

JEREMIAH'S CALL AND ARREST

Sasha spread her kente cloth over the swing arm table while her friend began organizing an array of nail polish and manicure utensils. The nursing home resident they had come to see focused on it all with sincere interest.

She and her friend were just two of the students who had been coming regularly. The previous quarter, their Sunday school teacher taught a series about servanthood. But it was one of the young students who had come up with the idea of visiting a local nursing home and putting the lessons into action.

“So many of the people never get visitors,” the student shared.

In the end, ten committed to making regular trips. Their teacher arranged the first date and collected permission slips, and she was delighted with the level of interest. Every other Saturday, two parents accompanied the young people to Serenity Manor Nursing Home.

They brought colorful index cards and notes with Scripture and encouragement: “You are Beautiful” (Psalm 45:11); “You are Loved” (Jeremiah 31:3); and “You are Important” (1 Peter 2:9).

The gesture made such an impact that one of the nursing assistants came to visit church one Sunday.

“My name is Jasmin, and I am a certified nursing assistant,” she told the pastor. “I just had to visit the church that keeps sending beautiful young people to spend time with our seniors! I haven’t been to church in quite some time.”

1 When have you been surprised by a young person’s message?

2 Have you ever felt too inexperienced to say “yes” to a job?

3 Where do you see leadership emerging from those around you?

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.

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.”

God Appoints Jeremiah

The book of Jeremiah begins with some dates. It is the thirteenth year of King Josiah's reign over Judah (Jer. 1:2). Jeremiah is the son of a priest, leaders who are supposed to be guiding God's people to seek holiness and to protect the purity of the temple. Later we read that the priests have utterly failed in this role.

Verse 5 contains the words of God's call to Jeremiah: “Before you were born I set you apart; I appointed you as a prophet to the nations.” But God's selection of Jeremiah comes as a surprise. Instead of welcoming this message, he gives two reasons that he cannot do what is being asked (v. 6).

First, Jeremiah says he does not know how to speak. This does not mean he has a physical impairment or anything that hinders. What he means is that he lacks the eloquence and skill for such a public role of communication. Second, he calls himself a mere “child” before the Lord (v. 6 KJV). In Hebrew, the term “child” is broad enough to include various stages of youth. It is used for infants (1 Sam. 4:21), young boys (1 Sam. 2:11), even teenagers and young men (Gen. 21:1;

2 Sam 18:5). Jeremiah's concern is that he is too young and inexperienced to speak on the Lord's behalf.

But God does not accept these excuses (v. 7). Jeremiah only needs to focus on going to whomever the Lord sends him, saying whatever the Lord tells him. God will choose Jeremiah's message and audience, not Jeremiah. What matters are not the qualifications of Jeremiah but his God-appointed task. When God chooses Jeremiah, He asks Jeremiah to trust that he shall be provided with what he needs.

In verse 8, the Lord commands Jeremiah not to "be afraid" of the people to whom he will be sent. God will be with him and protect him. During Jeremiah's ministry, many will fiercely oppose and persecute him. His enemies will attack him, but God will be on his side. Jeremiah receives further reassurance of God's presence in verse 9. The Lord touches Jeremiah's mouth to show that He has placed the correct words for Jeremiah to say. These will not be human ideas; they will be from God. Jeremiah becomes a mouthpiece of God, like Isaiah before him (compare Isa. 6:6–7).

Verse 10 reveals the prophetic assignment: God gives Jeremiah authority to announce messages of judgment and deliverance. He will proclaim judgment against kings and nations, as a consequence of their disobedience. And he will announce God's plans for future restoration, instilling hope in God's redemption.

God describes Jeremiah's ministry using two types of metaphors: agricultural (uproot, plant) and architectural (tear down, destroy, overthrow, build). Of the six verbs, four highlight the destructive aspects of judgment, while only two focus on future reconstruction. These reflect Jeremiah's difficult ministry context: in the face of great disobedience, he will have a harsh message for his generation. Nevertheless, he also points to the hope of future blessing, for those who serve God with faithfulness.

1 For what reasons does Jeremiah object to God's appointment?

2 What is God's response?

3 What will be the ministry task for Jeremiah? What must he do?

⁸ Now it came to pass, when Jeremiah had made an end of speaking all that the LORD had commanded him to speak unto all the people, that the priests and the prophets and all the people took him, saying, Thou shalt surely die. ⁹ Why hast thou prophesied in the name of the LORD, saying, This house shall be like Shiloh, and this city shall be desolate without an inhabitant? And all the people were gathered against Jeremiah in the house of the LORD.

¹² Then spake Jeremiah unto all the princes and to all the people, saying, The LORD sent me to prophesy against this house and against this city all the words that ye have heard. ¹³ Therefore now amend your ways and your doings, and obey the voice of the LORD your God; and the LORD will repent him of the evil that he hath pronounced against you. ¹⁴ As for me, behold, I am in your hand: do with me as seemeth good and meet unto you. ¹⁵ But know ye for certain, that if ye put me to death, ye shall surely bring innocent blood upon yourselves, and upon this city, and upon the inhabitants thereof: for of a truth the LORD hath sent me unto you to speak all these words in your ears.

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.”

Jeremiah on Trial

We transition many chapters ahead, and in obedience to the Lord, Jeremiah warns the people to turn from their evil ways, or else the Lord will bring destruction upon the temple and the city of Jerusalem (Jer. 26:1–7). He is delivering the message exactly as God has commanded, but when he finishes, the temple priests, other

prophets, and everyone else feels outraged. They seize him, shouting that he must die. They react with hostility because they believe Jeremiah is falsely claiming the Lord's authority. Their question in verse 9 is rhetorical, meant to accuse, rather than understand. They are scandalized, thinking *Why would God predict or threaten the destruction of His own temple?*

The people are under the false impression that God's presence and supernatural defense of the temple will ensure their safety (see Jer. 7:4, 10–14). They cannot accept that God would threaten to destroy the temple, so they believe Jeremiah deserves death as a false prophet (see Deut. 18:20).

The people set up a trial at one of the temple gates to bring their charges against Jeremiah (Jer. 26:10–11). In verse 12, Jeremiah gives his defense before all the people. He states that God Himself sent Jeremiah to prophesy against the temple and the city. Because God is the source of this message, not Jeremiah, the people's contention is with God, and Jeremiah is not a false prophet. Thus, even when threatened with death, Jeremiah does not change his message. Instead, he calls the people to repentance (v. 13). He urges them to change their way of life and do what is right. If they obey the Lord, He will relent and not bring judgment upon them. There is still an opportunity for them to repent.

Jeremiah puts himself at the mercy of the people (vv. 14–15). Courageously, he does not plead for his life. He is more concerned with faithfully delivering God's message than ensuring his personal safety. He warns the people that, if they execute him, they will be executing an innocent man. Such a murder would bring added guilt upon themselves and their city. He ends by emphasizing that this message is from the Lord, and it is the truth.

1 What are the people's accusations against Jeremiah?

2 How does Jeremiah respond in defense?

Finding the Right Words

I have always identified with Moses and Jeremiah, both of whom seem to fear public speaking. I am not confident. I tell people (sometimes, God) that I am not good enough, not eloquent enough. Give me a computer keyboard and I can communicate. But a microphone? Not so much.

Today's Scripture reminds me of when I was asked to give my testimony to a church youth group when I was about fifteen. My peers were in that group! I was very nervous, but I also felt that God had given me an opportunity to encourage others to go public with their faith. I read Mark 13:11, which was near my thoughts: "Do not worry beforehand about what to say. Just say whatever is given you at the time, for it is not you speaking, but the Holy Spirit." I repeated and memorized that verse to cover my anxiety as the date approached, and God was faithful. He gave me words to say, and I was shocked by the response.

Thus, I can understand Jeremiah's reluctance to be a spokesperson for God. Not only was he hesitant about the message (which gets him into hot water), but he tries to remind God of his youth and inexperience. He fears that no one will listen. But when God corrects him, "Do not say, 'I am too young,'" Jeremiah wisely drops the excuses (Jer. 1:7).

Jeremiah was thinking about Jeremiah. But God was thinking about His plan to use Jeremiah to be His prophet. Jeremiah would be the messenger, and God would take care of the rest.

If God is nudging you toward doing something you're avoiding out of fear, perhaps you should reconsider. Maybe God has recruited you as a spokesperson to share the gospel, or just to encourage someone. He is faithful and can supply your needs. Do you trust that truth?

1 Why might God choose young people to accomplish His will?

2 When have you received encouragement to step forward to do a hard thing?

3 What are ways we can overcome fear?

Overcoming Fear

Jeremiah is accused of speaking falsely, even after God designates him a prophet. But God would be able to protect him and to give him the words to speak, even if he is not confident of his own abilities. By looking to God instead of his own abilities, Jeremiah acts in obedience to his mission.

Can you identify one specific context where you could be taking a more active role in ministry? Write a prayer that asks God for strength to face this challenge.

Key Text

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.
—Jeremiah 1:7 KJV

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.”
—Jeremiah 1:7 NIV

Quiet Hour® and Cross Daily Bible Readings

Week of October 6 through October 11

Mon. Mark 13:1–13—Endure to the End.

Tue. Mark 13:14–27—God Will Protect God’s People.

Wed. 1 Samuel 15:20–26—To Obey Is Better than Sacrifice.

Thu. John 14:12–17—Keep Christ’s Commandment.

Fri. John 2:12–22—An Indestructible Temple.

Sat. Psalm 51:15–19—The Sacrifice that Pleases God.

Next Week: Jeremiah 7:1–11, 21–23

We will talk more about Jeremiah’s message and the compassion God shows for vulnerable people. Is your attention drawn to any group of vulnerable people this week?