

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

Today's Scripture: Jeremiah 1:6–10; 26:8–9, 12–15

I. Appointed to Prophecy

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.”

6. The book of Jeremiah begins with God calling to him to be a “prophet to the nations” (Jeremiah 1:5).

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). Amos noted he was a farmer, not a trained prophet. 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.

7. *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.

Jeremiah 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. It may also be a denunciation of sin and a call to repentance for those of the prophet's day.

8. 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. 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.

9. Jeremiah's sense of inadequacy for his call 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.

10. 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. It is the opposite of the next act of the Lord Jeremiah mentions, *to build*, which indicates construction. Second, nations will be destroyed. Third, nations will be overthrown. Once-powerful nations will be conquered by other nations and placed in a servile position.

II. Condemned to Death Jeremiah 26:8–9

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.

8. 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. This is often called the "Temple Sermon."

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).

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." Rather than obey the Lord's word given through Jeremiah, their first impulse is to seek his death.

9. 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. 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, 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).

III. Determined to Speak Jeremiah 26:12–15

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.”**

12. 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. 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.

14. 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.

15. While he offers no resistance to his would-be executioners, Jeremiah issues a warning to them. He is *innocent*, so his death would be murder and bring *blood* upon his critics, Jerusalem, and all its citizens. His only “crime” would be the speaking of *truth* given by the *Lord* who *sent* him. We should remember that the shedding of *innocent blood* is one of the greatest crimes of which Jeremiah accuses the leaders of Israel (Jeremiah 7:6; 22:3).

Jeremiah's pleas find a sympathetic response in some of the “officials” or elders of the land (Jeremiah 26:16). They intervene, and Jeremiah's life is spared (26:24), but there is no sign the people heed his warnings and repent. The destruction of Jerusalem promised by the Lord is still on track for fulfillment.

Involvement Learning

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Into the Lesson

What aspirations do you have?

How does fear of failure prevent you from achieving those aspirations?

In the Bible, there are many stories where people first told God they couldn't do what he asked because they were afraid. They made excuses. But God didn't change his mind about choosing them. Today, we will talk about someone like that: the prophet Jeremiah. Let's discover the reasons for his fear and the excuse he gave.

Into the Word

Read Jeremiah 1:6–10. What was Jeremiah's initial reaction to God's call?

How does God respond to Jeremiah's hesitation?

What promises does God make to Jeremiah to assure him?

Read Jeremiah 26:8–9, 12–15. What was the response of the officials and people when Jeremiah spoke at the temple?

How did Jeremiah defend his actions and message?

What can we learn from Jeremiah's response to opposition and danger?

Key Verse

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

Into Life

Today's lesson highlights that God can use individuals, regardless of age or natural ability. Write down ideas for inter-generational congregational ministry.

Choose a ministry from the options above and work with a partner to create a description of the ministry. Consider how the ministry could include youth in its leadership.

Thought to Remember

Walk in obedient faith, not fear.