

Jeremiah

The Prophetic Calling of Jeremiah

Lesson #1 for October 3, 2015

Scriptures: Jeremiah 1:1-5; 1:6-19; 7:5-7; Isaiah 1:19; 6:5; 1 Kings 2:26; Matthew 28:20.

1. Welcome to our study of the book of Jeremiah. This first lesson focuses primarily on his calling as spelled out in the first chapter of Jeremiah. We know more about the life of Jeremiah than we do about any other prophet in the Old Testament. There is a great deal of biographical information in the book. That information makes it easier to understand his work as a prophet. We know that he is a revered prophetic figure.
2. What do we know about conditions in the world in the days of Jeremiah?
3. Jeremiah was called to his ministry about 627 B.C. He continued to prophesy until at least 587 B.C. when Jerusalem and Solomon's Temple were destroyed and left in rubble. His story continued into Egypt after that. Daniel and his friends were taken into Babylonian captivity in 605 B.C. to represent Judah in Babylon. Ezekiel and most of the people of Judah were taken into captivity in 598/597 B.C. following the second conquest of Judah and Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar. Jeremiah prophesied during all of these events.
4. Nabopolassar, Nebuchadnezzar's father, rose to power in the Neo-Babylonian Empire in the same year that Jeremiah began his ministry. Nabopolassar reigned from 626 until 605 B.C. when he died in Babylon while his son Nebuchadnezzar was conquering Jerusalem for the first time. Jeremiah lived through all three conquests and the final destruction of Jerusalem.
5. Do you think of the prophetic ministry of Jeremiah as a success? Or, a failure? Jeremiah could never have stood up to all that he stood through without the Lord's help. The Lord told him that he would be "a fortified city, an iron pillar and a bronze wall." (Jeremiah 1:18, *NIV*) How does God give people strength to survive the trials they go through? Think about all the trials Paul went through and even Jesus Himself!
6. Consider the fact that Jeremiah was called by God to give assistance to and guidance to the people of the southern kingdom of Judah. What do you think Jeremiah thought as he realized that the people of Judah overwhelmingly rejected almost everything he tried to teach them? Jeremiah was not the only prophet trying to teach the children of Judah at that time in history. During Jeremiah's lifetime, the following prophets were also active: Daniel, Ezekiel, Zephaniah, Hulda, Obadiah, Nahum, and Habakkuk! Why do you think there were so many prophets active at the same time? How many of them knew each other? We do not know. Was God desperately trying to reach His people like He is with us through the three angels' messages?
7. We can presume that all of the prophets were carrying similar messages. They were trying to convince the people to stop sinning, stop killing people, stop worshiping idols, and to do what is right and fair to the poor, widows, and orphans. The fact that God sent all of those prophets to try to change the course of events seems to indicate clearly that God's judgment falling upon them was not inevitable. But, when people are accustomed to doing evil, change is not easy. How many things are we now doing that were considered evil some years ago? Are we as a society gradually slipping into more and more evil ways?
8. We are not told how the prophets received their messages. It seems clear that at times God spoke to them directly. At other times, the Holy Spirit worked through angels and gave prophets dreams or visions. Occasionally, God spoke with a "still small voice." (1 Kings 19:12) But, the prophets understood very clearly that God was speaking to them. And they knew what they had to do, even witnessing before kings, emperors, and generals.
9. Do you wish we understood more about how inspiration works? How would you feel about

giving an unpopular message to a king or emperor who had the full ability to order your death on the spot?

10. Some have suggested that in light of the three angels' messages and Revelation 19:10, we are supposed to be a prophetic people today. Are we carrying a popular message? How many people around us seem to want to hear what the Bible has to say? Being a prophet is not easy. How many Adventists today take Ellen White seriously?
11. Read 1 Kings 1 and 1 Kings 2:26. What do these passages tell us about Abiathar who apparently was an ancestor of Jeremiah? When Abiathar threw his support behind Adonijah the oldest son of David and the apparent heir to the throne, was that a serious mistake on his part? It led to his being dismissed from the priesthood. Did the kings in those days have the right to choose or to dismiss priests? Aren't priests supposed to be appointed by God? The town of Anathoth to which Abiathar was exiled was only about 3 miles northeast of Jerusalem. It was the hometown of Jeremiah and his family.
12. It is clear that Jeremiah had priestly training. Reviewing once again what we know from the Old Testament, we see that God calls shepherds, rabbis, farmers, as well as priests to the prophetic office.

A member of the Levitical priesthood, Jeremiah had been trained from childhood for holy service. In those happy years of preparation he little realized that he had been ordained from birth to be "a prophet unto the nations;" and when the divine call came, he was overwhelmed with a sense of his unworthiness. "Ah, Lord God!" he exclaimed, "behold, I cannot speak: for I am a child." Jeremiah 1:5-6.—Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings*, p. 407.1.

13. What was the expected role for priests in Old Testament times? Weren't they supposed to be the moral and spiritual leaders of the nation? Remember that although a number of priests were living and supporting the ministry of the temple around Jerusalem, other priests and their families were scattered throughout the tribes, ministering to the local peoples where they were. The tribe of Levi was actually given 48 cities scattered throughout the country as their inheritance in the land of Canaan. (Numbers 35:1-8; Joshua 21:1-42) Jeremiah's family came from one of those cities.
14. What do you suppose it meant to be a priest and a prophet at the same time? Weren't prophets kind of outliers from society? Were the priests partly to blame for the decline in spirituality in Judah? What are our spiritual responsibilities in the home or the church or in the community today? How do we go about determining what those responsibilities are?
15. Read Jeremiah 1:1-5. Jeremiah clearly thought that when God called him, he was still too young and could not serve as God's mouthpiece. He clearly thought that he was still unfit and incapable of doing the job. Other Bible prophets and writers shared his views of themselves. (Exodus 4:10-15; Isaiah 6:5; Jeremiah 1:6; 1 Corinthians 15:9; Ephesians 3:8) In what ways were the experiences of Jeremiah, Isaiah, and Moses similar?
16. Was Jeremiah at all uncertain about his call? He repeatedly stated, "The word of the Lord" came to me or, "The word of the Lord" says thus and so. Did speaking with his level of conviction help him to do his job?
17. Does the Seventh-day Adventist Church in 2015 have a clear message from the Lord? Are we clearly warning the world about what is coming?
18. Jeremiah received his call in the 13th year of King Josiah's reign, probably about 627/626 B.C. We do not know exactly when he was born.
19. Read again Jeremiah 1:4-5. How would you feel if God told you that you were His chosen messenger from the time you were conceived? How did Jeremiah know it was God speaking to him? Jeremiah was set aside or sanctified to be hallowed and holy to serve the LORD. This

is clearly a proof of God's foreknowledge. So, how is it that God can know the future without limiting our freedom? Would it be safe for anyone else to know our future? Even ourselves?

20. What bothered Jeremiah most when he received God's call? Was it just his young age? Or, did he recognize the spiritual condition of the nation around him?
21. If a prophet had responded to God's call by saying: "Sure! No problem. I can do that!" do you think God would have called him? Imagine being called to be a spokesman for the Creator of the universe!
22. In the days of the Old Testament, prophets' messages had to be delivered almost always in a personal, face-to-face manner. There were no websites, no e-mails, and it was not easy to write a letter.
23. Read Jeremiah 1:7-10. What was God's response to Jeremiah's reluctance? Does that response give us some courage as we think of what God might be asking us to do?
24. God touched his mouth and told him that he would be given the words that he was supposed to speak and that God would protect him. He would be like "a fortified city, an iron pillar and a bronze wall." (Jeremiah 1:18-19) What did God intend by saying that? Were those some of the strongest things known to man in Jeremiah's day? What terms do you think God would use if He were calling one of us to be His prophet today?
25. Do you think that Jeremiah thought that one person plus God is a majority? Did he move forward in his prophetic mission without any fears?
26. Read Jeremiah 1:11-19. What do you think is being pictured in these verses? When Jeremiah saw a boiling pot from the north about to tip over, what does that imply? The dangers to the Judean people in those days came first from Assyria and then from Babylon. Both of those nations approached Judah from the north. In light of what Jeremiah might have known about the Assyrians and the Babylonians, would he have been comforted by such a message?
27. How much of Jeremiah's call was for the benefit of the people? How much was for the benefit of Jeremiah himself? Would you feel a little more comfortable realizing that God had promised you that He would be with you? Certainly, Jeremiah needed that.
28. Read Matthew 28:19-20. What kind of promise is God making to us? Can we survive?
29. Martin Luther had some interesting words to say about Jeremiah in the introduction to his commentary on the book of Jeremiah as quoted in the *Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide* for Friday, October 2.

Jeremiah was a sad prophet, who lived in a deplorable and difficult period and, what is more, his prophetic service was extremely difficult as he was struggling and fighting with a bad-tempered and stubborn people. Apparently he did not achieve much success because he experienced how his enemies became more and more evil. They tried to kill the prophet several times. They pressed hard against him, whipping him several times. Yet, he would live to see with his own eyes how his country was devastated and his people taken into exile.

30. Notice Ellen White's words about Jeremiah.

For forty years Jeremiah was to stand before the nation as a witness for truth and righteousness. In a time of unparalleled apostasy he was to exemplify in life and character the worship of the only true God. During the terrible sieges of Jerusalem he was to be the mouthpiece of Jehovah. He was to predict the downfall of the house of David and the destruction of the beautiful temple built by Solomon. And when imprisoned because of his fearless utterances, he was still to speak plainly against sin in high places. Despised, hated, rejected of

men, he was finally to witness the literal fulfillment of his own prophecies of impending doom, and share in the sorrow and woe that should follow the destruction of the fated city.—Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings*, p. 408.1.

31. Review Jeremiah 1:16-19 again. Where does this sound like most of Jeremiah's opposition would come from? Was Jeremiah asked to stand up against the Assyrians and Babylonians? Was he given serious messages to the leaders of the Assyrians and Babylonians? Have you ever thought that the leaders of the Seventh-day Adventist Church needed a prophetic message from the Lord? If God called you to give such a message, how do you think you would respond? Did Jeremiah know immediately it was God speaking to him that first time? How did God let him know for sure that it was God speaking? Remember the story of the boy Samuel. (1 Samuel 3:1-18) Samuel was sure that it was Eli calling him.
32. What was it about Jeremiah that made him an appropriate candidate to do the work that God was calling him to do? Would you say that Jeremiah's feelings of inadequacy disqualified him? Or, did they qualify him even more to do the work God was calling him to do?
33. Is God trying to speak to some or all of us today? Don't you think there are things that God would like to say to His people or even to world leaders in our day? Would you be able and willing to speak up if God asked you to? How often have you found a "good excuse" for not doing something that God or the church wanted you to do? Aren't we told that each of us has a work to do? How does God qualify us for whatever He asks us to do?
34. Jeremiah has often been called the weeping prophet. Why do you think that is? Of course, we have not yet read much of his book. What do you think Jeremiah thought as he lived in or around Jerusalem as it was conquered by the Babylonians three times in a row, often following a terrible siege? After the third time when Jerusalem lay in complete ruins—nothing but a pile of rubble—Jeremiah was forced to go into Egypt against his will and against the advice of God. He apparently died in Egypt.
35. Jeremiah 1, discussing the call of Jeremiah, can conveniently be divided into three sections:
 - 1) Jeremiah's ancestry and his times. (Jeremiah 1:1-3)
 - 2) Jeremiah's call and visions. (Jeremiah 1:4-16)
 - 3) God's promise. (Jeremiah 1:17-19)
36. Jeremiah 1:1-3 teaches us that when God speaks, things happen. Does God's word come to people in our generation? Has God's word ever come to you? Notice that the word of the Lord came to Jeremiah three times in chapter one. (Jeremiah 1:4, 11, 13) Do we have any evidence that Jeremiah sent messages to any of the other nations? (Jeremiah 1:5) God described Jeremiah's formation in his mother's womb using the same word which was used in Genesis 2:7 regarding the forming of Adam by God: *from the dust of the ground*.
37. When Jeremiah was a little reluctant, God touched his lips with His hand. (Jeremiah 1:9) What do you think of the description God gave to Jeremiah of his future tasks? (Jeremiah 1:10) In what sense do you think Jeremiah was to uproot, to pull down, to destroy, and to overthrow? In what sense was he to build and to plant?
38. God promised to be with Jeremiah, but He challenged him to gird up his loins using the same terminology which would be used to tell soldiers to get ready for battle.
39. Are we listening to God with the same commitment that Jeremiah had? Is God trying to speak to us today? What might He say to us?

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