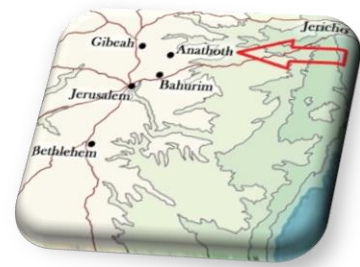


Jeremiah's Personal Call



A. The Man

'The words of Jeremiah the son of Hilkiah, of the priests who were in Anathoth in the land of Benjamin...' (v1)

1. Jeremiah was born around 640-643BC into a priestly family in Anathoth, 3 miles northeast of Jerusalem. Anathoth was a town assigned to Levites in the land apportioned to the Benjamite tribe (Josh 21:18). Today it is an Arab town is called Anata. Anathoth was located on the ridge, overlooking the green hills of Gilead on one side, and the barrenness of the Dead Sea on the other. It was also a political boundary between the southern kingdom of Judah with their two tribes: Benjamin and Judah, and the northern kingdom of Israel with their ten tribes. But the ten tribes of northern Israel were already lost by Jeremiah's days.

Growing up as a boy in Anathoth, Jeremiah would have seen the cities of Samaria lying in ruins in the north and occupied by foreigners. It was a graphic reminder of the costly consequences of disobedience and spiritual decay in the northern kingdom of Israel. Jeremiah would have also seen the very same spiritual and moral decline spreading also in Jerusalem.

2. Jeremiah's family was descended from 'Eli of Shiloh' who fell backwards and died as a judgement from the Lord. Later, Abiathar the priest was banished by Solomon to Anathoth because of his political unfaithfulness to David. It must have been frustrating for Hilkiah, Jeremiah's father and the whole family because they were unable to perform the temple service in Jerusalem. (It is unlikely that this Hilkiah is the Hilkiah high priest who discovers the book of the Law in 2 Kings 22.)

Rather than carrying on the family tradition and entering the priesthood, Jeremiah enters prophetic ministry. He was appointed by God to be a 'prophet to the nations' even before his birth (v5). In the New Testament, John the Baptist is an example of a similar prophetic calling. In the 13th year of Josiah's reign, Jeremiah moved to Jerusalem where he probably assisted Josiah's national reform.

B. The Message

'To whom the word of the LORD came...' (v2) 'Word of the Lord' in Hebrew '*debarim*' means (1) oracle, words, sayings, (2) deeds, incidents. They were both 'spoken' and 'acted out'. Jeremiah both 'heard' and 'saw' the word of the Lord. The phrase '*to whom the word of the Lord came*' and similar phrases occurs 349 times in the OT. It occurs 157 times in Jeremiah.

1. 'Spoken words' – Jeremiah was the finest poet of all the prophets. Poetry is the language of the heart. We should not forget that the Bible is an emotional book. When God speaks in poetry, He is primarily communicating the emotions of His heart. When God speaks in prose, He is primarily communicating the thoughts of His mind. Half of Jeremiah's prophecies are given in the form of 'poetry', and the other half in 'prose'. The Bible contains both the mind and the heart of God.

It is interesting to note that Jeremiah 2-20, which speaks of impending judgement, is mostly written in poetry. Whereas Jeremiah 21-45, which speaks of ultimate restoration after the destruction, is mostly written in prose.

2. 'Acted-out words' – Some of Jeremiah's prophecies were delivered through drama to drive the message home. Some were strange, but it was Jeremiah's calling and his way of communicating.
 - God told Jeremiah to bury dirty underwear in the Euphrates river and keep it there until it was ruined. The dirty ruined underwear depicted the inner lives of God's people in His sight.
 - Jeremiah wore a yoke to demonstrate that the nation of Judah should submit to the Babylonians.

- When everyone in Jerusalem was selling their property, because they would soon become worthless in the face of the impending Babylonian invasion, God told Jeremiah to buy a property as a sign that one day they will return from Babylon and live in their land once again. So, Jeremiah bought a field from his relatives at the full price when they were anxious to sell it at any price.
 - Many others - the lesson from the potter's field, hiding stones, throwing books in the river Euphrates, carrying a jar on his head around the city like a woman.
3. Structure - note Israel went into exile in 722BC, and Judah went into exile in 587BC.

<u>Ch 1</u>	Prologue – Jeremiah's Personal Call
<u>Ch 2-45</u>	The Sinning Nation
<u>Ch 2-20</u>	627-605BC: Immediate Retribution
	<i>[Mostly POETRY] – communicating God's conflicted emotion</i>
	612BC - Babylon destroys Assyria
	605BC - Babylon defeats Egypt
<u>Ch 21-45</u>	605-585BC: Ultimate Restoration
	<i>[Mostly PROSE] – longer term view of ultimate restoration</i>
	Babylon deports Judah
<u>Ch 46-51</u>	The Surrounding Nations
	Judgement on Egypt, Philistia, Moab, Ammon, Edom, Damascus, Elam, and Babylon.
<u>Ch 52</u>	Epilogue – National Catastrophe
	It records the dreadful national catastrophe that was breaking on Jerusalem.

C. Jeremiah's Call and Commission

Jeremiah started his ministry in the 13th year of Josiah's reign in 627 BC (v2).

1. The Prophet's Call (v4-8)

- I. God knew 'yada' Jeremiah (v5, c.f. Adam knew Eve). It means God 'committed Himself to' Jeremiah. Jeremiah's birth was not an accident, but the direct result of a long-term plan from eternity. God even chose the place, time, and the family he was to be born into. God was shaping Jeremiah emotionally, physically, and temperamentally. Then at the right time, God called and appointed Jeremiah to be a prophet to the nations. Jeremiah had no say in it. It was all God's plan.

God says 'I' FOUR times as He unveils His plan to Jeremiah - *'I formed (planned and made) you; I knew (committed to) you; I sanctified (set apart) you; I ordained (appointed) you a prophet to the nations.'* (v5)

Who has planned your destiny? Not you, but God. God has taken the trouble to plan our lives before we were even born. Jeremiah and Josiah were born in the same period. One was called to be a prophet, and the other a king. We are all destined to serve God with a holy calling.

- II. *Then said I, 'Ah Lord God! Behold, I cannot speak, for I am a youth.'* (v6) 'na'ar' in Hebrew refers to 'child, young man, teenager.' Jeremiah was probably around sixteen or seventeen. There seem to be

something special about this age and the call of God. But Jeremiah was not an alpha-male type, but an introvert, sensitive and poetic soul. Jeremiah wanted out and he gave God two reasons.

- 1) *'I am no good at public speaking.'* He didn't lack eloquence, but the temperament for public ministry as a shy individual. (C.f. Moses Ex 4:10)
- 2) *'I am still too young. Who will take me seriously?'* (C.f. Ex 3:11)
- 3) There was probably a third and 'unspoken' reason. *'I am afraid.'* Jeremiah feared the public ministry and the inevitable consequences.

III. God does not engage in discussion with Jeremiah. It was a 'take it or leave it' deal. There was no room for negotiation. Jeremiah chooses to either obey or disobey. God tells Jeremiah the following:

- 1) *Do not say, 'I am a youth' (v7).* Age is not a pre-requisite, only obedience is. We are never too young or too old for the call of God and to carry His word for our generation.
- 2) *'For you shall go to all to whom I send you and whatever I command you, you shall speak.'* (v7) It is not our ability but availability that God is looking for. In due time Jeremiah would be sent to the kings and priests.
- 3) *'Don't be afraid of their faces.'* Jeremiah was young, but not stupid. A priest's life was generally safe, but not so the prophets. There was a high premium on prophets' lives. God only gives Jeremiah His word, the promise of His presence and protection. *'For I am with you to deliver you,' says the LORD. (v19)* The same was promised to Moses (Num 21:34), and Daniel (Dan 10:12) and to Paul (Acts 27:24).

2. The Prophet's Commission (1:9-16)

- I. *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. See, I have this day set you over the nations and over the kingdoms... (v9-10a)* Jeremiah's sense of inadequacy was dealt with as God put His all-powerful word in his mouth. (C.f. Isaiah's call came with the burning coal from the altar, Is 6:7.) To Jeremiah, the word of the Lord often came in poetic forms. Jeremiah 2-20 communicates God's feelings and His broken heart in poetry.

The act of God putting His divine words in Jeremiah's mouth set Jeremiah over the nations as God's prophet to the nations. Our mouth is the hardest thing for God to get hold of, and it is the easiest thing for the devil to use. The greatest power that can be wielded by a man is the word of God in his mouth. This word that was put into Jeremiah's mouth, can also be put in our mouth as we study Jeremiah.

- II. *(a) To root out and to pull down; To destroy and to throw down; (b) To build and to plant.'* (v10b) Jeremiah's ministry is depicted in the dual role of a 'farmer - rooting out, planting, etc.' and a 'builder - pulling down, building, etc.' His work would be two-fold. First destructive - root out, pull down, destroy, throw down. Then constructive - build, plant. In TWO to ONE ratio, so two-thirds of Jeremiah's ministry would be in demolition work, hence he was seen as a doom and gloom prophet. 'Jeremiah' means (a) 'YHWH throws down,' 'YHWH hurls down,' 'YHWH cuts down or destroys'; (b) 'YHWH builds up or exalts' or 'YHWH establishes'. Jeremiah's name perfectly described his calling. Even the name Jeremiah's parents gave him as a baby, was not an accident.
- III. Now God gives Jeremiah his first vision. This is his first lesson as a prophet, (1) seeing visions, and (2) hearing words. God often starts with something familiar to the prophet, to communicate something that is not familiar to him. Why does God use pictures and puns to communicate with us? Because God is a poet and an artist.

A Budding Rod and Almond Tree (v11-12) Almond tree is the first tree to blossom in the spring. In the middle east it is called a 'Waker Tree.' 'shaged' (almond) sounds close to 'shoqed' (wake or

watching). So, God was saying in effect, *'Jeremiah, I am waking up the signs of My new spring season, and they will spring into action.'* *'I am early on the watch (awake) to carry out My purpose' (1:12, NEB).*

For 70 years since Isaiah and Micah, Judah had no clear word from the Lord. But now the winter was over, and God was bringing His word again through Jeremiah. He was waking up a new season – the season of spring. But what Jeremiah saw was not an almond 'branch', but almond 'rod' – the rod of punishment. The prophetic word of judgment and promise which lay dormant over Israel, were about to spring up to action.

A Big Boiling Pot (v13-16) – God now gives Jeremiah a second vision. The first vision was an outdoor picture from the farms. The second vision was an indoor picture from the kitchen. But both visions have the same message. The water was boiling in a cauldron - a huge pot, and it was about to tip over from the north. The Hebrew language paints the precarious picture of the 'wind fanning the flame under the pot.' God was calling the enemies of Judah, i.e. Babylon from the north, who would be boiling hot and dangerous. Babylon was not yet the superpower. For about a century the vandals ransacked the towns in the former northern kingdom of Israel. Now the pot was about to tip over and the southern kingdom of Judah was about to get badly burned. And God Himself was 'calling' the kingdoms of the north upon Jerusalem and Judah.

Why? (1) They have forsaken the true God; (2) They have burned incense to other gods, i.e. syncretic Canaanite-YHWH religion. (3) They were worshipping the works of their hands - materialism has replaced the love for God. What about Australia, and the nations?

3. The Promise of Presence (1:17-19)

Jeremiah's jaws must have dropped. He must have felt like Samuel when the boy prophet heard God's word of judgement against Eli's household. The messengers of good news are welcomed, but the messengers of bad news are often rejected. God tells Jeremiah in effect, 'Jeremiah, it's time to man up. If you give in to your fear of men, I will make you a fool before them. They will fight against you. But I will make you a fortress and deliver you from them all.'

God never promised Jeremiah a trouble-free life. Jeremiah had to choose between being a fool before men, or a fortress for God. And God delivered Jeremiah from all his persecutors. Do we have His prophetic word for our generation today? Then no more excuses. It is time to man up. God wants to put His word of power in our mouth and set His church over the nations and kingdoms as His fortress and His voice.

D. Christian response:

1. Conviction of the divine call – Jeremiah tried to build a wall of defence against the moral and spiritual decay of Judah of his day. It was a lonely journey, and a difficult call to follow through with very few encouragements. Jeremiah had to watch Jerusalem being destroyed and the people being taken captive.

What keeps a man or a woman of God when they are discouraged? It is the fact that 'God called you.' If you are sure of that call, then you have no other choice. That's why a strong conviction of the divine call on your life is very important.

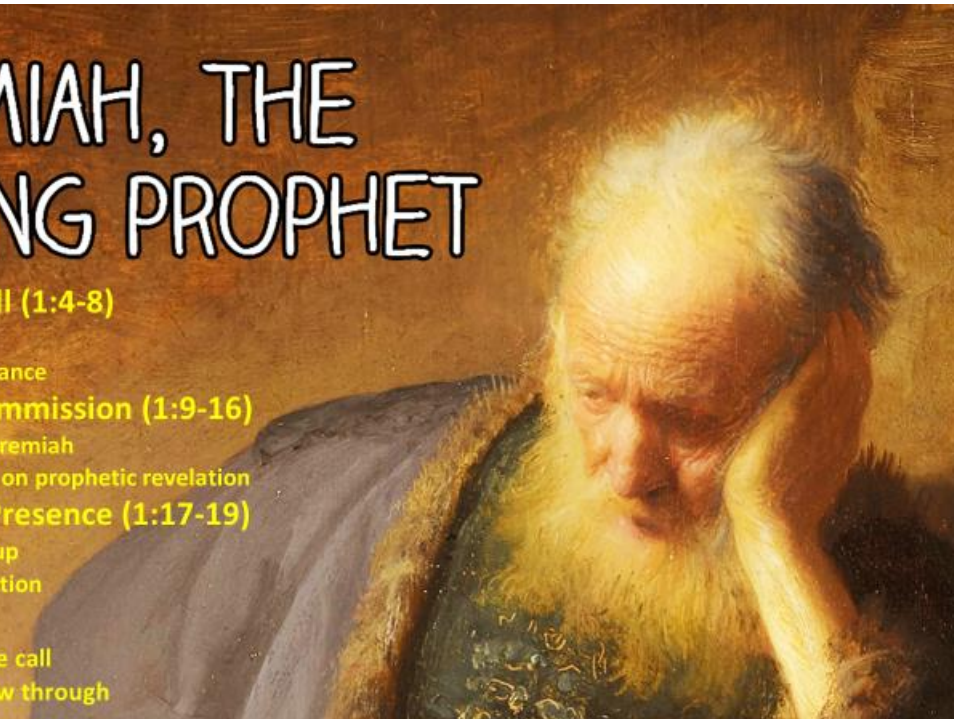
God knew Jeremiah's call had to be certain and strong. Jeremiah needed to know his life was divinely planned, and the promise of God's presence and protection was within that call of God. When he was discouraged, Jeremiah went back to that original call again and again.

The word of God is emphatic that all of our lives are divinely known, planned, sanctified, and called for God's high and holy purpose. Do you have a strong conviction of God's call on your life?

2. Commitment to follow through with God's calling – It is time for the church to man up (v7-8, v17-19). There is no more time to play spiritual infants. We are entering a new season, where the prophetic words that have been sown into the nations, is about to spring up suddenly. It will be both an 'exciting' and 'challenging' season.

Why? (1:16). Much of the church find it hard to take strong word from God. As soon as someone talks about the end time, our immediate reaction often is fear, to fly away to the sky, or to run and hide in a cave.

God said to Jeremiah, 'I will fortify you,' i.e. put in the divine structural reinforcement into Jeremiah's spirit to withstand all pressures, both internal and external. The same divine structural reinforcement is available to you within God's holy calling over your life. There is no protection for those who draw back from obeying the call of God. The only safety in troubled times is the rock-solid commitment to obey the call of God. This is so for the church today.



JEREMIAH, THE WEEPING PROPHET

- 1. The Prophet's Call (1:4-8)**
 - a. God's call
 - b. Jeremiah's reluctance
- 2. The Prophet's Commission (1:9-16)**
 - a. God's word on Jeremiah
 - b. 2 visions - lesson on prophetic revelation
- 3. The Promise of Presence (1:17-19)**
 - a. It's time to man up
 - b. Promise of protection

Our Responses

- a. Conviction to the call
- b. Courage to follow through