

I N T R O D U C T I O N

Take your Bible if you will and open it to the book of **Jeremiah**.

Jeremiah is considered to be a *sublime* figure among Canon of Scripture. As an unparalleled figure, he is “*one of the foremost OT prophets.*”¹

A man known to us as the “*weeping prophet.*”

He is the most autobiographical of all the prophets, yet one of the most misunderstood of the great *OT* prophets.

Sadly, he is the least read and least understood of all the *OT* books. With 52 rich chapters, it is the longest book in the Bible.

He was born in the Levitical town of **Anathoth** in **646 B.C.** The town situated about three miles northeast of Jerusalem and located at the very edge of the wilderness in the territory of Benjamin.

He was named “*the LORD exalts*” which served to him as encouragement for his life is unlike any other in Scripture.

His was not a happy life (outwardly). There was constant sadness in his life. In fact his expression of sorrow are classic. He writes in **Jer 9:1** –

¹ Oh that my head were **waters** And my eyes **a fountain of tears,**
That I might weep day and night For the slain of the daughter of
my people!

That is why many deem his life as “*one long martyrdom.*” Hosea and Jeremiah are both called “the martyr prophets” because of the sorrow of their lives.

His life was an open book. In it you see his brave actions, his tenderheartedness, and his deep and emotional struggles before God.

He was a son of a priest, **Hilkah** (cf 2 Kings 22:8) – perhaps the very priest who found the book of the law that was in the Temple that the young Josiah was reformed by.

¹ Charles L. Feingberg, *Jeremiah: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids, Mich: Zondervan, 1982), 1. *Jeremiah*

Thought a son of a priest, Jeremiah never seemed to exercise a priestly ministry.

Jeremiah was most likely a man of means for he had the funds to purchase a field (cf. 32:6-15).

He never married, for the Lord did not permit it so (cf. 16:2 – “*You shall not take a wife for yourself no have sons or daughters in this place.*”).

His closest friend was **Baruch**, son of Neriah, who was a faithful secretary and scribe.

Jeremiah lived a relatively short life – died at the age of 60 most likely in a foreign land, Egypt. It is so strange to think that Jeremiah, who counseled throughout his ministry against confidence in Egypt, should end his earthly days in Egypt against his will.

Though no one paid attention to this prophet in his day, Jeremiah has been accorded great recognition after death.

You cannot afford to miss out on this man’s life. It tells a story, not so much from rags to riches, but of *reluctance* to *faithfulness*.

There are **3 ASPECTS OF HIS LIFE** that you must know about Jeremiah, that aim to *convict* and *challenge* your life.

C O N T E N T

HIS CALLING - *Reluctance* (Ch. 1)

Jeremiah’s calling came at the rise of Babylon and nearly at the middle of King Josiah’s 31 year reign of Judah in **626 B.C.**

Nebechadnezzar’s father, Nabopolassar, had just claimed the throne in Babylon, having defeated the Assyrian army.

Although Jeremiah was twenty years old at the time, he probably grew up hearing about the horrible King of Judah, Manasseh, who had ruled 55 years (cf. 2 Kings 21:1-9).

Yet at the appointed time, Jeremiah receives an unexpected call from God.

Look down at **1:4** where we read –

⁴ Now the word of the LORD came to me saying,

⁵ “Before I formed you in the womb **I knew you**, And before you were born **I consecrated you; I have appointed you** a prophet to the nations.” [Talk about your life being predestined by God]

If predestination is not enough to shock you, Jeremiah hears the dreadful word – PROPHET. “*Who in their right mind would want to be a prophet?*”

A prophet was one who was authorized to speak for God. He received his message directly from God and could be authenticated.

But it also meant trouble in those days, because you were assigned to tell people what they needed to hear, not so much what they wanted to hear.

Even though the Lord assures him that he *knew, formed, consecrated, and appointed* him, Jeremiah responds with reluctance in **v. 6** –

⁶ Then I said, “**Alas**, Lord GOD! Behold, **I do not know how to speak**, Because I am a youth.”

“*Alas*” has the idea of fear, calamity, or dread. There is an imbedded fear about taking on this role in Jeremiah’s heart. *I don’t know if I can do this.*

He is reluctant on two (2) basis: his *lack of eloquence* and his *lack of experience*. I cannot speak well and I am only a youth.

This kind of reminds of Moses in **Exodus 4:10** –

¹⁰ Then Moses said to the LORD, “Please, Lord, **I have never been eloquent**, neither recently nor in time past, nor since You have spoken to Your servant; for **I am slow of speech and slow of tongue.**”

This is extremely important to any child of God. Despite the obstacles or circumstances, *what truly matters* is that God calls, God will protect and God will be present.

Notice God's response in **vv. 7-9** –

⁷ But the LORD said to me, “**Do not say**, ‘I am a youth,’ Because everywhere I send you, you shall go, And all that I command you, you shall speak.

⁸ “**Do not be afraid of them**, For I am with you to deliver you,” declares the LORD.

⁹ Then the LORD stretched out His hand and touched my mouth, and the LORD said to me, “Behold, I have put My words in your mouth.

Even when Jeremiah finds himself in jail, put there by the final king of Judah for preaching treason against the nation and the king, God has this to say to **Jeremiah in 33:3** –

³ ‘**Call to Me and I will answer you**, and I will tell you great and mighty things, which you do not know.’

I am with you now and will be until the very end. I am the Lord your God.

My beloved, we are not sufficient in ourselves, but our sufficiency is from God who has made us competent, not incompetent (cf. 2 Cor 3:5-6).

It is not about you, it is about Me. God reassures Jeremiah in **1:10** –

¹⁰ “See, **I** have appointed you this day over the nations and over the kingdoms, To pluck up and to break down, To destroy and to overthrow, To build and to plant.”

With God's word as your authority, you will speak forth *judgment* (i.e. pluck, break down, destroy, overthrow) and *restoration* (i.e. build, plant).

Then the challenge is given to young Jeremiah in **v. 17ff** –

¹⁷ “Now, **gird up your loins and arise, and speak** to them all which I command you. Do not be dismayed before them, or I will dismay you before them.

¹⁸ “Now behold, I have made you today **as a fortified city and as a pillar of iron and as walls of bronze** against the whole land, to the kings of Judah, to its princes, to its priests and to the people of the land.

¹⁹ “They will fight against you, but they will not overcome you, **for I am with you to deliver you**,” declares the LORD.

At this point, one might be thinking like Jeremiah,

“What kind of message do you have in mind that will call for a fortified city, a pillar of iron, and walls of bronze? That is a whole lot of shield and protection.”

None of us is given a whole life to see at the age of 20.

Just know that God is to be trusted. He will provide all the encouragement and help that you need. *Amen?* It is not about you, it is about God.

HIS MESSAGE - *Surrender (Ch. 7)*

What follows in the book of Jeremiah is a series of 13 compiled messages that God instructs Jeremiah to give to the people of Judah.

You see this from chapter 2 through chapter 25. Jeremiah follows orders.

In **30:2** we read –

² “Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel, ‘**Write all the words which I have spoken to you in a book.**

More specifically the Lord tells him in **36:2** –

² “Take a scroll and write on it all the words which I have spoken to you concerning Israel and concerning Judah, and concerning all the nations, **from the day I first spoke to you**, from the days of Josiah, **even to this day.**

Sadly, later on in that same chapter we read a most dreadful thing happens. Jehoiakim, son of Josiah, becomes king of Judah at the age 25 and rules 11 years on the throne.

You would think a king would listen to the Word of the Lord, but he does not. In fact when he hears what Jeremiah is both preaching and writing down to be read aloud, he cut the scrolls with a scribe’s knife and throws, bit by bit, three or four columns at a time, the scroll into the fire (36:23)!

You would think a king would be awestruck by the Word of the Lord, but this is what his reaction is in **36:24** –

24 Yet the king and all his servants who heard all these words **were not afraid, nor did they rend their garments.**

Listen when you hear the Word of the Lord, there better be a sense of fear, of holy reverence for His Word. In this case, it was more than reverence that was expected of the people, but a real fear with dread at the calamity that was to take place upon the people of Judah.

Q: *What were Jeremiah's messages all about?*

A: One word, moreover, two words: UNCONDITIONAL SURRENDER.

Allow me to take you on a jet through Jeremiah's messages. Hang on.

In **chapter 2** we read [Judah's faithlessness]:

11 “Has a nation changed gods When they were not gods? But My people have changed their glory For that which does not profit.

19 “Your own wickedness will correct you, And your apostasies will reprove you; Know therefore and see that it is evil and bitter For you to forsake the LORD your God, And the dread of Me is not in you,” declares the Lord GOD of hosts.

22 “Although you wash yourself with lye And use much soap, The stain of your iniquity is before Me,” declares the Lord GOD.

36 “Why do you go around so much Changing your way? Also, you will be put to shame by Egypt As you were put to shame by Assyria.

37 “From this *place* also you will go out With your hands on your head; For the LORD has rejected those in whom you trust, And you will not prosper with them.”

In **chapter 4** we read [warning of coming judgment]:

4 “Circumcise yourselves to the LORD And remove the foreskins of your heart, Men of Judah and inhabitants of Jerusalem, Or else My wrath will go forth like fire And burn with none to quench it, Because of the evil of your deeds.”

¹⁴ Wash your heart from evil, O Jerusalem, That you may be saved.
How long will your wicked thoughts Lodge within you?

¹⁵ For a voice declares from Dan, And proclaims wickedness from
Mount Ephraim.

[Dan was the northern boundary of the land. Mount Ephraim was the northern
border of Judah, not far from Jerusalem.]

²⁷ For thus says the LORD, “The whole land shall be a desolation,
Yet I will not execute a complete destruction.

²⁸ “For this the earth shall mourn And the heavens above be dark,
Because I have spoken, I have purposed, And I will not change My
mind, nor will I turn from it.”

In **chapter 5** we read [Reasons for the coming judgment]:

²⁰ “Declare this in the house of Jacob And proclaim it in Judah,
saying,

²¹ ‘Now hear this, O foolish and senseless people, Who have eyes
but do not see; Who have ears but do not hear.

²² ‘Do you not fear Me?’ declares the LORD. ‘Do you not tremble
in My presence? For I have placed the sand as a boundary for the
sea, An eternal decree, so it cannot cross over it. Though the waves
toss, yet they cannot prevail; Though they roar, yet they cannot
cross over it.

²³ ‘But this people has a stubborn and rebellious heart; They have
turned aside and departed.

²⁴ ‘They do not say in their heart, “Let us now fear the LORD our
God, Who gives rain in its season, Both the autumn rain and the
spring rain, Who keeps for us The appointed weeks of the harvest.”

²⁵ ‘Your iniquities have turned these away, And your sins have
withheld good from you.

In **chapter 6** we read [Certainty of the coming judgment]:

²² Thus says the LORD, “Behold, a people is coming from the north
land, And a great nation will be aroused from the remote parts of
the earth.

²³ “They seize bow and spear; They are cruel and have no mercy;
Their voice roars like the sea, And they ride on horses, Arrayed as
a man for the battle Against you, O daughter of Zion!”

And then in **chapter 7** Jeremiah is called to stand at the gate of the temple and preach his heart out.

³ Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, “**Amend your ways and your deeds**, and I will let you dwell in this place.

⁴ “Do not trust in deceptive words, saying, ‘This is the temple of the LORD, the temple of the LORD, the temple of the LORD.’

⁵ “For if you truly amend your ways and your deeds, if you truly practice justice between a man and his neighbor,

⁶ *if* you do not oppress the alien, the orphan, or the widow, and do not shed innocent blood in this place, nor walk after other gods to your own ruin,

⁷ then I will let you dwell in this place, in the land that I gave to your fathers forever and ever.

⁸ “Behold, you are trusting in deceptive words to no avail.

⁹ “Will you steal, murder, and commit adultery and swear falsely, and offer sacrifices to Baal and walk after other gods that you have not known,

¹⁰ then come and stand before Me in this house, which is called by My name, and say, ‘We are delivered!’—that you may do all these abominations?

¹¹ “Has this house, which is called by My name, become a den of robbers in your sight? Behold, I, even I, have seen *it*,” declares the LORD.

All of the Ten Commandments had been broken and they come to services only to feel secure in their sins!

God even tells Jeremiah not to pray for them in **7:16** –

¹⁶ “As for you, **do not pray for this people**, and do not lift up cry or prayer for them, and do not intercede with Me; for I do not hear you.

God adds in **v. 27** –

²⁷ “You shall speak all these words to them, but **they will not listen to you**; and you shall call to them, but they will not answer you.

At the end of the chapter we read of a horrific sin in **v. 31** –

³¹ “They have built the high places of Topheth, which is in the valley of the son of Hinnom, **to burn their sons and their daughters in the fire**, which I did not command, and it did not come into My mind.

There in the valley of Hinnom, the idolatrous nation burned their children to appease the fire god, Molech.

Later, that same place, would be called “*hell*” by our Lord Jesus Christ in **Matthew 5:22** –

²² “But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother shall be guilty before the court; and whoever says to his brother, ‘You good-for-nothing,’ shall be guilty before the supreme court; and whoever says, ‘You fool,’ shall be guilty *enough to go into the fiery hell*.

God tells Jeremiah that the same place where their children were slaughtered will be the same place where they would be slaughtered.

The slaughter of the coming doom of the city will be so great that Topheth will have to be used for burial.

All of this leads to Jeremiah to pen these words in **8:18ff** –

¹⁸ My sorrow is beyond healing, My heart is faint *within me!*

²¹ For the brokenness of the daughter of my people I am broken; I mourn, dismay has taken hold of me.

¹ Oh that my head were waters And my eyes a fountain of tears,
That I might weep day and night For the slain of the daughter of my people!

Later we read the saddest cries in the book in **15:10** –

¹⁰ Woe to me, my mother, that you have borne me...

By this point his life is in danger, he has been kicked out from so many places, one cannot count. He repeats himself in **20:14-15** –

¹⁴ Cursed be the day when I was born; Let the day not be blessed when my mother bore me!

¹⁵ Cursed be the man who brought the news To my father, saying, “A baby boy has been born to you!” *And* made him very happy.

But just so you do not think that it is all judgment and calamity, we have one of the most beautiful portions of Scripture (chapters 30-33).

These chapters speak of restoration, including the *New Covenant*, which we as the church today are participating in some of the benefits of that glorious covenant, yet the *ultimate* fulfillment will be for Israel.

Q: *What can you say about a man like Jeremiah?*

A: Allow me to answer that as we discuss his ministry.

There is one word that comes to mind and that is **FAITHFULNESS**.

HIS MINISTRY - *Faithfulness (Ch. 38)*

Now, you might be thinking, “*Is this the same man that was so reluctant to become a spokesman for God?*”

You would be surprised what God can do with a man. *Are you not surprised what He has done with you?*

Q: *So what do you do if a king destroys your life’s work?*

A: You write the whole thing again. That is what Jeremiah is instructed to do in **36:28** –

²⁸ “**Take again another scroll and write on it** all the former words that were on the first scroll which Jehoiakim the king of Judah burned.

Just to illustrate Jeremiah’s faithfulness, turn over to chapter 38.

Jeremiah is relentless as ever and preaches before another king what God has told him. This time it is King Zedekiah.

By this time, Jerusalem has been under siege on two (2) occasions – each with its own deportations. There is still one final siege on Jerusalem that will take place and it will be the last one.

Jeremiah tells Zedekiah in **38:3** –

³ “Thus says the LORD, ‘This city will certainly be given into the hand of the army of the king of Babylon and he will capture it.’ ”

The officials do not believe this and convince the weak king to get rid of this so called prophet of the LORD.

So they put him in a cistern, which they have to let Jeremiah down with ropes. The cistern has no water only mud and Jeremiah sinks into the mud (38:6).

One might be thinking, “*What a great ministry Jeremiah had!*”

Jeremiah has one more word with the king in private and *do you know what he tells him?* In **38:20** we read –

²⁰ “... Please obey the LORD in what I am saying to you, that it may go well with you and you may live.

Zedekiah does not listen to Jeremiah and Jerusalem is captured. His sons are killed before his eyes right before his own eyes are plucked out!

Afterward when they find Jeremiah bound in chains, the captain of the bodyguard frees him and gives him an option to go with him to Babylon or to go anywhere else – “*the land is before you; go wherever it seems good and right for you to go*” (40:4).

Q: Do you know what Jeremiah decides to do?

A: He stays “*among the people who were left in the land*” (40:6).

Faithfulness. The Lord loves this quality in His people and Jeremiah is truly one of those sublime figures in the *OT* that exemplify faithfulness.

Having served under 5 kings, spanning over 40 years of ministry, having never married and without children, Jeremiah faithfully proclaimed God’s message to his people.

CONCLUSION

There is a passage in the *NT* that is astounding as you consider this once reluctant prophet. In Matthew 16:13, when Jesus asks his disciples a very important question, “*Who do people say that the Son of Man is?*”

This is what they responded in v. 14 –

¹⁴ And they said, “Some say John the Baptist; and others, Elijah; but still others, **Jeremiah**, or one of the prophets.”

Q: I ask you, *why do you suppose they thought of Jeremiah?*

A: The life of no other prophet has so close an analogy to the earthly life of our Lord.

He has been rightly called the most Christlike of the prophets.

Just notice the analogies between Jesus and Jeremiah:

1. Both had a message for Israel and the world.
2. Both condemned the commercialism of temple worship and did so in a similar way (7:11; Matt 21:13).
3. Both were accused of political treason.
4. Both were tried, persecuted, and imprisoned.
5. Both foretold the destruction of the temple (7:14; Mark 13:2).
6. Both wept over Jerusalem (9:1; Luke 19:41).
7. Both forcefully condemned the priests of their day.
8. Both were rejected by their kin (12:6; John 1:11).
9. Both were tenderhearted. Jeremiah was so much like the Man of Sorrows that the rabbis identified Jeremiah with the Suffering Servant of Isaiah 53.
10. Both loved Israel deeply.
11. Both knew the meaning of loneliness (15:10; Is 53:3).
12. Both enjoyed unusual fellowship with God. One of the unique features of Jeremiah’s life was that he could be so free and honest in communion and conversation with God.

My beloved, I point you to Jeremiah, not so that might see another man in Scripture, but to see the mirror of Scripture and ask yourself this important question, “*what kind of man/woman am I?*”

- *Is there tenderness in you?*
- *Is there a love for God and a love for His people in you?*
- *Is there faithfulness in you?*

I am certain when Jeremiah went into the presence of God, our Master said to him, “*Well done, good and faithful slave.*”

The question is, *will our Master say that of us?*

No matter how you started your walk with the Lord, what is important is how you finish – with God’s help and encouragement.

As the Lord said to Jeremiah in his calling, “*I am with you to deliver you*” (1:8b).

Let us pray.