

The Kingdoms' Fall

*Jeremiah had good reason to weep,
but God has the remedy to wipe tears away!*

Introduction

Have you ever watched a movie and found yourself thinking, somewhere near the conclusion, "There has to be a catch. This can't be the way the story ends"?

This is what happens in the classic movie *E.T.* Near the end, the star of the show, the cute little extraterrestrial character, dies. His glowing heart stops glowing; his radiant pointer finger goes dark; his alien skin turns pasty. Our Reese's Pieces-eating gentle hero just dies.

Everyone knows this is wrong. You can feel it in the air. The story can't end like this. There must be some surprise, some hope, some twist or turn coming ... there *must* be!

Chapter 17 of *The Story* is just such a moment. The Northern Kingdom of Israel will disappear forever. The Southern Kingdom of Judah will be invaded by Babylon and taken captive. The city of Jerusalem and Solomon's temple will be destroyed.

We read along and say, "This can't be the end! God promised to bring people back to himself and accomplish his plan ... through Israel. Isn't there some surprise twist or turn? Is there still hope for God's plan?"

The answer to these questions will be examined in chapter 19 of *The Story* (but don't rush ahead to find out!).

Talk About It

Tell about a movie you saw or book you read in which you neared the end and things seemed to be concluding all wrong. How did things actually turn out?

4. Once Jerusalem had fallen and the Babylonians had utterly destroyed the nation of Judah, Jeremiah recorded what he saw and felt (Lamentations 1–5; *The Story*, pp. 243–245). What did he write that made the situation seem hopeless, like it was all over? What did he write that seemed to have a sense of hope, like God's plan could still be accomplished?

5. When God called Jeremiah to serve him, he assured him that his plan had been in place since Jeremiah was in his mother's womb. In the New Testament we learn that God has a plan for each of us who follow him. How has God gifted and called you to serve him and how are you following this call? How can your group members pray for you and cheer you on as you seek to follow God with greater faithfulness and passion?

"For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do." (Ephesians 2:10)

6. As with many of the people God calls (in the Bible and in the world today), Jeremiah had his list of excuses. What excuses do we use to try to get out of following God? How can we encourage each other to stop making excuses and boldly follow God's leading?

7. In one of the most hopeless times in biblical history, the prophet Ezekiel pointed ahead to a future time when the story's ending will be rewritten (Ezekiel 36:1–37:14; *The Story*, pp. 245–247). How do Ezekiel's words bring hope when it feels as if the story is over?

8. Respond to this statement: "In God's employment contract he does not ask us to be successful (by the world's standards) but faithful. Success is based on faithfulness to God ... not the results!" What is one way you can be more faithful to God in the coming weeks? How can your group members encourage you in this effort?



9. Read movement 3 of *The Story* (p. 11 of this participant's guide). If one of your group members has memorized this short statement that describes the heartbeat of the third movement, allow them to quote it and tell about what God taught them as they committed this statement to memory.

DVD Teaching Notes

As you watch the video segment for session 17, use the following outline to record anything that stands out to you.

How Israel got to their “no remedy” moment

Jeremiah’s assignment in God’s Upper Story

Ezekiel and Jeremiah speak

The bright spot in a dark time of history ... there is still hope!

DVD Discussion

1. In the DVD segment Randy said, “For hundreds of years God waited patiently, warned his people, and gave them chance after chance.” Why was God so patient with the people of Israel when they were so rebellious and sinful? How have you experienced God’s great patience in your life?

2. In the prophet Ezekiel’s amazing and powerful vision from God (Ezekiel 1, 2, 6; *The Story*, pp. 235 – 237), what do we learn about the following:
 - The condition of the people’s hearts (the nation of Judah)

 - The reasons for the coming judgment

 - What lies ahead for Judah and Jerusalem

3. How can God’s discipline of his children be the best gift he can give us? How has God disciplined you on your journey of faith and how did his loving discipline help you grow?

With God’s people there is never a strong, truthful bout of loving discipline without God’s grace following right behind it. It was true for Judah. It is true for us.