

Jeremiah

1. Introduction

January 8, 2015

Let's pretend that we are going to have an awards ceremony like the Grammys, the Golden Globes, the Oscars, the Emmys, and the People's Choice Awards, but minus those actors, actresses, and their sleazy dresses. We have many awards to give out to the famous people in the OT, so we need to hurry.

The "most distinctive performance" award goes to Isaiah; the "most difficult to understand" award goes to Ezekiel; the "most miracles performed through" award goes to Moses; the "special hellfire and brimstone effect" award goes to Elijah; the "most obnoxious prophet" award and the "most converts" award go to Jonah; the "most influential" award to Daniel; and the "most to be pitied" award for Hosea. Every single godly prophet, men, and women from the OT are receiving their awards, except one prophet.

Finally, there is one last award left to give out: the "most heroic" award. With a drum roll, the announcer calls out the name of Jeremiah and God the Father personally hands out this award to Jeremiah the prophet.

You may wonder why Jeremiah should receive this "most heroic" award. He was not a fighter, nor did he rescue any one's life. As a matter of fact, he was known as the "Weeping Prophet" and to make it worse, there was not one convert during his ministry.

But for over 42 years he stood virtually alone in the nation of Judah – preaching, warning, pleading, and trying to wake up the nation to the reality that judgment would surely come unless they didn't repent and seek the Lord's forgiveness and compassion. For 42 long years, no convert, no encouragement, no nothing. Actually, he was thrown into prison more than once by the very people whom he wanted to keep safe.

During our studies of this Book, I hope and pray that we get to know this prophet who stood steadfast against all odds and hopefully we will glean valuable lessons for our Christian walk with Christ from what the Lord did through him.

A. THE AUTHOR AND THE TIMELINE

This Book is, pretty much, in many ways, the autobiography of Jeremiah, whom the Lord raised up in a difficult place at a peculiar time doing an unpopular work. The timeline falls around 585 to 580 B.C.

I like the way J. Oswald Sanders described Jeremiah: "A figure of bronze dissolving into tears." This prophet had a balance of tenderness and toughness – a warmth of spirit that was very sensitive to people's needs and a willingness to lay himself bare in total honesty before the Lord at the same time fearlessness in serving Him in spite of threats against his life.

Don't write off Jeremiah as an insignificant prophet who whined a lot. His comments were quoted by our Savior and Lord Jesus more than any other prophets in the OT. Obviously Jesus thought what Jeremiah said was important.

B. THE THEME OF THE BOOK

The theme of the Book is to warn God's people of judgment and to urge them to repent, before it was too late. But the people ignored Jeremiah. They even threw him in a prison – out of sight, out of mind. The warnings become the consequences when we don't take them seriously.

C. PLACE AND TIME

Jeremiah 1:1-3 The words of Jeremiah the son of Hilkiyah, 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.

The precise meaning of the name Jeremiah is unknown, with suggested interpretations including 'the Lord founds', 'the Lord exalts' and 'the Lord throws down'.

Through these three verses, we get to know the author Jeremiah a little more. He was from a priest family and lived in Anathoth, which was a little village north of Jerusalem and served the Lord throughout five kings. Two of the five kings were not mentioned because their reigns were so short.

D. CALLED BY GOD

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. 8 Do 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. 10 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."

This portion of the Scripture comforts me. Long ago when I was involved with the prison ministry, for some crazy reasons, I desired to teach the Word of God to the inmates. I knew very little about the Bible. But in my stupidity and arrogance, I thought that I was a Bible teacher. The Lord crushed my ego, because He would have nothing to do with that kind of silliness. After that crash and burn, I didn't want to teach the Bible at all for over a year.

After a gentle rebuke by an inmate, I realized that I was acting like Moses in front of the burning bush – making excuses why he couldn't be used by the Lord. I knew that I had nothing to offer to the Lord and His people – no Bible college degree, no seminary degree, no eloquence in speech, and no fluency in English. I did not have and still don't have anything that I can show any excellent qualification to the world, except the call of God on my life as a pastor and teacher, and my availability to Him till the last breath He allows me to have.

As we see here in the conversation between the Lord and young Jeremiah, the Lord is not looking for someone with the capability, rather availability. I said this before, but I will quote this to you guys and to myself again here and in the future: "Unless the Lord puts words in the man's mouth, there is nothing worth hearing."

Out of my own life and the call of God, these two verses are very dear to me and the second verse has become our church's verse:

1 Corinthians 2:1-2 And I, brethren, when I came to you, did not come with excellence of speech or of wisdom declaring to you the testimony of God. 2 For I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified.

Without being called by God, becoming a pastor is the worst job in the world that you can find, because you will be absolutely miserable. Here is an interesting fact: 50% of the pastors starting out will not last 5 years. 1 out of every 10 pastors will actually retire as a pastor in some form. And 4,000 new churches begin each year, while 7,000 churches close in America.

The statistics speak for themselves. Working in ministry – whether he is a full-time pastor or a lay pastor balancing a job and a church – can be challenging. Families suffer, discouragement and depression – amongst a gamut of other things – runs like a river in the lives of those who sacrifice their own life to the cause of the church.

Back to Jeremiah. What a job that is, a prophet to the nations! A priest's duties were predictable. Just about everything he had to do was written down in the Law. All the priest had to do was follow instructions, representing the people to the Lord.

But the ministry of a prophet, however, was quite another matter, because you never knew from one day to the next what the Lord would call you to say or do, if you were a prophet. When the prophet sees the people going in the wrong direction, he has to tell them to get back to the right path of God. And we all know how much people hate to be told that they are in sin. Instead of repentance, they'd rather take revenge on you for your righteous call.

E. A HARD ROAD OF PROPHET'S MINISTRY AHEAD

Jeremiah 1:11-19 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." 12 Then 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. 17 "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. 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."

When we study the OT prophets, we discover that three sections of truth embedded in their messages:

- 1) **Past sin:** The nation has disobeyed God's Law
- 2) **Present responsibility:** The people must repent or God will send judgment
- 3) **Future hope:** The Lord will come one day and establish His glorious kingdom.

The Lord didn't give Jeremiah a joyful message of deliverance to announce but rather a tragic message of judgment. Naturally the Israeli people would resent Jeremiah for his message, though it was from the Lord. They hated him because they could see him in person, not like the invisible God.

The Lord was giving a clear picture to Jeremiah before he even started his prophetic ministry: "The people of Israel will not listen to what you tell them. They will hate your gut, and will fight against you." Great, what an encouragement, Lord, from the beginning of the ministry! The Lord made sure that His prophet understood what was ahead. He didn't sugarcoat it.

The word picture from v13 to 16 is a vivid image of destruction and judgment pouring out upon Judah from the north which turned out to be king Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon. We need to take God's Word in the literal interpretation within the context. Here is one example of a wrong allegorical interpretation by an ancient writer named Gregory: "Man's mind is this pot; that which from the north sets it on fire is the devil, by inflaming it with evil lusts, and then he sets up his throne therein."

What the Lord said in v17 "*Do not be dismayed before their faces*" cracks me up, because I get to see the people's facial expressions in the church while I teach. Some have "I-Don't-Care" look; others already are in somewhere in La La Land; a handful of people even look angry and they are about to walk out the door because they are mad at what I speak; then, there are people who are hanging on every word from the Bible.

I love the way the Lord assured His prophet in v19:

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 Lord didn't say that Jeremiah would not suffer, but He would be with him and deliver him. This promise of God proved true, but so did the other aspect of the promise. The enemies of Jeremiah did not prevail against him, and he served God with distinction through great trials for 40 years.

F. APPLICATIONS

- 1) **God chooses and uses unlikely people for unbelievable tasks.**
- 2) **When God's Word is ignored, we can mark on it. We will pay the price.**
- 3) **Sometimes the most deserving people are the least rewarded.**

As never before, our homes, churches, cities, and nations need decisive leaders who will obey the Word of God. "If you ever injected truth into politics," quipped Will Rogers, "you have no politics." The politician asks, "Is it popular?" The diplomat asks, "Is it safe?" But the true leader asks, "Is it God's will? Is it right?"

"Power tends to corrupt and absolute power corrupts absolutely." Sir John Acton

Though the mills of God grind slowly, yet they grind exceeding small;
Though with patience He stands waiting, with exactness grinds He all.

German writer Friedrich von Logau