

Jer. 1:4-19, Jeremiah's Call
May 6, 1989
H. Van Dyke Parunak

A. General Structure of Call Narratives

1. In our culture, certain kinds of documents or speech have a fixed structure, and we all recognize what they are. Examples:
 - a) Letter: "Dear Mary, It was so nice to hear from you Love, Joan."
 - b) Phone call: "Hello, Jack? This is John. Did you hear... Goodbye."
 - c) Sermon: Scripture reading, prayer, exposition, hymn.
 - d) Speech: "Ladies and Gentlemen, ..."
 - e) Office memo: "TO ..., FROM ..., DATE ..., RE ..."
 - f) Newspaper article: Headline, summary paragraph, increasing details later.
2. There was such a standard pattern in the OT, for sending a servant to do a task. When God is doing the sending, there are four central parts, with others less important: Commission, Objection, Reassurance, Sign. Consider several examples, on the handout: Moses, Gideon, Saul, Isaiah, and now Jeremiah. We will study each of these four stages in Jeremiah's call to service.
3. The reassurance and sign are doubled chiastically in Jeremiah's case; Isaiah and Ezekiel also show such doubling, though our chart does not display it. First study will cover through the first sign; then return to consider the second sign and reassurance in the next study.

B. Call, 4-5

A series of three successively more refined statements outlines Jeremiah's call, and serves as a model for how the Lord deals with each of us. (Note: location of *athnach* suggests that this is three rather than two.) Align with Rom. 8:29-30.

1. Foreknew, even before conception. Not knowledge of facts, but of people; corresponds to God's sovereign choice of us. Salvation begins, not with us, but with God's eternal plan.
2. Sanctified, here corresponding to "predestinated" in Rom. 8. Cf. Gal. 1:15, "separated me from the time I was in my mother's womb." God has a path of life chosen out for us before we are born.
3. Ordained, "called" in Rom. 8 and Gal. 1.
 - a) This is like an announcement in Jeremiah. After the two "before" clauses, God says, "Now then: I hereby ordain..." Is the perfect used for announcements in this way? Absolutely! GKC 106i,m. This is the call as God makes it known to Jeremiah, in the course of his life.

- b) "Prophet to the nations." Not just Judah. Cf. 1:10. So our ministry is not just to believers, but to unbelievers as well, and ultimately to every nation.

4. **Application:** How are we called?

- a) To salvation.
- b) To service. Some people think we disparage "full-time Christian service." Actually, we encourage it more than most Christians; we believe that EVERY Christian should be conscious of the Lord's direction and should be serving him full-time. My calling, my reason for being, is studying and teaching the Bible. ITI is just a way to put bread on the table (and, incidentally, to bring me into contact with people who need my ministry). I challenge you to that same standard.

Fundamental question: Is every believer called to a ministry, or (as with OT prophets) is this a special status? In the light of 1 Cor. 12, I tend to go with the former idea. But then this becomes a dispensational difference.

C. **Objection, 6**

- 1. "Child" probably implies that Jeremiah is less than 20.
- 2. **Application:** The objection should not be taken as a sign of unspirituality. The other examples show that recognition of one's own inability is a standard part of being called to divine service. 2 Cor. 4, "We have this treasure in earthen vessels." 1 Cor. 2, "Not many wise, not many mighty, not many noble, has God called." If we rest in our own skills, we in fact diminish the work of God.

D. **First Reassurance, 7-8**

Two prohibitions, each with its reasons.

- 1. 7, Don't say, "I am a child."
Reason: what JEREMIAH will do. He is not on his own initiative; should not worry about where to go, or what to do, for in both these the Lord will direct him.
- 2. 8, Don't be afraid of them.
Reason: What GOD will do. Cf. v.17.
 - a) Be with him, Cf. Matt. 28:20; Heb. 13:5.
 - b) Deliver him, 2 Tim. 4:17,18, Paul's sense of the Lord's presence to deliver him.
- 3. **Application:** Thus our objections to serving the Lord are both answered by recognizing that it is not we who work, but the Lord who works through us. Gal. 2:20!

E. **First Sign, 9-10**

An action, followed by two levels of interpretation.

1. The Lord touches his mouth. Cf. Ezek. 2:8-3:4, where he actually eats the scroll.
2. Meaning of the touching: "I have put my words in thy mouth." As a prophet, he speaks the word of the Lord. Note the common introductory formulae used in the book:
 - a) The Word of the Lord came unto Jeremiah saying...
 - b) Thus saith the Lord
 - c) The Lord said unto me (3:6)
 - d) The word that came to Jeremiah from the Lord (7:1; 11:1)
 - e) Saith the Lord ("Oracle of YHWH")
 - f) The word of the Lord that came to Jeremiah the prophet (46:1)
 - g) The word that the Lord spake ... by Jeremiah the prophet (50:1)
3. 1:10, The effect of that word: not just to describe what will happen (prediction), but actually to carry it out (cf. Isa. 55:11; John 1; Gen. 1). Two directions:
 - a) The scope: "over the nations and over the kingdoms." The definite article (as in v.5) suggests that the whole (known) world is intended.
 - b) The verbs: abab BA, where A = verb governing a living thing (plant or person), B = verb governing buildings or objects, lower case = destruction, upper case = restoration. Used figuratively, all of these here describe what God will do with the nation and its people. Cf. 18:7,9; 24:6; 42:10. The last shows that more than just presence in the land is in view. This goes further to encompass prosperity and happiness.

Cf. Eph. 3:17; Col. 2:7, where Paul uses these same two word-pictures to describe the prosperity of believers.
4. **Application:** We may not be given direct revelation from God, as Jeremiah was. But in the Scriptures we have the very word of God, and it is as powerful today as it was when it was first written. Do we realize that it actually works? Need to give people the Scripture, not just talk about it. Need to focus our attention on it; it is God's way to build us up and plant us, and to uproot and tear down the work of Satan.

F. **Second Sign, 11-16**

Note the new introductory formula (cf. 1:4), emphasizing a strong division here.

1. 11-14, Two visions. Both refer to common things, items of everyday life, that the Lord here gives special symbolic meaning.
 - a) 11, The almond rod. A pun in Hebrew: the name for almond is *shaged*, and the Lord's promise to watch over his word is *shoged*. The almond is the earliest shrub to blossom in the

spring, and the ground is white with its petals; the first sign of spring, sometimes coming in January or February! "Hasten" here is "watch, waken," like a child who wakes up early Christmas morning for excitement. Just as the almond can't wait for spring, so the Lord can't wait to fulfill his word.

Relate this to v.10. Jeremiah might be a little apprehensive: how can he, equipped only with a word from God, face kings and armies, pull down and build up? The answer: God will bring it to pass.

- b) 13, The boiling pot. The AV has it backwards: the face (the opening) of the pot is *away from*, not towards, the north. A boiling pot, about to spill over and dump its contents from north to south, symbolizing the invasion of the Babylonians, following the fertile crescent, from north to south.
2. 15,16 are the message that these images support: the certainty (represented by the almond branch) of an invasion from the north (the boiling pot). Note that the verses are described as what God does. The northern invaders are only his tools.
- a) 15, he will summon the invaders.
 - 1) "Setting up his throne at the entrance of the gate" is emblem of ruling over the city; cf. 39:3, and recall that the gate is the place of judgment. Cf. the ceremony between Ahab and Jehoshaphat in 1 Kings 22:10--held outdoors to accommodate the large crowds. Thus this verse is not predicting the invasion alone, but its outcome. We go immediately from threat to conquest, as promised by the almond stick.
 - 2) "against all the walls thereof round about, and against all the cities of Judah," shows that their rule will not be benevolent, but antagonistic and punitive.
 - b) 16, he will judge the wickedness of Judah. For the first time we see what the cause of the judgment is: they "have forsaken me, and have burned incense unto other gods, and worshipped the works of their own hands." They have violated the first commandment: "no other gods before me," and judgment must fall. So must it fall on us, if we put anything before the Lord in our affections and devotion.

G. **Second Reassurance, 17-19**

Three natural parts: what Jeremiah is to do; what the Lord will do; and what the people will do.

- 1. 17, Jeremiah's responsibility: three positive steps, and one negative.
 - a) "Gird up thy loins." Refers to tucking the long outer garment

up between the legs and into the belt, so that it will not hinder movement. Cf. modern "roll up your sleeves."
Preparation for action. We need to do this mentally: 1 Pet. 1:13. Just as an athlete psyches himself up before the contest, we need to gather our spiritual resources, through Bible study and prayer.

- b) "Arise." Suggests that he goes out to carry the message. Doesn't just wait for opportunities to come to him, but seeks to make opportunities.
 - c) "Speak all that I command thee." Don't leave any part of the message out.
 - d) "Be not dismayed," don't let them make you panic or become paralyzed. If you do, I will paralyze you. If we don't trust in God, he will not help us.
 - e) **Application:** Is our weakness in ministry because we only do part of this, "speak," but fail in the rest? Our ministry needs to be prepared, deliberate, complete, and trusting.
2. 18a, What God will do.
In contrast to Jerusalem, which will fall to the enemy, God will make Jeremiah a fortified city, with iron bolt and brass walls, absolutely invincible in the coming struggle. **Application:** God's protection of us may consist, not in removing us from trouble, but in strengthening us to endure in trouble.
3. 18b-19a, What the people will do.
- a) Who will oppose him? Everybody, "the whole land," emphasized by enumerating the several groups.
 - 1) the kings of Judah (recall that Jeremiah's ministry extends over five reigns)
 - 2) the princes (members of the court)
 - 3) the priests (! Sadly, just because one is labeled a clergyman does not make that person a believer, and our reforms must often be directed against them.)
 - 4) the people of the land, the common people. Jeremiah is not even representing the common man against the leaders. He is all alone!
 - b) 19, the outcome: they will oppose him, but will not defeat him.
 - c) Reason: repetition of promise of verse 8, "I am with thee to deliver thee."