

# The Fiery Bones

Jeremiah 20:9

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Text

Jeremiah 1:1-10

Topic

God gives Jeremiah his life's mission  
but Jeremiah thinks he can't accomplish it

Title

*"I Think I Can't, I Think I Can't"*

## Introduction

These are actual excuse notes written by parents:

- "My son is under a doctor's care and should not take P.E. today. Please excuse him."
- "Please excuse Lisa for being absent. She was sick and I had her shot."
- "Please excuse Jimmy for being. It was his father's fault."
- "Please excuse Jennifer for missing school yesterday. We forgot to get the Sunday paper off the porch, and when we found it Monday, we thought it was Sunday."
- "Please excuse Ray Friday from school. He has very loose vowels."

Hidden somewhere in those notes are valid excuses for the young adults to miss school.

When we first encounter Jeremiah he is a young man making his own excuse. It isn't to miss school but to question his calling.

No matter his excuse, God sends him as His prophet, letting Jeremiah know that he can trust the Lord to equip him.

We're going to contemplate Jeremiah's excuse by asking two questions of ourselves: #1 Do You Think That You Can't Serve The Lord?, and #2 Do You Trust That The Lord Can Send You?

#1 Do You Think That You Can't  
Serve The Lord?  
(v1-6)

Much of the historical background for Jeremiah can be found in Second Kings 22-25.

On the international scene, there was a three-way contest for world supremacy. Assyria had ruled the world for three hundred years but was growing weak. Babylon was on the rise, becoming a formidable challenger to Assyria. Likewise Egypt, a world power a thousand years earlier, was ambitious to extend her influence.

The kingdom of the ten northern tribes, Israel, had already fallen to Assyria by the time of Jeremiah's prophecies. Much of the southern kingdom of Judah was already in the hands of Babylon.

Babylon won the contest of the super-powers about the middle of Jeremiah's ministry. She ruled the world for seventy years, the same seventy years as the Jews' captivity.

Jeremiah ministered to Judah during the reigns of Josiah, Jehoahaz, Jehoiakim, Jehoiachin, Zedekiah, and the governorship of Gedaliah.

He was not the only prophet at this time. Contemporary with him, were Zephaniah, Habakkuk, and Huldah, the prophetess in Judah. Meanwhile, Daniel and Ezekiel were ministering in Babylonian captivity.

F.B. Meyer paints the following dark background for the messages of these prophets:

The northern tribes were captive... And Judah, unwarned by the fate of her sister Israel, was rapidly pursuing the same path, to be presently involved in a similar catastrophe. King and court, princes and people, prophets and priests, were infected with the

abominable vices for committing which the Canaanites had been expelled from the Promised Land centuries before.

In the streets of [Jerusalem], the children were taught to gather wood, while the fathers kindled the fire, and the women kneaded dough to make cakes for Astarte, “the queen of heaven,” and to pour out drink offerings to other Gods. The Temple... was the headquarters of Baal worship; its courts were desecrated by monstrous images and symbols...

For all their deliberate and willful sin, God wanted to warn His people. He wanted to call them to repentance. The best man for the job in Jerusalem *would be a boy!*

Jeremiah 1:1 The words of Jeremiah the son of Hilkiyah, of the priests who were in Anathoth in the land of Benjamin,

“Hilkiyah” was a common name and, so, scholars are split as to whether or not this was the same Hilkiyah who was the high priest that found the copy of the Law which encouraged the reforms under the reign of Josiah.

The village of “Anathoth” was about three miles northeast of Jerusalem. It was a city allocated by Joshua to the priests.

Jeremiah was the son of a priest living in a priestly village. He grew up with the expectation he would follow in his father’s footsteps. According to the Book of Numbers (4:3), a priest began his training at age 25 then served from ages 30 to 50. Jeremiah was on track to serve the Lord in his course once he became old enough and then retire after putting in his twenty years.

He doesn’t sound so different than us pursuing the American dream! Put in your twenty years or so then retire in a sleepy village and enjoy yourself.

Jeremiah 1:2 to whom the word of the LORD came in the days of Josiah the son of Amon, king of Judah, in the thirteenth year of his reign.

Josiah became king of Judah in 640BC, so his 13th year was 627BC. Let me pit that into perspective. He came to power when he was 8 years old! In his 13th year as king he was just 21 years old. It seems there was something of a youth movement going on with God!

Jeremiah 1:3 It came also in the days of Jehoiakim the son of Josiah, king of Judah, until the end of the eleventh year of Zedekiah the son of Josiah, king of Judah, until the carrying away of Jerusalem captive in the fifth month.

That last date was July/August 586BC. Jeremiah's ministry lasted at least 41 years.

"The word of the Lord came" meant that God called Jeremiah into the ministry of a prophet. Whatever Jeremiah's perceived or preferred career path, God had something else in mind.

Today, in the church, God the Holy Spirit gives gifts to believers as He chooses. We are told to "desire the best gifts," but ultimately we must remain subordinate to God's gifting. It's not to limit us, or for us to start thinking, "That's not my gift, so I don't need to step-up." No, it's to encourage us to be stirred-up to minister one with another so everyone is built up in God.

That's all the background we get before Jeremiah returns to the moment the word of the Lord first came to him to call him into the ministry of a prophet.

Jeremiah 1:4 Then the word of the LORD came to me, saying:

"Then." At a certain point in time; at a certain moment; God intervened and it changed the course of Jeremiah's life and service.

Jeremiah was already a believer. If you are not yet a believer in Jesus Christ, **the first intervention you need is conversion.**

As a believer, you may be called to a specific office, or gifting, at a point in time. But more than that, since we now have the indwelling of God the Holy Spirit, we are to be sensitive to "the word of the Lord" coming to us **all** the time, to direct our energies into serving Jesus wherever we find ourselves - in the household of faith (the church) and out among nonbelievers.

Jeremiah 1:5 "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you; Before you were born I sanctified you; I ordained you a prophet to the nations."

These Bible characters always seem so much more special than you and I. But this is simply a personal application by God to Jeremiah of what He says generally of all believers through David in Psalm 139:13.

Psalms 139:13 For You formed my inward parts; You covered me in my mother's womb.

Add to that this promise to you found in Ephesians 2:10,

Ephesians 2:10 For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.

We can definitely identify with Jeremiah. We, too, were known of God and are called to specific works.

Jeremiah was troubled and he voiced his concern.

Jeremiah 1:6 Then said I: "Ah, Lord GOD! Behold, I cannot speak, for I am a youth."

I don't know why, but it seems scholars cannot agree on how old Jeremiah was when he claimed he was "a youth." Estimates range from early teens through mid-twenties. I favor the younger age. Let's just say he knew that folks would think he was too young and would not respect him on account of it.

Have you noticed in your Bible study that God loves to use young people? Samuel comes to mind. So does David, who was just a teen ager when he defeated Goliath. Daniel and his three friends were young when they began their exploits in Babylon. In the New Testament, Timothy was notoriously young but the apostle Paul told him to get over it and exercise the gifts he'd been given and to pastor the church at Ephesus with boldness.

Our young people need to get with the program. **And we need to let them!** To encourage, rather than discourage, them from serving.

Jeremiah was called to "speak." That was his summary of what it meant to be a prophet; it was to "speak" for God. He thought, "I can't speak for God."

This is where it gets interesting for us. This is where we ask ourselves, “do I think I can’t serve God?”

Now there are two very different things that my saying, “I can’t,” might mean. One is good and one is not so good.

If I say “I can’t” but really mean “I won’t,” that’s not so good. Jesus once told a parable about making lame excuses. People were invited to a great supper. They responded by saying things like, “I have bought a piece of ground, and I must go and see it,” and “I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I am going to test them,” and “I have married a wife, and therefore I cannot come.”

They all could have, and should have, responded, but they were too involved in their own lives, too caught up in the things they would rather do. None of them were bad things in and of themselves. But they were so engrossed in them that they wouldn’t make time to respond to the invitation.

It’s oh so easy, is it not, to think that you’ve found what you are supposed to be doing between certain ages and, therefore, you need not respond to God’s invites. One thing is clear from even a quick reading of the Bible. **God finds ordinary people who are living their lives and calls them to do some extraordinary, even radical, things.**

When was the last time, really, that you stepped out of your comfort zone to serve the Lord? When was the last time following Him required a real sacrifice of time or talent or treasure?

If it’s been a while, you might be thinking “I can’t” when in reality you’re saying “I won’t.”

If, on the other hand, you say, “I can’t,” because you know that you must but you feel totally inadequate - well, that’s great! You and I *are* totally inadequate in ourselves to accomplish anything for God. “I will, but I can’t” is the attitude we ought to always cultivate if we are to be used of God.

Do you remember the last time you stepped out in faith? When you knew God had spoken to you to say something, or to do something, and you did it? God met you there, didn't He? He empowered you, didn't He?

That's where we want to live as believers. Shaken out of our comfort zones with a genuine sense of our personal inadequacies, depending totally on the Lord.

Which brings us to the fact we can trust the Lord.

#2 Do You Trust That The Lord Can  
Send You?  
(v7-8)

Have you ever stopped to consider that God has better ways of communicating than using you?

Angels are powerful messengers who always say what they are supposed to, when they are supposed to, and can back it up with unusual power.

God has chosen instead to send you and I into the world. He wants to show His power in our weakness. He doesn't use many mighty, or noble, but rather "God has chosen the foolish things of the world to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to shame the things which are strong" (First Corinthians 1:27).

Jeremiah 1:7 But the LORD said to me: "Do not say, 'I am a youth,' For you shall go to all to whom I send you, And whatever I command you, you shall speak.

In Jeremiah's case I want to believe his "I can't" was the sincere recognition of his inadequacies, coupled with the reception he knew he'd get from the people.

God simply dismissed Jeremiah's excuse. God didn't reason with him, or give him anything to think about. He just let Jeremiah know that he ought to replace his own thoughts with a trust in the Lord. God's calling always includes His enabling.

Even though Jeremiah was called to the high office of a prophet, he was essentially a messenger. God would send him to certain people and God would tell him what to say. How hard is that, really?

Well, the messengering wasn't so hard, but being God's messenger to those who don't want to hear Him **is** a hardship.

Jeremiah 1:8 Do not be afraid of their faces, For I am with you to deliver you," says the LORD.

No sugar coating from God. The "faces" of Jeremiah's listeners would reveal their desire to cause him harm. In fact, they **would** harm him - only God would "deliver" him.

Being delivered by God is great but it puts you on notice that you will find yourself in situations requiring deliverance!

- Jeremiah was persecuted by his own family
- He was plotted against by the people of his hometown
- He was rejected and reviled by his peers in the religious world
- The chief temple priest had him whipped and put in stocks
- He was almost murdered by a wild mob of priests and prophets after one of his messages
- He preached a sermon at the Temple gate and was nearly killed by an angry mob for predicting the temple would be destroyed

Truth is, we don't suffer well in this country. By that I mean we are at the far end of the spectrum when it comes to thinking it strange that we might be called upon to endure hardships or persecutions for the sake of our testimony. It's *not* strange; it's normal and we ought to rejoice if and when we are called upon to suffer for Jesus. We're in good company and can trust that God will deliver us - either from the suffering or through it.

Jeremiah said, "I cannot speak, for I am a youth." It's a great devotion, a wonderful meditation, for each of us.



First take the word “cannot” (can’t) and determine if you mean “I can’t because of my real inadequacies,” or if you mean “I won’t” because you do not want to answer God’s invitation.

Once you have worked through any issues and you really mean, “I can’t, Lord, without your constant presence,” take that sentence and remove the words “speak” and “youth,” and fill in the blanks for yourself.

What is it God has called you to do that you have an excuse for?

- Is it to share with someone but you feel you don’t have the knowledge?
- Is it to reconcile with someone but you are refusing to forgive?
- Is it to give to the work of the Lord sacrificially but you’ve convinced yourself you would if you could?

There are any number of combinations you can use to fill in the blanks.

For all of them, God says, “Do not say \_\_\_\_\_ (blank).” Instead trust Him. Step out. Discover those good works He has before ordained for you.