

YAHWEH PREPARES HIS PROPHET**Read Jeremiah 1.1-19****INTRODUCTION: JEREMIAH**

1/ We will begin a new course of study with this lesson. It will carry us through the Old Testament prophet **Jeremiah** and **The Book of Lamentations** – which has also been ascribed to Jeremiah as its human author.

2/ However, even though the Book of Jeremiah does contain messages that Jeremiah delivered from Yahweh, Jeremiah himself declares from the outset that **‘The words of Jeremiah’** [v 1] are actually **‘the word of Yahweh’** which He **‘put in’** Jeremiah’s mouth to deliver from Him [vv 2, 4, 9, 11, 13 – **and on throughout the book**]. Jeremiah will repeat this source of his words as **‘the word of Yahweh came to me’** [or similar wording] over fifty times in these messages.

3/ By word count, Jeremiah is the lengthiest book in the Bible. And so, obviously, we won’t be able to give any sort of detailed account of the book, but what we hope to do is cover the thematic sweep of the Book by delivering representative lessons from the flow of the book’s development.

4/ Jeremiah is both *oratorical* in that he delivers Yahweh’s messages to Judah and to all the surrounding nations; and it is also *autobiographical* in that Jeremiah [or the scribes who wrote down his words for him] describe many of the grievous persecutions and abuses he suffered at the hands of those he was trying to warn of Yahweh’s coming judgments against them.

5/ So, as we get started here in Jeremiah, let’s keep in mind what the purpose of the book is: Yahweh gives these words to Jeremiah to deliver to the people of Judah and all the other nations...

- to call them back to repentance from their chronic, historical, and rebellious disobedience against Yahweh;
- to call them back to faith, dependence, and worship of Yahweh;
- to warn them of the impending punishment that Yahweh will bring upon them, especially with the rise of the Babylonian Empire as the reigning super-power in the region;
- to declare Yahweh’s sovereignty over ALL the nations of the earth – ALL of their affairs and movements;
- and to promise them that He will keep His covenant promises in the Messiah who was to come by making the New Covenant.

These are at least the main and most prominent themes we will discover and point out as we make our way through the coming lessons.

6/ We should note also here at the outset that Jeremiah is known as ‘the weeping prophet’ because of his broken-heartedness over what Yahweh had called him to declare [see especially **ch 9 & Lamentations**].

7/ We should also maintain the constant awareness that Jeremiah’s tears were also Yahweh’s grief and tears because He must do what He will do. In this way, Jeremiah also pre-figures the heart of Jesus Christ Himself as He weeps over the same Jerusalem when He came / see **Luke 19.41-44**.

I / vv 1-3 / “It was the best of times, it was the worst of times...”

1/ Famous first line of Charles Dickens’s Tale of Two Cities. But they also describe the times in which Jeremiah prophesied...

2/ *‘It was the best of times’* in that Jeremiah began his prophetic ministry **‘in the thirteenth year of the reign of Judah King Josiah.’** Josiah goes down in the chronicles of the kings of Judah as being the brightest star among them all: **Before him there was no king like him, who turned to the LORD with all his heart and with all his soul and with all his might, according to all the law of Moses, nor did any like arise after him / 2 Kings 23.25.** This is because Josiah led in the greatest reformation and revival in Judah’s history. **You’ll find his history in 2 Kings 22-23 & 2 Chronicles 34-35.**

3/ So Jeremiah dates the beginning of his prophetic ministry in 627 BC since Josiah reigned from 640-609 BC.

4/ *'It was the worst of times'* because the kings who succeeded Josiah completely undid everything Josiah had done, which ultimately led to the Babylonian invasion of Jerusalem and the destruction of the city and their Temple. These would be the kings who are named after Josiah: Jehoiakim and finally Zedekiah.

5/ So, Jeremiah's prophetic ministry continued for at least forty+ years. He began declaring Yahweh's words **'in the thirteenth year of Josiah's reign'** [627 BC] through **'until the end of the eleventh year of Zedekiah, the son of Josiah, king of Judah, until the captivity of Jerusalem in the fifth month'** [587 BC]. See **2 Chronicles 36.11-21 & 2 Kings 24.18 – 25.21** for the details of this year and event.

II / vv 4-5 / "You did not choose Me, but I chose you..." [John 15.16]

1/ These verses will describe Yahweh's call on Jeremiah's life and the prophetic commission he received to carry out...

2/ **Now the word of Yahweh came to me...** meaning that Jeremiah didn't step forward or volunteer for this prophetic mission. Yahweh came to him and confronted him with His purposes and call He wanted Jeremiah to fulfill at His command.

3/ **Yahweh had laid claim to Jeremiah's life and what he would do with his life from before Jeremiah was even born.** God's purposes are the same for our lives, too / see **Romans 8.28-30 & Ephesians 1.1-14, et. al.** *Jeremiah was not only called, but he was created to serve Yahweh this way.*

4/ We must also note that the 'unborn' who are being formed in their mothers' wombs are persons, being 'formed' and 'knitted together' by the creative powers of God / see **Psalm 139.13-16.**

5/ Yahweh not only **'knew'** [chose] Jeremiah for his prophetic ministry from before his birth, but He also **'consecrated'** him, and **'appointed'** him for the purpose and mission to which He was now calling him. So all the purpose and activities of Jeremiah's life were under the Lordship, ownership, and purview of Yahweh's sovereignty and pleasure. *So with everyone of us.* **Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body / 1 Corinthians 6.19-20.**

6/ **I appointed you a prophet...** A prophet is, first of all, one who *forth-tells*, that is, speaks for God – says and tells from God what God wants those to whom He sends him to know from Him. A prophet will also *fore-tell* events that will happen in the future. God gives all the words, and Jeremiah fulfilled both aspects of this calling.

7/ **...to the nations.** Yahweh declares His absolute sovereignty over ALL nations – to raise them up and bring them down, to change the times and seasons of their power and very existence. This truth will be established and declared all throughout the Book of Jeremiah. It is also established and declared in all the Scriptures, Old and New Testaments. *We must remember this in these times in which we live also. Yes, as far as decency and order is concerned, the world seems to be 'out of control.'* *And it is out of our control. But God is in control of ALL things that are happening in ALL the nations!*

8/ And, it must be noted here: that even though Judah was the 'chosen nation,' they had not lived up to their calling. Judah is actually lumped in with **'to the nations'** here in Yahweh's commission to Jeremiah. Yahweh will have scathing messages and reports for Jeremiah to deliver to the other Gentile nations [see especially chapters 46-51], but He will also repeatedly tell Judah that they had acted no differently than the 'heathen' and 'pagan' nations [see chapters 2-11].

III / vv 6-10 / "...LORD, I can't..." "Yes, you can – and you will!"

1/ Jeremiah immediately objects and protests. In fact, as we go through this whole book, we will see that Jeremiah repeatedly protests to Yahweh / see, for example, **ch 20**. Jeremiah was not only 'the weeping prophet,' but he was also for his whole ministry 'the reluctant prophet.' Jeremiah shoots back to

Yahweh, **Behold, I do not know how to speak, for I am only a youth.** Jeremiah may have been only in late teens or early twenties when Yahweh laid this claim and call on his life. And this commission means speaking and going against ALL the ‘powers that be’ of his day – both domestic and international. This was a distasteful and dangerous mission Yahweh was calling and sending him to.

2/ *I can give you personal testimony to how I agonized in these very words over my own first pastoral calling. I was twenty-two years when my first church called me to pastor them on 4 July 1973. Even though preaching and pastoring was all I have ever wanted to do, and even though I sensed God’s call on my life to preach and pastor, still I was so aware and sensitive to my weaknesses, inabilities, and even incompetencies to undertake such a solemn and weighty responsibility to speak for God and shepherd people. Many, many times, I prayed and cried this same prayer to God – and not only in the beginning of my ministry, but many times since then.*

3/ **“The weaknesses of such a minister are the preferred instruments of a powerful God to work out His plan in redeeming His people.” Jerry Whang | ESV Expository Commentary.** Isn’t this the lesson that Jesus Christ taught Paul through his own agonies and prayers over his ‘thorn in the flesh’? **See 2 Corinthians 12.1-10.**

4/ Yahweh responds to Jeremiah, not just forcefully, but sternly, scoldingly, maybe even harshly – with this unmistakable rebuke: **‘Do not say...Do not be afraid...’** Poor Jeremiah had ‘crossed a line’ with his pitiful protest. After Yahweh had assured him that **‘I knew you,’** then Jeremiah contradicts Yahweh with **‘I do not know...’** [same word]. Yahweh rebukes Jeremiah’s lack of faith and confidence in Him by telling him: **‘Do not say...Do not be afraid...’ ‘For to all to whom I send you, you shall go, and whatever I command you, you shall speak ... for I AM with you to deliver you,’ declares Yahweh.**

5/ God not only knows what He is doing when He calls, commissions, and sends us, but He always promises **‘And behold, I AM with you always...’** God will be faithful to supply everything we will need to fulfill the service He gives us to do for Him. *“Have you been holding back from a risky, costly course to which you know in your heart God has called you? Hold back no longer. Your God is faithful to you, and adequate for you. You will never need more than He can supply, and what He supplies, both materially and spiritually, will always be enough for the present.” ~J. I. Packer*

6/ Then Yahweh proceeds to visibly [and maybe in some way physically] to give Jeremiah the faith, confidence in Yahweh, and courage he so lacked to commit himself to this calling and mission from Yahweh. Remember: Jeremiah keeps repeating **‘to whom the word of Yahweh came,’ ‘then the word of Yahweh came to me’ ... now Yahweh ‘put out His hand and touched my mouth...Behold, I have put My words in your mouth.’** There should be no doubt in Jeremiah’s mind that Yahweh would enable, strengthen, embolden, encourage, and protect him for this mission He was giving and sending him to fulfill.

7/ **See, I have set you this day over nations and over kingdoms...** We come back again to all ‘the powers that be’ to whom Yahweh was sending Jeremiah – whom Jeremiah must confront with Yahweh’s words. **There are six verbs that will characterize Jeremiah’s ministry over the next forty or so years: [1] pluck up; [2] break down; [3] destroy; [4] overthrow; [5] build; [6] plant.** These are weighty and powerful ‘job descriptions’ to give a young man – but Yahweh promises Jeremiah that he will fulfill all these activities by **the word of Yahweh** and because **‘for I AM with you...’**

8/ So, what we can call these instructions is *‘The content of this monumental, momentous mission.’* What will follow are two visions which will serve as *‘The confirmation of this monumental, momentous mission.’* Jeremiah will need to carry these confirming and affirming visions with him until the mission has been completed as Yahweh is giving it to him...

IV / vv 11-16 / “...Jeremiah, what do you see?”

1/ vv 11-12 / **VISION ONE: AN ALMOND BRANCH.** ‘Jeremiah, what do you see?’ And I said, **‘I see an almond branch.’** Then Yahweh said to me, **‘You have seen well, for I am watching over my word to perform it.’** There are two significances here we need to see. One is *emblematic*, the other is

linguistic. They both have to do with Yahweh's own oversight of His word – to make it happen and come to pass as He says it will.

2/ **What is the significance of an almond branch?** [1] The almond in that culture was *emblematic* of the 'watch' for spring to come. The almond tree was the very first to bloom and blossom, sometimes as early as January. So it was called '*the wakeful tree*' because it was '*watching*' and first '*awakened*' to the coming of spring. [2] Also [for the *linguistic* significance], in the Hebrew language, 'almond' [*shaqed*] sounds like 'watch' [*shoqed*]. So this vision of the *almond branch* would always remind Jeremiah that Yahweh was *watching* over His own words to make them happen as He had said.

3/ vv 13-15 / **VISION TWO: THE OVERTURNED BOILING POT/CAULDRON.** The word of Yahweh came to me a second time, saying, 'What do you see?' And I said, 'I see a boiling pot, facing away from the north.' So follow the vision now, because this is the way the history of the next few years will develop.

- Which direction from Jerusalem is this overturned boiling cauldron? It is *north*.
- Who is *north* of Jerusalem? *It is the super-power nations and kingdoms that had perennially been antagonists and threats against Israel and Judah.*
- Which direction will this *northern* kingdom, **facing away from the north**, spill its boiling contents? *Toward the south where Judah and Jerusalem are!*

4/ A little over 100 years before [722 BC], Assyria had come down from the *north* and destroyed the northern kingdom of Israel and taken them off into captivity. But now, Assyria's power and dominance was waning. Then, in 605 BC, during the reign of **Jehoiakim** [remember him from v 3?], Babylon dealt the final crushing blow and defeat to Assyria's power and became the dominant super-power over the entire ancient Near Eastern world. This was at the famous Battle of Carchemish.

5/ All these developments occurred during the 4th year of Jehoiakim's reign / **see Jeremiah 25**. From the time Nebuchadnezzar came to sole power, he set his sights on invading, conquering, and subjugating the whole region of Israel/Judah. This would eventually lead to three separate invasions and, at first, partial deportations of the inhabitants of Judah and Jerusalem: 605, 598, and 587 BC. This last invasion would be when he destroyed the city of Jerusalem and their Temple – and give occasion to the prophecy and fulfillment of the '**70 years of captivity**' / **see Jeremiah 25.8-14**.

6/ So this vision of a **boiling pot, facing away from the north** is a prophecy of the traumas that were coming upon the nation of Judah *from Babylon* as Yahweh explains in prophetic detail in vv 14-16.

V / vv 17-19 / "But you, dress yourself for work..."

1/ This is Yahweh's final charge to Jeremiah to '**arise, and say to them everything that I command you.**' No more time for objecting, protesting, complaining, or whining. He had been called by Yahweh, he had received his clear and specific commission, and now it was time to get to work!

2/ However, Yahweh once again reiterates His promises to strengthen and sustain Jeremiah: **Do not be dismayed** [discouraged, intimidated] **by them, lest I dismay you before them** / go back and re-read vv 6-8.

3/ v 18 / Jeremiah himself would become and serve as an emblem of how the beloved city, Jerusalem, would be attacked and assaulted. They would try to arm, reinforce, and fortify themselves against their intruders. They would fight back. *And they would fight against Jeremiah* for his words he would deliver against them from Yahweh ... just like they fought against Yahweh's words by the prophets who had come before Jeremiah. **But, they will fail and fall – Yahweh had said they would.**

4/ But as for Jeremiah, '**They will fight against you, but they shall not prevail against you, for I AM with you,**' declares Yahweh, '**to deliver you.**'

5/ You don't have to think hard or far to draw distinct similarities between Jeremiah's commission to the unbelieving culture of his day ... and ours in this day. But Christ's promises are just as sure...

'And behold, I AM with you always ... and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against you!'