

Bi235 Old Testament 2

Lesson Bi235-34 Jeremiah and His Message

God often called young people to be his messengers. Joseph was a young boy when God sent him dreams of his future importance. Miriam was young when she watched over baby Moses floating in the water. Ruth was a young widow who decided to devote her life to Naomi and the God of Israel. Timothy was a young pastor when Paul encouraged him, “Don’t let anyone look down on you because you are young, but set an example for the believers” (1Tim 4:12). Mary, the mother of Jesus, was probably a teenage girl when the angel appeared to her. The prophet Jeremiah was also called when he was a young man.

The word of Yahweh came to Jeremiah, “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.”

At first Jeremiah was reluctant. “Alas, Sovereign LORD, I do not know how to speak; I am too young.”

But Yahweh said to him, “Do not say, ‘I am too young.’ You must go to everyone I send you to and say whatever I command you. Do not be afraid of them, for I am with you and will rescue you” (Jer 1:5-8).

God called Jeremiah to prophesy to Judah during the last few years before the armies of Babylon destroyed Judah. He lived about 100 years after the prophet Isaiah. During the Assyrian crisis in Isaiah’s time, God saved Jerusalem from being destroyed by Assyrian armies. More than a century later, God sent Jeremiah and other prophets to warn Judah. Judgment in the form of Babylonian conquest threatened Judah, unless the nation turned back to God.

Rival prophets were telling Judah one thing, and Jeremiah was predicting the opposite. They were saying that God would never let anything bad happen to Jerusalem. Hadn’t God protected Jerusalem in the past from the Assyrian armies? Hadn’t God performed a miraculous rescue? They were sure God would certainly do it again.

Jeremiah reminded the people that their ancestors used to love Yahweh. They followed him during the years in the wilderness of Sinai. But later they strayed far from God. “They followed worthless idols and became worthless themselves.” God exclaimed, “My people have committed two sins; They have forsaken me, the spring of living water, and have dug their own cisterns, broken cisterns that cannot hold water.” Here was Yahweh’s legal case against Judah: “Does a young woman forget her jewelry, a bride her wedding garments? Yet my people have forgotten me, days without number” (Jer 2:5, 13, 32).

Jeremiah’s message was, “Repent!” Through him God sent this invitation, “Return, faithless people; I will cure you of backsliding” (Jer 3:22). If the people of Judah would return to worship God alone, then he would permit them to remain safe in their land. If not, they would be invaded and destroyed by foreign armies.

The big question for Judah was whether to believe Jeremiah or the rival prophets—whether to believe a message of doom or one of further protection from God. One message demanded a change of heart and behavior; the other said in effect, “Don’t worry; be happy; nothing bad is going to happen.”

One student of the Word has noticed six reasons why Jeremiah believed he was the true prophet:

First, he had an inner certainty that God had called him. “It’s true the LORD has sent me to you” (26:15).

Second, his message was not a popular message; he didn’t say the things that the crowds were saying. “I am ridiculed all day long; everyone mocks me” (20:7).

Third, no one but a fool would keep speaking words that brought disaster on himself. He was cursed by others, beaten (37:15), taunted (20:8), falsely accused (26:11), and arrested and imprisoned (37:14-15). He was often lonely. God told him not to get married or have children, not to mourn or show sympathy for others, because God had withdrawn his blessing, love, and pity for Judah (16:1-7).

Fourth, Jeremiah himself wanted to say comforting words to his neighbors, but he felt compelled by God to announce doom instead. “I have not desired the day of despair,” he said (17:16). He tried to keep quiet, but he said, “God’s word is in my heart like a fire, a fire shut up in my bones. I am weary of holding it in; indeed, I cannot” (20:9).

Fifth, his message was consistent with what God had previously revealed to Israel. God invited Judah to “stand at the crossroads and look; ask for the ancient paths, ask where the good way is, and walk in it, and you will find rest for your souls” (6:16).

Sixth, Jeremiah’s words were the words that Yahweh would naturally say. In other words, unless the nature of Yahweh had changed, he would still be angry at Judah for her sinfulness. What displeased and angered God in the time of Moses and Joshua still angered him in Jeremiah’s time. What pleased God down through the centuries of Israel’s history was still pleasing to God. Justice was still the right thing to do, and sin was still an offense against God.

Jeremiah had a close relationship with God, but a long and difficult relationship with the leaders of Judah. Very few people in Judah responded to his message and repented before God. None of Judah’s last kings paid any attention to his messages. As a result, Babylonian armies invaded Judah and deported much of the population to the city of Babylon. About 15 years went by until Babylonian armies finally destroyed the city of Jerusalem and the great temple of Solomon. Jeremiah predicted 70 years of captivity for the Judean people.

This story is **important** because it shows us that God continued to send messengers to Judah to warn the nation to turn back to him, or be destroyed. Jeremiah’s statements teach us how to decide whether teachers and ministers in our time are truly speaking from God or not. Being popular and drawing crowds does not mean a speaker has a true word from the Lord.

The **main truth** of this lesson is that men and women of God must be true to their calling, whether they are successful in the eyes of the world or not. Jeremiah was faithful, but few responded to his preaching in his own day. Years later, however, it was his book of prophecies that the survivors recognized as truly from God.

Let’s **review** this lesson—

1. When did Jeremiah become aware that God was calling him to be a prophet? [Pause]

- A. If you said, “When he was a young man, perhaps even a boy,” you are correct.
2. Why did Jeremiah’s enemies prophesy good news for the people of Judah? [Pause]
A. If you answered, “They believed that God would never let anything bad happen to Jerusalem or the temple of Solomon,” you answered correctly.
3. Why did Jeremiah prophesy bad news for the people of Judah? [Pause]
A. If you said, “The leaders of Judah and its people were living wickedly and not trusting in God,” you are right.

Your **assignment** for this lesson is to listen to it at least three times. As you hear the story each time, imagine how it happened. See the events in your own mind. Then tell the story in your own words as you remember it. Then listen to the story again and re-tell it until you feel sure you are repeating the words and actions correctly. Meditate on Jeremiah’s story. Ask yourself whether you are ever tempted to give people a message that makes them feel good, rather than one that makes them uncomfortable. Pray that you may always hear the voice of the Spirit and faithfully deliver God’s Word for his people.

Jeremiah had a ministry of ‘tearing down,’ but also one of ‘planting and building up’ (1:10). Two promises to memorize from Jeremiah are:

“Call to me and I will answer you and tell you great and unsearchable things you do not know” Jeremiah 33:3.

God also promised, “You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart” Jeremiah 29:13.