

# THE GOSPEL PROJECT – CHRONOLOGICAL PROPHETS AND KINGS GOD THE PURSUER *God Calls Jeremiah*

As we continue our study of God pursuing nations and individuals, we turn to God's pursuit of Jeremiah. Jeremiah's father and his grandfather were both priests. Undoubtedly in his youth, Jeremiah visualized following in their footsteps. However, it was the LORD's plan for Jeremiah to serve Him as a prophet instead. The life of a prophet would be much more demanding than the life of a priest. The priesthood consisted of 'predictable' duties while a prophet never knew what the LORD would call him to do from one day to the next.

A prophet in the Old Testament is defined as a person who spoke for God and who communicated God's message courageously. Their messages were given long before the written Word of the LORD was completed. It is likely that the prophets themselves never realized that the words they prophesied would eventually be preserved in the eternal Word of God.

It is natural to wonder, "do we still have prophets today?" since in the New Testament, the gift of prophecy is listed among other 'gifts of the Spirit.' (*1 Corinthians 12:10* and *Romans 12:6*)

The Greek word translated "prophesying" or "prophecy" in the passages where the gifts of the Spirit are listed means to speak forth or declare the way of the truth of God. Speaking forth the Word of the LORD in our time will not consist of any new revelation from God. We are called to confirm the Word of the LORD that is has already been given to us in His written Word. In a sermon Charles Spurgeon spoke of the *burden of the Word of the LORD* as mentioned in *Malachi 1:1*. Spurgeon helps us understand the attitude we should have today regarding our sharing of the Word of God. He said in part, "The servants of God mean business. They do not play at preaching, but they plead with men. They do not talk for talk's sake; but they persuade for Jesus' sake. They are not sent into the world to tickle men's ears, nor to make a display of elocution, nor to quote poetry—their is an errand of life or death to immortal souls! They have something to say which so presses upon them that they must say it. "Woe is unto me if I preach not the gospel!" They burn with an inward fire, and the flame must have vent. The Word of the LORD is as fire in their bones, consuming them; the truth of God presses them into its service, and they cannot escape from it; if, indeed, they are the servants of God, they must speak the things which they have seen and heard. The servants of God have no feathers in their caps—they have burdens on their hearts."

Jeremiah would have a 40 year ministry prior to the Southern Kingdom of Judah being taken into the Babylonian captivity for 70 years. He would prophesy during the reign of the five final kings of Judah.

The book of Jeremiah is a non-chronological collection of his writings. Some of Jeremiah's messages have dates. Some do not. His messages were delivered orally and perhaps repeatedly possibly for years before Jeremiah ever wrote them down. He also wrote the book of Lamentations. Jeremiah is remembered as the 'weeping' prophet.

Jeremiah declared God's final effort to save the people from their sins. Jeremiah lived about 100 years after the prophet Isaiah. Isaiah had prophesied that Jerusalem would be saved from Assyria during the reign of King Hezekiah. Jeremiah's mission was to warn of their coming judgment at the hands of the Babylonians. This time the people would not escape the judgment of God.

Jeremiah's life was a continuing struggle. But, in the struggle he became a beautiful reflection of our God. Jeremiah is often quoted as sharing God's 'telephone number' with us: **Jeremiah 33:3 (ESV)**<sup>3</sup> *Call to me and I will answer you, and will tell you great and hidden things that you have not known.* In times of our own discouragement, we are often encouraged through the LORD's words to His prophet. **Jeremiah 29:11 (ESV)**<sup>11</sup> *For I know the plans I have for you, declares the LORD, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope.*

Jeremiah was born during the reign of Manasseh – the son of Hezekiah. Manasseh reigned longer than any other of the kings (55 years) and he had the distinction of being the most wicked of all the kings. He restored all of the evil things that his father, Hezekiah, had abolished. He even sacrificed one of his own sons to the false god Molech. And yet, towards the end of his life after being deported to Babylon for a time, he repented of his sins and tried to reverse the trend to sinning that he had set in motion for his nation. However, he was killed by his own son, Amon. After a two year reign, the evil Amon was killed by some of his servants and his eight-year-old son Josiah came to the throne in his place. Josiah devoted himself to pleasing God. That such a wicked king as Amon could have had such a godly son can only be attributed to the grace of God. Jeremiah's call came in the 13<sup>th</sup> year of the reign of King Josiah.

God's plans for us precede our birth.

**Read Jeremiah 1:4-5 (ESV)**<sup>4</sup> *Now the word of the LORD came to me, saying,*<sup>5</sup> *“Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you; I appointed you a prophet to the nations.”*

The Word of the LORD came to Jeremiah. We don't know how the Word of the LORD literally came to Jeremiah. But, it must be like Charles Spurgeon spoke about – a burden – a fire in his bones! The Word of the LORD still comes to those who seek Him. His first call to us is His call to salvation. After salvation comes our call to service to the Living God. Centuries later, the Apostle Paul would write in **Galatians 1:11 (ESV)**<sup>11</sup> *For I would have you know, brothers, that the gospel that was preached by me is not man's gospel.* The Word of the LORD is NOT something man made up. It is not the product of

human imagination. Before Jeremiah was created in his mother's womb, the LORD had a plan for him. Would the LORD do less for His children today? Certainly not! He has a plan for each of us.

Each plan is as different and unique as our own individual fingerprints which serve as personal identifiers of who we are. And the plans God has prepared beforehand for each of us to do fit the specific time frame of humanity in which He has placed us. Like Jeremiah we are consecrated by God Himself even before we were formed in the womb. Consecration in scripture is the act of being set apart for God's use. David who was consecrated for God in his time spoke about it in *Psalm 139:14 (ESV)*<sup>14</sup> *I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Wonderful are your works; my soul knows it very well.*

Whatever we are called to do for our Savior, we can rest assured that God's Presence with us overcomes obstacles to our mission.

*Read Jeremiah 1:6-8 (ESV)*<sup>6</sup> *Then I said, "Ah, Lord GOD! Behold, I do not know how to speak, for I am only a youth."*<sup>7</sup> *But the LORD said to me, "Do not say, 'I am only a youth'; for to all to whom I send you, you shall go, and whatever I command you, you shall speak."*<sup>8</sup> *Do not be afraid of them, for I am with you to deliver you, declares the LORD."*

God Himself is speaking to Jeremiah and Jeremiah replies with excuses – he says he doesn't know how to speak because he is too young! He was probably about 20 at the time. David Jeremiah comments that the objection of unworthiness is a proper response to God's calling. He reminds us that recognition of our unworthiness promotes our dependence on God. You could say that the young prophet was in good company with his excuse making because he used an excuse similar to the prophet Moses. Moses told the LORD he was slow of speech at the time the LORD called him. However, Moses' repeated statements of unworthiness reflected a lack of trust in the LORD.

As we listen in on this conversation between the LORD and Jeremiah we see how loving God was. He didn't blast Jeremiah out of the water for making excuses. Instead He confirmed that He would be with Jeremiah throughout it all. *Deuteronomy 31:6 (ESV)*<sup>6</sup> *Be strong and courageous. Do not fear or be in dread of them, for it is the LORD your God who goes with you. He will not leave you or forsake you."*

Are you stumbling through life unaware of God's Presence? His Presence is a magnificent gift that He has promised to us through His Word. Our Lord Jesus said in *John 14:16 (ESV)*<sup>16</sup> *And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever.* The truth of this promise is that after you accept Christ as Savior, no matter how you may feel, you are never alone! Every child of God invariably goes through the feeling of losing God's Presence at times perhaps because we are going through some time of testing. *Job 23:10 (ESV)*<sup>10</sup> *But he knows the way that I take; when he has tried me, I shall come out as gold.* Maybe we are not feeling His Presence because we are careless about spending personal time with Him.

Remember that the practical result of being in God's Presence is joy! The fellowship is sweet for those who walk with the Lord in obedience and faith. But the sweet fellowship that comes from obedience and trust in the Lord is not a passing feeling. It sustains us, especially during trials. ***Nehemiah 8:10 (ESV)***<sup>10</sup> *Then he said to them, "...do not be grieved, for the joy of the LORD is your strength."* James the brother of Jesus said in ***James 1:2-3 (ESV)***<sup>2</sup> *Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds,*<sup>3</sup> *for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness.* When we persevere through trials, we prove to ourselves and to others that our faith is real, this causes our sense of God's Presence to increase along with our joy. David said in ***Psalms 16:11 (ESV)***<sup>11</sup> *You make known to me the path of life; in your presence there is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures forevermore.*

God's proclamation should be on our lips.

***Read Jeremiah 1:9-10 (ESV)***<sup>9</sup> *Then the LORD put out his hand and touched my mouth. And the LORD said to me, "Behold, I have put my words in your mouth."<sup>10</sup> See, I have set you this day over nations and over kingdoms, to pluck up and to break down, to destroy and to overthrow, to build and to plant."*

The prophet Isaiah's lips were touched with a burning coal of fire for purification. The LORD put His hand on Jeremiah's mouth. The touch of the Master is so important to our lives. We see in the New Testament how the transforming touch of Jesus caused the blind to see, the lame to walk, the dead to live again. For Jeremiah the touch of the LORD's hand put the LORD's words into his mouth. Being equipped by the LORD is the key to the success of any gospel endeavor. Oftentimes our equipping by the LORD comes in a way that to be honest, we might not like. But, remember He plans are to prosper us and not to harm us.

When you study the Old Testament prophets, you discover that three strands of truth wove their messages together: (1) past sin, (2) present responsibility, and (3) future hope. Jeremiah was given a tragic message of judgment for the people. Despite the difficulties of sharing those messages, Jeremiah accepted God's call. He recognized his own weaknesses but he also knew God's Presence would be with Him.

As a result of making the right decision to accept God's call, he became one of the most unpopular prophets in Jewish history. Measured by human standards, his ministry was a failure, but in the eyes of God, he was successful. It isn't easy to stand firm especially when standing alone. Yet Jeremiah resisted the crowd and remained steadfast in his devotion to the LORD's Word for over forty years.

***Lamentations 3:22-23 (ESV)***<sup>22</sup> *The steadfast love of the LORD never ceases; his mercies never come to an end;*<sup>23</sup> *they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness.*