

Lead In – Welcome to the church that gathers at Bethel. We gather for one reason and one reason only: the gospel—Jesus Christ in our place. His holy life counted as ours, His righteousness covering our sin, and His resurrection securing our hope, now and forever.

Today we begin a brand-new journey through the book of Jeremiah. It stands as the [longest of the prophetic books](#), stretching across 1,300+ verses, and it gives us something rare in Scripture—not only the message of a prophet, but the life of the man. We know [more about Jeremiah](#) than any other prophet in Scripture.

We will hear his words, but we will also feel his tears, trace his struggles, and watch what it looks like to follow God in a hard place with a faithful heart.

“Stop Telling God No” (Jeremiah 1:1-3)

We all have a story (It’s complicated). Meet Jeremiah. He was from a [priestly family](#), though not known for serving at the altar as much as standing under the weight of God’s Word. He is often called the “[weeping prophet](#)” because of the difficulty of his message and the depth of his sorrow. Tradition connects him to the book of [Lamentations](#)—a book that *gives voice to grief and teaches us how to bring our sorrow before the Lord*. Even our language carries his imprint. The word [jeremiad](#) speaks of a sorrowful complaint or a [list of rants](#). Yet behind his story, there is a glimpse of hope. He began to prophesy in [the 13th year of Josiah](#), at a moment when Yahweh was stirring renewal among His people.

You might not have a [history](#) like Jeremiah. But each of us has a story. For some, you have walked through deep [suffering](#), and you resonate with the weeping prophet. For others, your story carries [bitterness](#)—wounds that still shape the way you see the world. And for some, if we are honest, your road has been easy, and you are tempted to believe that others simply need to try harder and do better. Hypocrisy?

Take-Home: No matter your story—where you have walked or how far you have strayed—the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ pursues you. His mercy calls you to repent and believe, that you might be washed, made new, and brought near to God.

Your Life Is Not an Accident (1:5). Did you notice something beautiful about this text? God is the subject in every phrase: *I formed you; I knew you; I set you apart; I appointed you*. This is not the language of human achievement—it is the language of divine initiative. What a powerful truth for our faith. We often get tangled in debates about

the freedom of man and the sovereignty of God. If God calls, do we have a choice? And if that becomes your sole focus, you have missed the weight of the moment. The point is this: the sovereign Creator—who spoke all things into existence—set His affection upon you. There was a moment, in real time and space, when God turned toward Jeremiah and called him to Himself. For Jeremiah, that moment came in the thirteenth year of Josiah’s reign.

The New Testament brings this close to home. As Paul the Apostle writes in 1 Corinthians 1:9, “God is faithful; you were called by Him into fellowship with His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.”

So let me ask you—when did God call you? Not when did you get religious. When did God open your eyes to see Christ? When did the gospel move from something you heard to something you believed? When did Jesus become your Savior? And maybe, today is that day for you, when you say for the first time “the word of the Lord came to me!”

If you are in Christ, your calling is sure—you have been called by God. The question remains: are you walking in a manner worthy of that calling?

Take-Home: The wonder is not that God calls some—the wonder is that He would call you at all. That He would draw you to His Son and bring you into fellowship with Him should not lead to debate, but to worship. It should leave you speechless.

God Calls—We Stall (1:6–7). We have already seen the Lord’s call—rooted in the sovereign “I”: I formed... I knew... I set apart... I appointed. But so often we answer God’s first-person call with second-rate excuses. And here they come from Jeremiah: “I can’t speak. I am too young.” Beneath it all—fear.

There is no excuse you can bring that Yahweh has not heard before. Moses and Isaiah said the same—“I cannot speak.” Jeremiah feels the same weight: inadequate to carry the Word of God to a resistant people.

Hear this clearly: if your sense of **unworthiness** drives you to bow before the King and find strength in Him, that is grace. But if your unworthiness keeps you from trusting the goodness of Christ at work in you, that is a temptation to resist. The same feeling can lead to **worship**—or to **withdrawal**.

When God calls you, don't stall. What ministries in this church are waiting because we hesitate? What neighbor has not heard the gospel because we delay? What resources for the kingdom remain untouched because we hold back?

Take-Home: Friend, when the Lord calls, run to the throne—do not stall in obedience. What poor excuse have you wrapped around your disobedience? What shadow of fear has weakened your step? Why limp along the path of grace when the strength of Christ is yours to walk boldly by faith?

His Call, His Supply (1:7–10). When the Lord calls a man, He does not send him empty-handed—He sends him full of Himself. The call of God always carries the provision of God. Did not our Lord say, “[How much more will your Father in heaven give good things to those who ask Him](#)” (Matt. 7:11)? And again, “[Let us approach the throne of grace with boldness... to receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need](#)” (Heb. 4:16).

See it in Jeremiah. The Lord answers his youth—“[Do not say, 'I am only a youth'](#)” (Jer. 1:7). The Lord steadies his fear—“[Do not be afraid... for I am with you to rescue you](#)” (Jer. 1:8). And then—the Lord touches his mouth—“[I have put my words in your mouth](#)” (Jer. 1:9). What Jeremiah lacked, **God supplied**. What Jeremiah feared, God addressed.

And mark this well: the message was never Jeremiah's to begin with. The Word did not rise from his **ability**, but from God's **authority** (Jer. 1:9). The burden he felt was never his to carry alone. When God calls, He not only gives the word—He gives His presence and His deliverance (Jer. 1:8).

Take-Home: O child of God, if you belong to Christ, then the Lord Himself is your portion and your supply (Ps. 73:26; Phil. 4:19). You are not sent in your strength, but in His—and in Him, you lack nothing (2 Cor. 12:9).

God Calls, God Accomplishes (1:11–19). So here we are—God has called Jeremiah, the Lord has supplied Jeremiah, and now we wait and expect results. The visions begin simply: an [almond branch and a boiling pot](#).

The almond tree was known as the “[awake](#)” tree—it blossoms early while others still sleep. The Lord says, “[You have seen correctly, for I am watching over my word to accomplish it](#)” (Jer. 1:12). God is not passive. He is awake. He is active. He is committed to His Word. Then comes the second vision: [a boiling pot tilting from the north](#)—disaster is coming (Jer. 1:13–14). This is the language of judgment, of upheaval, of a hard message to carry.

And it raises the question: was Jeremiah successful?

By the world's standards, no. Little visible fruit. Constant resistance. A lifetime of difficulty. But listen carefully—"I am watching over my word to accomplish it" (Jer. 1:12). The watching belongs to God, not Jeremiah. The outcome belongs to God, not the prophet. Jeremiah's task was never to produce results, but to be faithful with the Word he was given.

God's success is not measured by man's standards. In our world, success is numbers, influence, and visible impact. But in God's kingdom, success is faithfulness. "Well done, good and faithful servant" (Matt. 25:21)—not well done, successful servant. Jeremiah was a success because he faithfully proclaimed the Word of the Lord, even when no one listened.

Take-Home: For those who are weary—preaching, praying, encouraging, serving—and wondering if it makes any difference: remember this, the watching is the Lord's responsibility. He will accomplish His Word. You be faithful.

So What? – So where does that leave us? God calls—and too often, we answer with hesitation. God speaks—and we respond with excuses.

And so the question presses in: **will you keep telling God no?**

Will you, like Jeremiah, confess your weakness yet yield to His Word? Yet the pattern of this text is clear: *God calls, God supplies, and God accomplishes.*

But this is not ultimately about Jeremiah—it is about Jesus Christ, the true and better Prophet, who did not say no. He did not shrink back. He did not delay. He set His face toward the cross, bearing every sin, every excuse, every moment you have resisted the will of God. And now, risen in power, He calls you—not to condemnation, but to grace.

So hear this and respond: **stop telling God no.**

Christian, walk in a manner worthy of your calling. Go—not in your strength, but in His. Go to the neighbor you've avoided. Go to the ministry you've delayed. Go with a steady hand, a humble heart, and a fearless faith. Speak His Word. Trust His power. Endure in His grace.

And leave the outcome where it has always belonged—in the hands of your faithful Savior. Sing – Pray – Give

Exegetical Notes

Jer. 1:1 The words of Jeremiah, the son of Hilkiah, one of the priests living in Anathoth in the territory of Benjamin. ² The word of the LORD came to him in the thirteenth year of the reign of Josiah son of Amon, king of Judah. ³ It also came throughout the days of Jehoiakim son of Josiah, king of Judah, until the fifth month of the eleventh year of Zedekiah son of Josiah, king of Judah, when the people of Jerusalem went into exile.

Jeremiah

Of all the prophets, Jeremiah is the one who conveys to us the most vivid sense of the man behind the words. For other prophets, we get at best a minimal notation of vocation (arborist, priest) and town of origin (Alter, 849).

However, Jeremiah, a priest from the town of Anathoth near Jerusalem who was active from the 620s B.C.E. until after the destruction of the kingdom of Judah in 586, tells us a good deal about himself through his continual anguish over his prophetic calling. Many episodes of his life, moreover, are reported in narrative detail, for the most part probably by his amanuensis Baruch son of Neriah (Alter, 849).

The English language aptly coined the noun "jeremiad" -a "complaining tirade," in the definition of the Oxford English Dictionary-because so often Jeremiah's prophecies are bitter denunciations of the people's wayward behavior accompanied by dire predictions that this will lead to scorched earth for the kingdom of Judah and exile for its inhabitants (Alter, 850).

From the north shall the evil be broached. The ominous nature of this prediction is enhanced by the vagueness of the formulation. The enemy in the later sixth century B.C.E. would have to be Babylonia, which is definitely farther east than north, though perhaps a northern invasion route is envisaged. The destroyer from the north also invokes the dire memory of Assyria, which a century earlier descended from the north and annihilated the kingdom of Israel (Fretheim, 45).

Priests

Jeremiah's father, Hilkiah, is not the same as the high priest in 2 Kings 22:4: the text would certainly have mentioned this if it were the case. TNIV reads one of the priests, which suggests that Jeremiah was himself a priest. However, the Hebrew reads (lit.) from, out of the priests", which means that he was from a priestly family (TOTC, 70).

There is no indication in the book that Jeremiah actually served as a priest, which is one of the differences between Jeremiah and Ezekiel.

Anathoth

This is a village near Jerusalem. Although Jeremiah is identified as a member of the priestly caste there, what follows does not indicate that he was an officiant in the Temple (Alter, 853).

Anathoth is a village three miles north-east of Jerusalem. Jeremiah has obviously walked the distance frequently in his life. It has been suggested that his family descended from Abiathar, who descended from Eli in Shiloh. Abiathar was excluded from the priesthood in Jerusalem by Solomon, who banished him to his home in Anathoth (1 Kgs 2:26-27). The remote relationship with Eli and Shiloh may account for the fact that Jeremiah mentions Shiloh (7:12, 14; 26:6, 9) and Samuel (1S:1).

Anathoth was the town where Abiathar, one of the two priests under King David, had been exiled for backing David's son Adonijah, who rebelled against his father (1 Kgs 2:26-27). Jerusalem was in the territory of Judah, but Anathoth was in the tribe of Benjamin (Kaiser, 30).

13th Year

This would be 626 B.C.E., four years before Josiah's sweeping cultic reforms, followed by the purported discovery of the Book of Teaching (Deuteronomy) in the Temple. While some scholars have wondered why there is no direct reflection of the Josianic reforms in Jerusalem's prophecies, it is noteworthy that he begins with an indictment of imported pagan practices (see verse 16), unlike Isaiah, whose initial emphasis is on social injustice. This stress on pagan practices may bespeak a Deuteronomic context (Alter, 853).

Reign

Yet, while kings set the time and place, they do not set the agenda. In fact, God's word will often speak against them, their policies, and their practices (Fretheim, 45).

1. Josiah (640-609 BCE); the "thirteenth year" is 627 BC
2. Jehoiakim (609-598 BC)

3. Zedekiah (597-587 BC); the fall of Jerusalem and the beginning of the exile are dated in the eleventh year and the fifth month of his reign.

Exile

The nature of the opening recollection of the book (vv. 1-3) means that the original audience for the book of Jeremiah was fundamentally different from the audience for the preaching of Jeremiah (even if many people were a part of both audiences). The raping and ravaging of Babylonian armies and the destruction of Jerusalem and its temple were a lively memory, and the shaming realities of exile were a present experience. Hanging over the entire book is the recurring theological question of 5:19: "Why has the LORD our God done all these things to us?" (9:12; 16:10; 22:8; Deut 9:24; 1 Kgs 9:8; see Introduction). Reading Jeremiah should enable readers to answer this question and to shape their lives into the future in terms of it (Fretheim, 55).

THE CALL OF JEREMIAH

Jer. 1:4 The word of the LORD came to me:
⁵ I chose you before I formed you in the womb;
I set you apart before you were born.
I appointed you a prophet to the nations.

4-5. God is the subject in these four phrases: I formed you; I knew you; I set you apart; I appointed you.

Word

The prophet perceived the onslaught of Yahweh's word as the formative impact of his career. This phrase is repeated in v 11 and 13, passages concerned with vision-experience; the phrase therefore covers both verbal and visionary material. The phrase carries with it the whole paradoxical experience of the overwhelming inbreaking of God's revelation into the consciousness of the one who is to speak and act for God (Holladay 33).

Jeremiah would have been considered a failure by today's standards of success, but in God's evaluation, he was an outstanding success. Why? Because God judges us by a different standard from the world's criteria for success. If we are obedient to his

commands for us, then we will receive his commendation (Matt 25:21). Jeremiah was a "success" because he faithfully proclaimed the word of the Lord (NAC, 48).

"The word of Yahweh came to me." Jeremiah uses this clause or its equivalent phrase ("Thus says Yahweh") some 157 times out of a total of 349 such examples in the Old Testament (Kaiser, 34)

The word of the LoRD is not a romantic or floating spiritual notion. It can be precisely linked to a chronological process. The arena of Yahweh's governing word is lodged in the reigns of Josiah (626-609 B.C.E.), Jehoiakim (609-598), and Zedekiah (598-587). The word of Yahweh is borne by the prophet, but it impinges upon the royal reality. It intrudes into the neat chronology of the kings to give us early notice that another governance is here that will unsettle the neat, fixed chronology. The word opens royal reality to another governance (Brueggemann, 22).

Knew/designated/made

As already noted, the three main verbs are all parallel: they must be understood together.

Chose

Alter translates, "Before I fashioned you in the belly I knew you." I knew you, /... I consecrated you. The sequence of verbs reflects the general pattern of focusing in the second verset of a line of biblical poetry: first God has an intimate relationship with Jeremiah ("knew"); then He consecrates him as prophet. The third verset spells out the nature of the consecration (Alter, 853)

"Know" (7) carries with it here two nuances that carry it beyond the meaning of "be acquainted with familiar in modern European languages. The first is the intimacy of husband and wife; in Gen 4:1 we are told that "Adam knew Eve his wife, and she conceived," and the sexual connotation of "know" is often present in the OT. At least this possibility reminds us that "knowledge" in the OT is likely to be personal and relational (Holladay, 33).

1Cor. 1:2 To the church of God at Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus, **called** as saints, with all those in every place who call on the name of Jesus Christ our Lord—both their Lord and ours.

1Cor. 1:9 God is faithful; you were **called** by him into fellowship with his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

Gal. 1:6 I am amazed that you are so quickly turning away from him who **called** you by the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel—

Gal. 1:15 But when God, who from my mother's womb set me apart and **called** me by his grace, was pleased.

2Tim. 1:9 He has saved us and **called** us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given to us in Christ Jesus before time began.

Set you apart

The verb "I designated you" (772TP1) is similar. The root has to do with what is "holy," that is, what is the inherent realm of God, what is at his disposal, what belongs to him. Thus, in 2:3, Israel is stated to be set apart to Yahweh, that is, his possession, at his disposal; the passages are thus analogous (Halladay, 33).

Jer. 1:6 But I protested, "Oh no, Lord GOD! Look, I don't know how to speak since I am only a youth."

Speak

Jeremiah conforms here to a virtual topos of biblical prophecy; Moses and Isaiah before him first professed their inability to speak when God charged them with the prophetic mission (Alter, 854).

Youth

No wonder Jeremiah is frightened by the enormous task he is to carry out. He objects to his calling by protesting that he is too young. The Hebrew word can mean 'child, and it is also used of Samuel when he began his ministry as a prophet (1 Sam. 3:1; Samuel is another example of a prophet dedicated to God before he was born). We may assume that Jeremiah was in his adolescence at the time of his call, since he was not yet married (see Jer. 16). On account of his youth, he was not an experienced speaker and must have

feared the opposition of adults for bringing such a heavyweight message at this young age (TOTC, 73).

Jeremiah protested that he was only a "child" (nw2), a word meaning anything from an "infant" (Exod 2:6) to a "boy/child" (1 Sam 3:1) or even someone up to young manhood, a "young man" (Gen 14:24; 22:3; 34:19)." His point, similar to the one Moses made at his call (Exod 4:10-16), was that he felt inadequate to the task of speaking God's word to these nations and peoples. His feelings of unworthiness and incompetence for such a high office are clear (Kaiser, 35).

Jer. 1:7 Then the LORD said to me:

**Do not say, "I am only a youth,"
for you will go to everyone I send you to
and speak whatever I tell you.**

**8 Do not be afraid of anyone,
for I will be with you to rescue you.**

This is the LORD's declaration.

Do not say

Do not say, 'I am only a child.' Since the origin of the message was not Jeremiah himself, the objection missed the point. The content of the message was to be God's business, not the prophet's. That should have lifted the burden off Jeremiah's shoulders. But Yahweh went on to promise his presence and his deliverance (Kaiser, 37).

Afraid

From the very start, a bitter antagonism is anticipated between Jeremiah and his audience. This theme will be developed in the military imagery of the concluding verses of the chapter (Alter, 854).

Jer. 1:9 Then the LORD reached out his hand, touched my mouth, and told me:

I have now filled your mouth with my words.

**10 See, I have appointed you today
over nations and kingdoms
to uproot and tear down,
to destroy and demolish,
to build and plant.**

Touched

This dedication or empowering gesture is clearly reminiscent of Isaiah 6, where the seraph touches the prophet's mouth with a burning coal.

Mouth

That Jeremiah is commissioned to be a prophet before he is born says something important about the relationship between the person and the calling. While this claim may have been intended to counter any challenge to Jeremiah's status as a prophet, a finer point is that the distinction between the prophetic office and the prophetic person is virtually collapsed. Jeremiah does not cease to be a person in his own right, but being a prophet defines his person from the very beginning; it is the very essence of his being. He is decisively shaped by God, not simply to be a certain kind of speaker, but a certain kind of person. Hence, he no longer has a private life that can truly be called his own; he goes without wife and children and the normal run of social activities (16:1-9; 15:17). See Fretheim, 57.

Build/Plant

Walter Brueggemann's language is helpful here. God's word works "harsh endings," but also "amazing beginnings." "God can work newness, create historical possibilities ex nihilo, precisely in situations that seem hopeless and closed." God's final word to the people of God is not the word of judgment.

Our day shares with Jeremiah's seventh-century Bc times some of the same leading indicators of our need for a new word from God: (1) rampant moral and spiritual decay, (2) more evidence of external religiosity and formal ritualism than a truly, heart-felt evidence of the real power and presence of God, (3) increased apostasy and departure from the revealed doctrines of Scripture, (4) increased international conflicts and economic tensions among the nations, and (5) increased evidences of divine judgment and warnings seen in families, the world about us, and our national leaders (Kaiser, 39).

The six verbs of v. 10 - "pluck up" and "break down," "destroy" and "overthrow," "build" and "plant" — are a pointed statement of God's way with the nations. The first four verbs are negative. They assert that no historical structure, political policy, or defense scheme can secure a community against Yahweh when that community is under the judgment of Yahweh. The last two positive verbs, "build" and "plant," assert in parallel fashion that God can work newness, create historical possibilities ex nihilo, precisely in situations that seem hopeless and closed. God works in freedom without respect either

to the enduring structures so evident or to the powerless despair when structures are gone. God alone has the capacity to bring endings and new beginnings in the historical process (cf. Deut. 32:39; Isa. 45:7; 113:7-9). See Brueggemann, 25).

Jer. 1:11 Then the word of the LORD came to me, asking, "What do you see, Jeremiah?" I replied, "I see a branch of an almond tree."

Almond

An almond-tree wand... I am vigilant. "Almond-tree" is shaqed; "vigilant" is shoqed.

The almond tree was called the "awake" tree because it blossoms early in the spring, while other trees remain dormant. Anathoth is still a center for growing almonds.

The purpose of the vision was to warn that God's announcements of judgment through earlier prophets had not been forgotten. Whenever Jeremiah and the people of Judah saw the almond tree, they were to remember that their God was watching them (5:6; 31:28). See NAC, 53.

But there is more to this vision; the almond tree is the first to bloom in spring, with its white blooms coming in January or early February. Accordingly, the almond "watches" for the spring. Jeremiah uses this same verb, "watching" (Tv, shôqed), three other times (Jer 32:28; 44:27; 5:6). See Kaiser, 39).

Jer. 1:12 The LORD said to me, "You have seen correctly, for I watch over my word to accomplish it." ¹³ Again the word of the LORD came to me asking, "What do you see?" And I replied, "I see a boiling pot, its lip tilted from the north to the south."

Watch

Watching will be God's responsibility, not Jeremiah's. He does not have to worry and wonder about the success of the word (though he apparently does, 17:14-18; 18:19-23); he is only to be faithful in speaking and embodying that word. Noteworthy in this image of watching is the idea that God's word is not understood to proceed on its own to effect what has been said once it has been spoken. God must go with that word and attend to ("watch") that word as it makes its way through minds and hearts in order to bring about what God purposes (Fretheim, 53).

North

It is turned to the north. More literally, "it is facing the north." This wording has puzzled interpreters because a pot has no front. Perhaps the least strained suggestion is Yair Hoffman's: the pot is sitting over a fire in a three-sided hearth, with the open side facing north (Alter, 855).

From the north shall the evil be broached. The ominous nature of this prediction is enhanced by the vagueness of the formulation. The enemy in the later sixth century B.C.E. would have to be Babylonia, which is definitely farther east than north, though perhaps a northern invasion route is envisaged. The destroyer from the north also invokes the dire memory of Assyria, which a century earlier descended from the north and annihilated the kingdom of Israel (Alter, 855).

Jer. 1:14 Then the LORD said to me, "Disaster will be poured out from the north on all who live in the land. ¹⁵ Indeed, I am about to summon all the clans and kingdoms of the north."

This is the LORD's declaration.

**They will come, and each king will set up his throne
at the entrance to Jerusalem's gates.**

**They will attack all her surrounding walls
and all the other cities of Judah.**

Jer. 1:16 "I will pronounce my judgments against them for all the evil they did when they abandoned me to burn incense to other gods and to worship the works of their own hands.

Jer. 1:17 "Now, get ready. Stand up and tell them everything that I command you. Do not be intimidated by them, or I will cause you to cower before them. ¹⁸ Today, I am the one who has made you a fortified city, an iron pillar, and bronze walls against the whole land—against the kings of Judah, its officials, its priests, and the population. ¹⁹ They will fight against you but never prevail over you, since I am with you to rescue you." **This is the LORD's declaration.**

There is a time to be still and listen (Exod 14:14; Ps 46:10; Eccl 3:7; Ezek 3:24-26), and there is a time to act (Exod 14:15; Ezek 3:27). Jeremiah's call was given, and now it was time for him to act on that call. He was apparently given no option about whether to accept or reject his prophetic task (NAC, 57).

Get ready/ gird up your loins

This is the language of one who is to prepare to go into the fray, which apparently awaits the prophet from those who dislike his message. All long-flowing garments were to be lifted up and tucked securely around the waist under a belt, either physically in a real battle or metaphorically for those in the kind of battle in which Jeremiah will find himself. Jeremiah's part is to "stand up" and get ready to speak God's word (Kaiser, 41).

Illustrations