

# Call to Be

Text: Jer. 1:1-19

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<sup>JER 1:1</sup> The words of Jeremiah son of Hilkiah, one of the priests at Anathoth in the territory of Benjamin. <sup>2</sup> The word of the LORD came to him in the thirteenth year of the reign of Josiah son of Amon king of Judah, <sup>3</sup> and through the reign of Jehoiakim son of Josiah king of Judah, down to the fifth month of the eleventh year of Zedekiah son of Josiah king of Judah, when the people of Jerusalem went into exile.

<sup>JER 1:4</sup> The word of the LORD came to me, saying, <sup>JER 1:5</sup> "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."

<sup>JER 1:6</sup> "Ah, Sovereign LORD," I said, "I do not know how to speak; I am only a child." <sup>JER 1:7</sup> But the LORD said to me, "Do not say, 'I am only a child.' You must go to everyone I send you to and say whatever I command you. <sup>8</sup> Do not be afraid of them, for I am with you and will rescue you," declares the LORD.

<sup>JER 1:9</sup> Then the LORD reached out his hand and touched my mouth and said to me, "Now, I have put my words in your mouth. <sup>10</sup> See, today I appoint you over nations and kingdoms to uproot and tear down, to destroy and overthrow, to build and to plant."

<sup>JER 1:11</sup> The word of the LORD came to me: "What do you see, Jeremiah?"

"I see the branch of an almond tree," I replied.

<sup>JER 1:12</sup> The LORD said to me, "You have seen correctly, for I am watching to see that my word is fulfilled."

<sup>JER 1:13</sup> The word of the LORD came to me again: "What do you see?"

"I see a boiling pot, tilting away from the north," I answered.

<sup>JER 1:14</sup> The LORD said to me, "From the north disaster will be poured out on all who live in the land. <sup>15</sup> I am about to summon all the peoples of the northern kingdoms," declares the LORD.

"Their kings will come and set up their thrones in the entrance of the gates of Jerusalem; they will come against all her surrounding walls and against all the towns of Judah.

<sup>JER 1:16</sup> I will pronounce my judgments on my people because of their wickedness in forsaking me, in burning incense to other gods and in worshiping what their hands have made.

<sup>JER 1:17</sup> "Get yourself ready! Stand up and say to them whatever I command you. Do not be terrified by them, or I will terrify you before them. <sup>18</sup> Today I have made you a fortified city, an iron pillar and a bronze wall to stand against the whole land--against the kings of Judah, its officials, its priests and the people of the land. <sup>19</sup> They will fight against you but will not overcome you, for I am with you and will rescue you," declares the LORD. (NIV)

## Sermon Statement

Jeremiah is called to be a prophet to the nations and God empowers him to be one in the face of oppositions and suffering. We are called to be the people of God and we are empowered to be that people in the face of oppositions and suffering.

## Background (1:1-3)

JER 1:1 The words of Jeremiah son of Hilkiah, one of the priests at Anathoth in the territory of Benjamin. <sup>2</sup> The word of the LORD came to him in the thirteenth year of the reign of Josiah son of Amon king of Judah, <sup>3</sup> and through the reign of Jehoiakim son of Josiah king of Judah, down to the fifth month of the eleventh year of Zedekiah son of Josiah king of Judah, when the people of Jerusalem went into exile.

Jeremiah prophesied during the darkest days of the southern kingdom Judah's history, beginning in the 13<sup>th</sup> year of Josiah (627 BC) and extending past the fall of Jerusalem (586 BC) and the exile. Jeremiah was not exiled to Babylon but was taken (kidnapped or prophetnapped) to Egypt. He continued to minister to his exiled people in devastated Judah and Babylon. He ministered under 8 rulers:

Assyria was the superpower dominating Jerusalem since before 722 BC. In 612 BC Nineveh, the capital of Assyria fell to Babylon. While Assyria and Babylon were struggling for power in the north of Judah, Egypt rose in power in the east and seeks to dominate Jerusalem.

- Josiah (Judah's last Godly king)- become king 640 BC

The reign of Manasseh (686–642 B.C.) was the beginning of the end for Judah. The Southern Kingdom, though threatened, survived the Assyrian invasion and had a religious as well as political resurgence under Hezekiah. But Manasseh, Hezekiah's son, plunged Judah into the same kind of idolatry that the Northern Kingdom had known under Ahab and Jezebel. The temple was polluted with pagan altars, the occult was promoted by the king, and child sacrifice to Moloch was practiced in the Hinnom Valley near Jerusalem. Jeremiah was born about 648 BC and grew up as a contemporary of Manasseh's grandson, Josiah. Living only about two miles from Jerusalem, and coming from a priestly family, Jeremiah would have been intimately acquainted with the political situation in Judah.

The name Josiah means 'the Lord heals.' Josiah was 8 years old when he became king. At 16 he began to seek God, and by 20 Josiah initiated a vigorous religious revival. The idols introduced by Manasseh were purged, and Josiah ventured out into the countryside to cleanse the whole land.

This four-year project completed, Josiah set about repairing the temple in Jerusalem and, as had happened in an earlier day, the lost books of Moses were again recovered. When the books were read, Josiah was horrified to discover the curses God had placed on the very lifestyle that Judah adopted (Deut. 28:15–68). Josiah set about immediately to find out what God intended. The Prophetess Huldah was consulted, and she told the king that all the judgments would surely come on Judah, but because of his own relationship with God the days of his reign would be peaceful.

Josiah instituted reforms in the religious system of Judah after the discovery of the book of Deuteronomy in the temple. Judah has reverted too far back to the pagan worship of Baal, neglected the cultic temple worship of sacrifices and holy feasts and human sacrifices to respond to the revival.

- Jehoahaz

King Josiah was killed by the Pharaoh Neco in 609 BC, followed by a three month reign of his son Jehoahaz (under Egypt's dominion). Pharaoh deposed of Jehoahaz and replaced him with his brother, Jehoiakim.

- Jehoiakim (ungodly, scripture burning king)

Jehoiakim means 'the Lord raise up.' When Egypt was defeated by Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon at the battle of Carchemish (605 BC), Jehoiakim switched allegiance from Egypt to Babylon.

Four years later, Nebuchadnezzar was defeated by the Egyptians and Jehoiakim switched allegiance to Egypt which was a fatal mistake. Within 3 years, Nebuchadnezzar regrouped and defeated Egypt. Nebuchadnezzar replace Jehoiakim with his son Jehoiachin.

- Jehoiachin (a ninety-day wonder judged by God)

Jehoiachin ruled for 3 months and was deported to Babylon with 10,000 others. He was replaced by his uncle, Zedekiah.

- Zedekiah (Judah's last king)

Zedekiah means 'the Lord is righteous.' However he was defiant towards Babylon, still believing that Egypt will come to his rescue. Nebuchadnezzar made him watch as his sons were slaughtered in front of him and then gorged out his eyes, thus making sure that the last thing he saw was his sons dying. Jerusalem was then destroyed in 586 BC.

- Nebuchanezzar (Babylon conqueror)
- Gedaliah (Babylonian appointed governor of occupied Jerusalem)
- Johanan (successor of Gedaliah who was assassinated)

Jeremiah has a long period of ministry of over forty years. However the majority of his prophecies were delivered in the 22 years before the fall of Jerusalem. Initially his call was for the people of Judah to repent but after chapter 19, the tone was different indicating that captivity and exile was inevitable.

### **God's calling (1:4-5)**

JER 1:4 The word of the LORD came to me, saying,

JER 1:5 "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."

God's call includes foreknowledge of Jeremiah.

### **Jeremiah's Response (1:6)**

JER 1:6 "Ah, Sovereign LORD," I said, "I do not know how to speak; I am only a child."

Like many of us, Jeremiah was reluctant to step forward. Perhaps he was afraid because he knew what he will be required to do. His name Jeremiah means either 'Yahweh exalts' or 'Yahweh throws.' Nobody wants to be a stone that Yahweh throws. Hence he comes forth with an excuse.

### **God's confirmation (1:7-14)**

JER 1:7 But the LORD said to me, "Do not say, 'I am only a child.' You must go to everyone I send you to and say whatever I command you. <sup>8</sup> Do not be afraid of them, for I am with you and will rescue you," declares the LORD.

JER 1:9 Then the LORD reached out his hand and touched my mouth and said to me, "Now, I have put my words in your mouth. <sup>10</sup> See, today I appoint you over nations and kingdoms to uproot and tear down, to destroy and overthrow, to build and to plant."

**(a) not a child (1:7-10)**

The Lord will enable those whom he calls to fulfill their ministries. He stressed the authority under which Jeremiah was to act. Jeremiah should not use inexperience as an excuse for evading his task. He would have no choice in the selection of his audience or his message. Rather, he was to go to everyone to whom God sent him and say whatever God commanded. Jeremiah did not have to be an eloquent elder -he was *simply to be a faithful messenger*. God showed Jeremiah the source of his message. Jeremiah's call must have come in the form of a vision (like Ezek. 1:1) because he noted that the Lord reached out His hand to touch Jeremiah's mouth. This visible manifestation of God was his object lesson to tell Jeremiah that the Lord himself would put his words in Jeremiah's mouth. Jeremiah *need not worry what to say*; God would provide the very words he would speak.

**(b) branch of almond tree (1:11-12)**

JER 1:11 The word of the LORD came to me: "What do you see, Jeremiah?"  
"I see the branch of an almond tree," I replied.

JER 1:12 The LORD said to me, "You have seen correctly, for I am watching to see that my word is fulfilled."

God's first confirming vision caused Jeremiah to see the branch of an almond tree. The Hebrew word for "almond tree" is šāqēḏ, from the word "to watch or to wake" (šāqad). The almond tree was named the "awake tree" because in Palestine it is the first tree in the year to bud and bear fruit. Its **blooms precede its leaves**, as the tree bursts into blossom in late January. The branch represented God who was watching to see that his word is fulfilled. God used a play on words to associate the almond branch with his activity. The word for "watching" is šōqēḏ, related to the Hebrew noun for "almond tree." Jeremiah's vision of the "awake tree" reminded him that God was *awake and watching over His word to make sure it came to pass*.

In response to the initial question, Jeremiah says he sees a *shaqed* (almond); God responds that he is *shoqed* (watching). In other words, the word play indicates that the tree and the divine watching are intimately interrelated.<sup>1</sup>

### (c) boiling pot (1:13-14)

JER 1:13 The word of the LORD came to me again: "What do you see?"

"I see a boiling pot, tilting away from the north," I answered.

JER 1:14 The LORD said to me, "From the north disaster will be poured out on all who live in the land.

The boiling pot is a common kitchen instrument.

God confirms Jeremiah's calling by his words and two visions.

### God's plan (1:15-16)

<sup>15</sup> I am about to summon all the peoples of the northern kingdoms," declares the LORD.

"Their kings will come and set up their thrones in the entrance of the gates of Jerusalem; they will come against all her surrounding walls and against all the towns of Judah.

JER 1:16 I will pronounce my judgments on my people because of their wickedness in forsaking me, in burning incense to other gods and in worshiping what their hands have made.

God plan of judgment will be carried out by the people from the north. God's judgment is in response to the Mosaic covenants. There are main four biblical covenants;

Both the Abrahamic and Davidic Covenants were in fact promises, or sworn oaths. God simply stated there what He intended to do and bound Himself to it by using the cultural contract form. Neither of these covenant promises hinged on any human action. Whatever God's people might do, God had announced His purposes and revealed His plan. He would accomplish all He intended to do.

The Mosaic Covenant is a promise too. But it is significantly different from the Abrahamic and Davidic Covenants. The Mosaic or Law Covenant spells out how God's people are to live in fellowship with Him. It shows Israel how to love the Lord and to love their neighbor. In this covenant God also bound Himself with promises. **He**

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<sup>1</sup>Craigie, P. C. (2002). *Vol. 26: Word Biblical Commentary : Jeremiah 1-25*. Word Biblical Commentary (16). Dallas: Word, Incorporated.

*promised to bless His people if they obeyed Him. And He promised to punish His people if they disobeyed.* Here, for the first time, God's intentions were made contingent on human behavior. The obedient generation would be blessed and the disobedient would suffer the discipline its actions deserved.

As a prophet Jeremiah has a strange message. Instead of the popular and political correct stand to depend upon the Egyptians' protection, Jeremiah called the people of Judah to surrender to the Babylonians and be taken into captivity. Then they are to trust the Lord to bring them back to the land. No wonder to many listeners, Jeremiah was preaching treason!

(BKC [OT] p. 1209)

### Parallels between Lamentations and Deuteronomy

Lamentations		Deuteronomy	
1:3	She dwells among the nations; she finds no resting place.	28:65	Among those nations you will find no repose, no resting place for the sole of your foot.
1:5	Her foes have become her masters.	28:44	He will be the head, but you will be the tail.
1:5	Her children have gone into exile, captive before the foe.	28:32	Your sons and daughters will be given to another nation.
1:6	In weakness they have fled before the pursuer.	28:25	The Lord will cause you to be defeated before your enemies. You will come at them from one direction but flee from them in seven.
1:18	My young men and maidens have gone into exile.	28:41	You will have sons and daughters but you will not keep them, because they will go into captivity.
2:15	All who pass your way clap their hands at you; they scoff and shake their heads at the Daughter of Jerusalem.	28:37	You will become a thing of horror and an object of scorn and ridicule to all the nations where the Lord will drive you.
2:20	Should women eat their offspring, the children they have cared for?	28:53	Because of the suffering that your enemy will inflict on you during the siege, you will eat the fruit of the womb, the flesh of the sons and daughters the Lord your God has given you.
2:21	Young and old lie together in the dust of the streets.	28:50	... a fierce looking nation without respect for the old or pity for the young.
4:10	With their own hands compassionate women have cooked their own children.	28:56-57	The most gentle and sensitive woman among you ... will begrudge the husband she loves and her own son or daughter the afterbirth from her womb and the children she bears. For she intends to eat them secretly during the siege.
5:2	Our inheritance has been turned over to aliens, our homes to foreigners.	28:30	You will build a house, but you will not live in it.
5:5	We are weary and find no rest.	28:65	Among those nations you will find no repose.
5:10	Our skin is as hot as an oven, feverish from hunger.	28:48	In hunger and thirst ... you will serve the enemies the Lord sends against you.
5:11	Women have been ravished in Zion, and virgins in the towns of Judah.	28:30	You will be pledged to be married to a woman, but another will take her and ravish her.
5:12	Elders are shown no respect.	28:50	... a fierce-looking nation without respect for the old ...
5:18	Mount Zion ... lies desolate, with jackals prowling over it.	28:26	Your carcasses will be food for all the birds of the air and the beasts of the earth, and there will be no one to frighten them away.

### God's empowerment (1:17-19)

- (a) fortified city
- (b) iron pillar
- (c) bronze wall

JER 1:17 "Get yourself ready! Stand up and say to them whatever I command you. Do not be terrified by them, or I will terrify you before them. <sup>18</sup> Today I have made you a fortified city, an iron pillar and a bronze wall to stand against the whole land--against the kings of Judah, its officials, its priests and the people of the land. <sup>19</sup> They will fight against you but will not overcome you, for I am with you and will rescue you," declares the LORD.

God promises Jeremiah that he will support, protect and empower him for his calling.

### Lessons for us

The table summaries the content of this sermon.

	Jeremiah	On us
Background (1:1-3)	Society in chaos	Society in chaos
God's calling (1:4-5)	Prophet to the nations	People of God; God's sons and daughters
The response (1:6)	excuse	? any excuse
God's confirmation (1:7-14)	(a) words (b) branch of almond tree (c) boiling pot	(a) His revelation in the Bible (b) Jesus' death and resurrection (c) Control of world affairs
God's plan (1:15-16)	Judgment on Judah	New Covenant (Jer. 31:31-34)
God's empowerment (1:17-19)	(a) fortified city (b) iron pillar (c) bronze wall	(a) New Nature (b) Bible (c) Holy Spirit

### (a) God's Calling

Like Jeremiah, God calls us even before we are created. We are called to be someone. That is why we have meaning and purpose in this life on earth. As Jeremiah slowly becomes the prophet to the nations, we are called to become someone special.

**(b) New Covenant (Jer. 31:31-34)**

<sup>31</sup> “The time is coming,” declares the LORD, “when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah. <sup>32</sup> It will not be like the covenant I made with their forefathers when I took them by the hand to lead them out of Egypt, because they broke my covenant, though I was a husband to them,” declares the LORD.

<sup>33</sup> “This is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after that time,” declares the LORD. “I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people. <sup>34</sup> No longer will a man teach his neighbor, or a man his brother, saying, ‘Know the LORD,’ because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest,” declares the LORD. “For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more.”

Jeremiah offers the clearest explanation of the New Covenant with God. This was quoted in Hebrews 8: 8-12

God is a God of justice. In the Old Testament, he executes judgment when after Israel refuse to obey him in spite of God sending prophets to remind them. Instead they chose to listen to false prophets, teachers and priest who tells them what they want to hear and promises them health, wealth and protection. Unfortunately these prophets did not remind them that these blessings are conditional on they *obeying* God’s words as in the Mosaic Covenant.

For us, on the other side of the cross, we are under the New Covenant. Does this mean that they will be no judgment for us? Unfortunately no, we will still be judged. However we will be judged under the terms of the New Covenant in which the Lord said “I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts.” (Jer. 31:3b). We do not have to face judgment for the Original Sin but we will be judged for what we do in our time on earth.

**(c) How God empowers us to live a Christian life.**

We are living in a chaotic time similar to the one Jeremiah was living in. There are still superpowers fighting for control of our lands and our souls. The names may have changed. It may not be called Assyria, Babylon or Egypt. Nowadays these superpowers come by the name of multinational corporations, hedge funds, globalization and the military-industrial complexes. On a local level, they are our local political parties and

political and social leaders that are influencing our lives. Bribery and corruptions are so common that we do not blink when we read about them in the newspapers. Murders are being covered up and are open secrets. In this context, can we live out our lives in being true to the teachings as revealed in the Bible and according to our conscience in our hearts? The answer is yes. As God will make Jeremiah a fortified city, an iron pillar and a bronze wall so that no one can harm him even though many will try. We, on the other hand, have a new nature because of the work of Jesus Christ on the cross, the guidance of the word of God and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. Like Jeremiah, many will see to harm us. Similarly, like Jeremiah, we will prevail because God is awake and watching his words so that they will come to pass.

Soli Deo Gloria