

July 16  
Lesson 7

# JEREMIAH

DEVOTIONAL READING: Psalm 75

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: Jeremiah 1

## JEREMIAH 1:4-10

**4** The word of the LORD came to me, saying,

**5** “Before I formed you in the womb I knew you,  
before you were born I set you apart;  
I appointed you as a prophet to the nations.”

**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.”



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## KEY VERSE

*“Do not be afraid of them, for I am with you and will rescue you,” declares the LORD.—Jeremiah 1:8*

## LESSON AIMS

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

1. Describe the Lord’s intent for Jeremiah’s prophetic ministry.
2. Explain how the gospel accomplishes the objectives given to the prophet in [Jeremiah 1:10](#).
3. Propose a strategy for presenting the gospel to one or more people groups that are especially hostile to its message.

## LESSON OUTLINE

Introduction

- A. When I Grow Up ...
- B. Lesson Background
- I. God's Plan ([Jeremiah 1:4, 5](#))
  - A. Jeremiah Foreknown ([vv. 4, 5a](#))
    - Ownership*
  - B. Jeremiah Foreordained ([vv. 5b, c](#))
- II. God's Corrective ([Jeremiah 1:6, 7](#))
  - A. Human Self-Doubt ([v. 6](#))
  - B. Divine Reassurance ([v. 7](#))
- III. God's Provision ([Jeremiah 1:8-10](#))
  - A. Deliverance ([v. 8](#))
  - B. Message ([v. 9](#))
  - C. Mission ([v. 10](#))
    - Word Power*
- Conclusion
  - A. No Solos
  - B. Prayer
  - C. Thought to Remember

## Introduction

### A. When I Grow Up ...

“What do you want to be when you grow up?”

When children are asked that question, their answers are remarkably consistent. Occupations such as doctor, athlete, teacher, dancer, police officer, firefighter, scientist, musician, actor, and nurse are common responses.

Regional differences also affect the choices. A child growing up in Silicon Valley might want to be a video-game designer while a child from rural Wisconsin may aspire to be a dairy farmer. Of course, childhood fantasy becomes a consideration with the appearance of such goals as becoming a princess, a superhero, a dinosaur, a mermaid, etc. As people grow older, we expect the answers to that question to become more realistic and not grounded in fantasy. We would look with more than a little surprise at a 19-year-old who still wants to be a superhero!

We probably can recall being asked this same question many times as children, and our responses became more realistic as the years passed. But how many who are reading this now were ever told specifically and honestly, “When you reach adulthood, your career will be that of a \_\_\_\_\_”? As far-fetched as this may sound, something of the sort *did* happen to a young man named Jeremiah. He was not asked what he wanted to be; he was *told!* Jeremiah came from a priestly background ([Jeremiah 1:1](#)), but God had other plans for him.

### B. Lesson Background

The prophet Jeremiah began his ministry “in the thirteenth year of the reign of Josiah son of Amon king of Judah” ([Jeremiah 1:2](#)). By modern reckoning, that was about 626 BC. These times were increasingly chaotic in the southern kingdom of Judah. Although the Assyrian threat—which resulted in the fall of the northern kingdom of Israel in 722 BC ([2 Kings 17:18](#))—no longer existed, it was being replaced by Babylonian aggression.

Godliness and holiness on the part of the Judeans, not military might, was the key to staving off disaster. Only reliance on and dedication to the true God would turn aside the threat of foreign invasion. In that regard, things may have looked hopeful for a time because of godly King Josiah's dedication to the Lord ([2 Chronicles 34:1-35:19](#)). But the spiritual condition of Judah took a quick and fatal turn for the worse after he died in 609 BC.

Four ungodly kings followed him, the final one being his son Zedekiah. It was he who was on the throne when the Babylonians sacked Jerusalem and destroyed Solomon's great temple in 586 BC ([2 Kings 24:18-25:7](#); [Jeremiah 1:3](#)).

Another issue of background is Jeremiah's hometown of Anathoth ([Jeremiah 1:1](#)). This village was located in the tribal territory of Benjamin, about three miles north-northeast of Jerusalem. Anathoth was a Levite town, a convenient residence for workers in the Jerusalem temple. As a resident of this town, Jeremiah undoubtedly thought he would follow in his father's footsteps in terms of career. But God had other plans.

## I. God's Plan

([JEREMIAH 1:4, 5](#))

### A. Jeremiah Foreknown ([vv. 4, 5a](#))

#### 4 The word of the LORD came to me, saying,

The first three verses of the book are written in the third person; now the text switches to first person (*me*). Although we're only four verses into the book at this point, this is not the first mention of *the word of the Lord* coming to Jeremiah. The previous two verses indicate that *the word of the Lord* begins to come to him during the reign of Josiah and continues to do so through the reign of Zedekiah (see the Lesson Background). This is a total of about 40 years (626-586 BC).

## HOW TO SAY IT

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Anathoth	An-uh-thoth.
Assyrian	Uh-sear-e-un.
Babylonian	Bab-ih-low-nee-un.
Goliath	Go-lye-uth.
Hananiah	Han-uh-nye-uh.
Jehoiakim	Jeh-hoy-uh-kim.
Josiah	Jo-sigh-uh.
Leviticus	Leh-vit-ih-kus.
seraphim	sair-uh-fim.
Zedekiah	Zed-uh-kye-uh.

#### 5a. “Before I formed you in the womb I knew you,

The Lord has been active on Jeremiah's behalf long before this moment. The four verbs used of the Lord in the three segments of [verse 5](#) reveal the intimacy of his care for Jeremiah.

First, we note that the word *formed* translates a Hebrew verb that is similarly rendered in [Isaiah 29:16](#). There it refers to a potter's creative activity in making functional and decorative objects from clay. Jeremiah will later be commanded by the Lord to go to a potter's house and learn a lesson from watching the potter work with clay (compare [Jeremiah 18:1-11](#)).

In the Old Testament, the Hebrew word translated *womb* is used of a person's belly ([Judges 3:21, 22](#)), the stomach of a person or an animal ([Job 20:15; 40:15, 16](#)), as well as of a woman's womb, as here (also [Genesis 25:23, 24; 38:27](#)). The intent is clear: God's creative activity includes the life in the womb, a point underlined by David in [Psalm 139:13](#).

The verb in the phrase *I knew you* conveys a sense of intimacy. It is often used to portray sexual intimacy between a husband and his wife ([Genesis 4:1, 17; 1 Samuel 1:19](#)), but that is not the case here, of course. David conveys in [Psalm 139:1, 2](#) a similar message about God's knowledge of the present (“You have searched me, Lord, and you know me. You know when I sit and when I rise; you perceive my thoughts from afar”), connecting it with God's foreknowledge in [139:16](#).

### OWNERSHIP

Pottery making is a very old art, still practiced around the world. In developed countries it tends to be done for artistic reasons more than practical ones.

In few places is this more evident than in the one-stoplight town of Seagrove, North Carolina. More than 100 potters call it home, and Seagrove is one of the oldest and largest pottery-making centers in the nation. The town's pottery businesses are housed in old homes, log cabins, and former stores and gas stations.

Deposits of natural clay in the region make the abundance of pottery possible. Even so, no tourist thinks, *I have a right to take any pottery with me for free because the stuff it's made from is little more than abundant dirt*. The potters' work in forming and shaping creates the value!

God used the language of forming pottery in calling Jeremiah to be a prophet. This reminded Jeremiah of the divine claim on him that existed before his birth. It is the same claim that God has on us today ([Romans 9:20, 21](#)). *He formed us, not we him* ([Acts 17:29](#)). —C. R. B.

### B. Jeremiah Foreordained (vv. 5b, c)

#### 5b. “before you were born I set you apart;

To be set apart is to be sanctified or consecrated. It applies in the Old Testament to both people (such as the Israelites in [Leviticus 20:26](#)) and objects (such as altars and their accessories in [Exodus 40:10](#)).

For Jeremiah this setting apart will become much more than just ritual or ceremony. It will also define the (sometimes harsh) reality of his prophetic ministry.

Jeremiah's uncompromising message of judgment will set him apart from rebellious kings (like Zedekiah), fraudulent priests (like Pashhur in

[Jeremiah 20:1, 2](#)), false prophets (like Hananiah in chapter 28), and those of the general populace who believe that the mere presence of the temple will guarantee safety from any foreign oppressor ([7:1-15](#)). Even the people of Jeremiah's hometown will command him to stop prophesying or face death ([11:21-23](#)).

*What Do You Think?*

How does the fact that God knows people even before their birth affect your worldview?

Talking Points for Your Discussion

- Concerning life-purpose
- Concerning sanctity of life
- Concerning personal accountability
- Other

### 5c. "I appointed you as a prophet to the nations."

The Lord reaches the climax of his initial message to Jeremiah and gets specific as to what the man is being set apart to do. The fact that he is to be a *prophet to the nations* implies a ministry that extends beyond the borders of Judah (see [Jeremiah 1:10](#); [25:15-26](#)). The particular construction of the Hebrew phrase translated *I appointed you* is also used in describing roles given by God to Abraham ([Genesis 17:5](#)), Moses ([Exodus 7:1](#)), the servant of the Lord ([Isaiah 49:6](#)), and Ezekiel ([Ezekiel 3:17](#)).

Does God set us apart in a similar way—even before birth? One should be cautious in expecting a "call" similar to that of Jeremiah. His call is recorded not so much to give us a specific example to follow, but to tell us why we need to heed the words that we are about to read in the text at hand. The primary call that we are to answer today is that of the gospel to call on the Lord and be saved ([Acts 2:21](#); [Romans 10:13](#)). After that we are to pursue the Lord's will and use our talents and spiritual gifts in his service. For some, that may involve full-time service in the church; for others, it may entail ministry in a more secular setting.

## II. God's Corrective

([JEREMIAH 1:6, 7](#))

### A. Human Self-Doubt (v. 6)

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

Jeremiah's initial response to the Lord's call is as hesitant as Moses' was ([Exodus 3:11, lesson 5](#)). Jeremiah claims a weakness in the area of his speech due to lack of age. One may find it somewhat ironic that Jeremiah is speaking while claiming an inability to speak. But he is likely thinking in terms of lacking the more polished or trained speaking ability that comes with the experience of years. Perhaps like Amos ([lesson 9](#)), Jeremiah is concluding that he is "neither a prophet nor the son of a prophet" ([Amos 7:14](#)).

The Hebrew word rendered *too young* can describe a wide range of ages from an infant ([Exodus 2:6](#)) to a man old enough to marry ([Genesis 34:19](#)). Thus it is difficult to know Jeremiah's age at this point. He seems to fear that his age could be a hindrance to addressing others, since youths are generally expected to remain quiet and respect those who are older ([Job 32:6, 7](#)).

*What Do You Think?*

How can we overcome the habit of making excuses for not serving God more fully?

Talking Points for Your Discussion

- Regarding age-related excuses
- Regarding time-related excuses
- Regarding ability-related excuses
- Other

### B. Divine Reassurance (v. 7)

#### 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 does not deny that Jeremiah is *young* (whatever age he may be). Rather, the Lord is telling him that he must not allow that to be an excuse for why he cannot answer the Lord's call. The key to Jeremiah's fulfillment of his ministry will not lie in who he is but in who the Lord is and in Jeremiah's obedience to the Lord's directions. Both audience and message are to be determined by the Lord: *You must go to everyone I send you to and say whatever I command you*.

Given the hostile responses Jeremiah will receive to his message, he may be tempted to give in to fear or intimidation, altering his message to

avoid conflict. But the prophet must remember who is calling him and to whom he is accountable. To use Paul's words, Jeremiah must "fix [his] eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen" (2 Corinthians 4:18).

### III. God's Provision

(JEREMIAH 1:8-10)

#### A. Deliverance (v. 8)

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

Ezekiel will also be told during the Lord's call to him not to *be afraid* of those who are in his audience (Ezekiel 3:9). Those people will be in Babylon, where the prophet is among those taken captive (1:1). The ones who threaten Jeremiah, on the other hand, are in Jerusalem. They will also include those in his hometown of Anathoth, who will threaten him with death if he does not cease prophesying (Jeremiah 11:21).

*I am with you* is one of the most frequent assurances from the Lord in Scripture. It is the same assurance that was offered to timid Moses (Exodus 3:12, lesson 5). It is the same assurance given to followers of Jesus today as they carry his gospel to the nations (Matthew 28:18-20).

The Hebrew word translated *rescue* is used of the Israelites' deliverance from their oppression in Egypt (Exodus 3:8; 18:10) and of David's rescue from the lion, the bear, and Goliath (1 Samuel 17:37). Jeremiah will require such divine rescue from the enemies that oppress and harass him throughout his ministry.

#### What Do You Think?

In what ways should others see in us fearlessness (but not recklessness) in service to God?

#### Talking Points for Your Discussion

- Regarding personal safety
- Regarding economic security
- Regarding emotional safety (ridicule, etc.)
- Other

#### B. Message (v. 9)

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

Now comes a visual aid intended to offer additional support to Jeremiah. The Lord's action is reminiscent of what happens to Isaiah, only with Isaiah one of the seraphim comes to him and touches his lips with a live coal taken from an altar (Isaiah 6:5-7, lesson 6). Here it is the Lord who reaches *out his hand* and touches Jeremiah's *mouth*.

By adding *I have put my words in your mouth* to this action, the Lord specifically addresses Jeremiah's earlier objection that he does "not know how to speak" (v. 6, above). Now, having received the Lord's words, he must speak! Or as Amos puts it, "The Sovereign Lord has spoken—who can but prophesy?" (Amos 3:8).

The Lord's declaration of putting his words in Jeremiah's mouth calls to mind the Lord's promise to Moses in Deuteronomy 18:18: "I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their fellow Israelites, and I will put my words in his mouth. He will tell them everything I command him." While this prophecy is said to be fulfilled in Jesus (Acts 3:22, 23), perhaps it can also be applied to God's provision of the prophetic ministry to his people, as illustrated by Jeremiah.

God also says through Moses that God himself "will call to account anyone who does not listen to my words that the prophet speaks in my name" (Deuteronomy 18:19). This too comes to pass through Jeremiah; when the people of Judah fail to heed his words, they pay the price through their country being conquered and the citizens taken captive.

#### What Do You Think?

What are some specific steps to take to ensure that the words we utter are consistent with God's Word (Psalm 39:1; 119:13)?

#### Talking Points for Your Discussion

- In steps of personal devotion (Psalm 119:148; Matthew 6:6-15; etc.)
- In steps to seeking godly counsel and teaching (2 Chronicles 25:16; Hebrews 13:7; etc.)
- In steps to gain understanding of the times (1 Chronicles 12:32; Matthew 16:3; etc.)

#### C. Mission (v. 10)

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

Jeremiah will spend most of his life in Judah (chapters 41-44 of the book of Jeremiah record his journey to Egypt after the fall of Jerusalem). But his prophetic ministry will have an impact far beyond Judah. God appoints him *over nations and kingdoms*, but not due to any of Jeremiah’s own achievements or merit. This occurs only because the Lord has placed his words in Jeremiah’s mouth. The authority is from the Lord alone. Chapters 46-51 of the book of Jeremiah include the prophet’s oracles directed against various nations and kingdoms of his day. It includes a particularly lengthy one against Babylon (chapters 50 and 51).

The nature of Jeremiah’s ministry to the nations is then pictured through a series of verbs: *to uproot and tear down, to destroy and overthrow, to build and to plant*. The first four are negative; the final two are more hopeful and promising. This may indicate that Jeremiah’s ministry will be more negative than positive, but it will conclude on a positive note: hope will prevail beyond the current tragic circumstances in Judah that will culminate in divine judgment. Jeremiah does offer hope—of a future king who will “do what is just and right in the land” ([Jeremiah 23:5, 6](#)) and of a new covenant ([31:31-34](#)).

The language of the verse before us is used elsewhere in the book of Jeremiah to highlight God’s activity in fulfilling Jeremiah’s prophetic words ([Jeremiah 18:7-10; 24:6; 31:28; 32:41; 42:10; 45:4](#)). This is a way of affirming that the Lord makes certain that Jeremiah’s prophetic ministry will accomplish no less than what the Lord intends.

### WORD POWER

The source of the adage “The pen is mightier than the sword”—the wording if not the concept itself—is the 1839 play *Richelieu*, by English playwright Edward Bulwer-Lytton. The idea is that communication gets things done more effectively than does the violence of armed confrontation.

But it’s not always a simple either-or choice, since written and spoken communication can lead and has led to use of the sword. The twisted words of Adolf Hitler persuaded his country and its allies to launch a world war; the candid words of Winston Churchill galvanized his country and its allies to meet violence with violence to defeat that threat.

Twisted communication seems almost to be an art form these days, designed to influence behavior rather than to communicate truth. George Orwell, writing in 1949, predicted as much (and worse) in his novel *1984*: “If thought corrupts language, language can also corrupt thought.” Since the year he wrote that, the world has seen no fewer than 17 countries include the wording or idea of *Democratic Republic* in their designations; yet the citizens in the majority of these countries enjoy few of the freedoms available in Western democracies.

None of this should come as a surprise to readers of the Bible. The Scriptures record numerous instances in which human communication results in violence being avoided, as well as violence being initiated or intensified. (Contrast the results of Gideon’s tactful response to the angry Ephraimites in [Judges 8:1-3](#) with those of Jephthah’s confrontational response in [12:1-6](#).)

Given how much power human words have to incite violence and to quell it, to hurt and to heal, to depress and to encourage, how much more must the same be true of the Word of the living God! He still seeks those who will take his Word to build so that he does not have to destroy (compare [Ezekiel 22:30](#)). What will be your response to his invitation? —C. R. B.

#### What Do You Think?

What is God calling you to do on a daily basis?

#### Talking Points for Your Discussion

Regarding things “to destroy”

Regarding things “to build and to plant”

## Conclusion

### A. No Solos

With certain tasks, one’s ability to go it alone without any assistance is the measure of success. A would-be pilot must fly his or her plane solo. A young driver takes great pride in being able to drive to and from school or work without Mom or Dad riding along. From youth, it seems, to do something “all by myself” becomes the standard of success in many areas of life.

In contrast, God said that his presence, his words, and his purpose were to identify Jeremiah’s ministry. Never would there be a time when he would have to go solo, even as he suffered perhaps more persecution and harassment than any other prophet in the Old Testament. “No solos” can be a difficult concept to accept and apply in many areas of one’s life, but it is absolutely vital to apply in our service for the Lord.





**Visual for Lesson 7.** Point to this visual as you ask how the objection of age in [verse 6](#) can relate to Paul's admonition in [1 Timothy 4:12](#).

Let us remember that there was never a self-made prophet or a self-made apostle. And there are no self-made servants of Jesus in the twenty-first century. We must draw our strength from the Lord!

A go-it-alone philosophy led humanity into the tragedy of sin in the Garden of Eden, the consequences of which still reverberate. If the temptation to “fly solo” spiritually grows as you gain skills and knowledge with the passing years, remember: “Not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit,” says the Lord Almighty” ([Zechariah 4:6](#)).

### **B. Prayer**

Father, help us avoid the extremes of fearful silence and go-it-alone arrogance! Let us rather be always and only your instruments to speak the words of confrontation and comfort as you enable us. Grant us wisdom to know when and how to speak your Word. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.

### **C. Thought to Remember**

A child of God is no mere child!

## INVOLVEMENT LEARNING

## Into the Lesson

Make arrangements ahead of time for a class of elementary-age children to visit your class. Begin class by pointing to a specific child at random and asking what he or she wants to be when grown up. Repeat the question for each child, jotting responses on the board as you go.

After all children have answered, thank them and their teacher as you release them to return to their own class. (If you have a computer or mobile device, you may wish to play a prerecorded clip from the Internet of children being asked that question.)

*Alternative.* Distribute copies of the “When I Grow Up” activity from the reproducible page, which you can download. Have students work this puzzle in small groups or as a class activity.

After either activity lead into Bible study by saying, “We probably can recall being asked that same question many times when we were children. We probably gave some of the same or similar answers. Today we will look at a variation of this scenario in the call of a Bible prophet. God did not ask Jeremiah what he wanted to be. He *told* him!”

## Into the Word

Divide the class into three groups, and give each group paper, pens, and one of the following Bible research assignments. Suggested responses are listed under each assignment.

### Group 1—God’s Plan ([Jeremiah 1:4, 5](#))

Find statements about what God had already done.

“I formed you.”

“I knew you.”

“I set you apart.”

“I appointed you.”

### Group 2—God’s Command ([Jeremiah 1:6-8a](#))

Find statements about what God was commanding Jeremiah to do or not do.

“Do not say, ‘I am too young.’”

“You must go to everyone I send you to.”

“Say whatever I command you.”

“Do not be afraid of them.”

### Group 3—God’s Provision ([Jeremiah 1:8b-10](#))

Find statements about how God would provide for Jeremiah and his mission.

“I am with you and will rescue you.”

“I have put my words in your mouth.”

“I appoint you over nations and kingdoms.”

Allow time for groups to share and summarize their Scripture assignments with the rest of the class.

## Into Life

Say, “Jeremiah protested that he was not mature enough to be God’s servant. That seems like a protest we could all make. Note, however, God’s solution—God put his words in Jeremiah’s mouth! That solution is also ours. God’s Word can be in our mouths when we study it daily.”

To help your students see how God’s Word aided Jeremiah in the most trying of circumstances, give them the following schedule for devotional reading this week:

Sunday—Death threats ([Jeremiah 11:18-20](#))

Monday—Betrayal ([Jeremiah 12:5-13](#))

Tuesday—Beatings ([Jeremiah 20:1-6](#))

Wednesday—His message censored ([Jeremiah 36:1-26](#))

Thursday—Left to die ([Jeremiah 38:1-13](#))

Friday—Taken to Egypt ([Jeremiah 43:1-13](#))

Saturday—Witnessed the destruction of Jerusalem ([Jeremiah 52:1-30](#))

*Alternative.* Distribute copies of the “I Want to Be ...” activity from the reproducible page. This exercise will help students choose areas in which they need to mature and to memorize Scripture that will remind them of God’s will in that specific area of their lives.