

The Call and Commission of Jeremiah

Jeremiah 1

Jeremiah 1:1-3 – *“The words of Jeremiah the son of Hilkiah, of the priests who were in Anathoth in the land of Benjamin, 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. 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.”*

Background Notes

The time of the prophet Jeremiah was about 100 years after the time of Isaiah the prophet. During Isaiah's day, the Assyrian Empire was in power. Nebuchadnezzar and the Babylonian Empire came to power in Jeremiah's time.

The prophet Jeremiah came from a priestly family (v1). He lived in Anathoth, in the tribal land of Benjamin, about three miles north of Jerusalem.

Jeremiah's ministry lasted for more than 40 years (v1-3). He ministered in Judah from the 13th year of King Josiah in 627 BC, to the days of Zedekiah, the last king of Judah. After the destruction of Jerusalem in 586 BC, when many of the survivors were taken into captivity in Babylon, Jeremiah continued to minister to the people who were left.

Even though Jeremiah had a long ministry, it was not a pleasant or popular ministry. He had to constantly denounce the people's sin and warn them of the coming judgment of God on Judah and Jerusalem - including the destruction of their beautiful Temple. God said this judgment would come because of the people's sins, and because they had turned from Him to worship idols.

That's why Jeremiah is called the "Weeping Prophet." His sorrow continued in the book of Lamentations, written after the fall of Jerusalem. Jeremiah is also called the "Lonely Prophet," because he was commanded by the Lord not to marry (chapter 16). This was to be a vivid warning and sign to Judah that happy and normal times were soon to end with the people's captivity and exile.

The book of Jeremiah is difficult to outline, either thematically or chronologically. However, although there are some exceptions, chapters 1-39 are prophecies before the fall of Jerusalem, and chapters 40-52 are prophecies after the fall of Jerusalem - or at least after the first Babylonian invasion in 605 BC.

Doctrinal Points

1. The call of believers is predetermined by our sovereign Lord.

Jeremiah 1:4-10 – *Then the word of the Lord came to me, saying: 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.”*

⁶ *Then said I: “Ah, Lord God! Behold, I cannot speak, for I am a youth.”*

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. ⁸Do not be afraid of their faces, for I am with you to deliver you,” says the Lord.*

⁹ *Then the Lord put forth His hand and touched my mouth, and the Lord said to me: “Behold, I have put My words in your mouth. ¹⁰See, I have this day set you over the nations and over the kingdoms, to root out and to pull down, to destroy and to throw down, to build and to plant.”*

In verses 4-10 we have the call of Jeremiah. When did God call of Jeremiah? Was it in the year that he began his ministry? No. Jeremiah's call was pre-determined in the eternal councils of God!

God is omniscient - He knows everything from the beginning to the end. God knew all about Jeremiah before he was born. In His sovereignty, God formed Jeremiah when he was conceived - right down to his genetic makeup.

Furthermore, God predetermined Jeremiah's ministry: *“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” (v5).*

Can all of this be applied to believers today? Yes, of course it can! If you say God didn't know all about you from eternity past, you'd be saying that God is not omniscient. And if you say that God didn't know about the spiritual gifts that He was going to give you, or that He didn't plan your area of service, you'd be denying God's sovereignty.

The apostle Paul recognized this truth when he wrote that God *“...set me apart before I was born, and who called me by His grace...” (Galatians 1:15)*. Think of that! The apostle Paul - who persecuted the Church before he was saved - was actually set apart by God for the ministry before he was born!

About our area of service, Ephesians 2:10 says, *“For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.”* Our sovereign Lord pre-determined our calling. We're not just a random accumulation of molecules that came together by chance! We are known. We were formed - we were set apart - and we were appointed - by a sovereign God. The call of believers was predetermined by our sovereign Lord.

2. The call of believers is confirmed by our loving Lord.

Jeremiah 1:11-16 - *Moreover the word of the Lord came to me, saying, “Jeremiah, what do you see?” And I said, “I see a branch of an almond tree.” ¹²Then the Lord said to me, “You have seen well, for I am ready to perform My word.”*

¹³ And the word of the Lord came to me the second time, saying, "What do you see?" And I said, "I see a boiling pot, and it is facing away from the north." ¹⁴ Then the Lord said to me: "Out of the north calamity shall break forth on all the inhabitants of the land. ¹⁵ For behold, I am calling all the families of the kingdoms of the north," says the Lord. "They shall come and each one set his throne at the entrance of the gates of Jerusalem, against all its walls all around, and against all the cities of Judah. ¹⁶ I will utter My judgments against them concerning all their wickedness, because they have forsaken Me, burned incense to other gods, and worshiped the works of their own hands.

In verses 11-16 the Lord gave Jeremiah two signs that were to confirm his ministry. Both signs emphasized to Jeremiah that his prophetic warnings to Jerusalem would come true. The almond tree is the first tree to blossom in Israel, and it announces that spring is near. In the same way that almond blossoms predict spring, Jeremiah's prophecies about the soon-coming invasion and fall of Judah and Jerusalem would come true.

The sign of the boiling pot facing out of the north emphasized that the Babylonian forces would come from the north, and that they would besiege Jerusalem in the near future, as Jeremiah predicted.

Notice that Jeremiah did not ask for signs - the Lord gave them as confirmation to Jeremiah of his ministry. We need to be careful about asking God for signs. In Matthew 12:39 the Lord said, "*an evil and adulterous generation seeks after signs.*" And 2 Corinthians 5:7 says, "*We walk by faith, not by sight.*" That verse alone should warn us against demanding signs from God. In His grace, the Lord often does give confirmation when we're following Him and doing His will, and this confirmation may come with confirming signs.

For example, when we were thinking and praying about the Lord's direction for Growing Christians Ministries, we were offered some free radio time. We believed that this was a confirming sign that the Lord wanted Growing Christians Ministries to expand into radio and audio ministry. God has blessed and provided for this expansion. At other times we didn't receive signs like that, but in distinct ways the Lord confirmed our walk of faith and decisions for the ministry. The call of believers is confirmed by our loving Lord.

Practical Applications

1. Let's "gird up our loins"!

Jeremiah 1:17-19 - "*Therefore prepare yourself [gird up your loins] and arise, and speak to them all that I command you. Do not be dismayed before their faces, lest I dismay you before them. ¹⁸ For behold, I have made you this day a fortified city and an iron pillar and bronze walls against the whole land— against the kings of Judah, against its princes, against its priests, and against the people of the land. ¹⁹ They will fight against you, but they shall not prevail against you. For I am with you," says the Lord, "to deliver you."*

The King James translation, “*gird up your loins*” (v17), comes from the times when men wore long, loose robes. They would tie (“*gird*”) the long robes up around their waists when working. A paraphrase of “*gird up your loins*” would be “get ready for action”!

Verse 19 predicted that Jeremiah’s ministry would not be well received. After all, he was preaching about sin, and judgment that was to come in the near future. And Jeremiah was reluctant to enter the ministry because of his youth and his poor speaking ability (v6). What was the Lord’s answer to Jeremiah? “Don’t be afraid! I will be with you, and I will tell you what to say” (v7-8). “I will touch your mouth and you will speak My words” (v9). “I will give you strength and determination” (v18). “The opposition will not overcome you” (v19). ‘Therefore - *gird up your loins*. Get ready for action!’

The Lord gave all those promises to Jeremiah, and He gives them to us as well. The Lord will give us the strength and courage and needed resources to accomplish whatever He calls us to do. So let’s “*gird up our loins*”! Let’s get ready for action!

2. Let’s be all that we were meant to be!

In essence, “Be all you were meant to be!” is the challenge that God gave Jeremiah. “*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*” (v5).

What was the logical conclusion that Jeremiah should have drawn from this firm declaration from the Lord? He should have realized that God was challenging him to *be all that he was meant to be*. But Jeremiah started to make excuses: “*Ah, Lord God! Behold, I cannot speak, for I am a youth*” (v6). The Lord had to rebuke Jeremiah: “*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. Do not be afraid of their faces, for I am with you to deliver you,” says the Lord*” (v7-8). In other words, said the Lord – “With My help, you can be all I meant you to be, and do all that I created you to do!”

The Lord would say the same to us today. The Lord has made us. He has designed each of us in line with His sovereign plans and purposes. God does not expect us to be what we were not designed to be, but He does expect us to be all that we were meant to be.

According to Matthew 25, some Christians are “five-talent” servants, some are “two-talent” servants, and some are “one-talent” servants. The Lord does not expect you to be a “five-talent” person if He has designed you to be a “two-talent” person. But even if you are only a “one-talent” person, you are valuable to the Lord - and He expects you to be all that you were meant to be!

Do we make excuses, as Jeremiah did at first? And - maybe with false humility – do we hold back from doing what the Lord is calling us to do? Let’s accept the challenge of Jeremiah 1. *Let’s be all that we were meant to be!*