

The Books of Jeremiah and Lamentations, Teacher's Guide

Lesson 1: The Call of Jeremiah

Jeremiah 1:1-19

Teaching Aim (Teacher Orientation)

Doctrinally, this opening chapter establishes that the prophetic word Jeremiah will speak is not his own opinion but the word of God, watched over by God Himself to bring it to pass (1:9, 12). It also sets out a robust view of God's purpose and initiative: God knew, consecrated, and appointed Jeremiah before birth. The teacher must handle this carefully. This is a call to a covenant task and office, not a proof-text for Calvinistic unconditional election of individuals to salvation. God's setting apart of a prophet for a purpose is the same kind of language Scripture uses of nations and servants chosen for a mission through which God will bless many. The gospel call remains genuinely universal, and human beings are truly able to respond (1:7, where the command assumes Jeremiah can and must obey).

The chapter also presses the reality of judgment. The boiling pot from the north (1:13-16) is God's just response to a people who "have forsaken me" and worship "the works of their own hands." God is holy, and sin has consequences. Keep this God-centered and never fatalistic; judgment falls because of real, chosen sin, not arbitrary decree.

Beyond the doctrine, the lesson aims at the formation of the student. Most believers carry a private "I am only..." that they use to excuse themselves from God's call. Jeremiah's story confronts that excuse with the steady promise "I am with you." The teacher's goal is not only that students understand God's sovereignty and word, but that they walk out willing to obey God in the very place they have been afraid, trusting His presence more than their own adequacy.

Question 1

Student Question:

Read 1:4-5. Before Jeremiah was born, God says He "knew" him, "consecrated" him, and "appointed" him a prophet. What does this reveal about God's purpose and initiative, and how is this a call to a particular task rather than a statement that some individuals are unconditionally destined for heaven while others are not?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Begin by slowing down on the staggering claim of verses 4-5. Before Jeremiah drew a breath, God already had a purpose for his life. The three verbs build: "knew" (set His covenant attention on him), "consecrated" (set him apart), "appointed" (gave him an office). This is the initiative of

God, and it should fill us with awe. Our lives are not accidents; the God of history weaves purpose into them before we are aware of it.

Here the teacher must guard the flock against a common misreading. Calvinism takes texts like this to teach that God unconditionally selects certain individuals for salvation and passes over the rest, apart from any response on their part. But the text is about a call to a task, not a decree about an eternal destiny. God is appointing Jeremiah “a prophet to the nations,” not informing him that he is among an elect few guaranteed heaven. Scripture is full of such purposeful callings: Israel chosen as a nation to bless all families of the earth, Cyrus named for a task, Paul set apart from his mother’s womb to preach (Galatians 1:15).

Notice too that the very next verses assume Jeremiah’s real freedom and responsibility. God commands, “you shall go... you shall speak” (1:7). A command implies the ability to obey or refuse. The gospel call is like this: real, universal, and answerable. God’s foreknowledge of a purpose does not cancel human responsibility; it gives it weight.

Land the application warmly. The same God who had a purpose for Jeremiah has a purpose for each person in the room. That truth is not meant to make us passive but to make us bold. We did not invent our calling and we cannot finally frustrate God’s good purposes when we yield to them.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- God’s purposeful initiative in a person’s life, established before birth (1:5).
- The difference between God’s call to a covenant task and the Calvinistic idea of unconditional individual election to salvation; this text teaches the former, not the latter.
- The genuine, universal gospel call and real human ability to respond, implied by the commands of verse 7.
- Every life has God-given purpose; we are not accidents.
- The danger of using “predestination” language to excuse passivity or to question whether the gospel invitation is sincere for all.

Discussion Prompts

- What is the difference between God appointing someone to a task and God deciding their eternal destiny apart from their response?
- How does knowing God had a purpose for you before you were born change how you view your ordinary days?
- Why does a command like “you shall go” assume that Jeremiah was truly able to obey?

Question 2

Student Question:

Jeremiah's first instinct was to name his limitation: "I do not know how to speak, for I am only a youth" (1:6). What is the "I am only..." that most often rises in your heart when you sense God asking something of you?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This is the first of the self-examining questions, and it lands on something universal. Jeremiah's "I am only a youth" is every believer's favorite hiding place. We all have a version: I am only a stay-at-home parent, only a new Christian, only a quiet person, only one voice. The excuse feels like humility, but often it is fear wearing humility's coat.

Help students see what God did with the excuse. He did not flatter Jeremiah ("No, you're very impressive!") and He did not scold him. He simply refused to let the limitation set the agenda: "Do not say, 'I am only a youth.'" God's answer to our inadequacy is never our adequacy; it is His presence.

Invite honesty. Ask each person to silently finish the sentence, "When I sense God nudging me, the excuse I reach for is 'I am only...'" Naming it robs it of some of its power. Then point them back to the promise that follows in the chapter: "I am with you."

Be gentle. Some genuine limitations are real, and God is not asking people to pretend. He is asking them to stop letting the limitation be louder than His voice.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The tendency to disguise fear as humility.
- God's call is not based on our qualifications but on His presence and word.
- Self-knowledge as a spiritual discipline: naming our habitual excuses.
- The difference between honest weakness brought to God and weakness used to avoid obedience.

Discussion Prompts

- What is your most common "I am only...", and when did you last use it?
- How is fear sometimes disguised as humility in our hearts?
- What might God be inviting you to do that your excuse is currently blocking?

Question 3

Student Question:

Read 1:7-9. God answers Jeremiah's fear not by promising him eloquence but by putting His own words in Jeremiah's mouth. What does this teach us about where the power of God's message actually comes from?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Verses 7–9 reveal the engine of the prophet’s ministry: “Behold, I have put my words in your mouth.” The authority of Jeremiah’s message will never rest on his eloquence, age, or charisma. It rests on the fact that the words are God’s. This is the doctrine of revelation in seed form: God speaks, and His servant carries that word faithfully.

This is liberating for every Christian who has ever felt tongue-tied in sharing faith. The power is not in our polish but in God’s word. When we speak Scripture, encourage with Scripture, and teach the gospel, we are handling something with its own God-given power (Romans 1:16; Hebrews 4:12).

Draw a careful line. We are not prophets receiving fresh revelation as Jeremiah did; the faith has been once for all delivered (Jude 3). But we do carry the same authoritative word, now complete in Scripture. Our confidence rests there, not in ourselves.

Encourage teachers to model this by grounding their lessons in the text rather than in personality. The best teaching gets out of the way and lets God’s word speak.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The divine origin and authority of God’s word (1:9).
- The power of the message lies in God’s word, not the messenger’s ability (Romans 1:16).
- The difference between Jeremiah’s direct revelation and our handling of the completed Scriptures (Jude 3).
- Confidence in evangelism rooted in God’s word rather than personal eloquence.

Discussion Prompts

- Why is it freeing to know the power is in God’s word and not in our skill?
- How does this change the way you might share your faith with a neighbor?
- What is the difference between Jeremiah’s revelation and the way we receive God’s word today?

Question 4

Student Question:

God said, “Do not be afraid of them, for I am with you to deliver you” (1:8). Whose faces, or whose disapproval, are you most afraid of right now, and how does the promise “I am with you” speak to that fear?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Verse 8 names the real obstacle: not Jeremiah’s youth but his fear of people. “Do not be afraid of them.” The Hebrew literally warns against fearing “their faces.” Most of our disobedience is downstream of the fear of someone’s face, a frown, a withdrawal of approval, a raised eyebrow.

God meets the fear not with a pep talk but with a presence: “for I am with you to deliver you.” The cure for the fear of man is the nearness of God. When God’s face is more real to us than the disapproving faces around us, courage becomes possible.

Help students locate their particular fear. For some it is a boss, for others a parent, a spouse, a friend group, a culture. Proverbs 29:25 names it: “The fear of man lays a snare, but whoever trusts in the Lord is safe.”

Move toward something concrete. Ask them to name one relationship where fear of disapproval has silenced their obedience, and one small, brave next step.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The fear of man as a snare (Proverbs 29:25).
- God’s presence as the answer to fear, not self-confidence (1:8).
- Courage as a fruit of trusting God’s nearness.
- The difference between cowardice and wise, prayerful prudence.

Discussion Prompts

- Whose “face” are you most afraid of, and how does it affect your obedience?
- What does it mean practically for God’s presence to be more real to you than someone’s disapproval?
- What is one brave, small step of obedience you could take this week?

Question 5

Student Question:

Read 1:11–12. God shows Jeremiah an almond branch and says, “I am watching over my word to perform it.” The almond was the first tree to bud in spring. What is God teaching Jeremiah about the certainty and timing of His word?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

The almond vision (1:11–12) is a Hebrew wordplay: the word for almond (shaqed) sounds like the word for watching (shoqed). The almond tree was the first to bud after winter, the “awake tree.” God says, “I am watching over my word to perform it.” His word is not idle; it is awake, active, certain to bloom in its season.

This is enormous comfort for a prophet who will labor forty years with little visible fruit. The delay between God’s word and its fulfillment is not failure; it is the patient season before the bud. What God says, God does (Isaiah 55:10–11).

Apply it to the long obediences of ordinary faith. We pray, we sow, we wait. The almond branch tells us God has not forgotten His promises; He is awake over every one of them.

Caution students against demanding to see the harvest on their timetable. The God who watches over His word also governs its timing.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The reliability and certainty of God's word (1:12; Isaiah 55:10–11).
- God's sovereignty over the timing of His promises.
- Encouragement for faithful service that sees little immediate fruit.
- The hidden, patient season before God's word 'buds.'

Discussion Prompts

- How does the picture of the 'awake tree' encourage you when you see no results?
- Where are you tempted to think God has forgotten a promise?
- Why is God's timing as much a matter of trust as God's word?

Question 6

Student Question:

If God truly watches over His word to bring it to pass, how would resting in that promise change the way you obey Him in a situation where you cannot yet see any results?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self-question follows naturally from the almond vision. If God truly watches over His word, then obedience can rest, even when nothing seems to be happening. So much of our anxiety in obeying God comes from secretly believing that results depend on us.

Help students distinguish their job from God's. Our task is faithfulness; the fruit is God's business. The farmer scatters seed and sleeps (Mark 4:26–29); the growth is God's.

Invite a specific area: a wayward child being prayed for, a hard conversation, a quiet witness at work, a habit being put to death. Ask, "What would change if you truly believed God was watching over His word to perform it here?"

Encourage perseverance without guilt. Resting in God's faithfulness is not passivity; it is the deep root that keeps us obeying when the harvest is slow.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The relationship between our faithfulness and God's sovereignty over outcomes.
- Freedom from the burden of producing results ourselves (Mark 4:26–29).
- Perseverance in obedience during long seasons of waiting.
- Trust as the root of steady, joyful service.

Discussion Prompts

- In what situation are you carrying the weight of results that belongs to God?
- How would resting in God's faithfulness change the way you obey there?
- What is the difference between trusting rest and passive giving up?

Question 7

Student Question:

Read 1:13–16. The boiling pot tilting from the north pictures the coming judgment on Judah “for all their evil” in forsaking God and worshiping the works of their own hands. What does this vision reveal about God’s holiness and His response to sin?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

The second vision (1:13–16) turns sober. A boiling pot tilts from the north, and out of it disaster will be poured on Judah. The reason is stated plainly: “for all their evil in forsaking me... and worshiping the works of their own hands.” God’s judgment is never arbitrary; it is His holy, just response to real and chosen sin.

Teach God’s holiness here without flinching. A God who never judged sin would not be good; He would be indifferent to evil. The same love that makes God patient also makes Him unwilling to wink at the destruction sin works in His people.

Note the idolatry named: worshiping “the works of their own hands.” Idolatry is always, at root, the worship of self-made things, things we can control. Help students see the modern forms: money, image, comfort, success.

Keep it God-centered and hopeful. Even this warning is an act of mercy; God tells Judah the truth so that they might repent. Judgment announced in advance is judgment that still leaves a door open.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- God’s holiness and the justice of His judgments (1:16).
- Sin as forsaking God and worshiping the works of our own hands.
- Idolatry as the worship of self-made, controllable things.
- Warning of judgment as itself an act of mercy, leaving room for repentance.
- The danger of presenting a sentimental God who never judges sin.

Discussion Prompts

- Why would a truly good God have to take sin seriously enough to judge it?
- What are some modern ‘works of our own hands’ that quietly take God’s place?
- How is a warning of judgment actually a form of mercy?

Question 8

Student Question:

Jeremiah was called to speak hard truths people did not want to hear. Where are you tempted to soften, edit, or stay silent about God's truth to keep the peace, and what would faithful courage look like there?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self-question presses the courage theme into the student's daily speech. Jeremiah was called to say things people hated to hear. We are not prophets, but we are all tempted to edit God's truth to keep the peace, to stay silent when a word is needed, or to soften what God has made clear.

Distinguish faithful courage from harshness. The goal is truth spoken in love (Ephesians 4:15), not bluntness for its own sake. Jeremiah wept over the people he warned; courage and compassion belong together.

Help students locate the pressure points: a family member living in sin, a workplace where convictions are mocked, a culture that calls evil good. Where do we go quiet to avoid a frown?

Move to one concrete resolve. Not a crusade, but one honest, loving, truthful word they have been avoiding.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The call to faithful courage in speaking God's truth (Ephesians 4:15).
- The temptation to soften or silence truth to keep the peace.
- Truth and love held together, as in Jeremiah's tears.
- The difference between courageous witness and combative harshness.

Discussion Prompts

- Where are you most tempted to stay silent about God's truth?
- How do we tell the difference between loving courage and harshness?
- What is one truthful, loving word you have been avoiding?

Question 9**Student Question:**

Read 1:17-19. God promises to make Jeremiah "a fortified city, an iron pillar, and bronze walls," adding, "They will fight against you, but they shall not prevail over you, for I am with you." How does God equip the people He calls, and how does this promise of His sustaining presence both demand faithful endurance and make it possible?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This is the heaviest block of the lesson, and it gathers the chapter's themes. God promises to make Jeremiah "a fortified city, an iron pillar, and bronze walls against the whole land" (1:18). Then comes the stunning honesty of verse 19: "They will fight against you, but they shall not prevail over you, for I am with you... to deliver you." God does not promise an easy road; He promises an unbreakable presence on the hard road.

Teach two truths together. First, God equips those He calls. The strength is not Jeremiah's native toughness; God makes him a pillar. Whatever God commands, God enables. Second, this equipping does not remove the fight; it sustains Jeremiah through it. The promise is not 'no battle' but 'no defeat, for I am with you.'

Here the teacher can point to the larger biblical pattern that reaches its height in Christ and His servants. The Lord told Paul at Corinth, almost in Jeremiah's words, "Do not be afraid... for I am with you" (Acts 18:9-10). Jesus promised, "I am with you always" (Matthew 28:20). The God who stood with Jeremiah stands with His church.

Hold faithfulness and assurance together honestly. God's sustaining presence does not make Jeremiah a passive bystander; he must still "gird up his loins" and speak (1:17). The promise that they will not prevail is for the prophet who keeps obeying. So with us: God preserves us as we continue in faith and obedience (Hebrews 3:14), and that very promise of His presence is what makes endurance possible. This is not a guarantee that removes our responsibility, but a presence that empowers it.

Close with comfort. No faithful servant of God serves alone. The opposition may be real and fierce, but the verdict is already in: "they shall not prevail over you."

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- God equips those He calls; the command comes with the enabling (1:18).
- God promises sustaining presence, not the absence of opposition (1:19).
- The biblical pattern of 'I am with you' from Jeremiah to Paul to Christ's "I am with you always" (Acts 18:9-10; Matthew 28:20).
- The call to keep obeying ("gird up your loins," 1:17); the promise is for the faithful, not the passive.
- Endurance through opposition as preserved by God's presence, held together with our continued faith (Hebrews 3:14).
- Assurance that is real without becoming the false comfort of 'once saved, always saved' apart from continued faithfulness.

Discussion Prompts

- What does it mean that God promised presence rather than an easy road?
- How do we hold together God's promise to sustain us and our call to keep obeying?
- Where do you most need to hear 'they shall not prevail... for I am with you' right now?

Question 10

Student Question:

Look back over the whole chapter, from God's eternal purpose to His promise to stand with Jeremiah against the whole land. Name one specific way the Lord Jesus is using Jeremiah's call to form courage, trust, or obedience in you this week.

Commentary and Teaching Notes

The capstone question asks students to move from study to surrender. Look back across the chapter: God's purpose before birth, His word in the prophet's mouth, His command not to fear, His watching over His word, His sober warning, and His unbreakable presence. Each theme is an invitation to be formed.

Resist letting this stay abstract. Press for one specific way the Lord Jesus is shaping them: a fear to surrender, an excuse to drop, a word to speak, a long obedience to keep, a trust to deepen.

Tie it to Christ explicitly. Jeremiah's call points forward to the One who perfectly spoke the Father's word, who set His face like flint, and who is now with His people always. We are formed not by trying harder but by walking with Him.

Invite each person to name their 'one thing' aloud or on paper, and to take it into the week as a matter of prayer and obedience.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Moving from knowledge to formation and obedience (James 1:22).
- Christ as the perfect Prophet who fulfills Jeremiah's pattern of faithful courage.
- Spiritual formation as walking with Jesus, not mere self-effort.
- The value of naming one concrete step of obedience.

Discussion Prompts

- Which theme of this chapter is the Lord pressing on you most?
- What is the one specific step of trust or courage you will take this week?
- How does walking with Jesus, rather than gritting your teeth, change the way you grow?