

Called By God

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| <i>Text</i> | Jeremiah 1:1-19 |
| <i>Reading</i> | Galatians 1:11-24 |
| <i>Theme</i> | The Lord appointed Jeremiah as a prophet and promised him strength for his task. |
| <i>Purpose</i> | To explain the prophetic ministry of Jeremiah and to apply this to our own calling to serve Christ Jesus. |

Brothers and Sisters,

I'm sure many of you have had the experience of being asked to do something you did not want to do. Someone came along and asked you to do this particular job, or to take up that responsibility, or to fill a new position.

This was the *last* thing you wanted to do. In fact, you were really very anxious about the thought of doing this. You knew it was going to be a difficult job. You knew that you would be unpopular because of it and that it wasn't going to win you any friends. You did not want to do it.

And yet you knew you *had* to do it. There was no choice about it. Someone had to take this position and you knew, in yourself, that you were that person. There was no getting out of it. You were compelled to take it up.

If you have ever been in a situation like this, or approaching this, then you will understand just a little of how Jeremiah felt when God called him to be a prophet. As he wrote these words to introduce these prophecies God gave him, he reflected back over his call to be a prophet of the Lord.

He remembered his feelings and responses.

But even more importantly, he remembered the words of God to him. Those words were going to sustain him and strengthen him through a long and difficult ministry of about 50 years. They sustained him to write the longest book of the Bible, containing more words than any other.

Through this book we also know more about the personal life and struggles of this man than of any other Old Testament prophet. He has given us a rich and honest account of his trials and of his conversations with God.

The opening verses tell us his name, Jeremiah, which was a common name at the time.

He was the son of Hilkiah, who was a priest.

He lived in the village of Anathoth, which was located about 5 kilometres NE of Jerusalem in the territory of the tribe of Benjamin. From certain vantage points in his village he could see the walls of Jerusalem in the distance.

He lived and prophesied in the declining years of the kingdom of Judah. His prophecies covered the reigns of five kings, although two are not mentioned in these opening verses because they lasted only three months.

He began his calling as a prophet in the thirteenth year of Josiah. That was the year 627 BC. He preached for 40 years until the fall of Jerusalem in 587 BC, and even after that.

What kept him going was that he knew he had been made a prophet **BY GOD'S APPOINTMENT**. This is the first point we want to consider.

This was a result of **God's sovereign choice**.

He expressed that call in the same way as many other prophets when he wrote; "The word of the Lord came to me..."

Of course, this wasn't his first experience of God. He was a member of Israel, of the tribe of Levi. He had grown up in a believing home and his father was a priest. He knew about the Book of the Covenant and the law of the Lord. No doubt various people had influenced his life and the Lord had used these people to prepare him for this moment and for this specific call to be a prophet.

Think about your own life. Many of you have grown up in Christian homes, having believing parents and enjoying the privileges of being baptised members of the church. No doubt you too were influenced by various people in the church. The Lord uses all of these people and these privileges to prepare you for your calling.

The Lord has a plan and a purpose for you, as he had for Jeremiah. Have a look at verse 5; "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I set you apart; I appointed you as a prophet to the nations."

There are four verbs in this verse:

I formed you, he said. God made him in his mother's womb. Yes, he was conceived by his father and born of his mother, but it was God who formed him. God created him. And God creates each new life - which is why we need to fight hard to protect the life of each child including the life of the unborn child.

I knew you, God said. The word has the sense of an intimate knowledge. God knew this man and he knows us through and through.

I set you apart, God said. God had a special job for this man and he had this in mind before he was born, as he had for the apostle Paul. God is sovereign and all-knowing. Even before we are born God has chosen his elect people in love; he knows what he wants us to do; he has planned out our lives.

I appointed you as a prophet to the nations, he said to Jeremiah. What a task! You think you have taken on some big jobs! Think about this one - a prophet to the *nations*! Not only did he have to speak to his own people in Judah but he also had to speak to the world empires of the time - Assyria, Babylon and Egypt; and

to the other nations - the Philistines and Moabites. Who wanted to mess with them!? Who wanted to get caught up in the politics of the nations of the world?!

This is why he pleaded to be excused; “Ah, sovereign Lord, I do not know how to speak, I am only a child.” (verse 6).

That will remind you of Moses in the Sinai desert who came up with the same excuse - “I don’t know how to speak”.

It will also remind you of the response of Solomon to the Lord - “I am only a child”.

The word translated as child often referred to a boy or a young man. We don’t know how old Jeremiah was but scholars have suggested he was perhaps in his late teens or early 20s.

But he didn’t only mean he was young in years but also in experience. He didn’t have the training for this. Nor did he feel he had the character for this. By nature he was sensitive and tender, emotional and introspective. Surely the Lord could find a more suitable candidate for this position!

But the Lord insisted and **called him to be a prophet.**

A prophet was someone who was called to speak God’s words. They were the spokesmen for the Lord.

Jeremiah had no choice about this calling. He had to do it. “You must go to everyone I send you to” (verse 7).

And he had no choice about his message; “and say whatever I command you” (verse 7). His message came directly from the Lord and he had to speak the very words of God.

The Lord illustrated that in a symbolic way. In verse 9 we read; “The Lord reached out his hand and touched my mouth and said to me; Now, I have put my words in your mouth.” As a prophet he would speak the very words of God. He would pass on God’s word to God’s people.

As a prophet he pointed beyond himself to the Lord Jesus. Moses had predicted the coming of Christ when he said; “The Lord your God will raise up a prophet like me from among your own brothers. You must listen to him” (Deuteronomy 18:15).

1,500 years later Jesus was born from the tribe of Judah in the line of David. Like the other prophets he was anointed - not with oil, but with the Holy Spirit. He came “to be our chief prophet and teacher who perfectly reveals to us the secret will of God for our deliverance” ([Heidelberg Catechism Question 31](#)). He came to explain God’s will and to proclaim God’s words. Today we need to listen to him as his words come to us through the Bible and through the preaching of his word.

None of *us* are called to be prophets of God like Jeremiah. Now that Jesus has come there is no further need for any prophets because God “has spoken to us by his Son” (Hebrews 1:2) and because God has revealed in the Bible all we need to know about salvation.

But there is a sense in which *all of us* are prophets. If you are a Christian you share in the anointing of the Lord Jesus; you too have been anointed with the Holy Spirit; and you are called to confess the name of Jesus and to proclaim God’s word and to tell others about Jesus. This is the task that God gives to all believers. Everyone of you is a prophet called to declare the message about God to those around you.

As well as this general task the Lord also calls us to specific tasks; he gives every one of us a specific calling. The reformers called this a “vocation”. Each one of us is called to serve the Lord in a specific place and in a number of roles.

What is your vocation? How are you serving the Lord? What is God calling you to do?

Are you fulfilling your task, or are you trying to put God off with excuses; “I’m too young, too old, too busy, too tired?”

Be sure you hear the call of the Lord as it comes to you through his word and his providence and his church. Be sure you obey him and fulfil your calling to serve him.

Jeremiah was called to be God’s prophet.

Secondly, we will see that he was given **GOD’S MESSAGE**.

That message was summed up in verse 10; “See, today I appoint you over nations and kingdoms to uproot and tear down, to destroy and overthrow, to build and to plant.”

His message had a strongly *negative* slant to it. The main message of his ministry was that of judgement. The Lord would uproot Israel from their land. He would tear down the temple. He would destroy Jerusalem. He would overthrow the nation because of their sin.

But there was also a *positive* note to his message - he would also “build and plant”. He promised a restoration. After Jerusalem had been torn down the Lord would plant them back in their own land and they would be able to rebuild what had been destroyed.

His prophecies about the restoration looked beyond the return from exile to the new covenant that God would make with his people with the coming of the Messiah (Jeremiah 31:31). We have the privilege of living in this time of the restoration - in this new covenant situation in which the Lord Jesus is building his kingdom and causing his church to grow in the world.

The Lord gave Jeremiah **two illustrations** of the message of judgement that he would bring.

In one vision the prophet saw an almond tree. The Hebrew word for the almond tree (shâqêd) is very similar to the word for watching (shâqad). In this vision God wanted to emphasise that he would fulfil his word.

The people of Judah needed this confirmation because they were more inclined to believe the false prophets who promised that all would be well.

They were like the people of Peter's day, and of ours, who said, "Where is this 'coming' he promised?" (2 Peter 3:4).

This vision emphasised that God would watch to see that his word was fulfilled. The judgement would come. His word was certain. God would do as he had said.

The other vision was of a boiling pot, no doubt a common sight in Jeremiah's village. This one was tilting away from the North and indicated that the judgement of God would come through people from the North. This was a reference to the Babylonian empire. They actually lived to the east of Israel, but when attacking Judah they would go around the Arabian Desert which was impassable and then approach from the North.

This happened in the eleventh year of King Zedekiah, which is why Jeremiah records that date so precisely in verse 3. The arrival of the Babylonian army was the proof of his prophecies of judgement on Judah.

In verse 15 God gave an accurate and detailed description of what would happen when the Babylonians arrived. They would take the city and set up their thrones at the city gates as the new rulers (Jeremiah 39:1-3).

The Lord had appointed Jeremiah to bring a very sobering message to his people. He was *God's prophet* with *God's message*. He could only fulfil such a task, thirdly, **IN GOD'S STRENGTH**.

The Lord gave him an **exhortation** (verse 17).

"Get yourself ready." Literally it reads; "Tighten the belt around your waist!" Get ready for your task. Prepare yourself for action. "Stand up and say whatever I command you."

The Lord says this to you as well. "Get yourself ready!" Are you ready to do whatever the Lord wants of you? Are you prepared to fulfil your task? Are you willing to serve the Lord Jesus in your calling?

The Lord also gave a **warning** (verse 17b).

"Do not be terrified by them, or I will terrify you before them."

When the Lord calls you to do something you can't get out of it. You have to obey. There are serious consequences if you disobey such a call. Look at what happened to Jonah when he disobeyed God's call to go to Nineveh and went off in the opposite direction. The Lord urged Jeremiah to obey and not to be afraid of the people. He urges the same on you. Fear God more than men.

Finally the Lord also gave him **encouragement**.

Jeremiah had reason to hesitate when the Lord called him. This was a difficult assignment. His message would be unpopular. Most people would oppose him. He would have few friends.

But the Lord promised to make him strong, like "a fortified city, an iron pillar and a bronze wall to stand against the whole land" (verse 18).

As we have seen, this wasn't his character. He was not the sort of person you would pick for an assignment like this.

But God promised to give him strength and courage. His enemies would be tough, but the prophet would be even tougher. His enemies would oppose him, but the prophet would be resilient, immovable.

The Lord promises this to you too.

When God calls he also equips.

When God gives you a task he will also give you the strength for that task.

When he calls you to obedience he will also give you all you need to be obedient.

Not only that, but the Lord promised to be with him. Verse 19: "They will fight against you but will not overcome you, for I am with you and will rescue you."

That is the greatest promise anyone can have. This is what the Lord has promised to you too.

Think of that powerful refrain of Psalm 46; "The Lord Almighty is with us, the God of Jacob is our fortress."

These Old Testament promises were fulfilled again in Jesus, who came into this world as Emmanuel, God with us.

And even though he has ascended to heaven he is still with us. "And surely I am with you always, even to the very end of the age" (Matthew 28:20).

God called Jeremiah to a specific task - be a prophet of judgement.

The Lord also calls you, through his word and Spirit, to specific tasks and responsibilities.

He calls you to be a prophet, declaring the good news about Jesus.

He calls you to obey him and serve him in every area of life.

And he promises you strength to do this. No matter who opposes you God will be with you.

Go, and fulfil your calling in his strength.

Amen.