<p><b>Key Thought</b>          I can trust God with my future.</p>



### INTRODUCTORY ACTIVITY

**A. CONNECT** the Big Room experience with the Bible story by asking the students questions about how the things they saw relate to the key word and the key thought for the day. Use the following questions to stimulate conversation.

- "What issue about the future was the family dealing with?"
- "What were their concerns?"
- "What kinds of things do you hope God has placed in your future?"



### TABLE TALK 1

**CHALLENGE** the students to create something that will be easily recognizable using a piece of dough or clay that you give them. Cover the tables with butcher paper and allow three to five minutes for them to shape different creations. Allow the students to talk about what they have made with others at their tables. Then ask the students to consider the following ideas.

- Describe what you made
- Do you like the way it turned out?

- Would you want to start over?
- Do you think you can do it better next time?
- What if the lump looked up and said to you: “I don’t like the way you made me. I don’t like what you are doing to me”?
- How would you respond to the lump?

**LISTEN** for comments you can make about the Creator being in charge. **EXPLAIN** that we will see this same thing happening today in our Bible lesson. The people God had made to be a special treasure to Him did not want to do what He said. They had their own ideas about the kind of god they wanted to worship. They chose the kind of lifestyle they wanted. They listened to His prophets and simply said, “No Way!” If you were a parent, what would you do with such a disrespectful child? Let’s find out what God did.



## EXPLORING THE BIBLE PASSAGE

- **HAVE** the students locate the book of Jeremiah. **REVIEW** the stories about the other prophets we have studied: Elijah, Elisha, Isaiah, Jonah, Amos and Hosea. **RECALL** the problems these prophets faced as they delivered God’s message to a sinful rebellious people.
- **REMIND** the students of what happened to the nation of Israel with its 10 tribes. They were gone—gone—gone! In today’s lesson, the same thing is about to happen to the nation of Judah. They had been able to escape the Assyrians and continue for another 130 years. However, things were not looking good and Jeremiah was the man to tell them how bad things were about to get. Jeremiah used objects familiar to the people to show them how God felt about their sin. Why didn’t they get it?

### A. The Potter’s Clay: Jeremiah 18:1–17

- Verse 1–4: What was the potter doing in his shop? What kind of problem was he having? What did he do to correct it?
- Verses 5–6: What did God tell Jeremiah that He would do to the children of Israel?
- Verses 11: What did God tell Jeremiah to tell the people of Judah?

- Verse 12: How did the people answer Jeremiah? A shocking response! Does the clay tell the potter what to do?
- Verses 16–17: What was God's response?

## B. A Shattered Jar: Jeremiah 19:1–13

- Verses 1–2: Where did Jeremiah take the leaders and the priests?
- Verses 5–6: Why was God so upset with Judah?
- Verse 10: What did Jeremiah do with the clay jar?
- Verse 11: How did this illustrate what God was going to do?

## C. A Rotten Sash: Jeremiah 13:1–14

- Verses 1–3: What did God tell Jeremiah to buy? (*Explain loincloth.*)
- Verses 4–7: What did God tell Jeremiah to do with it after he had worn it for a while?
- Verses 8–12: How did the loincloth illustrate what God thought about Judah's sin?

## THE BOOK OF LAMENTATIONS

**SAY:** "Jeremiah was unable to persuade the people to repent. When the end finally came and Jerusalem lay in ruins, all the prophet could do was weep, or lament, as he walked through the deserted streets." *[Use a tissue and pretend to be crying as you talk about "the weeping prophet."]* No matter how hard Jeremiah had tried to convince the people to repent, they would not. It was too late. He was all alone in the city. He had no family. His friends had turned on him because they did not like what he was saying (Jeremiah 18:18)."

**HAVE** the students find this book in their Bible and turn to chapter 3, verses 22–24. It only has five chapters. **SAY:** "In spite of everything that had happened, the prophet could still praise God, his hope of salvation." **[NOTE:** *The Jews have been re-gathering for hundreds of years in the land God gave them, especially after it became a nation in 1948. Their final restoration will be when they accept Jesus as Messiah at the end of the age.]*



## THE CROSSROADS

If you have a map, show how Israel and Judah lay right in the middle of a battleground between Assyria, Egypt and Babylon. Today, their country is even smaller and still lies in a dangerous area.

- The Israelites had no chance for survival unless God intervened in their behalf. His plan included saving a remnant of the tribe of Judah. Why?
- The exile in Babylon would be hard. They would miss their homeland. What advice did Jeremiah give them? Read aloud Jeremiah 29:4–7.
- Did God have a plan they didn't know about? Explain the plan and then have the students read the key verse in chapter 29:11.
- What was God's plan for Judah? (In 70 years they would be able to return home and rebuild their shattered country.)
- What is God's plan for you? This verse applies to you too.
- What is the very first step in God's plan for you? (salvation and believer's baptism)

*[Share the plan of salvation. Encourage the students to share the Gospel and read God's Word daily so that they can grow in their faith.]*



## TABLE TALK 2

Put some of these items around the room: backpack, basket of fruit, a dirty rag, a bottle of water, a set of Popsicle® sticks, a roll of Life Savers®, a broken pot, a Band-Aid®, a road sign, etc. **HAVE** each table group leader help their group pick out three of these objects and bring them back to the table group area. The table group leader will then lead the students in a discussion where they try to figure out how the objects they chose can be used to tell someone about Jesus. See explanations below.

- Backpack: Jesus can carry your load of sin.
- Dirty rag: *Our sin is like this rag.*
- Water: *Jesus washes our sins away.*
- Popsicle® sticks: *Form a cross with them.*
- Life Savers®: *Jesus gives us eternal life.*
- Basket of Fruit: *Jesus gives us the fruits of the spirit.*
- Broken pot: *Sin breaks God's heart. Jesus restores what is broken.*



- Bandage: *Jesus heals the broken-hearted.*
- Road sign: *Warning! Your sins have eternal consequences.*

If time allows, let each group share one object lesson with the entire group. Hopefully, the students will catch on and find other things to use in sharing the Gospel. Encourage them to look around their house for some ideas. Challenge them to share the Gospel with at least one person this next week.



## SCRIPTURE MEMORY: Jeremiah 29:11

*“For I know the plans I have for you. . .  
to give you a future and a hope.”*

—Jeremiah 29:11

**A. USE** a beach ball as a visual aid. Slowly deflate the ball as you recount Jeremiah’s grief over the capture and deportation of his countrymen. Explain how it would seem to the Hebrews that God had abandoned them, but that was not the case. Jeremiah sent a message to the Jews in Babylon who had been deported (Jeremiah 29:4–7).

- Do not despair.
- Build houses there and live in them.
- Plant crops and eat the produce.
- Give your sons and daughters in marriage and multiply.
- Seek the welfare of your captors and pray for them so that things may go well for you.
- After 70 years I will bring you home.
- Then Jeremiah wrote these words: *“For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans for wholeness and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope”* (Jeremiah 29:11).

**B. BEGIN** to inflate the beach ball again. **SAY:** “Just when everything looked hopeless, God sent word by Jeremiah that the Jews would have a future and that all hope was not gone. God’s Spirit, like the air in this ball, was still with them. They were His chosen people. The Messiah

would come through them.”

**C. TOSS** the beach ball around the room. Each student who catches the ball must repeat the key verse. Try to give all students an opportunity to catch the ball and say the verse.



## BIBLE LEARNING PROJECT:

### Redemption Rags

**Supplies:** red rags, Sharpies®, potting soil or play sand, cups, water, craft sticks

- Write the phrase, “I will give you a future and hope” on the board for students to reference.
- Allow the students to mix up a little soil and water in the cups provided.
- Give each student a red rag, a Sharpie® and a craft stick.
- Instruct them to use the markers to write the key verse paraphrase on their rags.
- Have them spread a small amount of dirt on their rag using a craft stick.
- Discuss how the dirt represents our sin. To those who are redeemed through Christ, God promises cleansing, hope and an eternal future with Him. Our lives do not have to be *dirty rags*.



## A LOOK AT THE BOOK

**HAVE** the students look in the table of contents in their Bibles.

- Ask them to name the 17 books of Old Testament prophecy.
- Ask them to identify the one book in the New Testament that is considered to be prophecy.
- Ask them to explain the difference between a *major* prophet and a *minor* one.
- What are the names of the minor prophets?

**CONDUCT** a quick Bible Drill activity to help the students locate the books themselves without reference to page numbers.



## REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Who is known as the “weeping” prophet? (*Jeremiah*)
2. Is he a major or minor prophet? (*major*)
3. How do we know he is major? (*because of the length of his writings*)
4. Why was he crying? (*to see the city in ruins and the people deported*)
5. What other book did he write? (*Lamentations*)
6. What does it mean to lament? (*to grieve, to cry, to regret*)
7. Name one object Jeremiah used to show the people what God thought about the people’s sin. (*pot, rag, a yoke*)
8. What group of people conquered the land of Judah? (*the Babylonians*)
9. What group of people conquered the land of Israel? (*the Assyrians*)
10. When would the Jews be able to return to their land? (*in 70 years*)
11. What future event would take place in their land that would bless the whole world? (*the birth of Christ*)
12. How is Jesus connected to the people of Judah? (*Mary and Joseph were both from the line of David.*)
13. When will the Jews be restored to full blessing by God? (*when they accept Jesus as Messiah personally; when Christ comes again to defeat Satan forever*)