

The Call of Jeremiah

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[0:00] Jeremiah 1 He served over 40 years covering parts of five decades.

He primarily preached a message of impending doom if Judah failed to repent. So not surprisingly, his message was pretty unpopular with the people. As far as what's recorded in the Bible, he only had two converts.

And one of them was his scribe that helped him write Jeremiah. So if you take that person out, he only had one recorded convert. Let's go ahead and read the chapter, and then we'll work through each section.

So Jeremiah chapter 1 says, It says,

So a pretty large chunk of Scripture tonight. We're going to break it into five sections.

[3:47] Each one of them is going to begin with the letter C. And you'll notice on your handout, it's a little bit different style handout from you tonight, because there are no blanks in the handout tonight. But I did leave some space on the back page if you want to add some of your notes there.

After we look at five things in the chapter that begin with the letter C, we'll consider one more C word, and we're going to compare how Jeremiah's commissioning mirrors our own.

So be looking for those similarities as we go along tonight. So let's first take a look at the context.

And we see that context in verses 1 through 3.

So here are just those verses again. It says, Anonoth was two to four miles northeast of Jerusalem. So Jeremiah grew up relatively close to the capital city and its temple. In fact, he was almost in the shadow of the temple. But Anonoth was one of the four towns in Benjamin that was allotted to the priest.

[5:15] Jeremiah was actually from the lineage of Abiathar, who was the priest disposed of, or deposed of, I mean, by Solomon in favor of Zadok. And that was when God denounced Eli's family.

So Jeremiah was not an insider in temple politics because he was in an unfavorable position to criticize the temple leadership, since his father and his lineage was along the lines of the priest that was deposed.

So he lived in difficult times. He actually ministered from about 627 B.C., or from the reign of Judah's last good king, who was Josiah, to sometime after the fall of Jerusalem at the hands of the Babylonians in 587.

Despite his efforts, he really wasn't able to stop the nation's slide into exile. And we talked about that already when we said that he only had two reported converts during his whole ministry.

But we will see, though, that Jeremiah's message of judgment contained the word of hope. And that word of hope was that a righteous remnant was going to be restored. The land had actually been defiled by the people's idolatry, and the leaders really brought the nation to the brink of disaster.

[6:30] And that's what caused the exile of the people. But based upon his everlasting love for Israel, God promised to bring the people back from captivity and restore them to blessing.

And Jeremiah ultimately prophesied that Israel's enemies would be defeated and the people would be able to sing joyfully of God's goodness. Chapter 1 actually previews the whole book of Jeremiah because we'll see the predominant theme of judgment in chapter 1, but we'll also see the word of hope as we walk through the chapter.

So before we get into the other verses, just think about the situation Jeremiah is in and kind of put yourself in his place. He's a young outsider to temple politics.

He's not in the line of the main priestly family. And he's about to find out that God is calling him to preach impending doom to the nation. So how do you think Jeremiah probably felt at that time?

He's a man on fire on our mission. He couldn't wait to get out there. Absolutely. At least if he couldn't wait to get out there, he does a pretty good job of hiding it whenever he talks to the Lord.

[7:42] And we'll see that as we go through the verses. And we'll see how Jeremiah needed some reassurance. And we can get some reassurance ourselves because God provides the reassurance to Jeremiah just like he will provide reassurance to us.

So let's move on to the second section of chapter 1 and look at the call of Jeremiah. We see that call in verses 4 through 8. Those verses say, So here comes Jeremiah's response here.

He says, So let's look at those verses in a little bit of detail here.

First of all, in verse 5, we see the sovereignty of God because God tells Jeremiah that he knew Jeremiah before Jeremiah was even born. And God also tells Jeremiah that before Jeremiah's conception, God had already set him apart to be God's spokesman.

So in two different ways, God actually tells Jeremiah that Jeremiah's calling had been planned even before Jeremiah existed. So let's look at each of those two things in a little more detail because God revealed that his selection of Jeremiah as a prophet had occurred before he'd even been formed in the womb.

[9:20] And the word for new there, when God talks about knowing Jeremiah, is the Hebrew word that means far more than intellectual knowledge. It's the same word that's used of intimate relations experienced by a husband and a wife.

And it conveys a sense of a close personal relationship and also protection. So before Jeremiah was even conceived, God had singled him out to be the spokesman to him.

And he said, and particularly Judah. And Jeremiah had been set apart for the ministry. And even the term set apart is significant because that specific word translated as set apart means setting something apart for a specific use.

So he wasn't set apart just for anything. He was set apart for something specific, which of course was for God's use in speaking to Judah. So should these words have given Jeremiah confidence, do you think?

But look again at Jeremiah's response in verse 6. It says, Then said I, O Lord God, but I cannot speak, for I am a youth. So is this response what you would have expected after hearing this dialogue about how you've been chosen by God and set apart for a special purpose?

[10:30] It may be pretty easy for us to kind of chuckle about how Jeremiah reacted, but the response is probably similar to how we would have reacted if we had been Jeremiah back then.

And Jeremiah's word choice actually helps explain his reaction because the word translated youth there actually means that he remained dependent on parental support. So he was young enough that he still wasn't making his own living.

He was depending on his parents to support him. So that probably puts him in his late teens or early twenties when these events happen. I was going to say under 40. Yep. Definitely under 40.

And so, you know, put yourself in Jeremiah's place. He's an outsider to temple politics. He doesn't even have his own job that can support himself.

And yet he's supposed to go tell Judah that he's speaking on behalf of the Lord God and telling them what God wants them to hear. But there is a little bit of irony in these verses because Jeremiah says he can't speak.

[11:37] But who did he tell he couldn't speak? He talked back to the God of the universe and said, but I can't speak. Yet he didn't have any problem giving a response back to God.

Which kind of reminds me of the call of Moses that we looked at a little bit last week in Exodus. So that's a fairly typical reaction. In the next section of the chapter, we see God provide Jeremiah with several confirmations of the call.

And these confirmations cover verses 7 through 16. We're going to look at verses 7 through 16 in smaller chunks. Verses 7 through 10 make up the first section of confirmations.

Those verses say, But the Lord said to me, Do not say, I am a youth, for you shall go to all 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.

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 to root out and to pull down, to destroy and to throw down, to build and to plant.

[12:49] So we see God give three answers to Jeremiah's objections here. First, he stressed the authority under which Jeremiah was supposed to act. God told Jeremiah that he shouldn't use inexperience as an excuse for evading the task.

Jeremiah was to have no choice in the selection of his audience or his message. Rather, he was to go wherever God wanted him to go, go to whoever God wanted him to go, and say whatever God commanded him to say.

So Jeremiah didn't have to be an eloquent elder statesman there. God was telling him simply to be a faithful messenger of what God had told him to say. Then God's second answer to Jeremiah's objections came when God stressed that he would protect the future prophet.

Evidently, Jeremiah was afraid for his personal safety, and of course his fears were probably based upon the awareness of the times that he was living in, because people later did try to get rid of him several times in Jeremiah, at least five or six times, if not more, the people did try to get rid of Jeremiah.

Yet God had told Jeremiah not to be afraid of him, because God was going to be on his side. The people would try to kill Jeremiah, but God promised to rescue him whenever he got in that situation.

[14 : 09] And if you look at verse 8, that's where it says, for I am with you to deliver you. We're going to see those same words repeated again later on in the chapter. Then the third answer to Jeremiah's objections came when God showed Jeremiah the source of the message.

And evidently, Jeremiah's call was in the form of a vision, because he noted that the Lord had reached out at him and touched his mouth. So this was a visible manifestation that God gave Jeremiah to tell Jeremiah that the Lord himself had put the message in Jeremiah's mouth.

So in other words, Jeremiah didn't need to worry about what he was going to say. God would provide what he wanted Jeremiah to say whenever Jeremiah needed to say it. So let's dive just a little deeper into each of these responses.

Verse 7 is really a mild rebuke from God when God says, do not say I am of you, for you shall go to all to whom I send you, and whatever I command, you shall speak.

Was God giving Jeremiah a choice there? And that's one thing that God wanted to make clear. He was telling Jeremiah what to do. And he firmly let Jeremiah know that God had already decided things.

[15 : 29] That's a rebuke, but it's also a reassurance, because God is telling Jeremiah that regardless of Jeremiah's objections, Jeremiah is going to do what God wanted, and he will deliver that message, and God will still be with him.

And then God also reassures Jeremiah by telling Jeremiah that he's going to be God's ambassador, because Jeremiah is going to go wherever God sends and say whatever God tells him to say.

And that really makes it clear that Jeremiah belongs to God. He has nobody else that he needs to worry about pleasing, so he should just focus on pleasing God and not worry about what happens with everybody else.

So from Jeremiah's viewpoint, Jeremiah's promise of protection was likely both a positive and a negative, because Jeremiah knows that he can either fear God or fear men, and he need not fear men because God is going to deliver him through all the trials, but he sees the mention of deliverance there, so God gives Jeremiah a preview that there's obviously going to be a trial or two that Jeremiah is going to have to be delivered from.

And I'm sure Jeremiah would have much rather just left that part out of that and said, you can skip that part and I'll just go ahead and say what you want me to say anyway. But then, when we look at verse 9, God's touching of Jeremiah's mouth is another reassurance because that sets it apart for God's use.

[16 : 59] And again, that's a visual to Jeremiah of God putting his words in Jeremiah's mouth and underscoring the source of the message and the source of the message that is divine.

So Jeremiah then can claim no credit for what follows. The word itself has the power over the nations and the kingdoms and the sovereign word of God is what governs history, not what Jeremiah really decides to say because that message won't be Jeremiah's.

And then God gives Jeremiah a preview of that message as we go through verse 10 and we see that Jeremiah's message is threefold.

It says he must pluck up and break down and this refers to preaching against sin. The second thing that he must preach against is he must destroy and overthrow which relates to messages concerning judgment.

And then the third thing that his message will include will be building and planning which means that Jeremiah must preach about hope and renewal. So when we talk about plugging up and breaking down, destroying and overthrowing, building and planning, we actually have three pairs of verbs

there.

[18:13] How many of those verbs are negative in those six? Four of the six are negative and I don't think that was meant to be an exact ratio that two-thirds of Jeremiah's message would be negative and one-third would be positive.

But God really does give Jeremiah a clue that the vast majority of his message is going to be negative. But at least he does give him some reassurance that he's going to have some positive features to his message too because the hope and renewal pieces certainly are positive and that will help carry Jeremiah through the tough times as well.

So then the next set of confirmations comes in verses 11 through 15. God asked Jeremiah to interpret two visions so let's take those visions one at a time.

Looking at verses 11 and 12 we see the first one and it says 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.

Then the Lord said to me, you have seen well for I am ready to perform my word. This is actually a play on words here because the almond tree was literally known as the wakeful tree because it awakened from the dormant winter earlier than the other trees.

[19:35] It actually bloomed in January so it was a symbol of God's early judgment. And God actually used the play on words to associate the almond branch with his activity because the word for watching is very closely related to the word for almond tree.

They sound very much alike. So Jeremiah's vision of the awake tree or the wakeful tree really reminded him that God was awake and watching to make sure everything he said in his word was going to come to pass.

Then the second vision comes to Jeremiah in verses 13 through 15 and they say, 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. Then the Lord said to me, Out of the north calamity shall break forth on all the inhabitants of the land 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 the cities of Judah. So let's talk about that one a little bit.

[20:45] The pot was actually a large kettle that was apparently sitting on a fire because it was boiling. And that indicates that a wind or a draft was blowing on the fire to help bring the contents to a boil.

And the pot was tilting away from the north which indicates that its contents were about to be spilled out toward the south. The tilting pot actually represented a disaster that was going to be poured out on those who live in Judah.

And the direction from which the pot was facing represented the peoples of the northern kingdom whom God was summoning to punish Judah. And that was Babylon and her allies. And of course Babylon was located to the east geographically but the invading armies followed the trade routes along the Euphrates River when they marched into Judah.

So that meant that the armies really did approach from the north even though Babylon itself was in a different direction. So you can see God really put in detail how the vision was going to happen.

And notice that God twice confirmed that Jeremiah was seeing the visions correctly. Check out verse 12 again. It says, Then the Lord said to me, You have seen well for I am ready to perform my word.

[22:03] So verse 12 confirms that Jeremiah understood the first vision. Then verses 14 through 16 confirm that Jeremiah understood the second vision.

Let's take a quick detour to just consider why Jeremiah would want reassurance that he interpreted the visions correctly. We know Jeremiah was the son of a priest so he no doubt knew the law including God's words in Deuteronomy 18:20-22.

And here are Deuteronomy 18:20-22. It says, But the prophet who presumes to speak a word in my name which I have not commanded him to speak or who speaks in the name of other gods that prophet shall die.

And if you say in your heart how shall we know the word which the Lord has not spoken when a prophet speaks in the name of the Lord if the thing does not happen or come to pass that is the thing which the Lord has not spoken a prophet has spoken presumptuously and you shall not be afraid of him.

So in Jeremiah's time false prophets were actually stoned. Do you think it would be important for Jeremiah to really be certain he was understanding God's message correctly before he proclaimed it to the people?

[23 : 19] It gives a whole different meaning to the term rocking somebody to sleep doesn't it? Jeremiah actually had no interest in being rocked to sleep that way. He wanted to avoid stoning at all costs.

So the section of the chapter has one more confirmation for Jeremiah and let's take a look at it in verse 16. It says I will utter my judgments against them concerning all their wickedness because they have forsaken me, burned incense to other gods, and worshipped the works of their own hands.

And of course God is speaking there and at first glance it doesn't look like a confirmation to Jeremiah but it really is because God is confirming to Jeremiah that he has good reason to punish Judah.

So why was God planning to punish Judah? She played the harlot. That's right. She played the harlot with other nations and worshipped other gods with a little g and had set up idols.

We know that violating the Ten Commandments is never a good idea but violating the first one of the Ten is particularly bad. So because of that the invading armies are going to execute the judgment on Judah.

[24 : 33] God makes it clear that it's really his judgments against the people for all their evil and forsaking him. The term forsaking literally indicates that they have abandoned their covenant for God and they have replaced it with other gods and they demonstrate that breaking by making offerings to other gods as well and by bowing down to idols.

So their sin really amounts to harm or evil committed against God. So even though the other nations are going to be the instrument God uses, God makes it clear through Jeremiah that he is the one really behind the judgment that's coming.

Then verse 17 has the charge to Jeremiah. So here's that verse again when we see the charge. It says, Therefore prepare yourself and arise and speak to them all that I command you.

Do not be dismayed before their faces lest I dismay you before them. So God gives Jeremiah four directives there. First of all, he must dress for work and that literally means gird up your loins.

We've seen gird up your loins in other places where that's where the people would take their robes and tie up their long robes to make sure that they didn't get in their way whenever they were needing to move faster.

[25 : 55] And then in addition to dressing for work, he must arise and therefore be ready for the work. He must say only what God commands him to say and then finally he must not be dismayed by his foes as he works or God will give him over to their terrors.

That's a pretty clear charge, isn't it, from God? It's not very long in that section, but God makes it real clear again what he wants Jeremiah to do. And in fact, it pretty much just sums up what God has already told Jeremiah in the previous verses.

So the last section of the chapter has the comfort and Jeremiah will be able to carry out God's charge because of this comfort.

So look at verses 18 and 19, that's where God tells Jeremiah these words. He says, 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.

They will fight against you, but they shall not prevail against you, for I am with you, says the Lord, to deliver you. Does the for I am with you, says the Lord, to deliver you sound familiar?

[27 : 11] It's similar to what we saw earlier in the chapter as well. But before we talk about that a little more, be sure to catch the tense of the verb in the first line of verse 18.

Does God say he will make Jeremiah strong? It's not a future tense. God says he's already made Jeremiah strong.

God. We know from verses like verse 6 that Jeremiah was yet to fully comprehend and appreciate that strength, but God knew that Jeremiah already had the necessary strength.

And that's really a key part, is that God has made Jeremiah have the strength that's needed. So Jeremiah shouldn't fear because it was God that made him the fortified city, the iron pillar, and like bronze walls that could withstand every possible attack from the different segments of the

population.

So Jeremiah essentially is invincible as long as he does God's work and as long as God still has a purpose for him. So God's sovereignty then is Jeremiah's comfort.

[28:19] And then verse 19 tells us why Jeremiah will prevail, and that's because of God's presence. Because God tells Jeremiah, for I am with you, and it's God's presence that really makes him like the fortified city.

So he is going to be able to endure all that will follow, and the calling, the word, and the presence of God is going to keep him safe as he does what God wants him to do.

So here's how Matthew Henry summarizes verse 19. It says, Those who are sure that they have God with them, as he is if they be with God, need not, ought not be afraid, whoever is against them. So of course that's Old English, so let's listen to the Old English one more time. It says, Those who are sure that they have God with them, as God is, if they be with God, need not and ought not be afraid, whoever is against them.

So really, if you remember nothing else from this lesson, remember that promise in verse 19, if God is with us, then we need not be afraid of anything else.

[29:26] So we've looked at the context, the calling, the confirmations, the charge, and the comfort, and we're out of verses, but we have one more C word left.

In fact, you could say we have one more thing that we need to see, and we could call it the conclusion, but let's call it the comparison instead. The reason why I wanted to call it the comparison is we need to see how much we're like Jeremiah.

We touched on this a little bit, but we're really more like Jeremiah even than what we might have realized on the surface. Think about Jeremiah's context first. He was living life in Ananath when God picked him, and Ananath may not be in northeast Oklahoma or even in North America, but the point is that Jeremiah was just living a fairly ordinary life whenever God got Jeremiah's attention. He wasn't doing anything particularly special. He was just doing whatever somebody his age normally does, maybe applying for a job and doing some other things. We don't know. But he wasn't doing anything special, yet God chose him to do this particular message.

And of course, we know that God told Jeremiah in verse 5, before I formed you in the womb, I knew you, and before you were born, I sanctified you. The same thing actually applies to us, because remember Ephesians 1, 3, and 4, Paul wrote this to the Christians at Ephesus.

[30:57] He said, Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, just as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love.

God has so many So then, think about Jeremiah's confirmations as well. At first glance, we can easily think that God has never spoken to us like he spoke to Jeremiah.

That God has actually spoken to us more than he's spoken to Jeremiah. Before you think I've completely lost it, let me explain what I mean by that.

And God's words to Jeremiah comprise one book of the Bible. We have the entire Bible, which is God speaking to us. And we know from verses like 2 Timothy 3, 16 and 17 how important that is, because 2 Timothy 3, 16 and 17 say, All scripture is given by inspiration of God and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, and for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete thoroughly equipped for every good work.

So, particularly focus on the last part there, the word of God is important so that we can be thoroughly equipped for every good work. And then also, listen to Proverbs 30, verse 5, because it has the same context in the Old Testament.

[32:31] It says, Every word of God is pure. He is a shield to those who put their trust in him. God is a word of God. And think about Jeremiah's charge.

We have already talked several times about how God told Jeremiah to prepare himself and arise to speak all that God commanded and do not be dismayed in front of the people. And God says this to us in Acts 1.8.

It says that you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you shall be witnesses to me in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the end of the earth.

So that is spoken directly to us as Christians as well, as we know from our emphasis on Go a few months ago. And then finally, think about Jeremiah's comfort. God told Jeremiah, They will fight against you, but they shall not prevail against you, for I am with you, says the Lord, to deliver you.

And Jesus tells us in Matthew 28, 18-20, All authority has been given to me in heaven and on earth. Go, therefore, and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you, and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.

[33 : 52] So when is Jesus with us? Yep, he's with us always, even to the end of the age. And we're like Jeremiah in one other way, too, because at least I am very much like Jeremiah, in that I'm very good at finding reasons or excuses, probably is a better term for that, in an attempt to delay doing what God wants me to do.

But the next time we have doubts, we really need to remember the verb tense of Jeremiah 1, 18. Jeremiah had doubts, but in God's mind, Jeremiah's mission was already accomplished before God asked him to do it.

And that's why we also need to remember Jeremiah 1, 19 as well, because God makes the same promise to us. They will fight against you, but they shall not prevail against you, for I am with you, says the Lord, to deliver you.

So how much easier would life be if we really fully put our trust in that promise and realized that what God asked us to do has already equipped us to do it?