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THE LOOKOUT

JUNE 2023

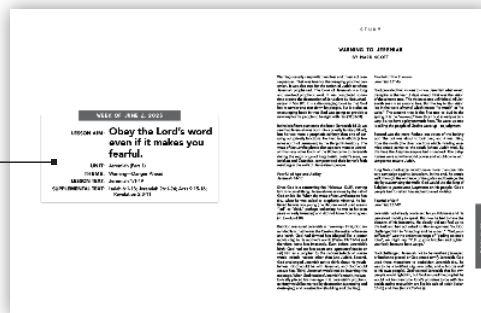
Unit: Jeremiah (Part 1)

Theme: Warning—Danger Ahead

Overview: We see warnings everywhere. Bridge out. Slow down. Don't drink the water. Warnings even predate the fall of humankind (Genesis 2:16-17). In the perfect Garden of Eden, God warned Adam and Eve against failing to trust his goodness. For the June lessons we are studying the book of Jeremiah, written by the weeping prophet, who also wrote the book of Lamentations, the subject of our May study. Students will learn how Jeremiah was warned about fear overtaking him, how worshipping anything other than God ends in judgment, how relying on a man-made temple is trusting in the wrong thing, and how liars like Hananiah will meet their doom.

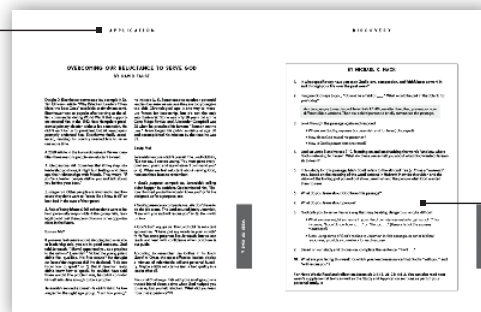
HOW TO USE

Each week has a **lesson aim**, **lesson text**, and **supplemental text**.



Tabs indicate the week of each lesson.

Each week features three sections: **Study**, **Application**, and **Discovery**.



Use the **Discovery** questions to study, discuss, and apply the Scripture passages in a group or class.

WEEK OF JUNE 4, 2023

LESSON AIM: **Obey the Lord's word
even if it makes you
fearful.**

UNIT: Jeremiah (Part 1)

THEME: Warning—Danger Ahead

LESSON TEXT: Jeremiah 1:1-19

SUPPLEMENTAL TEXT: Isaiah 6:1-13; Jeremiah 26:1-24; Acts 9:15-16;
Revelation 2:8-11

WARNING TO JEREMIAH

BY MARK SCOTT

Warnings usually carry with them fear and threats of consequences. That was true for the weeping prophet Jeremiah. It was also true for the nation of Judah to whom Jeremiah prophesied. The book of Jeremiah is a long and involved prophetic work. It was completed sometime around the destruction of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar in 586 BC. It is a discouraging book in that God has to *uproot and tear down* his people. But it is also an encouraging book in that God was going to provide a new way for his people to be right with him (31:31-34).

In the brief introduction to this book (Jeremiah 1:1-3), we see that Jeremiah was born into a priestly family (*Hilkiah*), but his was more a prophetic ministry than one of carrying out priestly functions. He lived in *Anathoth* (a few miles north of Jerusalem) in the *Benjamin* territory. *The word of the Lord* (a phrase that appears more in Jeremiah than any other book of the Bible) came to Jeremiah during the reign of good King Josiah. Josiah's sons, *Jehoiakim* and *Zedekiah*, compromised their father's faith resulting in the *exile* of Jerusalem's people.

Fearful of Age and Ability*Jeremiah 1:4-10*

Since God is a consuming fire (Hebrews 12:29), serving him is no small thing. Jeremiah was undone by the call of God on his life. When the *word of the Lord* came to him (i.e., when he was called to prophetic ministry), he believed he was *too young* (the Hebrew word used means "lad" or "child," perhaps indicating he was in his teen years or early twenties) and did *not know how to speak* (cf. Exodus 4:10).

But God reassured Jeremiah in three ways. First, God reminded him that he was the Creator, the maker of heaven and earth. God had *formed* him (shaped like a potter molds clay) in his mother's womb (Psalm 139:13-16) and therefore knew him intimately. Even before Jeremiah's birth, God had set him apart and *appointed* (made or set) him as a *prophet to the nations* (which of course would include nations other than just Judah). Second, God challenged Jeremiah not to think about his youthfulness. God would be *with* Jeremiah, and God would *rescue* him. Third, Jeremiah would not be inventing the message. When God *touched* Jeremiah's mouth, he symbolically placed his message in it. Jeremiah's prophetic ministry would be marked by destruction (uprooting and destroying) and construction (building and planting).

Fearful of the Enemies*Jeremiah 1:11-16*

God provided two visions to show Jeremiah what would transpire in the fearful days ahead. First was the vision of the almond tree. This vision seems unfinished. All Jeremiah sees is an *almond tree*. But the key to this vision lies in the word *almond*, which means "to watch" or "to wake." The almond tree is the first tree to bud in the spring. It is the "wake-up" tree. It can bud as early as January. So, we have a play on words here. The wake-up tree is calling the people of God to wake up—to judgment.

Second was the more fleshed-out vision of the *boiling pot*. The pot was about to boil over, and it was tilting from the north (the direction from which invading enemies would come) to the south (where Judah was). By this time the Assyrian empire had crumbled. The Babylonians were now the world power and would come with vengeance toward Judah.

King Nebuchadnezzar would make more than one military campaign against Jerusalem. In the end, he would walk through *the entrance of the gates* and besiege the city by *surrounding the walls*. God would use the king of Babylon to *pronounce judgments* on his people. God's people had forsaken him and embraced idolatry.

Fearful of Self*Jeremiah 1:17-19*

Jeremiah had already confessed his youthfulness and his perceived inability to speak. But now he had to face the demons of his insecurity. He clearly did not feel up to this task and had not asked for this assignment. So, God challenged him to "stand up and be a man." "*Get yourself ready*" was the ancient concept of "girding up one's loins"; we might say, "Pull up your britches and tighten your belt, because here we go."

God challenged Jeremiah not to be *terrified* (dismayed or broken to pieces) or God would *terrify* Jeremiah. God used three metaphors to embolden Jeremiah (i.e., he was to be a *fortified city*, *iron pillar*, and a *bronze wall* to his own people). God warned Jeremiah that his own people would fight him, but God assured the prophet he would not be *overcome*. God's promises to be *with* Jeremiah and to *rescue* him are like his calls of Isaiah (Isaiah 6:1-13) and Paul (Acts 9:15-16). ■

APPLICATION

OVERCOMING OUR RELUCTANCE TO SERVE GOD

BY DAVID FAUST

Dwight D. Eisenhower serves as a key example in Dr. Tim Elmore's article "Why Reluctant Leaders Often Make the Best Ones" (available at timelmore.com). Eisenhower was so popular after serving as the allied commander during World War II that supporters entered him in the 1952 New Hampshire presidential primary election without his permission. He didn't want to run for president, but 24 newspapers promptly endorsed him. Eisenhower finally acquiesced, realizing his country needed him to serve one more time.

A 2020 article in the *Harvard Business Review* identifies three reasons people are reluctant to lead:

1. *Interpersonal risk.* Some fear that if they step into leadership positions, it might hurt feelings and damage their relationships with friends. They worry, "If you're a leader, people dislike you and talk about you behind your back."

2. *Image risk.* Other people are reluctant to lead because they don't want to "seem like a know-it-all" or look bad in the eyes of their peers.

3. *Risk of being blamed.* Still others don't want to be held personally responsible if the group fails, fearing it could cost them promotions or other opportunities in the future.

Excuse Me?

If you ever feel unsure about stepping into a service or leadership role, you are in good company. God told Jeremiah, "I [have] appointed you as a prophet to the nations" (Jeremiah 1:5), but the young priest didn't feel qualified. His first excuse? *He thought he lacked the required skill.* He declared, "I do not know how to speak" (v. 6). But if Jeremiah really didn't know how to speak, he couldn't have said those words! The problem was, he didn't consider himself articulate enough to be a prophet.

Jeremiah's second excuse? *He didn't think he belonged to the right age group.* "I am too young,"

he insisted (v. 6). Sometimes we overlook potential leaders because we assume they are too young (or too old). Chronological age is one way to measure fitness for leadership, but it's not the only way. Barton W. Stone was only 28 years old at the Cane Ridge Revival and Alexander Campbell was 28 when he preached his famous "Sermon on the Law." Jesus began his public ministry at age 30 and accomplished his mission by the time he was 33.

Equip Me!

Jeremiah's excuses didn't prevail. The Lord told him, "Do not say, 'I am too young.' You must go to everyone I send you to and say whatever I command you" (v. 7). When we feel reluctant about serving God, here are three facts to remember:

- *God's purpose compels us.* Jeremiah's calling didn't happen by accident. God reminded him, "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you" (v. 5). He designed us for a purpose, too.

- *God's presence accompanies us.* We don't have to do the job alone. The Lord assured jittery Jeremiah, "I am with you and will rescue you" (v. 8). He is with us, too.

- *God's truth equips us.* The Lord told his reluctant spokesman, "I have put my words in your mouth" (v. 9). We aren't prophets like Jeremiah, but we can teach and lead with confidence when Scripture is our guide.

According to researcher Jim Collins in his book *Good to Great*, the most effective leaders display a mixture of indomitable will and personal humility. Maybe a little reluctance isn't a bad quality in a leader after all.

Personal Challenge: Talk with your small group or a trusted friend about a time when God nudged you to serve, but you felt reluctant. What did you learn from that experience? ■

DISCOVERY

BY MICHAEL C. MACK

1. In what specific way have you seen God's love, compassion, and faithfulness at work in and through your life over the past week?
2. Imagine God says to you, "Do not be afraid of ____." What would he put in that blank for you today?

Ask two people to read aloud **Jeremiah 1:1-19** one after the other, preferably from different Bible versions. Then ask a third person to briefly summarize the passage.

3. Look through the passage again and respond:
 - Where are God's *purposes* (for Jeremiah and for Israel) displayed?
 - How does God reveal his *presence*?
 - How is God's *power* demonstrated?
4. Look at verse 5 and verses 7-10, focusing on and emphasizing the words *I* and *my*, where God is referring to himself. What do these verses tell you about what God wanted Jeremiah to learn?
5. In his study for this passage, Mark Scott refers to the almond tree (v. 11) as a "wake-up" tree, based on the meaning of the word *almond* in Hebrew. How do this vision and the vision of the boiling pot poured out show Jeremiah and the people what God wanted them to see?
6. What do you learn about God from this passage?
7. What do you learn about people?
8. God calls you to serve him in a way that may be risky, dangerous, and/or difficult.
 - What excuses might someone in your life circumstances make to get out of it? For instance, "I don't know how to . . ." or "I'm too . . ." (*Keep a list of the excuses mentioned.*)
 - Now, using some of God's replies to Jeremiah in this passage, or other biblical responses, provide a comeback for each excuse.
9. Based on our study and discussion, complete the sentence: "I will . . ."
10. What are you facing this week for which you need reassurance that God is "with you" and "will rescue you"?

For Next Week: Read and reflect on **Jeremiah 2:1-13, 26-28; 4:1-2**. You can also read next week's supplemental texts as well as the Study and Application sections as part of your personal study. ■