

May 24
Lesson 13 (NIV)



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REPENT OF INJUSTICE

DEVOTIONAL READING: [Psalm 72:1–17](#)

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: [Jeremiah 22](#)

JEREMIAH 22:1–10

¹This is what the LORD says: “Go down to the palace of the king of Judah and proclaim this message there: ²‘Hear the word of the LORD to you, king of Judah, you who sit on David’s throne—you, your officials and your people who come through these gates. ³This is what the LORD says: Do what is just and right. Rescue from the hand of the oppressor the one who has been robbed. Do no wrong or violence to the foreigner, the fatherless or the widow, and do not shed innocent blood in this place. ⁴For if you are careful to carry out these commands, then kings who sit on David’s throne will come through the gates of this palace, riding in chariots and on horses, accompanied by their officials and their people. ⁵But if you do not obey these commands, declares the LORD, I swear by myself that this palace will become a ruin.’”

⁶For this is what the LORD says about the palace of the king of Judah:

“Though you are like Gilead to me,
like the summit of Lebanon,
I will surely make you like a
wasteland,
like towns not inhabited.

⁷I will send destroyers against you,
each man with his weapons,
and they will cut up your fine
cedar beams
and throw them into the fire.

⁸“People from many nations will pass by this city and will ask one another, ‘Why has the LORD done such a thing to this great city?’ ⁹And the answer will be: ‘Because they have forsaken the covenant of the LORD their God and have worshiped and served other gods.’”

¹⁰Do not weep for the dead king or
mourn his loss;
rather, weep bitterly for him
who is exiled,
because he will never return
nor see his native land again.

KEY VERSE

This is what the LORD says: Do what is just and right. Rescue from the hand of the oppressor the one who has been robbed. Do no wrong or violence to the foreigner, the fatherless or the widow, and do not shed innocent blood in this place. —Jeremiah 22:3

JUSTICE AND THE PROPHETS

Unit 3: Called to God's Work of Justice

LESSONS 10–14

LESSON AIMS

After participating in this lesson, each learner will be able to:

1. State promised results of obedience to God and promised consequences for disobedience.
2. Compare and contrast God's statements regarding social justice and injustice with those in other lesson texts of this unit.
3. Evaluate his or her church's ministries to the most vulnerable and participate in a plan for improving those.

LESSON OUTLINE

Introduction

A. Natural Disasters?

B. Lesson Context

I. For Judah (JEREMIAH 22:1–5)

A. Audience Identified (vv. 1, 2)

B. Message Delivered (v. 3)

C. Consequences Specified (vv. 4, 5)

House Rules

II. For the Nations (JEREMIAH 22:6–10)

A. Imagery of Destruction (vv. 6, 7)

B. Example of Disobedience (vv. 8, 9)

C. Mourning for the Exiles (v. 10)

Conclusion

A. Supernatural Restoration

B. Prayer

C. Thought to Remember

HOW TO SAY IT

| | |
|-------------|--|
| Babylonians | Bab-ih-low-nee-unz. |
| Gilead | Gil-ee-ud (<i>G</i> as in <i>get</i>). |
| Jehoahaz | Jeh-ho-uh-haz. |
| Jehoiakim | Jeh-hoy-uh-kim. |
| Josiah | Jo-sigh-uh. |
| Lebanon | Leb-uh-nun. |
| Shallum | Shall-um. |

Introduction

A. Natural Disasters?

On May 18, 1980, Mount St. Helens erupted in the state of Washington. It

was the deadliest eruption ever in the United States. The estimated power of the blast was 1,600 times the size of the atomic bomb dropped on Hiroshima. Miles of forest were leveled by the direct blast, and the very earth was scorched by its power. Fifty-seven people and thousands of animals died as a result. What had previously been lush forest and vacation area looked like moonscape. The ash cloud turned the sky dark as far away as Montana. The blast was a violent reminder of nature's potential for destruction.

The utter devastation that was to follow the destruction of Jerusalem probably looked equally shocking. A once thriving city would be reduced to wilderness and wasteland. A primary thing to keep in mind, however, is that the devastation of Jerusalem was definitely supernatural in origin.

B. Lesson Context

The historical context of this lesson is the same as that of lesson 12, so that information need not be repeated here. Even so, we can say a bit more about the man Jeremiah himself.

God called Jeremiah as a young man to be his prophet to Judah; Jeremiah's own evaluation was that he was too young and not qualified to speak ([Jeremiah 1:6](#)). The forthcoming con-

frontations would seem, at times, to be just two against everyone else. But since one of those two was God ([1:17-19](#)), there could be no question regarding the outcome.

At times in Jeremiah's lengthy ministry, the stress was so great that it seemed as if he was at the psychological breaking point. Nothing Jeremiah did seemed to persuade people. One example of his extreme frustration is his series of complaints in [Jeremiah 12:1-4](#) (also [20:7-18](#)). God's response? If we could be permitted a very loose translation of [Jeremiah 12:5](#), it would be something like, "Cowboy up and get with the program!" But Jeremiah's early years of prophetic ministry under King Josiah were easy compared to what was to come.

I. For Judah (JEREMIAH 22:1-5)

A. Audience Identified (vv. 1, 2)

1a. This is what the LORD says:

This is a common introductory phrase. It tells the reader that a new prophecy is beginning and to expect a change from the previous subject. Jeremiah is in Jerusalem as our text begins (compare [Jeremiah 19:3](#)).

1b. "Go down to the palace of the king of Judah and proclaim this message there:

Go down is probably a directional command in a literal sense. Jerusalem features elevation changes. So the directive suggests that Jeremiah receives it while at or near the temple mount and therefore will need to walk downward to get to *the palace of the king of Judah*.

Based on the timing of the prophecy, the king currently sitting on Judah's throne is probably Jehoiakim. However, God refers to the location of the king's palace instead of to the king himself. This implies that Jeremiah will not be speaking only to the king (contrast [Jeremiah 13:18](#); [21:11](#) [lesson 12]; [34:2](#)).

2a. “Hear the word of the LORD to you,

This phrase is another introduction to prophecy (examples: [Isaiah 28:14](#); [Ezekiel 13:2](#)). The expression demands not just listening but also comprehending and heeding the message (contrast [Isaiah 6:9](#), quoted in [Matthew 13:14](#)). What Jeremiah is about to speak is an authoritative message. As such, it will be quite unlike the invented messages of Jerusalem's false prophets ([Jeremiah 23:14](#); etc.).

2b. “king of Judah, who sit on David's throne—you, your officials and your people who come through these gates.

Referring to *David's throne* confirms the sense that this prophecy is directed toward all David's royal heirs and not

necessarily to a single, specific *king of Judah* (compare [Luke 1:32](#)). Jeremiah explicitly extends this challenge to the king's court and all his *people* (all those in the palace household). The *gates* are the entrances to the palace (see also [Jeremiah 22:4](#), below; contrast city gates in [17:25](#)). Everyone should listen to and be responsible to respond to Jeremiah's words, but especially the leaders.

What Do You Think?

What techniques can we use to confront publicly the failures of those in authority while we exhibit honor and respect at the same time (compare [Acts 23:4, 5](#); [1 Peter 2:17](#))?

Digging Deeper

What interpretive cautions and controls should we adopt before taking Jesus' actions in [Matthew 21:12, 13](#) as a model for our own?

B. Message Delivered (v. 3)

3a. “This is what the LORD says:

Again, Jeremiah emphasizes that *the Lord* is speaking. Jeremiah himself is only the messenger.

3b. “Do what is just and right.

This is the point of leadership failure (compare [Ezekiel 45:9](#); [Amos 5:24](#)). Doing *what is just* is to ensure fair treatment but is not limited to that. It also extends to

developing and maintaining healthy, honest, and respectful relationships at all levels. To *do ... right* is to create and maintain those kinds of relationships. Even so, we should not see too much of a distinction between being just and right, given their many uses as parallel terms in Hebrew poetry (examples: [Isaiah 32:1](#); [Amos 5:24](#); see discussions of parallelism in lessons 4, 9, and 10).

God's character sets the standard for what is just and right (compare [Leviticus 25:17](#); [Psalm 89:14](#); [Isaiah 56:1](#); [Micah 6:8](#)). Both must be expressed toward everyone at all times. And it is the leaders who are to set the example.

3c. “Rescue from the hand of the oppressor the one who has been robbed. Do no wrong or violence to the foreigner, the fatherless or the widow, and do not shed innocent blood in this place.

Oppression flourishes where justice and righteousness are absent. In such circumstances, *the oppressor* can cheat and steal without consequence (see also [Jeremiah 21:12](#), last week's lesson). The three kinds of victims mentioned are the most vulnerable in the ancient world. The three were mentioned together 16 times in the Hebrew Old Testament (compare [7:6](#)). *The foreigner* (that is, a non-Israelite living among the covenant people) should have legal recourse for righting

violence done to himself and his family. *The fatherless and the widow* are most susceptible to poverty, lacking a family breadwinner.

What Do You Think?

What stance(s) should Christians adopt regarding governmental policies and procedures that the Word of God says are wrong?

Digging Deeper

How do [Acts 4:18–20](#); [5:27–29](#); and [Romans 13:1–7](#) help shape your answer?

C. Consequences Specified (vv. 4, 5)

4. “For if you are careful to carry out these commands, then kings who sit on David's throne will come through the gates of this palace, riding in chariots and on horses, accompanied by their officials and their people.

God frequently sets his commands in the context of consequences and blessings (example: [Deuteronomy 11:26–28](#)). Here, God promises again to extend David's legacy to David's royal descendants if they will *carry out these commands*—namely, practice justice and righteousness.

The bottom-line question is simple: Do those *who sit on David's throne* desire to keep their positions, or do they not?

5a. “But if you do not obey these commands, declares the LORD,

A warning against refusing to obey and heed God’s *commands* is in keeping with the blessing/curse pattern established early in the history of Israel (see [Deuteronomy 28](#)). Jeremiah does not use that couplet specifically, but blessing-and-curse is indeed the sense here (compare [Zechariah 8:13](#)).

What Do You Think?

Which sins of injustice are most in need of correcting today: those of commission (doing wrong) or those of omission (failing to do right)? Why?

Digging Deeper

Which of those two areas are you best positioned to help correct? Why?

5b. “I swear by myself that this palace will become a ruin.”

To *swear* is a particularly weighty way of making a promise (compare [Genesis 22:16](#)). The more significant, permanent, or powerful the thing sworn on, the more definite and absolute the promise. There is nothing and no one more significant, permanent, or powerful than God ([Hebrews 6:13](#)). He will make sure he fulfills this promise if Judah refuses to respond obediently.

The consequences God describes are both symbolic and literal. The phrase *this*

palace refers both to David’s descendants and to the physical structure of their dwelling. If Judah’s leaders disregard God, they will not only be dethroned; they also will be without a physical residence in Jerusalem (compare [Jeremiah 39:4–8](#)).

HOUSE RULES

When I was in high school, I met Sam. As we got acquainted, I began to hear from Sam about how unjust his father was. As Sam and I got closer, we would visit each other’s homes. I began to see why Sam was frustrated. His father approached life with a critical, demanding spirit.

One day Sam said, “I wish my dad were more like your dad.” Ironically, my dad had some of the same rules as Sam’s dad. The difference was in approach. My father prioritized, helping me understand why the house rules were in place, as well as how they worked for my own good.

Jeremiah tried to help the leaders of Judah see that there were good reasons for God’s rules. If God couldn’t get the leaders’ attention through prophecy, then he would get their attention through fulfillment of prophecy. What does it take for God to get your attention?

—C. R. B.

II. For the Nations

([JEREMIAH 22:6-10](#))

A. Imagery of Destruction (vv. 6, 7)

6a. For this is what the LORD says about the palace of the king of Judah:

Again, Jeremiah restates that the words he speaks come from *the Lord* and are addressed to *the palace of the king*. There should be no mistake about either the source or the intended recipients!

6b. “Though you are like Gilead to me, like the summit of Lebanon, I will surely make you like a wasteland, like towns not inhabited.

God uses imagery to affirm how precious his people are to him. *Gilead* is an area just east of the Jordan River ([Numbers 32:1-4, 19](#)); *Lebanon* is located along the seacoast north of Israel. Those areas were known for their forests ([Judges 9:15](#); etc.). Both David and Solomon used expensive wood from the areas in building projects ([2 Samuel 7:2](#); [1 Kings 5:1-10; 7:2](#)). Gilead was also known for its balm ([Genesis 37:25](#); [Jeremiah 8:22; 46:11](#)).

Other than the text before us, mention of Gilead and Lebanon occur together in the same verse only in [Zechariah 10:10](#). Just three verses later, that prophet speaks of fire destroying Lebanon’s “cedars” and “oaks of Bashan”—an area lying north of and adjacent to Gilead ([11:1, 2](#)). The coming

destruction will be heartbreaking. Though David’s lineage is precious to the Lord, he will dispossess its kings if they don’t change their unjust ways. But that is up to them.

7. “I will send destroyers against you, each man with his weapons, and they will cut up your fine cedar beams and throw them into the fire.

The *destroyers* to whom God refers are the Babylonians ([2 Chronicles 36:17-19](#)). Reference to *your fine cedar beams* may refer either to (1) trees of the forest or (2) the cedar used in construction for the wealthy, especially the king’s palace. Considering the first possibility, the felling of trees is a natural thing for a besieging army to do for building its siege ramps and towers ([Jeremiah 6:6](#); compare [43:12](#); [Isaiah 10:34](#)).

Since an army would use the trees closest at hand, which probably wouldn’t be cedar, the reference to cedar in the king’s palace is more likely. Under either interpretation, the victorious besiegers will burn everything of significance before leaving for home ([Jeremiah 52:13](#)). Judah will be a deconstruction zone. The sense of the verse is of priceless things destroyed that need not have been.

B. Example of Disobedience (vv. 8, 9)

8. “People from many nations will pass by this city and will ask one

another, ‘Why has the LORD done such a thing to this great city?’

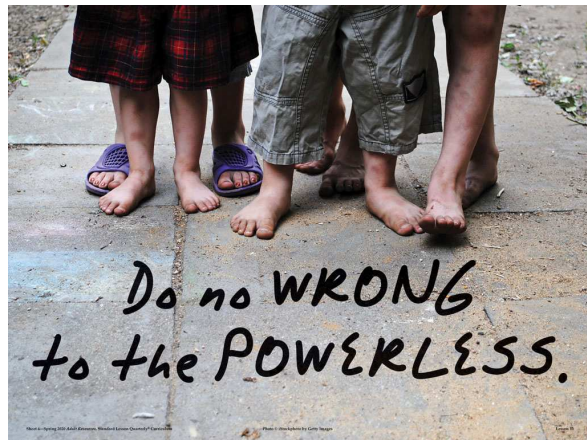
People of the ancient Near East generally linked the rise and fall of *nations* to the power of a nation’s deities (see [1 Kings 20:23](#)). Jerusalem’s status as a *great city* has earned Judah a reputation for following a very powerful deity. This is what God intended ([Genesis 12:1-3](#)).

The injustice that infects Jerusalem and Judah does not draw the nations toward the just and holy God—the only God there is. Instead, the nations around Jerusalem see no difference between Judah’s way of life and theirs, between their gods and Judah’s God. And when those nations see the defeat and captivity of God’s people, they will link it to God’s activity. The scope of devastation Judah is to undergo will be so immense that everyone will conclude that it was a God-driven action. The extent of the destruction will accomplish what Jerusalem and her injustice had not: nations will acknowledge God in at least one sense.

9. “And the answer will be: ‘Because they have forsaken the covenant of the LORD their God and worshiped and served other gods.’”

God’s plan from the beginning has involved inviting others to experience and follow him. We see this in God’s promise to Abraham, that Abraham will be a blessing to the nations ([Genesis](#)

[12:1-3](#)). We see this again in [Zechariah 8:20-23](#), as God’s restoration of Judah draws the nations to seek him. We see it again in the New Testament, when Peter challenges his readers to live lives that draw questions—all so that we may respond with Jesus as our answer ([1 Peter 3:8-15](#)).



Visual for Lesson 13. While discussing v. 3, have the class identify their responsibilities toward “the powerless” in the community.

But in our text we see the opposite occurring. Jerusalem’s injustice does not draw the nations to seek God, since they see no difference between Judah’s actions and their own. So God plans to draw their attention to his ways of justice and righteousness by disciplining Judah for her failure to model God’s character. That would invite others to see God for who he is (compare [2 Kings 22:17](#); [Ezekiel 39:23](#)). The forthcoming devastation will be seen as divine in origin. The predicted *answer* is nothing new (see [Deuteronomy 29:25](#),

26; [1 Kings 9:8, 9](#); [Jeremiah 16:10, 11](#)).

C. Mourning for the Exiles (v. 10)

10a. Do not weep for the dead king or mourn his loss;

This lament is usually understood to refer to Josiah, Judah's last righteous king ([2 Chronicles 35:25](#)). Mourning *for the dead* is a significant ritual for cultures worldwide; the ancient Near East is no exception. Jeremiah's words suggest that there is a fate worse than death (compare [Ecclesiastes 4:2](#)).

10b. rather, weep bitterly for him who is exiled, because he will never return nor see his native land again.

The reference is to Shallum, also known as Jehoahaz ([Jeremiah 22:11, 12](#), not in our printed text; [2 Kings 23:29–32](#)). Shallum succeeded Josiah as king in about 609 BC. Reversing Josiah's initiatives, Shallum led Judah back into the evils of Josiah's predecessors; he was king for only three months, then was exiled permanently to Egypt ([23:33](#); the Shallum of [2 Kings 15](#) is a different person).

It seems odd to mourn the exile of an evil king yet not grieve the death of a godly king (compare [Jeremiah 22:18](#), not in our printed text). The force of Jeremiah's prophecy has been God's warning of destruction and exile if Judah's leaders refuse to practice justice. Shallum is to serve as an example of the grief of

all the exiles. Jeremiah holds him up as a warning of his hearers' own possible future.

What Do You Think?

In what ways does this verse help you in establishing priorities of focus?

Digging Deeper

What additional help do you find in [1 Corinthians 7:29–31](#) in this regard? How so?

Conclusion

A. Supernatural Restoration

The word from the Lord to the house of David features two promises: (1) If David's descendants would renounce injustice, then God would bless them, but (2) if not, they would suffer punishment. Judah would experience the full and recognizable consequences of disobeying God. God would therefore exhibit his character to the world and draw people to himself in one of those two ways.

God calls us to the same challenge he posed through Jeremiah. As we demonstrate God's righteous and just character in our actions, we also must expose the injustice inflicted on the powerless by oppressive people and systems. But we don't just draw people to God as an abstract. Rather, we draw people to the living Jesus. To reject this mission is to

risk experiencing God in ways we will not like.

B. Prayer

Heavenly Father, help us see ways in which we have been unjust so that we may repent and model you as you would have us do. We pray in the name of the one who suffered great injustice, Jesus. Amen.

C. Thought to Remember

Does your example invite God's justice?

INVOLVEMENT LEARNING

Enhance your lesson with NIV Bible Student (from your curriculum supplier) and the reproducible activity page (at www.standardlesson.com or in the back of the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary Deluxe Edition).

Into the Lesson

Give to each of six class members a piece of poster board on which you have written one word of the following in very large letters:

Get while the getting is good.

Ask the six participants to come to the front and arrange themselves in the

correct order. After they do so, merely say, "Hmmm ... looks like we have some work to do." Then have half the class think of reasons why the sentence represents a correct worldview by which to live; the other half is to think of reasons it represents a defective worldview. Jot proposals on the board during ensuing whole-class discussion.

Announce that today's text will cast light on whether this axiom is biblically valid or defective.

Into the Word

Prepare handouts with the following headings and/or others as you see fit. Leave space between the headings for notes.

- I. What the leaders should do
- II. How God will respond
- III. What disobedience will bring
- IV. What the nations will conclude

Distribute the handout to groups of two to six to complete as the outline suggests. After five minutes, allow groups to share with the whole class.

Next, pose the following questions for whole-class discussion. (*Option.* To encourage balanced participation, say that no one gets to speak twice until everyone has had an opportunity to speak once.)

- 1—Why was God’s exhortation aimed at the leaders rather than the population at large?
- 2—How is God’s instruction here different from prophecies that focus on idol worship?
- 3—What makes God’s promised punishment especially terrible?
- 4—Why would God predict the reaction of pagan nations?

Next, form the class into study pairs or triads to discuss these comprehension questions:

- How are God’s statements regarding justice and injustice **similar to** his statements in the other lessons in this unit studied so far?
- How do God’s statements regarding justice and injustice **differ from** his statements in the other lessons in this unit studied so far?

Point students again to the six-word sentence that began today’s session. Ask, “How does today’s text suggest an approach for God’s people different from ‘Get while the getting is good?’”

Into Life

Distribute handouts (you prepare) featuring the following categories:

- | | |
|--------------------------|-----------------|
| ___ Victims of injustice | ___ For-eigners |
| ___ Widows | ___ Orphans |

Ask learners to take 30 seconds to rank from 1 (best) to 4 (needs most improvement) how your church is doing in ministering to each category of people. Follow by creating an overall class tally on the board. Discuss reasons for different rankings. (*Option.* Precede this exercise by having study pairs complete the “Concern for the Vulnerable” exercise on the activity page, which you can download.) Remind students that each listed category is in [Jeremiah 22:3](#).

Form small groups designated by the four categories above, one designation per group. Allow learners to be in the group of their choosing. Have groups propose how group members can help your church improve in that area of ministry.

Option. Conclude by distributing the “Prayer for Wisdom to Help” exercise at the bottom of the activity page as a take-home.

To print the reproducible activity page, simply click the highlighted text below to create a pdf file on your hard drive. Then open the pdf file in Acrobat Reader and print.

Activity Page (May 24—Repent of Injustice)

REPENT OF INJUSTICE

Lesson 13, Jeremiah 22:1-10, NIV

CONCERN FOR THE VULNERABLE

Jeremiah's prophecy recorded in chapter 22 urges the leaders of Judah to do what is just and right. Each heading below represents a category of concern mentioned there, especially in verse 3. Under each heading are other Bible verses that echo similar concerns. For each list, match the scriptural teaching with a word or phrase or idea from verse 3.



Photo: © Chrissa Leah / Cultura

1. _____
Proverbs 21:13
Galatians 2:10
2. _____
Exodus 22:21
Leviticus 19:34
3. _____
Exodus 22:22
Deuteronomy 24:19-21
4. _____
Deuteronomy 19:10
Proverbs 1:11-16

Who would fall into one of these categories in our community?

What can we do to help?

[verse 3: *This is what the Lord says: Do what is just and right. Rescue from the hand of the oppressor the one who has been robbed. Do no wrong or violence to the foreigner, the fatherless or the widow, and do not shed innocent blood in this place.*]

PRAYER FOR WISDOM TO HELP

After reading Jeremiah 22:1-10 and the above Scriptures, write a prayer, asking God for wisdom, strength, and opportunity to obey Him in at least one of the areas you wrote above.



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Dear God, _____

