

Jeremiah 1:6

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Then said I, Ah, Lord GOD! behold, I cannot speak: for I am a child.

Analysis

Jeremiah's response—'Ah, Lord GOD! behold, I cannot speak: for I am a child'—reveals genuine humility and human inadequacy in face of divine calling. The exclamation 'Ah, Lord GOD!' (ahah, Adonai YHWH, אָהָה אֲדֹנָי יְהוָה) expresses dismay, overwhelm, or protest—not defiance but honest recognition of the calling's magnitude. His objection 'I cannot speak' uses the verb yada (יָדָע, 'know') in its negative form—literally 'I do not know how to speak'—indicating felt incompetence for prophetic proclamation. The phrase 'I am a child' (na'ar, נָעַר) refers to youth, inexperience, or minority—Jeremiah may have been late teens or early twenties, lacking the age, authority, and experience typically required for public ministry. His objection parallels Moses ('I am slow of speech,' Exodus 4:10) and shows that God's calls often exceed human capacity by design—forcing dependence on divine enablement rather than natural ability. This pattern reveals that spiritual effectiveness depends not on human credentials but God's empowerment.

Historical Context

Ancient Near Eastern cultures highly valued age, experience, and social standing as prerequisites for authority. Elders governed cities; seasoned warriors led armies; aged priests mediated sacred duties. For God to call a young, inexperienced priest to prophesy against kings, condemn temple worship, and pronounce national destruction overturned cultural expectations. Jeremiah's youth likely intensified opposition—who was this novice to contradict established religious leaders? Yet Scripture repeatedly shows God choosing unlikely

instruments: David the shepherd boy over his older brothers, young Samuel over Eli, young Timothy to lead churches. This divine pattern demonstrates that calling doesn't depend on human qualifications but divine sovereignty. Jeremiah's forty-year ministry proved God's empowerment—he outlasted all the kings he confronted and saw his prophecies fulfilled exactly. His initial sense of inadequacy gave way to bold proclamation as God's word proved powerful through him.

Related Passages

Matthew 25:31 — Final judgment

Romans 2:1 — Judging others

Study Questions

1. How does Jeremiah's honest expression of inadequacy differ from false humility or excuse-making when God calls us to difficult obedience?
2. What does God's consistent pattern of calling unlikely, inadequate people teach us about where spiritual authority and effectiveness originate?

Interlinear Text

וַאֲמַר	אָהָה	אֲדָנִי	יְהוָה	הֵנָּה	לֹא	יָד עֲתִי	יֵבֶר
Then said	I Ah	Lord	GOD	H2009	H3808	behold I cannot	speak
H559	H162	H136	H3069			H3045	H1696
כִּי	נִ עַר	אֲנִי:					
H3588	for I am a child	H595					
	H5288						

Additional Cross-References

Exodus 6:12 (References Lord): And Moses spake before the LORD, saying, Behold, the children of Israel have not hearkened unto me; how then shall Pharaoh hear me, who am of uncircumcised lips?

Jeremiah 32:17 (References God): Ah Lord GOD! behold, thou hast made the heaven and the earth by thy great power and stretched out arm, and there is nothing too hard for thee:

Exodus 6:30 (References Lord): And Moses said before the LORD, Behold, I am of uncircumcised lips, and how shall Pharaoh hearken unto me?

Jeremiah 14:13 (References God): Then said I, Ah, Lord GOD! behold, the prophets say unto them, Ye shall not see the sword, neither shall ye have famine; but I will give you assured peace in this place.

Exodus 4:1 (References Lord): And Moses answered and said, But, behold, they will not believe me, nor hearken unto my voice: for they will say, The LORD hath not appeared unto thee.

Jeremiah 4:10 (References God): Then said I, Ah, Lord GOD! surely thou hast greatly deceived this people and Jerusalem, saying, Ye shall have peace; whereas the sword reacheth unto the soul.