

# CONTENTS

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<b>1</b>	Has God Called Me? <i>Jeremiah 1:1-19</i>	5
<b>2</b>	Why Has God Done All These Things to Us? <i>Jeremiah 5:1-31</i>	11
<b>3</b>	Where Is the Disconnect? <i>Jeremiah 7:1—8:3</i>	17
<b>4</b>	What Makes God Cry? <i>Jeremiah 8:14—9:1</i>	23
<b>5</b>	Can God Love Rags? <i>Jeremiah 13:1-14</i>	29
<b>6</b>	How Certain Is Our Future? <i>Jeremiah 31:27-40</i>	35
<b>7</b>	Can You Imagine a Different World? <i>Jeremiah 50:1-20</i>	41
<b>8</b>	Will God Turn to Save Us? <i>Lamentations 3:1-39</i>	47

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### Jeremiah 1:1-19

#### Learner Session Guide

#### Focus Statement

God's particular call to the young Jeremiah gives us an opportunity to consider how we also are summoned to speak God's word in our own day and time, as well as to reflect upon those circumstances that make our call fearsome and difficult.

#### Key Verse

"Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you; I appointed you a prophet to the nations."  
*Jeremiah 1:5*

## Has God Called Me?

 Focus Image



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### Gather

#### Check-in

Take this time to connect or reconnect with the others in your group. We are about to listen to God through the words of Jeremiah and the poems of Lamentations. Part of that listening process will involve hearing one another's insights and perceptions of texts in the Book of Faith. You need only have a willingness to be open to the Holy Spirit's prompting as you enter the conversation.

#### Pray

*Almighty and eternal God, so draw our hearts to you, so guide our minds, so fill our imaginations, so control our wills, that we may be wholly yours, utterly dedicated to you; and then use us, we pray, as you will, but always to your glory and the welfare of your people, through our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen. (Evangelical Lutheran Worship, Augsburg Fortress, 2006, p. 86)*

#### Focus Activity

In the Bible, a prophet is someone called to speak God's word. Look at the Focus Image and consider the title for this session: Has God Called Me? In one sentence, write down why God might—or might not—need a prophet.



Notes

### Open Scripture

Read Jeremiah 1:1-19.

- What stood out for you as important in the passage? Why?
- What do you find comforting in the passage? What do you find challenging?
- What questions does this passage raise for you?

### Join the Conversation

#### Historical Context

1. The first chapter of Jeremiah divides into two parts: the historical setting of Jeremiah's entire ministry is described in verses 1 to 3, while the actual call of the prophet appears in verses 4 to 19. Although short, the historical setting is important. From it we learn that Jeremiah's prophecies are set in the context of watershed events in Israel's life, especially the destruction of Jerusalem by the Babylonian Empire. Later generations understood the meaning of these events through the messages from God spoken by Jeremiah.

- Is the word of God appropriately addressed to governments? If so, how? If not, why not?
2. The references to the disaster that approached from the north show that Jeremiah's call and the messages he delivered were linked to a particular time and circumstance. Jeremiah's concern was to deliver a timely word to God's people in the hope that they might come to realize their sin and turn back to God. The task was daunting and Jeremiah's words of doom and gloom were not likely to be warmly received. Accordingly, God promised to be present for Jeremiah.
- Consider Jeremiah 1:4-19, then write down one word that you think describes Jeremiah's reaction to his call.

- Imagine that, like Jeremiah, you heard God summon you to speak God's word. How might you react? What emotions would you experience?

### Literary Context

1. Scholars have long recognized recurring patterns of form in many biblical texts, including the type we have before us, the *prophetic call narrative*. The dialogue between God and Jeremiah follows a known sequence in which the prophet is commissioned.

- Review Jeremiah 1:4-19. Make a list of the steps that occur in this passage after God addresses Jeremiah. What does Jeremiah say? Then what happens?
- Compare your list from the activity above to the call of Moses in Exodus 3. What might an ancient Israelite conclude about Jeremiah, based on the similarities?

2. A prophetic call narrative not only gives us a preview of the themes of the prophet's messages, but also assures the reader that this is, indeed, someone who has been addressed by God and who authentically proclaims God's word.

- Why might it have been important for ancient hearers to be assured that Jeremiah's proclamation was authentic? What was at risk if he was a false prophet?
- If Jeremiah's call narrative is a preview of his ministry and message, make a list of the sort of things we can anticipate him saying in the rest of this book of the Bible.

### Lutheran Context

1. A guiding Lutheran principle for understanding the Scripture is that the Bible should be interpreted according to its plain meaning. In *Opening the Book of Faith*, Mark Allan Powell explains, "This means that passages are to be understood in the sense that would have seemed obvious to their original readers. They are not to be taken out of context or twisted to be read in a sense that never would have occurred to their original readers" (Augsburg Fortress, 2008, p. 37).

- What might have been the plain meaning of Jeremiah 1:5 for those who preserved and read this portion of Jeremiah's call?
- What might have been the plain meaning of Jeremiah 1:14-16 for those who preserved and read this portion of the call?

2. Believers are sometimes tempted to embrace words addressed to biblical characters as direct and unmediated promises or statements about themselves or about our contemporary historical context.

- Does God have a plan for Jeremiah's life? What is it? Are all details scripted in advance, or not?



Notes



- Does Jeremiah 1:1-19 signal that God has specific vocational plans for all people? Why or why not?

### Devotional Context

1. Jeremiah's call makes it clear that God chooses to employ people as a means to spread God's word. Perhaps God could communicate with us in another way, but God has chosen to speak through words communicated in the Bible and through words uttered by ordinary people.

- Describe a time when God spoke to you through another person, or a time when you believe that God spoke through you.

2. Our "call story" comes in baptism. In *Evangelical Lutheran Worship's* rite of Holy Baptism, parents and congregants promise to nurture children in the faith so that they might "learn to trust God, proclaim Christ through word and deed, care for others and the world God made, and work for justice and peace" (p. 228).

- List what the baptized in your congregation are doing to live out the words of the baptismal liturgy. Where could a visitor, for example, find evidence of proclamation, care, or work for justice and peace?

### Wrap-up

Be ready to look back over the work your group has done in this session.

### Pray

*Ever-living God, we give you thanks that you have called us through baptismal water and the Word to be your servants. On the strength of your baptismal claim on us, help us to learn to trust you more so that we might proclaim Christ boldly, care for others and the creation you have made, and continue the struggle for justice and peace until your reign is fully realized. Teach us to be your messengers, speaking—as we pray—in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.*

## Extending the Conversation

### Homework

1. Read the next session's Scripture text, Jeremiah 5:1-31, slowly and prayerfully.
2. This week, begin each day with a prayer that you might be sensitive to how God might be speaking to you through others. Carry a small notepad or piece of paper to record times when that prayer is answered. At the next session, share what you discovered about yourself in this process.

3. Find information about how the larger church is caring for creation and working for justice and peace. At the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) Web site, [www.elca.org](http://www.elca.org), search for “environment” or “justice and peace.” To discover how the church speaks to the government, search for “advocacy.” If your congregation does not regularly have access to information about the work the church is doing throughout the world, consider discussing with your pastor how you might partner with others in your congregation to share that exciting news.

4. Incorporate the singing of “We All Are One in Mission” (ELW 576) in your daily devotional life this week. Consider how the summons to service in that hymn reflects Jeremiah’s call and your own.

5. Make three columns on a piece of paper. In the first column, list all of the reasons you find it hard to speak about your faith in Jesus to your family, neighbors, or coworkers. Next to each item, jot down what you believe God might have to say about your reason. This week, look for opportunities God gives you to speak about the one in whom “we live and move and have our being” (Acts 17:28), and record them in the third column. Share your experiences with your group next week.

### Enrichment

1. If you want to read through the entire books of Jeremiah and Lamentations during this unit, read the following sections this week.

- Day 1: Jeremiah 1:1-19
- Day 2: Jeremiah 2:1-37
- Day 3: Jeremiah 3:1-25
- Day 4: Jeremiah 4:1-31
- Day 5: Jeremiah 5:1-31
- Day 6: Jeremiah 6:1-30
- Day 7: Jeremiah 7:1—8:3

2. Join the ELCA advocacy effort by signing up for the e-Advocacy network. Simply search for “e-advocacy” at [www.elca.org](http://www.elca.org) and click on the link. Write a letter to your congressional representative or senator about an issue pertaining to care for others, the world, or justice and peace.

3. Do online research regarding the biography of Rev. Martin Luther King Jr., noting the ways that King’s ministry interfaced with and challenged governmental powers. Videos of many of King’s sermons and speeches, including his “I have a dream” speech, are available on the Internet. Ponder the ways that King’s ministry was similar to and different from Jeremiah’s.



Notes

## SESSION ONE



### Notes

A large, empty, rounded rectangular box with a thin orange border, intended for taking notes.

4. View the film *Oh, God!* (Warner Bros. Pictures, 1997), paying special attention to the scene in which Jerry, a supermarket assistant manager, is called to spread God’s word even though he believes himself to be entirely unequal to the task. For a darker and more violent version of one who heeds the prophetic call, see the film *The Book of Eli* (Warner Bros. Pictures, 2010).

### For Further Reading

*Jeremiah* by Terence E. Fretheim (Smyth Helwys Bible Commentary Series, vol. 15; Smyth Helwys, 2002). A thorough but completely approachable discussion of the entire book of Jeremiah.

“The Prophetic ‘Call’ Narrative: Commissioning into Service” by Dennis Bratcher, at <http://www.crivoice.org/prophetcall.html>. Describes the form or pattern of call narratives in the Bible, and their likely meaning.

Available at [www.augsburgfortress.org](http://www.augsburgfortress.org):

*The Prophetic Imagination* by Walter Brueggemann (Fortress Press, 2001). Brueggemann demonstrates how prophetic address functions not only to describe the real world, but leads us to imagine (and thus to see) the new reality God is fashioning.