

**UNIT 7 JEREMIAH AND THE PROPHETIC MOVEMENT LESSON 1****"ENCOUNTER WITH GOD"**

Jeremiah Chapter 1: Read these notes before reading the Bible.

INTRODUCTION:

In popular speech, the Prophetic books are the 16 books of the O.T. from Isaiah to Malachi. They are further subdivided into the 4 Major Prophets (Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel and Daniel) and the twelve Minor Prophets.

This subdivision is not in the Hebrew Bible. It is divided into the Law, Prophets, and Writings.

The Prophets consist of eight books: Joshua, Judges, Samuel, Kings (the Former Prophets) and Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel and The Twelve (Latter Prophets).

So Jeremiah is one of the Major Prophets and one of the Latter Prophets.

The life and ministry of Jeremiah will be our main interest. But as we go, we will compare him with the other prophets and thus gain an overall understanding of the Prophetic Movement.

1. WHAT SORT OF PERSON WAS A PROPHET?

A prophet is one who announces the claim and word of God. He does not necessarily predict future events but this can be part of his ministry.

In a map of ancient Palestine you will find that Anathoth (vs.1) was a little village on the north-eastern outskirts of Jerusalem. It was in the hill country about 4 miles from the city. There, in the picturesque, rugged beauty and secluded quietness of a country environment, Jeremiah was unconsciously being prepared to become God's prophet to the nation. Jeremiah was nurtured in a religious home; his father was a priest (v.1).

Jeremiah appears as a very timid and sensitive person: it was no mean task to be called to be a prophet, and Jeremiah shrank from the responsibility. This was not just youthful jitters either (he was probably 18-20 years old). Throughout his whole ministry Jeremiah constantly endured an emotional and spiritual conflict within himself. Some commentators have identified Jeremiah as the original 'suffering servant' spoken of in Isaiah 53 (i.e. until Jesus came and perfectly fulfilled the description). Often he has been referred to as the 'Weeping Prophet'.

To his credit, this reluctant prophet displayed great courage in the face of constant opposition and threats. He was an heroic statesman and prophet who battled against the complacency, self-interest and injured pride of his nation, despite his personal sensitivity. In fact, in many ways, his sensitive nature was a strength which enabled him to appreciate his responsibility. It was a strong conviction of God's call that kept him at his post, and this for a ministry which lasted over 40 years.



Jeremiah was typical of all the prophets. Of course they were not stereotyped and each one was different, both in personality and background. But they were all very human.

For example, Ezekiel was also a priest but, unlike Jeremiah, he probably belonged to an aristocratic family of Jerusalem. We conclude this because while still a relatively young man, (probably before he was 30 years old - Ezekiel 1:1) he was taken as an exile to Babylon along with many of the nobility of Jerusalem (cf. 2 Kings 24:10-17). Isaiah likewise, judging from his cultured speech and intimacy with the court circle, seems to have come from an aristocratic family. He was a married man, having at least two children (Isa. 7:3, 8:3, 18), and spent his entire days in Jerusalem. On the other hand, Amos (Amos 1:1) was a herdsman from the desert wastes; Micah (Micah 1:1) was a peasant from the countryside and Hosea (Hosea 7:7, 8) possibly a baker from the town. The background environment of all the prophets is reflected strongly in their outlook on life, and in their turn of speech as they preached God's message to their contemporaries. Even the spiritual experiences by which each prophet discerned God's message seems to bear the stamp of their respective personalities. Thus Ezekiel saw unusual symbolic visions (Ezekiel 1-3), while Amos was appalled at the social and spiritual conditions of his day, and was inspired by divine actions of judgment (the 'roar of the lion' - Amos 3:8) which he saw in natural disasters around him (Amos 4:6-12).

A prophet, therefore, was just an ordinary sort of person whose natural personality was the channel through which God spoke His message.

2. HOW DID GOD CALL A PROPHET?

No two prophets received their commissioning to office in the same manner. Yet all were called by more or less the same principle of experience. They encountered God. By voice and vision they were confronted with the living God in a personal challenge to action. We have already considered the human side of the prophets, but it was God's ordination that made these men to be prophets.

The first chapter of Jeremiah is specifically concerned with his call.

- (a) Verses 1-3 date the era in which Jeremiah served as a prophet. The dating is given in relationship to the respective kings who reigned at the time. Jeremiah commenced his ministry in the thirteenth year of Josiah's reign and also prophesied through the reigns of Jehoiakim and Zedekiah (2 Chron. 36:5, 11, 12). These latter two men were evil leaders. (He also prophesied during the reigns of Jehoahaz and Jehoiachin but these were for only 3 months each).
- (b) Verses 4-10 describe the conversation between a sensitive and timid village lad and an insistent Voice whose divine origin was recognised, whose authority was inescapable, and whose challenge was personal.

The Lord tells Jeremiah that he was predestined to be God's spokesman. Before he was even conceived he was consecrated and set apart as God's man. This was to give Jeremiah the necessary assurance that he was to have a divine message. God commanded Jeremiah (v. 7, 8), to:-

1. Arise, go
2. Speak God's Word
and



3. Not be afraid

It is interesting to see how conscious the prophets were of their divine authority in whatever they said. They didn't just offer an opinion. They made pronouncements. "Thus says the Lord"! Compare these passages: Jeremiah 2:2; 6:12, 15, 16, 22; 23:11, 12, 15, 16; Isaiah 1:24; 14:22-24; Ezekiel 6:11; 7:5; Amos 1-2. Sometimes the prophets appear to have acted merely out of their knowledge of God's standards and the people's moral condition, without the need of some special form of inspiration. Yet still it was God's Word.

- (c) Verses 11-16 confirmed the young man's inward conviction of call in two signs depicting God's attention and purpose. Jeremiah discerned spiritual significance in the new shoot of the almond tree as it awakened to the first breath of spring. The Hebrew word for almond is "shoqed" which means "watcher". Jeremiah sensed that although the nation might think that God was asleep and so unconcerned about their sin He in fact was alert and watching over (= shoqed) His word of judgment to fulfil it. Similarly, he placed a spiritual interpretation upon the cooking pot which he saw bubbling up and spilling over. In this he saw trouble brewing for his country from the northern nations.

The cooking pot may have been an actual pot; he may have had a vision of a cooking pot or, some suggest that as he looked at the clouds they seemed to take the form of a huge boiling cauldron leaning over from the north, ready to discharge its contents over Judah and Jerusalem. However the message came, he had the certainty of coming disaster. Isaiah's experience seems to be rather more dramatic and awe-inspiring (Isaiah 6:1), while Ezekiel's visions are quite imaginative and strange (Ezekiel 1-3).

- (d) Verses 17-19 assured the future prophet of divine strengthening and protection. God promised Jeremiah:-
1. I am with you to deliver you
 2. They shall fight against you
 3. I give you strength like a fortified city, an iron pillar and a bronze wall

QUESTION 1:

Who was Jeremiah's father? Where did Jeremiah live? How old was he when he became aware of God's summons? Can you detect any personality characteristics in Jeremiah from this passage? (v. 6, 8).

QUESTION 2:

How many times is it recorded in this chapter, "The Lord said to me"? What invincible assurance is given to Jeremiah as a source of strength and courage? (v.19).

QUESTION 3:



In chapter 1, what did Jeremiah learn about God? List all the ways in which God was relating himself to Jeremiah.

QUESTION 4:

What similarities are there in the visions of Jeremiah and those of Amos? (cf. Amos 7:7-9; 8:1-3)

QUESTION 5:

Why do you think there is such an emphasis at the very start of his ministry, upon the difficulties that Jeremiah will encounter? What essential requirement does God demand from his servants? (v.17; Ezekiel 2:3-8; 3:16-21).

QUESTION FOR GROUP STUDY:

When God wanted to address men and women, He chose a man like them to be His mouthpiece. The Divine Word comes through a human agent. In just the same way God wants to use us today. Under His influence our personalities, which are all different, can be heightened or made effective for His use. We may not be called to a prominent ministry, but we are all born to fulfil a divine purpose. Have you yet discovered what God wants you to do? What is it?