

The Calling of Jeremiah the Prophet (Special Messenger)



SABBATH—SEPTEMBER 26

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON: Isaiah 1:19; Jeremiah 7:5–7; 1 Kings 2:26; Jeremiah 1:1–5; Isaiah 6:5; Jeremiah 1:6–19; Matthew 28:20.

MEMORY VERSE: “Before I formed you in your mother’s body I chose you. Before you were born I set you apart to serve me. I appointed [chose] you to be a prophet to the nations” (Jeremiah 1:5, NIV).

WE KNOW MORE ABOUT THE LIFE OF JEREMIAH than we do about any other Old Testament prophet. Facts about his life in the Bible help us to understand his work as a prophet. Jeremiah had such an influence on history that, even at the time of Jesus, he was a loved and respected prophet.

At the same time, the prophet’s work seemed to lead to only little success. There were many years of strong warnings and pleadings. But the people did not listen to the messages Jeremiah gave them from the Lord.

But Jeremiah could not be bought or sold. He would not change. He stood as “a fortified [well-armed] city, an iron pillar and a bronze wall” (Jeremiah 1:18, NIV), not in his own strength but in the Lord’s.

Jeremiah’s life was not a happy one in many ways. His calling brought him suffering and sadness. He even spent time in prison. So many of these troubles came from the very people whom he was trying to help point in the right direction. So, in his own way, Jeremiah was an example of what Jesus Himself would face hundreds of years later in the same land.

THE PROPHETS (Jeremiah 7:5–7)

According to their calling, the prophets were strong protectors of God’s law. They defended the covenant¹ and the Ten Commandments (Jeremiah 11:2–6). Micah 3:8 gives one summary of the prophets’ work. Their duty was “to tell Jacob’s people what they’ve [they have] done wrong. I’m [I am] ready to tell Israel they’ve [they have] sinned” (NirV). And the understanding of sin is meaningless without the law (read Romans 7:7).

Read Isaiah 1:19; Jeremiah 7:5–7; and Ezekiel 18:23. What was the prophets’ message to the people? In what ways is that message the same to us today? Read also Matthew 3:7–11.

God’s judgment was not a sure thing. It would come if the people did not turn from their evil ways. But change is not so easy, especially when people become so used to doing evil. Who has not seen people get so used to the evil that had shocked them at one time? The message of the prophets was to let people understand just how bad their evil was and what the results would be if they did not turn away from it. Of course, the message did not come from the prophets. Instead, it came from the Lord.

The prophets do not usually explain how God’s Word was given to them or how they heard it. At times, God spoke to them directly. At other times, the Holy Spirit touched them in dreams or visions or, perhaps, through a “still small voice” (1 Kings 19:12). But no matter how their messages came to them, the prophets had a mission. They were to tell God’s will to the common people and deliver it before kings, emperors, and generals, too.

This work required great responsibility. If prophets told the truth, these powerful people could kill them. If they did not tell the truth, God’s judgment could also come upon them. To be a prophet is a heavy calling. And the Bible tells us that those who received the call to be prophets took it seriously.

We can be glad they did. And we can be glad their messages have come down to us in the Bible. In that sense, their words still speak, even today. The question now, as in Jeremiah’s time, is the same: Will we listen?

What are the prophets still telling us? What is their basic message to God’s people?



The words of the prophets still speak today. Will we listen?

DEFINITIONS

1. covenant—promise and/or agreement between God and His people.

JEREMIAH'S FAMILY BACKGROUND (1 Kings 2:26)

Read 1 Kings 1 and 1 Kings 2:26. What was the background that sent Abiathar back to his home in Anathoth?

After he strengthened his throne, Solomon had trouble with his brother Adonijah over who should be king. At this time, Solomon removed Abiathar the priest from his office and sent him back to his hometown, Anathoth. Anathoth was about three miles northeast of Jerusalem. Hilkiah, Jeremiah's father, was a member of a priestly family that lived in Anathoth. Some have guessed that Jeremiah's family may have come down from Abiathar. Either way, we know from Jeremiah 1:1 that the prophet had an honored family line. So, we find that all through history the Lord has called all kinds of people—shepherds, rabbis, fishermen, priests—to be prophets.

“Jeremiah was a member of the Levitical priesthood. He had been trained from childhood for holy service. In those happy years of preparation, he little knew that he had been called from birth to be ‘a prophet to the nations.’ When God's call came, Jeremiah felt unworthy. He said, ‘I don't [do not] know how to speak. I'm [I am] only a child’ Jeremiah 1:5, 6 (NIRV).”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings*, page 407.

The priests were to be the spiritual leaders of the nation. God had given them important duties that had an effect on almost every area of the nation's spiritual life. Some had been faithful to that task. Others had not been faithful. As we will soon read in the book of Jeremiah, the prophet (Jeremiah) had very strong words to speak against these unfaithful priests, who had proved unworthy of the responsibilities and work that God had given them.

What are your spiritual responsibilities, whether at home or in the church? If a prophet were to speak to you now about those responsibilities, what might he or she say?



God has called all kinds of people—shepherds, rabbis, fishermen, priests—to be prophets.

THE CALLING OF JEREMIAH AS A PROPHET (Jeremiah 1:1–5)

Read Jeremiah 1:1–5. What does this tell us about Jeremiah’s calling?

Jeremiah was like other prophets in the Old Testament (and like Paul in the New Testament; read Galatians 1:1; Romans 1:1). Jeremiah did not try to hide the fact that God had called him. He was very clear about it in these opening verses of Jeremiah. For example, all through the book of Jeremiah, he speaks of “the word of the LORD,” which had come to him. No doubt this strong belief helped him to keep moving forward in the face of hard work, suffering, and troubles.

Jeremiah’s calling happened about 627 to 626 B.C., in the thirteenth year of Josiah’s rule. We do not know the exact year when the prophet was born or his exact age when he began his ministry. But we will understand that Jeremiah thought of himself as a child, someone too young for the work given him.

Read Jeremiah 1:4, 5. What encouragement and comfort should Jeremiah have gotten from these words?

God chose Jeremiah to be a prophet before he was born. God set him aside for his work as a prophet. The words translated “I sanctified [set apart] you” (verse 5, NKJV) come from a verb that means “to be hallowed [holy],” “to be holy,” and to “sanctify [make holy].” It has a holy and religious meaning to it. It is tied also to the sanctuary service itself. In fact, the word for “sanctuary” comes from the same root word. It means that something or someone is “set apart for a holy purpose.” It is what God had planned for Jeremiah, even before his birth. These verses do not teach the false idea of life before birth. Nor do they teach that we already are saved or lost before we are born. Instead, they teach God’s foreknowledge.

God knows the end from the beginning. What comfort can we get from this as we go through life’s troubles?



Jeremiah was set aside for a holy purpose before his birth.

UNWILLING PROPHETS (Exodus 4:10–15)

The Lord had chosen Jeremiah to be a prophet. But the young man was frightened and did not feel up to it. Perhaps Jeremiah had known that the spiritual condition of the people at the time was not good. He knew what needed to be done, and he did not want the job.

Compare Jeremiah 1:6 with Isaiah 6:5 and Exodus 4:10–15. What points are the same in each of these events?



Jeremiah was afraid he would not be a good speaker.

Neither Jeremiah, Isaiah, or Moses felt they were qualified to be prophets. Perhaps that was an important requirement for the job of a prophet: a sense (feeling) of not being worthy and unable to do the very important work. *A spokesman (leader) for the Creator?* No wonder they all did not feel they were worthy to do the work. They all pulled back from it, at least at first.

Notice Jeremiah's first action after being called. He quickly talked about being unable to speak well. Moses said the same thing. Isaiah, too, talked about his mouth, his lips. In all cases, they knew that they would have to speak to people. They were going to get messages from God, and they would be responsible for preaching those messages to others. Unlike today, where they could build a Web site or send a text message, they would have to communicate with people face to face. Imagine having to stand before angry leaders or others to give them sharp words of correction and warning. So, it is easy to understand why these soon-to-be prophets would be unwilling to do God's work at first.

Read Jeremiah 1:7–10. What does God tell Jeremiah? What hope and promise are found in God's words to Jeremiah? How can these words also encourage you when you are doing the work God has called you to do?

THE ALMOND BRANCH (Jeremiah 1:11–19)

The prophet is God's witness. His job is to speak, not for himself but for God alone. Jeremiah was not called to find answers to the problems of the nation or to become a famous or popular leader whom the people would follow. Jeremiah's most important mission was to deliver the words of God to the people and their leaders. The point here is not about what humans can do. It is about God's rulership and power alone. The prophet was to point the people to the Lord alone for answers to all their problems. It is no different for us today.

What was Jeremiah's first vision about? Read Jeremiah 1:11–19.

Most Bible translations translate the Hebrew words in verse 11 as "the branch of an almond tree." But these translations miss the Hebrew meaning of the words here. The words translated "almond tree" have the same root as the verb "to keep watch" in verse 12. Here, the Lord says that He is going to "keep watch" over His word to fulfill it.

One could argue that the central message of the entire book of Jeremiah is found in verses 11 and 12 of chapter 1. God's word will be fulfilled. One day everyone will know that events happen just as God said they would. God wants His people to turn away from their sins. He offers grace (mercy) and forgiveness. But He does not force anyone to obey and be healed. If His people will not respond to Him, His words of judgment and punishment will certainly be fulfilled just as His words against Israel were fulfilled in the book of Jeremiah.

As we can know, God's words were not just for the people. The Lord was speaking directly to Jeremiah himself. He was warning him to be prepared for the attacks that he would face. No matter what happened, Jeremiah could have the promise from God that "I am with you." He would need it. And we all do too!

Read Matthew 28:20. What promise can we find for ourselves in these words to us as we live in the kind of world that we do today?

ADDITIONAL THOUGHT: Martin Luther wrote about the prophet in the introduction of his book about Jeremiah: “Jeremiah was a sad prophet, who lived in a difficult period. His service as a prophet was very difficult. Jeremiah was struggling and fighting with a bad-tempered and stubborn people. Clearly he did not receive much success because he experienced how his enemies became more and more evil. They tried to kill the prophet several times. They worked hard against him. They whipped him several times. But Jeremiah would live to see with his own eyes how his country was destroyed and his people taken into slavery” (adapted).

“For forty years Jeremiah was to stand before the nation as a witness for truth and righteousness [holy living]. In a time of great backsliding, he was to show through his life and character [thoughts; feelings; actions] the worship of the only true God. During the terrible sieges² of Jerusalem he was to be the mouthpiece³ of Jehovah [God]. He was to foretell [tell beforehand] the downfall of the house of David and the destruction of the beautiful temple built by Solomon. And when put in prison for his fearless preaching, he was still to speak clearly against sin in high places. Hated by men, he was finally to witness the real fulfillment of his own prophecies of doom, when the city of Jerusalem was destroyed.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings*, page 408.

DISCUSSION QUESTION:

① One of the saddest things we as Seventh-day Adventists should think about is the fact that God had warned Jeremiah that he would face attacks *from his own people*. Read Jeremiah 1:17–19 again. Who would be the ones fighting against him? What fearful lesson should we learn from this for ourselves? For example, what is our attitude (feeling) toward prophecy given to us, even if we don’t like it? How does the Ellen G. White quote above explain the fearful truth that the very ones who should have been representing the true God were the ones who were fighting against God by attacking His leaders? (Read also Ecclesiastes 1:9.)

DEFINITIONS

2. sieges—when enemies surround a city so people cannot get food and water.

3. mouthpiece—someone who speaks for others.