



LifeLight

"In Him was life, and the life was the light of men." John 1:4

Jeremiah/Lamentations

LEADERS GUIDE



The Prophet Jeremiah mourns amid the cascading towers of Jerusalem. Jeremiah prophesied the city's fall as well as the return of its citizens from exile seventy years later, making him a prophet of both doom and hope.



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Contents

Introducing the LifeLight Program		5
Session 1—Lecture Leader	Jeremiah Is Called—and Proclaims Judgment Jeremiah 1–4	9
Session 2—Lecture Leader	The Temple Sermon and Other Discourses Jeremiah 7–11	14
Session 3—Lecture Leader	Jeremiah’s Perpetual Sermon: Repent or You Will Die Jeremiah 13; 15–18	19
Session 4—Lecture Leader	Life after King Josiah: The Beginning of the End Jeremiah 20; 23; 26; 25; 36	24
Session 5—Lecture Leader	Between the First Deportation and the Fall of the Kingdom of Judah Jeremiah 21; 29; 27–28; 37; 38	29
Session 6—Lecture Leader	Consolation for Judah—Promise of a New Covenant Jeremiah 30–31	34
Session 7—Lecture Leader	Consolation for Judah—God Will Restore Judah’s Fortunes Jeremiah 32–33	39
Session 8—Lecture Leader	The Aftermath of the Fall of Jerusalem and Judgments against Foreign Nations Jeremiah 34; 42–44; 46–47; 50	44
Session 9—Lecture Leader	Mercies New Every Morning Jeremiah 52; Lamentations 1–3; 5:20–22	49
.....		
Session 1—Small-Group Leader	Jeremiah Is Called—and Proclaims Judgment Jeremiah 1–4	57
Session 2— Small-Group Leader	The Temple Sermon and Other Discourses Jeremiah 7–11	60
Session 3— Small-Group Leader	Jeremiah’s Perpetual Sermon: Repent or You Will Die Jeremiah 13; 15–18	63
Session 4— Small-Group Leader	Life after King Josiah: The Beginning of the End Jeremiah 20; 23; 26; 25; 36	66
Session 5— Small-Group Leader	Between the First Deportation and the Fall of the Kingdom of Judah Jeremiah 21; 29; 27–28; 37; 38	69
Session 6— Small-Group Leader	Consolation for Judah—Promise of a New Covenant Jeremiah 30–31	72
Session 7—Small-Group Leader	Consolation for Judah—God Will Restore Judah’s Fortunes Jeremiah 32–33	75
Session 8—Small-Group Leader	The Aftermath of the Fall of Jerusalem and Judgments against Foreign Nations Jeremiah 34; 42–44; 46–47; 50	78
Session 9—Small-Group Leader	Mercies New Every Morning Jeremiah 52; Lamentations 1–3; 5:20–22	81

Introduction

Welcome to LifeLight

A special pleasure is in store for you. You will be instrumental in leading your brothers and sisters in Christ closer to Him who is our life and light (John 1:4). You will have the pleasure of seeing fellow Christians discover new insights and rediscover old ones as they open the Scriptures and dig deep into them, perhaps deeper than they have ever dug before. More than that, you will have the pleasure of sharing in this wonderful study.

LifeLight—An In-depth Study

LifeLight is a series of in-depth Bible studies. The goal of LifeLight is that through a regular program of in-depth personal and group study of Scripture, more and more Christian adults may grow in their personal faith in Jesus Christ, enjoy fellowship with the members of His body, and reach out in love to others in witness and service.

In-depth means that this Bible study includes the following four components: individual daily home study; discussion in a small group; a lecture presentation on the Scripture portion under study; and an enhancement of the week's material (through reading the enrichment magazine).

LifeLight Participants

LifeLight participants are adults who desire a deeper study of the Scriptures than is available in the typical Sunday morning adult Bible class. (Mid-to-older teens might also be LifeLight participants.) While LifeLight does not assume an existing knowledge of the Bible or special experience or skills in Bible study, it does assume a level of commitment that will bring participants to each of the nine weekly assemblies having read the assigned readings and attempted to answer the study questions. Daily reading and study will require from 15 to 30 minutes for the five days preceding the LifeLight assembly. The day following the assembly will be spent reviewing the previous week's study by going over the completed study leaflet and the enrichment magazine.

LifeLight Leadership

While the in-depth process used by LifeLight begins with individual study and cannot achieve its aims without this individual effort, it cannot be completed by individual study alone. Therefore, trained leaders are necessary. You fill one or perhaps more of the important roles described below.

The Director

This person oversees the LifeLight program in a local center (which may be a congregation or a center operated by several neighboring congregations). The director

- serves as the parish LifeLight overall coordinator and leader;
- coordinates the scheduling of the LifeLight program;
- orders materials;
- convenes LifeLight leadership-team meetings;
- develops publicity materials;
- recruits participants;
- maintains records and budgeting;
- assigns, with the leadership-team, participants to small discussion groups;
- makes arrangements for facilities;
- communicates outreach opportunities to small-group leaders and to congregational boards;
- follows up on participants who leave the program.

The Assistant Director (*optional*)

This person may assist the director. Duties listed for the director may be assigned to the assistant director as mutually agreeable.

The Lecture Leader

This person prepares and delivers the lecture at the weekly assembly. (**Lesson material for the lecture leader begins on p. 9.**) The lecture leader

- prepares and presents the Bible study lecture to the large group;

- prepares worship activities (devotional thought, hymn, prayer), using resources in the study leaflet and leaders guide and possibly other, outside sources;
- helps the small-group discussion leaders to grow in understanding the content of the lessons;
- encourages prayer at weekly leadership-team and discussion leaders meetings.

The Small-Group Coordinator (*optional; the director may fill this role*)

This person supervises and coordinates the work of the small-group discussion leaders. The small-group coordinator

- recruits with the leadership-team the small-group discussion leaders;
- trains or arranges for training of the discussion leaders;
- assists the director and discussion leaders in follow-up and outreach;
- encourages the discussion leaders to contact absent group members;
- participates in the weekly leadership-team and discussion-leaders equipping meetings;
- provides ongoing training and support as needed.

The Small-Group Discussion Leaders

These people guide and facilitate discussion of LifeLight participants in the small groups. (**Lesson material for the small-group leaders begins on p. 57.**) There should be one discussion leader for every group of no more than twelve participants. The small-group discussion leaders are, perhaps, those individuals who are most important to the success of the program. They should, therefore, be chosen with special care and be equipped with skills needed to guide discussion and to foster a caring fellowship within the group. These discussion leaders

- prepare each week for the small-group discussion by using the study leaflet and small-group leaders guide section for that session (see p. 57);
- read the enrichment magazine as a study supplement;
- guide and facilitate discussion in their small group;
- encourage and assist the discussion group in prayer;

- foster fellowship and mutual care within the discussion group;
- attend weekly discussion-leaders training meetings.

Leadership Training

LifeLight leaders will meet weekly to review the previous week's work and plan the coming week. At this session, leaders can address concerns and prepare for the coming session. LifeLight is a 1½-hour program with no possibility for it to be taught in the one hour typically available on Sunday mornings. Some congregations, however, may want to use the Sunday morning Bible study hour for LifeLight preparation and leadership training. In such a meeting, the lecture leader and/or small-group coordinator may lead the discussion leaders through the coming week's lesson, reserving 5 or 10 minutes for problem solving or other group concerns.

While it requires intense effort, LifeLight has proven to bring great benefit to LifeLight participants. The effort put into this program, both by leaders and by participants, will be rewarding and profitable.

The LifeLight Weekly Schedule

Here is how LifeLight will work week by week:

1. Before session 1, each participant will receive the study leaflet for session 1 and the enrichment magazine for the course. The study leaflet contains worship resources (for use both in individual daily study and at the opening of the following week's assembly) and readings and study questions for five days. Challenge questions will lead those participants who have the time and desire a greater challenge into even deeper levels of study.
2. After the five days of individual study at home, participants will gather for a weekly assembly of all LifeLight participants. The assembly will begin with a brief period of worship (5 minutes). Participants will then join their assigned small discussion groups (of twelve or fewer, who will remain the same throughout the course), where they will go over the week's study questions together (55 minutes). Assembling together once again, participants will listen to a lecture presentation on the readings they have studied in the previous week and discussed in their small groups (20 minutes). After the lecture presentation, the director or another leader will distribute the study leaflet for the following week. Closing announcements and other necessary business may take another five minutes before dismissal.

In some places, some small groups will not join the weekly assembly because of scheduling or other reasons. Such groups may meet at another time and place (perhaps in the home of one of the small group's members). Those congregations may record the lecture given by the lecture leader at the weekly assembly and duplicate it for use by other groups meeting later in the week.

3. On the day following the assembly, participants will review the preceding week's work by rereading the study leaflet they completed (and that they perhaps supplemented or corrected during the discussion in their small group) and by reading appropriate articles in the enrichment magazine.

Then the LifeLight weekly study process will begin all over again!

Recommended Study Resources and Worship

The Lutheran Study Bible. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2009. This resource contains more than 26,000 study and application notes, a most thorough reference guide (pp. lxxv–cx), and over 90,000 cross-references, as well as a 31,000-entry concordance, maps, charts, and timelines.

Roehrs, Walter R., and Martin H. Franzmann. *Concordia Self-Study Commentary*. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1979. This one-volume commentary on the Bible contains 950 pages and is tailored for lay use.

The Concordia Organist is a 31-CD collection of pipe organ accompaniments for all the hymns and liturgical music in *Lutheran Service Book*. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House (order no. 99-2264). Use these CDs for worship hymn accompaniment.

Jeremiah Is Called—and Proclaims Judgment

Jeremiah 1–4

Preparing for the Session

Central Focus

God called prophets (and today He calls pastors) so that people would clearly know the will of God through their proclamation.

Objectives

That participants, led by the Holy Spirit working through God's Word, will

1. learn that God called Jeremiah to speak to the people of Judah the words they needed to hear, whether of Law or of Gospel;
2. understand how thoroughly the people of Judah had abandoned God in their worship of other gods; and
3. know that God continues to call out to those who do not believe, even while they are rejecting His message.

Note for the small-group leaders: Lesson notes and other materials you will need begin on page 57.

For the Lecture Leader

Session Plan

Worship

Begin the session with the hymn printed in the study leaflet. Accompaniments are available in denominational hymnals, such as *Lutheran Service Book* or *Lutheran Worship* (refer to hymnal index). (Note: Concordia Publishing House has available *The Concordia Organist*. All the initial worship hymns in the LifeLight courses are included in this resource. It's especially helpful for mission congregations and small parishes. See the list of study resources on page 7.) Follow with this prayer:

Prayer

Almighty God, You know we live in the midst of so many dangers that in our frailty we cannot stand upright. Grant strength and protection to support us in all dangers and carry us through all temptations; through

Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen. (Collect for Epiphany 4; PCC, p. 544)

Lecture Presentation

1 God Calls Jeremiah (Jeremiah 1:1–10)

The prophet Jeremiah lived during a turbulent time in the kingdom of Judah. He lived through the destruction of Jerusalem and of the temple, marking the beginning of the Babylonian Exile. He is sometimes called "the weeping prophet" because of the tone of much of his writing.

Jeremiah begins his book by recording his call into the ministry. This call would have been important to him as he faced the personal affronts to himself during his ministry in Judah. Because of the affliction he suffered as a prophet of God, it would have been quite natural for him to wonder if he indeed was doing God's will.

He could look back at his call as evidence that he was in fact a prophet of God. The Church on earth, whether in the Old Testament or the New Testament, has stressed the importance of a call for those who proclaim God's Word. One cannot simply take the job upon himself; one must be called by God.

Jeremiah could look back at his call from God and state unequivocally, "I am doing what God has called me to do."

Jeremiah probably needed that reassurance. As far as we know from the biblical record, Jeremiah suffered the most physically and emotionally of any prophet. His hearers didn't take kindly to his words. That's because his vocation as prophet was not to make people feel good. God told him: (Jeremiah 1:10) "See, I have set you this day over nations and over kingdoms, to pluck up and to break down, to destroy and to overthrow, to build and to plant." Jeremiah's call had two aspects: one to tear down, and one to build up.

And most of the time, it seems, he was tearing down. He was confronting the people with their sin. He was showing them the need to repent. He warned the people about God's coming judgment. The Israelites did

not take kindly to his words. They persecuted Jeremiah because of his preaching.

Nevertheless, what Jeremiah proclaimed was God's Word. "Behold, I have put My words in your mouth," God told Jeremiah. Jeremiah was faithful to his calling, proclaiming only what God gave him to proclaim. He stands in stark contrast to other prophets of the time, who told the people what they wanted to hear.

We can't expect any better when we proclaim God's Word faithfully. Your study of Jeremiah gave you a chance to consider areas where the proclamation of God's Word faithfully brings the ire of the world upon the Church and its preachers. We can't do less than Jeremiah in declaring the words that God has given us to proclaim.

We must not neglect, however, the other side of Jeremiah's proclamation: building up. This is the proclamation of the Gospel, the proclamation that God forgives sins for the sake of the suffering and death of Jesus Christ. In the case of Jeremiah, of course, it was the proclamation of the Messiah to come, the one promised as the seed of the woman (Genesis 3:15) and the son of David.

Through it all, Jeremiah had God's Word to proclaim: (Jeremiah 1:9) "Behold, I have put My words in your mouth." And that's what Jeremiah did: proclaim God's Word. He proclaimed what God gave him to proclaim, even though the disbelieving people refused to take Jeremiah's message to heart. It may have seemed fruitless (especially considering the outcome with the fall of Jerusalem), yet Jeremiah continued steadfast in proclaiming God's Word.

2 God Gives Jeremiah His Commission (Jeremiah 1:11–19)

The Lord states in Jeremiah 1:17, "Say to them everything that I command you." God commanded Jeremiah to plainly relate the words that He gave him, to proclaim and not withhold anything. Jeremiah was to proclaim everything that God told him. The Church has always done this: be faithful in proclaiming everything that God commands. Here we have it in the Old Testament. We have the same command in the New Testament. Jesus' words to the disciples says the same thing: (Matthew 28:19–20) "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, . . . teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you."

The Church does not have the option of picking and choosing what it will proclaim. For example, the frontier

preacher and churchman C. F. W. Walther wrote in 1848 about the future of his denomination:

Even though we possess no power but that of the Word, we nevertheless can and should carry on our work joyfully. Let us, therefore, esteemed sirs and brethren, *use* this power properly. Let us above all and in all matters be concerned about this, that the pure doctrine of our dear Evangelical Lutheran Church may become known more and more completely among us, that it may be in vogue in all of our congregations, and that it may be preserved from all adulteration and held fast as the most precious treasure. Let us not surrender one iota of the demands of the Word. Let us bring about its complete rule in our congregations and set aside nothing of it, even though for this reason things may happen to us, as God wills. Here let us be inflexible, here let us be adamant. If we do this, we need not worry about the success of our labor. Even though it should *seem* to us to be in vain, it *cannot* then be in vain, for the Word does not return void but prospers in the thing whereto to the Lord sent it [Isaiah 55:11]. By the Word alone, without any other power, the Church was founded. By the Word alone, all the great deeds recorded in Church history were accomplished. By the Word alone, the Church will most assuredly stand also in these last days of sore distress, to the end of days. Even the gates of hell will not prevail against it. (Matthew C. Harrison, trans. and ed., *At Home in the House of My Fathers* [St. Louis: Concordia, 2011], p. 9)

You had a chance in your study of this chapter to think of some of the things that are difficult to proclaim because they go against the grain of "political correctness" or what is commonly accepted as reasonable and correct. Sometimes the Church (and individual Christians) will find themselves in the same position as Jeremiah, hated and reviled by unbelievers. This enmity didn't stop Jeremiah, and it can't stop the Church today, as long as the Church wants to remain the Church.

3 Jeremiah's Words Condemn Judah (Jeremiah 2)

The chapters of Jeremiah that we shall read for the first few weeks give no indication of the date when they were written or delivered. Jeremiah could have delivered the messages from God at any time during his ministry (and he probably delivered many of these a number of times).

Jeremiah jumps right in, proclaiming the word of condemnation to Jerusalem. God didn't mince His words, and neither did Jeremiah. God calls to mind the seminal event in the lives of the children of Israel: the exodus. God prefaced the Ten Commandments with this statement: (Exodus 20:2) "I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery." This grounding of the lives of the Israelites in God's action in bringing them out of Egypt is immediately followed by the First Commandment: (v. 3) "You shall have no other gods before Me."

Yet what did the Israelites do? Go after other gods. "Inconceivable!" (as Vizzini in *The Princess Bride* would have said). Even nations who have gods that aren't true gods (and keep proving it) don't give up on their gods. But Israel gave up on the true God.

The problem was not just the people. All the leaders were to blame: (Jeremiah 2:8) "The priests did not say, 'Where is the LORD?' Those who handle the law did not know Me; the shepherds transgressed against Me; the prophets prophesied by Baal and went after things that do not profit." Were the people, then, guiltless? By no means. Although the shepherds (the pastors) need to proclaim the Word of God, those who hear it need to know that what is proclaimed is the true Word of God. Even the sheep need to examine the Scriptures to make certain that what is proclaimed is indeed so (see the account of the Bereans in Acts 17:11)—which is what you are doing right now.

It probably grates on our sensibilities to hear God call His people a whore. (And God does it a few more times in chapter 3.) How can a loving God call His people such a name? We must understand the seriousness with which God takes the relationship between Himself and His people. "You shall have no other gods before Me." God is saying, "I am the only God you should and must know. I am your husband, having rescued you from captivity. To bow down to any other god or thing is to break that bond of husband and wife. Apostasy is, in short, to be a whore."

As I said, stark words. But words we also must take to heart. If you heard a call to the Israelites in that last sentence, you were correct. God rescued the Israelites from captivity and bondage in Egypt. But God has also rescued us from captivity and bondage to the devil and to death. And what do we do? Go after other gods. Go after other things that we think are gods. Those gods might be financial security, popularity, physical comfort—and those are the gods that are "acceptable" in polite soci-

ety. There are plenty more that aren't so acceptable. In short, we are as bad as the Israelites, playing the spiritual whore.

The words of condemnation for Israel also apply to us. God wants us to consider the enormity of our sin, so that we turn to Him in repentance and faith. As we do that, God will no longer tear down but will build us up in faith. God's Word will heal us, will restore us, and will keep us in His kingdom of grace.

4 Judah Should Have Seen God's Judgment of Israel (Jeremiah 3)

God works through the events of history to bring about His will. He uses history as an object lesson for His people. So God compares Judah with Israel. After the death of Solomon, the united monarchy divided into two kingdoms, the Northern Kingdom of Israel and the Southern Kingdom of Judah.

The two kingdoms survived side by side for almost three hundred years. Yet, they both strayed from God's ways, the ways God had set out for them when He rescued them from bondage and slavery in Egypt. God sent prophets to both the Northern Kingdom and the Southern Kingdom, calling the people to repentance. The people of Israel listened about as well as the people of Judah, which is to say, not very well.

God's patience had come to an end with Israel by 722 BC, when the Assyrian Empire had destroyed the capital, Samaria, and carried the people away to exile, to be lost among all the foreign populations of Assyria. The people of Judah should have seen the result of such apostasy—well, they did see the results. The Assyrian Empire had even besieged Jerusalem, but God had not permitted Jerusalem to fall at the time. He was still patiently calling Judah to repentance.

God told Jeremiah that Judah should have taken the demise of Israel to heart. But her people didn't. Even if they did appear to return to God, it was not with their whole heart. They still wanted to have their cake and eat it too (that is, worship God, but also worship Baal or some other god who wasn't true god). Because the people of Judah did not take God seriously, even when they saw what happens to those who forsake God, God called them less righteous than Israel. Judah had eyes to see, but could not see.

Even in the midst of God's anger and sorrow at the unfaithfulness of Judah, however, He reaches out with a willing hand: (Jeremiah 3:12) "Return, faithless Israel, declares the LORD. I will not look on you in anger, for I

am merciful, declares the LORD; I will not be angry forever." God's merciful hand continues to reach out to Judah, to call Judah to repentance, to receive Judah again as His bride, as His people.

The voice of Jeremiah, which so powerfully preached the Law (that is, that the people have sinned, that the people have turned their back on God), is not preaching merely to beat the people down. That voice has only one purpose: to call the people to repentance and to return to God. (3:22) "Return, O faithless sons; I will heal your faithlessness." These astounding words come from the same God who had called the people's worship of other gods a spiritual whoredom. God offers salvation to all who turn to Him.

He states through Jeremiah: (3:23) "Truly the hills are a delusion, the orgies on the mountains. Truly in the LORD our God is the salvation of Israel." This is what God desires for all people.

5 The Choice: Repentance or the Destruction of Jerusalem (Jeremiah 4)

God's gracious invitation to return to Him remains for Judah (and for all people). God is not bringing on disaster because of any petty animosity with people who turn their back on Him. God is here giving an object lesson on the dire consequences of sin and lack of repentance. But all this is done for the sake of repentance. "To Me you should return" (4:1) is the gracious invitation of God.

However, there remains the impending possibility of destruction if there is no repentance. Jeremiah states: (v. 13) "Behold, He comes up like clouds; His chariots like the whirlwind; His horses are swifter than eagles—woe to us, for we are ruined!" The appearance of God in the destruction of Jerusalem is a forerunner to His appearance on the Last Day. The imagery of the clouds is very much like that found in the Advent hymn "Lo! He Comes with Clouds Descending" (*LSB* 336).

The end of Jerusalem is a "mini event" compared to our Lord's return on the Last Day. And on that day, there will also be those who exclaim, "We are ruined!": "Those who set at naught and sold Him, Pierced and nailed Him to the tree, Deeply wailing, deeply wailing, deeply wailing, Shall their true Messiah see" (*LSB* 336:2).

As Jeremiah says in 4:18, "Your ways and your deeds have brought this upon you. This is your doom, and it is bitter; it has reached your very heart." But for those whose ways and deeds are grounded in Jesus Christ, the experience is quite different: "Those dear tokens of His

passion. . . . With what rapture, with what rapture, with what rapture Gaze we on those glorious scars!" (*LSB* 336:3). That is what God wanted with proclamation to return to God. And for all those who have turned to God in Christ Jesus, the Last Day is not a day of destruction. It is instead a day of joy and a day of peace, a day of mercy for which God's people long with all their heart. The ways and deeds of Jesus have brought this hope upon us. This is our blessing, and it is our bliss, which has reached to our very hearts.

Jeremiah's proclamation clearly showed that being a part of God's people is not a matter of outward compliance with the Law. Jeremiah begged his listeners to remove the foreskin of their hearts—to not just be a part of God's people through the outward ritual and appearance of circumcision, for such a person has a doom that has reached his very heart.

Instead, God wants people to wash their heart from evil (v. 14). That is the only way to salvation. Our hearts must be washed by the pure water of God's Word in Baptism. Without that, we have hearts that have not been circumcised, our thoughts and our deeds have only brought doom upon us.

You noticed this in your reading, but it is worth pointing out again: Jeremiah is not a clinical observer, merely explaining the cause of the problem. He is part and parcel of his own countrymen. What happens to them also affects him. If the people of Jerusalem rejoice, he rejoices; if they suffer, he suffers. Likewise, God in His wisdom has sent us today pastors who are with us, in our midst, who can understand both our joys and our pains.

Conclusion

One difficulty with reading Jeremiah is that the chapters are not presented in a chronological sequence. Prophesies are intertwined with Jeremiah's life, and various events get repeated or reported in a different order than they clearly happened. We will be reading much of the Book of Jeremiah (but not all) in a somewhat chronological order, so that events are presented in the order in which they likely happened. However, we urge you to read the entire book in order, since this is the way in which the Holy Spirit presents it to us.

There are seventeen selections from the prophet Jeremiah (counting also Lamentations) that are commonly read during church services (since one selection occurs twice, there are actually eighteen occasions on which Jeremiah is read). Additional selections may appear

in other lectionaries. Although this is a lot fewer than Isaiah or the Psalms, it is only a couple fewer readings than from Genesis, and more than any other Old Testament book other than the three named here. Thus, one can get a glimpse of the importance of Jeremiah's book for the Christian Church. (The opening prayers in this guide are taken from the Collects of the Day on occasions when the Old Testament selection is from Jeremiah. The hymns are those sung as the Hymn of the Day.)

Concluding Activities

Conclude the session with an appropriate prayer and distribute the study leaflet for week 2.

The Temple Sermon and Other Discourses

Jeremiah 7–11

Preparing for the Session

Central Focus

God expects those who claim to be His people to show that relationship in both worship and life.

Objectives

That participants, led by the Holy Spirit working through God's Word, will

1. see that their lives must accord with their claim of being Christians;
2. understand how abominable false worship (in both church and state) is to God; and
3. know that God's punishment of the people of Judah did not come because He abandoned His people but because they abandoned Him.

Note for the small-group leaders: Lesson notes and other materials you will need begin on page 60.

For the Lecture Leader

Session Plan

Worship

Begin the session with the hymn printed in the study leaflet. Accompaniments are available in denominational hymnals, such as *Lutheran Service Book* or *Lutheran Worship* (refer to hymnal index). (Note: Concordia Publishing House has available *The Concordia Organist*. All the initial worship hymns in the LifeLight courses are included in this resource. It's especially helpful for mission congregations and small parishes. See the list of study resources on page 7.) Follow with this prayer:

Prayer

O Lord, mercifully hear our prayers and having set us free from the bonds of our sins deliver us from every evil; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen. (Collect for Epiphany 8; PCC, p. 546)

Lecture Presentation

Historical Background—Manasseh

The man who was primarily responsible—humanly speaking—for the sad state of affairs in the kingdom of Judah was a man who is mentioned only once in Jeremiah: Manasseh. Manasseh was the grandfather of the king during whose reign Jeremiah's ministry began. Manasseh was the most wicked of the kings of the Southern Kingdom, Judah. He reigned for fifty-five years, from 696 to 642 BC. Although his own father, Hezekiah, was a faithful king, Manasseh returned the kingdom and the people to all the perversions of pagan worship that had afflicted the children of Israel since they had entered the Promised Land. The history of his reign in 2 Kings 21 begins by stating that he "did what was evil in the sight of the LORD" (v. 2).

The writer of 2 Kings compares Manasseh to Ahab, who was the worst king of the Northern Kingdom of Israel. Manasseh reversed the reforms of his father, Hezekiah, by reintroducing the worship of Baal and other pagan gods. He promoted the building of pagan altars on the high places of Judah. He "worshiped all the host of heaven and served them" (2 Kings 21:3)—one aspect of this practice, making offerings to the "queen of heaven," is mentioned in Jeremiah 7 and 44.

He not only worshiped the pagan gods, but he also engaged in abominable practices condemned by God. He burned his son as an offering. He consulted mediums and necromancers; that is, he engaged in all types of satanic arts. Not only did he promote and practice the evil, but he also persecuted and desecrated the good. Manasseh set up pagan altars in the temple of Jerusalem. He persecuted and murdered many innocent people—including especially the prophets and others who confessed and proclaimed the truth.

Because of all of Manasseh's evil actions, actively promoting pagan—even satanic—worship and actively keeping the truth from being proclaimed, God pronounced judgment on the land of Judah: (2 Kings 21:13) "I will stretch over Jerusalem the measuring line of Samaria, and the plumb line of the house of Ahab, and I will wipe Jerusalem as one wipes a dish, wiping it and turning it upside down." This was the heritage of

Manasseh. Nevertheless, God still gave the people of Judah the opportunity to repent and avert the doom that God had decreed for them.

Manasseh's successor was his son, Amon. However, Amon reigned only two years before he was assassinated by some of his servants. His son, Josiah, became king in his place in 640 BC.

1 Jeremiah Points Out the People's Inconsistency (Jeremiah 7:1–28)

In chapter 7 of Jeremiah, we have the words of God to the prophet, part of which he is to preach to the people at the gates to the temple in Jerusalem, and part of which are words directed to Jeremiah personally. Although this is called the "Temple Sermon" and it was preached at the gates of the temple, it is called this because it is about the temple.

At the center of the sermon are these words in verse 4: "Do not trust in these deceptive words: 'This is the temple of the LORD, the temple of the LORD, the temple of the LORD.'" Although you found out in your study that this was not a condemnation of the temple itself, this point bears repeating, because the words of Jeremiah have been misunderstood.

The historical background given at the beginning of this lecture gives you some context for this sermon. We will expand upon that background next week when we look at the reign of Josiah. Here we will simply say that Josiah reformed the worship of the people of Judah, rolling back the changes made by Manasseh.

The people evidently picked up on the reforms and returned to worship at the temple well enough. However, through God's revelation to him, Jeremiah knew that coming to worship at the temple was simply a superficial act for many of the people. They had acquiesced to Josiah's admonition to return to the worship of Yahweh but did not have an inward change to their hearts.

Thus, Jeremiah had to call attention to this inconsistency among the people. They could not claim to be good believers simply by coming to the temple but making no other change in their lives. They had to act like believers in all of their life. Paying attention to God's requirements to offer sacrifices at the temple but ignoring God's requirement for one's life simply would not work.

God's Commandments are still God's Commandments. Jeremiah held up the mirror of the Law to the people to show them that they were not believers when judged by their actions. Now, of course Jeremiah knew that no

one is perfect in keeping the Commandments. Here he is pointing out gross breaking of the Commandments with no concern or repentance to be shown.

There was nothing wrong in and of itself with worshiping at the temple. In fact, God commanded it. Jeremiah did not want to imply that worship at the temple was optional. His concern was that the people's lives did not show their faith. The lack of a godly life did not mean that the sacrifices at the temple were worthless and useless.

God's command for offering sacrifices still stood. God's command for worshiping still stands. Worship (the service of Word and the Sacraments) is not optional (AC V). The Word and Sacraments are that through which the Holy Spirit works. It was no different in Old Testament times. God worked through the rituals at the temple to forgive the sins of the people and reassure them of the forgiveness of sins because of the coming Messiah.

Man's faithlessness does not negate God's faithfulness. To use a modern caricature (and I label it a caricature because I do not know how accurate the depictions of the Mafia in the popular media are), a Mafia boss who goes to Mass on Sunday morning, then in the afternoon calmly calls for the murder of a rival does not negate the efficacy of the body and blood of Christ in Holy Communion. God's forgiveness through the body and blood is offered and distributed in Holy Communion—but that doesn't mean a person has to accept the gracious gift or have it affect one's life in any way.

2 Jeremiah Grieves for His People (Jeremiah 7:29–8:22)

Jeremiah continues by referring to more dark shadows from the past. Offering child sacrifices to Molech was a practice done in the Valley of the Son of Hinnom. As you heard in the brief biography of Manasseh at the beginning of the lecture, Manasseh himself had sacrificed his son. Although Josiah had outlawed the practice during his reign (and during the time of Jeremiah's ministry), some people still practiced this abominable ritual.

Therefore, God used the valley as an object lesson. Since the people were so desirous of slaughtering their children here, the valley would become the Valley of Slaughter as Nebuchadnezzar destroyed the city of Jerusalem and killed many of the inhabitants. Nebuchadnezzar and his army would kill so many people that there would be no room to bury them. The dead bodies would simply be left as carrion in the valley.

Jeremiah draws attention to a problem of his time, one that has been a problem of all time for the Church. That is the problem of false prophets. We will continue to hear about this as we read in Jeremiah. Here, Jeremiah refers to the lying prophets who proclaim “Peace, peace” when there was no peace.

No problem of the present is unique to our time—and no problem of Jeremiah was unique to his time. There is still the problem of false prophets who proclaim one thing when God’s Word proclaims another. The only sure defense against such false prophets is to know for yourself what God’s Word says—something you are learning now. You will know well not to listen to someone who proclaims one thing when God’s Word proclaims another.

God has put His prophets and preachers in the midst of His people. Those who proclaim God’s Word are not apart from or separate from the people to whom they make their proclamation. Jeremiah also lived among God’s people. And it wasn’t an easy life. At the end of chapter 8, he grieves for God’s people who continually ignored God’s Word. He was in the midst of them, proclaiming the truth, but the people ignored the truth. Jeremiah couldn’t do anything about their lack of reception. But he could grieve over the stupidity of such people. Here we have some of his grieving.

3 Why Does God Bring Destruction? (Jeremiah 9)

Jeremiah continues his grieving (9:1), “Oh that my head were waters, and my eyes a fountain of tears, that I might weep day and night for the slain of the daughter of my people!” Jeremiah knows what is coming: the death of many of the inhabitants of Judah and Jerusalem. He could not change God’s judgment, but he could still mourn for them.

Jeremiah even could wish that he could get away from the people (9:2): “Oh that I had in the desert a travelers’ lodging place, that I might leave my people and go away from them!” The sin of the people was so oppressive that Jeremiah can wish to get away from it.

However, Jeremiah stayed and continued doing his duty as God’s prophet. He knew that very few people would actually listen to him, but he stayed and proclaimed what God gave him to proclaim.

Jeremiah raises a very important question in verse 12: “Who is the man so wise that he can understand this?

To whom has the mouth of the LORD spoken, that he may declare it? Why is the land ruined and laid waste like a wilderness, so that no one passes through?” This is still the question to raise for modern men, since the answer they give is wrong.

Modern man would explain the destruction of Judah and Jerusalem as simply the working out of political and military processes, a process that showed the strength of the army of Babylonia and the weakness of the people of Judah. Although that explanation is, of course, partially true, it is not fully true.

Jeremiah continues, (v. 13) “And the LORD says: ‘Because they have forsaken My law that I set before them, and have not obeyed My voice or walked in accord with it.’” That is the basic reason for the destruction of the land and the city. The destruction was God’s punishment of the people who did not hearken to God.

The same lack of understanding occurs for any destruction. “Why do tornadoes, hurricanes, tsunamis, fire, . . . [fill in the blank] cause such destruction?” Scientists would point to weather patterns and the actions of humans on the environment that result in certain inclement weather. But that doesn’t actually answer the question “Why?”

Only through the Scriptures can we know the why: because Adam’s sin has corrupted the entire creation so that nothing in creation works the way it should, in conformity with God’s good will for His creation. Because the creation is corrupted, there are terrible disasters that kill humans and destroy property. That is the ultimate answer to “why?”: because of sin that has corrupted all things.

It is this sin that Jeremiah and God bemoan: The people (v. 14) “have stubbornly followed their own hearts and have gone after the Baals.” “Followed their own hearts”—they don’t know that “the heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it?” as Jeremiah himself will say in 17:9. Their own hearts are far from God, because their hearts are also affected and infected by sin. Sin-affected hearts will also seek something other than the true God. In the case of the people of Judah, this involved going after the Baals. But anything other than the true God is a likely goal of the sin-affected heart.

4 Jesus Christ, the Wisdom of God (Jeremiah 10)

A part of your study in preparation for today's lesson was on 10:12, where Jeremiah said, "It is He who made the earth by His power, who established the world by His wisdom, and by His understanding stretched out the heavens." The question allowed you to make the connection between wisdom and Jesus Christ.

If this idea was new to you, it is worthwhile considering it further (and if it wasn't new to you, it is always worthwhile considering to reinforce your understanding). The concept of the Second Person of the Holy Trinity as God's Wisdom is well-established in the Bible. You had an opportunity to read some of the verses where Jesus Christ (that is, the preincarnate Jesus Christ) was called the Wisdom of God.

The personification of Jesus Christ as Wisdom is also found in the church's historical liturgy. The Great O Antiphons are antiphons used at Vespers during the last seven days of Advent. Since most of us do not attend Vespers office all seven days, we have probably never heard them used in their intended setting.

However, the hymn "O come, O come, Emmanuel" uses the seven antiphons and sets them to music. You have likely sung the stanza about wisdom. It is the second stanza of the hymn, but the first of the "O" antiphons, sung at Vespers on December 17. (You can find the antiphon itself accompanying hymn 357 in *Lutheran Service Book*.)

O Wisdom, proceeding from the mouth of the
Most High, pervading and permeating all creation,
mightily ordering all things: Come and teach us the
way of prudence.

This is the antiphon that becomes stanza 2 of the hymn:

O come, Thou Wisdom from on high,
Who ord'rest all things mightily;
To us the path of knowledge show,
And teach us in her ways to go.

That must always be our prayer. We need the help and the power of the Holy Spirit to follow the Wisdom of God in Jesus Christ. Especially in our day and age, we need to pray continually, "Come and teach us the way of prudence." That is something the Jesus Christ delights in doing, and He will teach us prudence as we study the Word of God, where the wisdom of God is revealed.

5 God's Request to His People: Hear and Obey (Jeremiah 11)

God wants us to call upon Him in Christ Jesus. God said about the people of Judah: (11:11–12) "Behold, I am bringing disaster upon them that they cannot escape. Though they cry to Me, I will not listen to them. Then the cities of Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem will go and cry to the gods to whom they make offerings, but they cannot save them in the time of their trouble."

There are no false gods who will hear the cry of their worshipers. Only the true God will listen and respond. But He will not respond to those who do not cry out in faith. The cry to God must be in faith, with a trust in the one who revealed God to us, Jesus Christ. Without that faith in Jesus Christ, without that trust in the true God, God will not listen. But cries made out of faith to God will always be heard and answered.

Moses wrote: (Exodus 20:1–3) "And God spoke all these words, saying, 'I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. You shall have no other gods before Me.'" Thus God began the covenant that He made with His people in the wilderness of Sinai after the exodus. This is the covenant that the people of Jerusalem had forgotten. This is the covenant that God, through Jeremiah, asked the people to listen to.

"Hear the words of this covenant," God commands in Jeremiah 11:2. Then, in verse 6, He says, "Hear the words of this covenant and do them." In verse 7, God commands, "Obey My voice." The same Hebrew word is used in all these verses: *hear* is the same word as *obey*. Hearing is connected with doing in verse 6. Hearing, doing, and obeying are all connected.

The problem for the people of Judah is that they did none of the three. They claimed to hear the words of the covenant, but they didn't do them. They claimed to hear, but they didn't obey. Because they neither did nor obeyed, they didn't really hear.

Hearing God's Word is not letting the words go in one ear and out the other; hearing God's Word is not something to do in one's spare time when it really doesn't make a difference. Hearing God's Word has to be done actively; hearing God's Word has to make a difference in one's life. Without that difference in one's life, there is no real hearing.

The Bible has been written so that we, today's hearers, are not as obtuse of heart as the people of Jeremiah's day. God does not want us to follow our own paths, our own desires, our own gods. Rather, God wants us to be as actively engaged as Samuel was when he said, "Speak, LORD, for your servant hears" (1 Samuel 3:9). When Samuel heard, he did and obeyed, exactly as the verb implies. That should also be our attitude: "Speak, LORD, for Your servant hears." May God bless your hearing and studying of His Word, that it may result in fruit; that is, that it may result in your obeying God's Word and doing what He commands and wills.

Concluding Activities

Conclude the session with an appropriate prayer and distribute the study leaflet for week 3.