

# Jeremiah's Call and Commission

Bible Background • [JEREMIAH 1](#)

Printed Text • [JEREMIAH 1:4-10](#)

Devotional Reading • [PSALM 75](#)

## Aim for Change

By the end of the lesson, we will: RECOUNT the details of the promises God made to Jeremiah; SENSE the intensity of Jeremiah's call and his emotional reaction to it; and RESPOND to a call from God despite feelings of personal inadequacy.

## In Focus

Al loved to play softball for his local team. It was just for fun, but Al really worked the hardest of everyone on the team. Just before the last game of the season, the team captain had to suddenly leave for an emergency. But before he left, he asked Al to coach in his absence. Al was shocked, and replied, "But Cap, there are other players better than me. Why not choose them?" The captain said, "None of them are as diligent and determined as you. You can do it, Al. You have the ability."

Al agreed to coach the team. When the team came to the field, he explained what was going on. Al then created a new batting order. He changed the pitching schedule so the best one would pitch late in the game. The team didn't understand, but they followed Al.

Al's new arrangements worked; his team won the game handily. One player asked, "How did you know to switch the order?" Al said, "We've played against the other team before. I remembered their strengths and weaknesses, and created the order from that information." Al didn't believe in himself at first, but his captain had confidence in his ability. Al stepped up to lead the team because his captain had confidence in him.

*In today's lesson, Jeremiah steps up to be a prophet because God called him to do it and believed in him. Is there something God has called you to but you didn't have confidence you would be able to do it?*

## Keep in Mind

"Be not afraid of their faces: for I am with thee to deliver thee, saith the LORD"  
([Jeremiah 1:8](#)).

## KJV

**Jeremiah 1:4** Then the word of the LORD came unto me, saying,

**5** Before I formed thee in the belly I knew thee; and before thou camest forth out of the womb I sanctified thee, and I ordained thee a prophet unto the nations.

**6** Then said I, Ah, Lord GOD! behold, I cannot speak: for I am a child.

**7** But the LORD said unto me, Say not, I am a child: for thou shalt go to all that I shall send thee, and whatsoever I command thee thou shalt speak.

**8** Be not afraid of their faces: for I am with thee to deliver thee, saith the LORD.

**9** Then the LORD put forth his hand, and touched my mouth. And the LORD said unto me, Behold, I have put my words in thy mouth.

**10** See, I have this day set thee over the nations and over the kingdoms, to root out, and to pull down, and to destroy, and to throw down, to build, and to plant.

## NLT

**Jeremiah 1:4** The LORD gave me this message:

**5** "I knew you before I formed you in your mother's womb. Before you were born I set you apart and appointed you as my prophet to the nations."

**6** "O Sovereign LORD," I said, "I can't speak for you! I'm too young!"

**7** The LORD replied, "Don't say, 'I'm too young,' for you must go wherever I send you and say whatever I tell you.

**8** And don't be afraid of the people, for I will be with you and will protect you. I, the LORD, have spoken!"

**9** Then the LORD reached out and touched my mouth and said, "Look, I have put my words in your mouth!

**10** Today I appoint you to stand up against nations and kingdoms. Some you must uproot and tear down, destroy and overthrow. Others you must build up and plant."

## The People, Places, and Times

**Covenant.** The relationship between the Lord and His people was based on an agreement. God would continue to protect and be present with His people. In return, His people would follow Him and be obedient to the commandments given to Moses for the people. Unfortunately, while God kept His part of the covenant, His people would blatantly break their promise. This angered God and led to the age of the prophet, who was <sup>[1]</sup>God's spokesperson.

**Judgment.** The prophet would give warnings to God's people when they were disobedient. If the people did not heed the warnings, then God would issue a judgment on them. Judgment was a punishment that God would give to the people for disobedience and breaking their covenant. It would only occur after God has given His people multiple chances to repent from their disobedience. The hope was that the people would return to obeying and following God.

## Background

The nation of Judah and its capital Jerusalem continued to sin against God. They continued to disobey Him, worship idols, be less faithful to Him, mistreat their neighbor, and disregard everything He had taught them to do. Some of their kings during this time tried to guide these people in the right direction (e.g., King Josiah, 2 Kings 23): following God and being more respectful to Him. It would work briefly, but the people would soon return to old habits. Then God sent another prophet to help guide the people back into covenant with Him. Jeremiah tried to warn the people what would happen if they continued to break their covenant. He tried to urge the people to repent from their sin and disobedience. Instead of heeding the warnings, they became angry at him. The people of Judah and Jerusalem ignored God's message through Jeremiah. Jeremiah prophesied that they would be in exile for seventy years because of their hardened heart and Jerusalem would be destroyed by their enemy, the Babylonians. Judah and Jerusalem were completely oblivious to God's anger toward them. They forgot about all the times God had showed them love and support, and focused only on themselves. Unfortunately, some people were innocent victims of their brothers' and sisters' sins, but they too suffered. God gave many chances, but it was up to them to take action.

### At-A-Glance

1. Born for This ([Jeremiah 1:4-5<sup>L</sup>](#))
2. Change Focus (v. 6)
3. Equip (vv. 7-9)
4. Commissioned (v. 10)

## In Depth

### 1. Born for This ([Jeremiah 1:4-5<sup>L</sup>](#))

When God called Jeremiah to be a prophet, He wanted to reassure him that he was born to do this. God tells Jeremiah that before he was born, before he was formed in the womb, He knew what Jeremiah was going to do. God had already set him apart to be a prophet. Jeremiah had no need to worry because his path was set. When God sets up something, it will succeed because He can never fail at anything He does. We also learn that God is omniscient, or all-knowing. He already knew that Jeremiah was going to be successful for Him. Whatever God called you to do, you were born to do it also. Jeremiah did not have to be nervous in this new chapter of his life because God created him to be a prophet. He was born for this.

### 2. Change Focus (v. 6)

Once God shares with Jeremiah that he was created for his calling, Jeremiah loses focus. Instead of focusing on the fact that God was in control, Jeremiah dwells on his inadequacies. He says he is unable to speak because he is too young. Jeremiah feels that he does not have enough experience to do what God called him to do. Jeremiah briefly forgets that when God calls a person to do something, human experience or ability doesn't matter because He gives people the ability to do His work. Though we should always prepare ourselves through education and other avenues, we should not rely on these preparations when it comes to our Heavenly Father's

business. When Jeremiah thought the job was too much for him, he focused on himself and not on the One who called him.

### **3. Equip (vv. 7–9)**

As Jeremiah became nervous, God again reassured him by reminding him that age and experience are not factors when it comes to His work. Regardless, Jeremiah had to go wherever God sent him anyway (v. 7). God knew that the task would bring about different challenges, so he tells Jeremiah not to worry about other people harming him because He will be there to protect him. Whatever God calls us to do, His presence will always be with us. He will not abandon us.

God promised to equip Jeremiah with His presence, but then also equips him in the same way He equipped Isaiah: by touching his mouth. God touching Jeremiah's mouth was His way of showing him that He will be talking through him. God equipped Jeremiah with all he needed to operate in his calling.

### **4. Commissioned (v. 10)**

After showing Jeremiah he was born to be a “prophet to the nations” and equipping him, God then commissions him for service (v. 10). He commissions Jeremiah to stand up against nations and kingdoms, and build up those willing to repent. God commissions Jeremiah not only to preach to Jerusalem, but all people. This commissioning means God entrusts Jeremiah to act as an agent for Him. Jeremiah would speak for God, giving people another chance to keep their covenant with Him. Sometimes the words said would tear down and destroy, if Jerusalem did not comply. God's words and actions could also build up, though, for those who come to Him with a repentant heart. God entrusts Jeremiah with the calling of His spokesperson or prophet. God will always give you your assignment when He feels you are ready to accept it.

### **Search the Scriptures**

1. Is there an age limitation when it comes to serving God ([Jeremiah 1:6](#))?
2. How do God's words of reassurance to Jeremiah apply to us (v. 10)?

### **Discuss the Meaning**

When we are given a task that appears too much for us to handle, we sometimes focus on our weaknesses as reasons we can't handle the task. How did God dispel the weaknesses that Jeremiah focused on?

### **Lesson in Our Society**

People tend to only rely on what they can see. It is hard for us to step outside our comfort zone, especially when we allow fear to guide us. God will challenge us to step outside of our comfort zone to see if we are willing to trust Him. Jeremiah was willing to step out of his comfort zone to serve as God's spokesperson because he understood that God was with him.

### **Make It Happen**

Some people refuse to take on new challenges because they are afraid of taking a risk. However, sometimes taking a risk is necessary. Think of someone you know who has a hard time taking on new challenges. How would you help encourage that person to take on <sup>[1]</sup><sub>[5EP]</sub>a challenge?

## More Light on the Text

### Jeremiah 1:4–10

**4 Then the word of the LORD came unto me, saying, 5 Before I formed thee in the belly I knew thee; and before thou camest forth out of the womb I sanctified thee, and I ordained thee a prophet unto the nations.**

Jeremiah 1:4-10 is commonly referred to as the call of Jeremiah. The call narrative here follows the prophetic call formula in the Old Testament: (1) divine confrontation; (2) introductory word; (3) commission; (4) objection; (5) reassurance; (6) sign (Exodus 3:1–4:9, Judges 6:11–24). Jeremiah's call begins with a divine encounter presented here as a dialogue between him and God: "The word of the LORD came unto me" (Jeremiah 1:4). God's appearance is followed by an introductory word that establishes that the choice of Jeremiah as a prophet (Heb. navi', **nah-VEE**) was no arbitrary decision, but that God had set him apart (Heb. kadash, **kah-DASH**, consecrate, make holy), before he was even born. A prophet was a spokesperson called by God to serve as an intermediary between Him and the people. God commissioned Jeremiah to preach His Word to the nations (Heb. goyim, **goy-EEM**). At this time "nations" still referred especially to a group within a certain territory other than Israel or Judah. However, when God's people were under Assyrian, Babylonian, Persian, Greek, and Roman rule, it referred more to a group with non-Jewish ancestral heritage. This word implies His message will be not just for Israel, but for all the world.

**6 Then said I, Ah, Lord GOD! behold, I cannot speak: for I am a child. 7 But the LORD said unto me, Say not, I am a child: for thou shalt go to all that I shall send thee, and whatsoever I command thee thou shalt speak.**

In classic fashion, Jeremiah protests his call: "I cannot speak: for I am a child" (v. 6; cf. Exodus 4:10). This verse is a favorite among preachers' selections for youth day or other occasions to encourage youth to not let their age limit their ability to do what God has called them to do. This passage conveys that meaning in two ways. The first is the meaning of the word "child." The word translated as "child" (Heb. na'ar, **NAH-ar**) in v. 6 has a range of meanings including "lad," "son," "servant," and "member of a professional guild." It has been applied to both infants (Exodus 2:6) and to unmarried people of marriageable age (Genesis 34:19). Solomon replied with a sort of false humility that he is "only a little child" (na'ar) when he ascended to the throne of David (1 Kings 3:7). He clearly was not a little child, but a man about twenty years old; however, he was unmarried and had not yet fathered a child, so he had not yet advanced to adulthood in the Israelite life cycle. So this message is relevant for anyone considered a youth, from a toddler to a young adult.

The second challenge in using the call of Jeremiah as a message to youth is conveying the gravity of his vocation as a prophet. God sent him to preach to the nations amid great suffering, death, and destruction in his own home. He experienced derision, death threats, imprisonment, and false accusations for proclaiming God's Word. He was forced to remain single and fatherless as a sign to Judah that this would be its fate.

**8 Be not afraid of their faces: for I am with thee to deliver thee, saith the LORD. 9 Then the LORD put forth his hand, and touched my mouth. And the LORD said unto me, Behold, I have put my words in thy mouth.**

Despite Jeremiah's doubts about being up to the challenge, and his fears of the opposition he

would face, he need not worry because God reassures him. God will accompany him and deliver him from his adversaries. The desire for God to accompany us through dangers and trials and the faith that He will deliver us is our fervent prayer.

At the funeral of Rev. Martin Luther King Jr., the gospel singer Mahalia Jackson sang the words to King's favorite song "Precious Lord":

Precious Lord, take my hand  
Lead me on, let me stand

The well-renowned gospel singer and composer Thomas A. Dorsey was inspired to pen the hymn "Precious Lord" upon the death of his wife, who died giving birth to their son, who died shortly after. For both Dorsey and King, the confidence that God would accompany them and lead them on gave them the reassurance to continue delivering God's message to a nation hostile to His Word.

As a sign of His promise, God reached out and touched Jeremiah's mouth. God is ascribed human attributes (such as having arms and hands) to enact this intimate image. He puts His own words in Jeremiah's mouth, which confirms the legitimacy of Jeremiah as a prophet sent by God and authenticates the message as His Word (cf. [Deuteronomy 18:18](#)<sup>L</sup>).

**10 See, I have this day set thee over the nations and over the kingdoms, to root out, and to pull down, and to destroy, and to throw down, to build, and to plant.**

Having assured Jeremiah that God will accompany him and has equipped him for the task, He reiterates the task for which He has commissioned Jeremiah: to be a prophet "over the nations and over the kingdoms" (cf. v. 5). Jeremiah's mission on one hand is to act as a sword: "to root out," "pull down," "destroy," and "throw down." It is no wonder that Jeremiah's messages moved the recipients to such aggression toward him—he preached a message of doom and destruction to rulers and nations, kings and kingdoms, even his own. On the other hand, he offered a message of hope and renewal: "to build, and to plant." The latter message of reconstruction was harder to receive in the aftermath of the judgment God wrought on the nations and kingdoms.

### **Say It Correctly**

Josiah. jue-**SIGH**-uh.

Commission. co-**MIH**-shun.

## Daily Bible Readings

### MONDAY

A Prophet like Moses  
([Deuteronomy 18:15–22](#)<sup>L</sup>)

### TUESDAY

By Almond Branch and Boiling Pot  
([Jeremiah 1:11–19](#)<sup>L</sup>)

### WEDNESDAY

Assured of the Lord's Deliverance  
([Jeremiah 15:10–21](#)<sup>L</sup>)

### THURSDAY

Prophetic Message from the Potter  
([Jeremiah 18:1–11](#)<sup>L</sup>)

### FRIDAY

Egypt Punished; Israel Saved  
([Jeremiah 46:25–28](#)<sup>L</sup>)

### SATURDAY

Jesus Calls Disciples  
([Mark 1:16–20](#)<sup>L</sup>)

### SUNDAY

Jeremiah's Call and Commission  
([Jeremiah 1:4–10](#)<sup>L</sup>)