

Jeremiah's Call and Arrest

Devotional Reading: Jeremiah 1:11–19

Background Scripture: Jeremiah 1:1–10; 6:10–11; 8:18; 9:2; 26:1–24

Jeremiah 1:6–10

⁶ “Alas, Sovereign LORD,” I said, “I do not know how to speak; I am too young.”

⁷ But the LORD said to me, “Do not say, ‘I am too young.’ You must go to everyone I send you to and say whatever I command you. ⁸ Do not be afraid of them, for I am with you and will rescue you,” declares the LORD.

⁹ Then the LORD reached out his hand and touched my mouth and said to me, “I have put my words in your mouth. ¹⁰ See, today I appoint you over nations and kingdoms to uproot and tear down, to destroy and overthrow, to build and to plant.”



Jeremiah 26:8–9, 12–15

⁸ But as soon as Jeremiah finished telling all the people everything the LORD had commanded him to say, the priests, the prophets and all the people seized him and said, “You must die! ⁹ Why do you prophesy in the LORD’s name that this house will be like Shiloh and this city will be desolate and deserted?” And all the people crowded around Jeremiah in the house of the LORD.

¹² Then Jeremiah said to all the officials and all the people: “The LORD sent me to prophesy against this house and this city all the things you have heard. ¹³ Now reform your ways and your actions and obey the LORD your God. Then the LORD will relent and not bring the disaster he has pronounced against you. ¹⁴ As for me, I am in your hands; do with me whatever you think is good and right. ¹⁵ Be assured, however, that if you put me to death, you will bring the guilt of innocent blood on yourselves and on this city and on those who live in it, for in truth the LORD has sent me to you to speak all these words in your hearing.”

Key Text

The LORD said to me, “Do not say, ‘I am too young.’ You must go to everyone I send you to and say whatever I command you.” —Jeremiah 1:7

Judah, from Isaiah to the Exile

Unit 2: Jeremiah and the Promise of Renewal

Lessons 5–9

Lesson Aims

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

1. Summarize the context of Jeremiah's call.
2. Compare and contrast Jeremiah's reaction to God's call with that of Isaiah in reaction to his own call (Lesson 1).
3. Develop a plan to encourage congregational ministry free from age discrimination.

Lesson Outline

Introduction

- A. Plucking and Planting
- B. Lesson Context

I. Appointed to Prophecy (Jeremiah 1:6–10)

- A. Jeremiah's Objection (v. 6)
- B. The Lord's Response (vv. 7–8)
Confounding the Wise
- C. Jeremiah's Commission (vv. 9–10)
En Pointe

II. Condemned to Death (Jeremiah 26:8–9)

- A. Unwelcome Message (v. 8)
- B. Unruly Crowd (v. 9)

III. Determined to Speak (Jeremiah 26:12–15)

- A. Assured Promise (vv. 12–13)
- B. Dire Warning (vv. 14–15)

Conclusion

- A. Each Christian's Call
- B. Prayer
- C. Thought to Remember

Introduction

A. Plucking and Planting

Although I want my lawn to be a healthy mix of grasses, unwelcome visitors also grow there: weeds. A particularly irksome offender is nutsedge, which initially masquerades as grass. Untreated, it can take over large sections of a lawn. While spraying with weed killers has some effect, new plants seem to return in a few days. By midsummer, the only way I have found to control nutsedge is to get on my knees and pluck out every single plant by the roots.

In the same lawn, I annually overseed sections where the grass is thin. This adds new growth and increases the lawn's thickness and health. Often, I overseed an area damaged by nutsedge and my clumsy extractions of this weed.

So the same turf area may see "plucking" and "planting" as uprooting and renewing. Such imagery is used in the book of Jeremiah to describe the Lord's control over the rise and fall of nations. Nations are "plucked" (face disaster) or "planted" (allowed to prosper) according to the Lord's plans. This lesson looks at God's purposes in the history of nations and the role of his prophets (like Jeremiah) in announcing and interpreting these events.

B. Lesson Context

Jeremiah's prophetic ministry began in 627 BC, about 70 years after Isaiah. He was a priest at Anathoth (Jeremiah 1:1), therefore from the tribe of Levi and an educated person. About this time, the last great Assyrian king died, ending the dominance of this cruel nation over the people of Israel. But other foreign menaces came to dominate Judah: first Egypt, then Babylon. This climaxed in 586 BC when the armies of Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar captured Jerusalem and destroyed both the city walls and the temple (see 2 Kings 25:1, 8–11).

Jeremiah's career spanned the reigns of the last five kings of Judah before this catastrophe. Jeremiah is known as the "Mournful Prophet." His name contributes to the English term "jeremiad," a bitter railing against opponents. He is credited

as the author of the book that bears his name as well as the book of Lamentations.

I. Appointed to Prophecy

(Jeremiah 1:6–10)

A. Jeremiah’s Objection (v. 6)

6. “Alas, Sovereign LORD,” I said, “I do not know how to speak; I am too young.”

The book of Jeremiah begins with God calling to him to be a “prophet to the nations” (Jeremiah 1:5). We may compare this to other callings such as those of Moses (Exodus 3:5–10), Isaiah (Isaiah 6:1–13), Samuel (1 Samuel 3:10–21), Ezekiel (Ezekiel 2:3–8), and Amos (Amos 7:14–15).

It is common for a person the Lord is calling on to express various inadequacies. Moses claimed to be “slow of speech and tongue” (Exodus 4:10). Isaiah protested he was a “man of unclean lips” (Isaiah 6:5; see lesson 1). Amos noted he was a farmer, not a trained prophet (Amos 7:14). Jeremiah asserts he is *too young* and therefore cannot be expected to *speak* like a prophet. We do not know how old Jeremiah was, but given that he was already serving as a priest suggests he was not a young child. He may not have been a seasoned orator, but he was hardly a small boy. Regardless of his exact age, Jeremiah appears to use his age as a reason for not being up to the task.

In Jeremiah’s response, we also see a curious capitalization of “Lord” in the title *Sovereign LORD*. If translated in strict alignment with other occurrences of these two Hebrew terms, *adonai Yahweh* would be rendered “Lord LORD.”

What Do You Think?

When is a time that you doubted you were capable of something you felt God asking you to do?

Digging Deeper

How can we move through feelings of inadequacy to respond to God more readily in obedience and faith?

B. The Lord’s Response (vv. 7–8)

7. But the LORD said to me, “Do not say, ‘I

am too young.’ You must go to everyone I send you to and say whatever I command you.

The Lord will have none of Jeremiah’s objections. Jeremiah would *go* where the Lord would *send* him and would speak *whatever* the Lord might *command*. God was not expecting Jeremiah to venture out as an unequipped spokesman with no support. The Lord would direct his ministry and supply content for his messages.

We have come to associate prophecy with predictions of the future and prophets with those who reveal future events. This, however, is not the whole of what Jeremiah is called to do when he speaks. He is the Lord’s spokesman, who goes and speaks as the Lord directs him. This message may include revealing God’s plans for the future (Jeremiah 31:31–34, etc.). It may also be a denunciation of sin and a call to repentance for those of the prophet’s day (8:4–7; 18:5–11, etc.).

The messages of prophets such as Jeremiah often include warnings of God’s potential acts of punishment while promising blessings for those who listen, repent, and obey. Prediction of future events was something the people could evaluate and thereby judge the veracity of any prophet (see Deuteronomy 18:21–22). In Jeremiah’s situation, he denounced false prophets for promising “peace” to the people because it was a message the public wanted to hear. Jeremiah knew this was a false prediction, that foreign invasion was on the horizon (Jeremiah 6:13–15, etc.).

Confounding the Wise

As a mom of four, I referee a lot of disagreements. One day, I overheard my two youngest having an argument. My son Garrett had offered his younger sister Morgan what seemed like a good solution, but for some reason she wouldn’t agree. After listening to both sides, it still seemed that Garrett’s solution was reasonable.

Turning to Morgan to ask her why she wouldn’t agree to it, she thought for a moment. She looked up with sad eyes and lamented, “I know it makes sense, but it’s like my body won’t agree. It just can’t catch up to what he is saying.” I was stunned by how deep and rich her words were. I realized that instead of pushing her to

move toward a solution, she just needed a little time. After being allowed that time, she and Garrett went on to enjoy their game.

The necessary wisdom to handle this tiff came from a 7-year-old. It's not always the most educated, lofty, and powerful voices that teach us. God often communicates his truth by means of humble, unlikely sources. When was the last time you encountered truth in an unlikely place? How did you receive it? —N. H.

8. **“Do not be afraid of them, for I am with you and will rescue you,” declares the LORD.**

Jeremiah likely considers that he will face opposition to his message and new vocation. This can include stiff animosity from those he is to address with words from the Lord. Some Bible translations, such as the *King James Version*, are more literal here with, “Do not be afraid of their faces.” This phrase implies anxiety over face-to-face encounters. Jeremiah will not be posting to social media, let alone sending a letter. He will be in the physical presence of people who reject his message in threatening ways.

C. **Jeremiah’s Commission (vv. 9–10)**

9. **Then the LORD reached out his hand and touched my mouth and said to me, “I have put my words in your mouth.”**

Because the prophet is to be God’s spokesman, Jeremiah’s mouth will become a symbol for his task. Here we are reminded of the prophet Isaiah. When Isaiah received his great vision of the Lord on his heavenly throne, he felt completely out of place in God’s presence and protested that he was a man of “unclean lips” (Isaiah 6:5). When an angel took a burning coal from the altar in heaven and touched it to Isaiah’s mouth, he was

How to Say It

<i>adonai</i> (Hebrew)	ad-owe-nye.
Anathoth	An-uh-thoth.
Jehoiakim	Jeh-hoy-uh-kim.
Jeremiah	Jair-uh-my-uh.
Nebuchadnezzar	Neb-yuh-kud-nez-er.
Shiloh	Shy-low.

spiritually cleansed and empowered. When God asked for a volunteer to speak to the people, Isaiah responded, “Here am I. Send me!” (6:8; see lesson 1).

The call of Jeremiah has similarities. Jeremiah’s sense of inadequacy for his call also brings a touch to his *mouth*, this time by the Lord’s *hand*. This is not to cure a speech impediment or to repair damaged vocal cords. Rather, Jeremiah is told that the Lord has *put his words in the prophet’s mouth*. Jeremiah will never need to worry about a situation in which he thinks, “I don’t know what to say.” God gives him a task and will surely give him a message.

What Do You Think?

When was fear a barrier to obeying God’s direction in your life?

Digging Deeper

What steps can you take to grow your faith and combat fear?

En Pointe

One day, feeling overwhelmed by ministry responsibilities, I reached out to a mentor for advice. She responded with an interesting fact about ballet dancers. “If they move to pointe shoes too soon,” she said, “they risk breaking their ankles.”

I felt the truth of her words immediately. I had taken on too much, effectively “moving to pointe” too soon. The weight of it all was about to break me. I thanked her for her wise words and considered where I could make some ankle-saving adjustments. A couple of years later, this advice came to mind again when my daughter came home from dance class, announcing that her teacher had invited her to move to pointe shoes. We celebrated with gusto, reveling in this achievement. I couldn’t help but reflect on how, for me, the idea of pointe shoes had represented weightiness and struggle. For my daughter, they were a thrill and a joy.

What was the difference? It all depended on the teacher making the call. When the teacher makes the call, we can trust that we are well-equipped to

do the work he has given us. Consider making a list of the things you feel called to do. Do you feel equipped? Why or why not? —N. H.

10. “See, today I appoint you over nations and kingdoms to uproot and tear down, to destroy and overthrow, to build and to plant.”

Jeremiah’s call is not to be squandered on denouncing the petty sins of his community. God’s plans for Jeremiah are much bigger, international in scope. We should understand this carefully, though. Jeremiah is not appointed and empowered to be a kingmaker or judge over *nations and kingdoms* in any way apart from God’s control and plan. His role as God’s spokesman is weighty, delivering the verdicts and judgments of the “King of the nations” (Jeremiah 10:7).

One of the many figurative ways the book of Jeremiah illustrates this plucking and planting is the work of a potter in Jeremiah 18. The Lord is pictured as the ultimate maker of clay pots, a metaphor for nations. Jeremiah equates the divine potter’s actions in shaping a pot with plucking up, pulling down, and destroying (Jeremiah 18:7).

In this verse, the actions of building and planting are also included. The founding and blessing of nations are in God’s hands, as are their punishment and destruction. Even a nation that has been planted and built up by the Lord is subject to being uprooted and destroyed if it persists in disobedience (Jeremiah 18:9–10).

The act of uprooting is further described using three terms with political overtones. First, *nations* will be torn down. This can refer to the actual razing of buildings, even the complete decimation of a city. It is the opposite of the next act of the Lord Jeremiah mentions, *to build*, which indicates construction. For a nation, this could be the infrastructure of buildings and fortifications that come with national longevity. We may marvel at the grand buildings of the ancient Egyptians or Mayans and the legacies they leave of defunct empires. But the Lord may leave little trace of the nations he destroys, thus allowing for reconstruction by another peo-

ple. Second, nations will be destroyed. This is the next step beyond conquering. It means the nation ceases to exist like the northern kingdom of Israel, utterly dismantled by the Assyrians in the eighth century BC.

Third, nations will be overthrown. Once-powerful nations will be conquered by other nations and placed in a servile position.

What Do You Think?

How might God use a person’s ministry to bring both warning and blessing to others?

Digging Deeper

What are some things such a person would need to be cautious about?

II. Condemned to Death

(Jeremiah 26:8–9)

A. Unwelcome Message (v. 8)

8. But as soon as Jeremiah finished telling all the people everything the LORD had commanded him to say, the priests, the prophets and all the people seized him and said, “You must die!”

Our lesson moves to the central section of the book of Jeremiah to give us a glimpse of how the opening verses of his call to be a prophet in chapter 1 were actualized in the events of his ministry. In chapter 26, Jeremiah goes to Jerusalem to speak God’s words during the reign of King Jehoiakim (Jeremiah 26:1). This is often called the “Temple Sermon” and may be the same incident related in chapter 7 (see Lesson 6). The material in Jeremiah is not always related in chronological order. In that regard, this later account—from a slightly different perspective—may help us understand what happened in chapter 7. The thrust of Jeremiah’s message in chapter 7 is that the people’s expectation of future peace (7:20, 34) and their pride in the protection of the temple (7:4) are mistaken.

Jehoiakim probably became king in 609 BC, so this would be roughly 20 years after Jeremiah began his prophetic ministry. The Lord’s message through Jeremiah was that the people must keep

the law and turn from their evil ways (Jeremiah 26:3–4). If not, the Lord would curse them and make Jerusalem like “Shiloh,” a deserted site that lived only in memory (26:6; see also 7:12–15).

When Jeremiah finishes delivering God’s words, the reaction of *the priests, the prophets and all the people* is to threaten his life. They are deeply offended, having no desire to repent or return to the Law of Moses. When they say, “*You must die,*” we can understand this to mean, “We are going to kill you” (compare Jeremiah 26:11). Rather than obey the Lord’s word given through Jeremiah, their first impulse is to seek his death.

B. Unruly Crowd (v. 9)

9. “Why do you prophesy in the LORD’s name that this house will be like Shiloh and this city will be desolate and deserted?” And all the people crowded around Jeremiah in the house of the LORD.

This response shows us that the people have understood Jeremiah clearly. He has promised that the temple would be *like Shiloh*, a former site of the temple’s predecessor, the tabernacle (Joshua 18:1). Shiloh was abandoned after the army of Israel was defeated by the Philistines around 1050 BC. In this battle, the ark of the covenant was captured (1 Samuel 4:4, 10–11), a national disaster for Israel.

Initially, Jeremiah’s words find no listeners who take them to heart. There is no repentance, only hostility to the messenger. Even though Jeremiah claims to speak *in the Lord’s name*, his message is rejected by *all the people*. Instead, they continue to believe the temple’s false prophets, who have assured them of future peace and prosperity (Jeremiah 23:16).

What Do You Think?

When have you witnessed someone ridiculed or threatened for doing what was right?

Digging Deeper

How might you learn from the example of such people to live confidently and boldly in your own life?

III. Determined to Speak

(Jeremiah 26:12–15)

A. Assured Promise (vv. 12–13)

12. Then Jeremiah said to all the officials and all the people: “The LORD sent me to prophesy against this house and this city all the things you have heard.

Jeremiah’s courage is on display here. Although he surely expects he will be executed, he takes a last opportunity to speak the word of the Lord. He reminds his audience that his message is not his own concoction but the prophecy *the Lord sent him to deliver against this house* (the temple) *and this city* (Jerusalem). He is not pronouncing judgment based on his own standards; he is voicing the judgments of the Lord.

13. “Now reform your ways and your actions and obey the LORD your God. Then the LORD will relent and not bring the disaster he has pronounced against you.

Jeremiah’s summary advice is simple: *reform your ways and your actions* (repent) and *obey the Lord’s voice* (follow the Law of Moses). Jeremiah promises that if the people repent (change their ways), the Lord will *relent of the disaster* he has planned. We refer to this as conditional or contingent prophecy. The Lord reveals, through a prophet, the future that awaits if the people do not repent. This disastrous course lies in store for the people if nothing changes in their attitudes and actions.

B. Dire Warning (vv. 14–15)

14. “As for me, I am in your hands; do with me whatever you think is good and right.

Having reiterated his message without compromise, Jeremiah submits himself to the *hands* of his enemies. He has been faithful to his call, and now he accepts the potential consequences. Implicit here is Jeremiah’s faith in the Lord. Without such faith, he would not be able to confidently hand himself over to his enemies. This does not mean that Jeremiah knows it will go well for him. Rather, despite not knowing the outcome, he has faith in the one who called him. This was the right path for him to take, regardless of how it would end.

What Do You Think?

How have you had to entrust yourself to God's care for your well-being and safety?

Digging Deeper

What is an example of a way God might ask you to take a risk for the sake of Christ's kingdom?

may be just as challenging as it was for Jeremiah. As with Jeremiah, this may come upon you at a young age. Ministries of truth and service are not just for mature believers.

What inhibits you from assuming a more active ministry for the Lord? Do you think you are too young? Too inexperienced? Do you think you are too old? Do you think you don't know the Bible well enough? Do you think you are too busy? Are you slowed by fear of rejection?

Jeremiah likely felt many of these things. He could have lived a respectful life as a priest enjoying the quiet stability of a small village. The Lord had other plans for him. He was called to be God's spokesman of judgment to the elites of his land, even the great nations of his world. Although he did not seek or relish this responsibility, he faithfully carried it out. May we follow the example of brave Jeremiah in the calls to ministry that the Lord extends to every Christian.

B. Prayer

Lord, you know us intimately. May we yield our hearts to this loving relationship and find ways to serve you and your people. May we never be fearful but always faithful. We pray in the name of the innocent one who was faithful unto death, Jesus our Lord. Amen.

C. Thought to Remember

Walk in obedient faith, not fear.

Conclusion

A. Each Christian's Call

Jeremiah knew from an early age that obeying the Lord's call would be difficult, even dangerous. His messages of future destruction would be unpopular among the ruling elite of Jerusalem, and they would sway the people against him. Yet he faithfully delivered these hard words, even at the risk of his own life.

Today, you may not be called to deliver God's words to elites in places of societal power. Your roles may be confined to your church, family, school, or workplace. Nevertheless, speaking truth



Visual for Lesson 5. Display this visual and ask participants to reflect on Jeremiah's situation and the Lord's words of comfort to him.