

# Jeremiah

## Chapter 1

**The words of Jeremiah, the son of Hilkiah, one of the priests who were in Anathoth in the land of Benjamin, 2 to whom the word of the LORD came in the days of Josiah the son of Amon, king of Judah, in the thirteenth year of his reign. 3 It came also in the days of Jehoiakim the son of Josiah, king of Judah, and until the end of the eleventh year of Zedekiah, the son of Josiah, king of Judah, until the captivity of Jerusalem in the fifth month.**

**1:1–3** The background and setting of Jeremiah's call are stated concisely but comprehensively. (CSB)

Jeremiah presents credentials for his authority to speak and for his claim to be heard. He is the ambassador of the Lord God, who shapes the lives of individuals and determines the destiny of nations. (TLSB)

Preface supplying information about the prophet: his name, parentage, birthplace, and the era of his activity. (TLSB)

Called to the unhappy task of announcing the destruction of the kingdom of Judah (thoroughly corrupted by the long and evil reign of Manasseh and only superficially affected by Josiah's efforts at reform), it was Jeremiah's commission to lodge God's indictment against his people and proclaim the end of an era. At long last, the Lord was about to inflict on the remnant of his people the ultimate covenant curse (see Lev 26:31–33; Dt 28:49–68). He would undo all that he had done for them since the day he brought them out of Egypt. It would then seem that the end had come, that Israel's stubborn and uncircumcised (unconsecrated) heart had sealed her final destiny, that God's chosen people had been cast off, that all the ancient promises and covenants had come to nothing. (CSB)

But God's judgment of his people (and the nations), though terrible, was not to be the last word, the final work of God in history. Mercy and covenant faithfulness would triumph. Beyond the judgment would come restoration and renewal. Israel would be restored, the nations that crushed her would be crushed, and the old covenants (with Israel, David and the Levites) would be honored. God would make a new covenant with his people in which he would write his law on their hearts (31:31–34) and thus consecrate them to his service. The house of David would rule them in righteousness, and faithful priests would serve. God's commitment to Israel's redemption was as unailing as the secure order of creation (ch. 33). (CSB)

Jeremiah's message illumined the distant as well as the near horizon. It was false prophets who proclaimed peace to a rebellious nation, as though the God of Israel's peace was indifferent to her unfaithfulness. But the very God who compelled Jeremiah to denounce sin and pronounce judgment was the God who authorized him to announce that the divine wrath had its bounds, its 70 years. Afterward forgiveness and cleansing would come—and a new day, in which all the old expectations, aroused by God's past acts and his promises and covenants, would yet be fulfilled in a manner transcending all God's mercies of old. (CSB)

**1:1** *Jeremiah*. Nine other OT men had the same name (see 1Ch 5:24; 12:4, 10, 13; Ne 10:2; 12:1, 34), two of whom were the prophet's contemporaries (Jer 35:3; 52:1). (CSB)

*Hilkiah*. Means “The LORD is my portion.” For Hilkiah’s possible relationship to a priestly house dating back to King Solomon see Introduction: Author and Date. Two other men named Hilkiah (a common OT name) were also Jeremiah’s contemporaries. (CSB)

Jeremiah’s father likely was a member of the clan associated with Abiathar, the high priest whom Solomon banished to Anathoth (1Ki 2:26). The high priest during the reign of King Josiah (therefore a contemporary of Jeremiah) was also named Hilkiah (2Ki 22:4–14), though he belonged to a different Levitical family. (TLSB)

*priests*. Like Ezekiel (Eze 1:3) and Zechariah, Jeremiah was both prophet and priest. (CSB)

*Anathoth*. See 11:21–23; 32:6–9. The Hebrew word is the plural form of the name of the Canaanite deity Anat(h), goddess of war. Anathoth had had priestly connections in Israel as early as the times of Joshua (Jos 21:18) and Solomon (1Ki 2:26), and its pagan origins had presumably been almost forgotten by Jeremiah’s time. Present-day Anata, three miles northeast of Jerusalem, preserves the ancient name, though the ancient site was about half a mile southwest of Anata. (CSB)

Village c 3 mi NE of Jerusalem, assigned to the Levites. (TLSB)

*Benjamin*. Anathoth was one of the four Levitical towns in the tribal territory of Benjamin (Jos 21:17–18), and after the exile Benjamites settled there again (Ne 11:31–32). (CSB)

**1:2–3** Cf 2Ki 22–25. Three of the last five kings of Judah are mentioned; the other two reigned only three months each: Josiah’s son Jehoahaz, called Shallum (2Ki 22:11), was deposed by Pharaoh Neco; Jehoiakim’s son Jehoiachin, called Coniah and Jeconiah (2Ki 23:24; 24:1), was removed from office and taken to Babylon by Nebuchadnezzar. (TLSB)

**1:2** *The word of the LORD came*. The most common way of introducing a divine oracle at the beginning of a prophetic book (see Eze 1:3; Jnh 1:1; Hag 1:1; Zec 1:1; cf. Hos 1:1; Joel 1:1; Mic 1:1; Zep 1:1). (CSB)

*to whom*. Beginning in v. 4, Jeremiah speaks in the first person (see, e.g., vv. 11, 13; 2:1). (CSB)

*thirteenth year*. 626 B.C. (see 25:3). (CSB)

*Josiah*. See 3:6; 36:2. He was the last good and godly king of Judah. Jeremiah sympathized with and supported his attempts at spiritual reformation and renewal (see 22:15b–16), which began in earnest in 621 (see 2Ki 22:3–23:25; 2Ch 34:8–35:19; cf. 2Ch 34:3–7). (CSB)

**1:3** *Jehoiakim*. His predecessor (Jehoahaz) and successor (Jehoiachin) are not mentioned, since they each reigned only three months. In contrast to his father Josiah, Jehoiakim was a wicked ruler (see 2Ki 23:36–37; 2Ch 36:5)—as Jeremiah discovered almost immediately (see Introduction: Background; see also 22:13–15a, 17–19; 26:20–23). (CSB)

*end of the eleventh year*. Ab (July–August), 586 B.C. (see 52:12). (CSB)

587 BC. On the seventh of Av, Nebuzaradan began to destroy Jerusalem. More than 40 years elapsed from the time the Word of the Lord first came to Jeremiah in the 13th year of Josiah’s

reign (c 628 BC) to this tragic point in Israel's history. When it was no longer possible to date events by the regnal years of a king, "the captivity of Jerusalem" served to indicate the setting of Jeremiah's ministry (e.g., 41:1). However, no dates are supplied to establish how long he served the refugees who took him to Egypt (43:5–7). (TLSB)

*Zedekiah.* The last king of Judah (see Introduction: Background), as wicked in his own way as Jehoiakim (see 52:1–2; 2Ch 36:11–14; see also Jer 24:8; 37:1–2). (CSB)

**1:1–3** Jeremiah introduces himself and the historical context of his ministry. God sent prophets like Jeremiah to convict His people of their sin so that they might repent and return to Him. In mercy, God patiently waited, providing ample time for repentance. He is likewise patient toward you, whom He calls to repentance and true faith in Christ. • Father, I thank You for Your Word: the Law to reveal my sin and guide my conduct, and the Gospel to show me the Savior and Your love through Him. Amen. (TLSB)

### *The Call of Jeremiah*

**4** Now the word of the LORD came to me, saying, **5** "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." **6** Then I said, "Ah, Lord GOD! Behold, I do not know how to speak, for I am only a youth." **7** 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. **8** Do not be afraid of them, for I am with you to deliver you, declares the LORD." **9** 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. **10** 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." **11** And the word of the LORD came to me, saying, "Jeremiah, what do you see?" And I said, "I see an almond[a] branch." **12** Then the LORD said to me, "You have seen well, for I am watching over my word to perform it." **13** The word of the LORD came to me a second time, saying, "What do you see?" And I said, "I see a boiling pot, facing away from the north." **14** Then the LORD said to me, "Out of the north disaster shall be let loose upon all the inhabitants of the land. **15** For behold, I am calling all the tribes of the kingdoms of the north, declares the LORD, and they shall come, and every one shall set his throne at the entrance of the gates of Jerusalem, against all its walls all around and against all the cities of Judah. **16** And I will declare my judgments against them, for all their evil in forsaking me. They have made offerings to other gods and worshiped the works of their own hands. **17** But you, dress yourself for work; arise, and say to them everything that I command you. Do not be dismayed by them, lest I dismay you before them. **18** And I, behold, I make you this day a fortified city, an iron pillar, and bronze walls, against the whole land, against the kings of Judah, its officials, its priests, and the people of the land. **19** They will fight against you, but they shall not prevail against you, for I am with you, declares the LORD, to deliver you."

**4–19** The account of Jeremiah's call includes two prophetic visions (vv. 10–16) and some closing words of exhortation and encouragement (vv. 17–19). (CSB)

**1:4–10** Consecrated to the prophetic office before he was born, this youth was neither a wide-eyed visionary nor a self-appointed rabble-rouser. God commissioned Jeremiah to speak His words, charged with the power to destroy whatever opposed the kingdom of God and to build whatever would promote its coming. (TLSB)

**1:4** *the word of the Lord came to me* – It is always God who initiates his call to us. It is not something we find either by searching or by accident. That should inspire confidence in us because left to our own devices we would be in big trouble. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 14, Part 1)

This immediately removes prophecy from the realm of subjectivity. Jeremiah does not feel some inner stirring or a sense of the divine. He is the recipient of a verbal revelation. Biblical prophecy is no more and no less than relaying to others the word of Yahweh that the prophet himself has received. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 14, Part 1)

The Word of the Lord would be the anchor of Jeremiah’s life, holding him securely in all the fierce tests he would face. (PBC)

**1:5** *I formed you.* See Isa 49:5. God’s creative act (see Ge 2:7; Ps 119:73) is the basis of his sovereign right (see 18:4–6; Isa 43:21) to call Jeremiah into his service. (CSB)

Cyril of Jerusalem: “He is not ashamed to assume flesh, who is the framer of those very members.... Let the mouths of all heretics be stopped who slander their bodies, or rather Him who formed them” (*NPNF 2 7:79*). (TLSB)

St Bernard of Clairvaux says, “How beautifully the Divine oracle has distinguished between conception in the womb and birth from the womb! and showed that if the one was foreseen only, the other was blessed beforehand with the gift of holiness: that no one might think that the glory of Jeremiah consisted only in being the object of the foreknowledge of God, but also of His predestination” (*SLSB*, pp 302–3). (TLSB)

God the Creator is speaking to Jeremiah. Jeremiah, who comes forth from his mother’s womb, is “formed,” no less lovingly by Yahweh, the Creator, than was Adam. In God’s economy of gracious purpose, Jeremiah should know his value to be equal to the first man, for Jeremiah, too, has a unique worth based on God’s having formed him for a purpose. God does not call His prophet to embark on a task for which Jeremiah must find the way or the ability or the purpose. God has formed and given life to Jeremiah for this very calling. (This verb, which comes from the vocabulary of pottery, will become important in its participial form in Jeremiah’s later proclamation [18:2-6]). These words apply not only to Jeremiah, but more important, to Christ Himself. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 14, Part 1)

*I knew you.* In the sense of making Jeremiah the object of his choice. The Hebrew verb used here is translated “chosen” in Ge 18:19; Am 3:2. (CSB)

Yahweh, in contrast to the false gods, alone can know and be known in such perfect closeness (see Jer 44:3; also note referring to God’s knowledge of Moses in Deut 34:10). God reassures Jeremiah with *is*. What matters most is that Yahweh knows Jeremiah. Jeremiah will also come to know Yahweh, but that is not the determinative *fac*. Who knows God the Father, and is known by Him, more profoundly than God the Son? Indeed He says, “I and the father are one” (John 10-30) (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 14, Part 1)

*I consecrated you* – “I sanctified you.” The Hebrew verb here is virtually always used in a sacral sense in both Hebrew and related languages, and it should not be translated “set apart.” Far better is the NRSV’ “I consecrated you” or the KJV and NKJV’s “sanctified.” The Lord is declaring that His intention for Jeremiah involves sacred ministry. While Jeremiah is set apart by virtue of his priestly ancestry (see Jer 1:1), this personal reference indicates something beyond

that and is best explained in apposition to the third stitch of the verse: “a prophet to the nations, I appointed you.” Jeremiah’s life was hallowed for this prophetic task from conception. But then, who is more sanctified, who more consecrated, than Jesus? He was the Lamb of God, sinless and holy. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 14, Part 1)

*I appointed you.* The Hebrew for this verb is not the same as that in v. 10, but both refer to the commissioning of the prophet. (CSB)

KJV and NKJV read “ordained.” Aside from the translation question, it is plain that God wanted Jeremiah to understand – without ambiguity – where He was calling him and for what purpose. We see Jesus also in these words. His baptism was the point of inauguration – His ordination, if you will – of His ministry. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 14, Part 1)

*prophet.* Lit. “one who has been called” to be God’s spokesman (see Ex 7:1–2; 1Sa 9:9 and notes). (CSB)

*nations.* Although Judah’s neighbors are probably the primary focus (see 25:8–38; chs. 46–51), Judah herself is not excluded. (CSB)

This is no small calling. Jeremiah’s calling is to no parochial ministry, but to a universal prophetic ministry (to the nations), declaring a truth from the Creator of all nations to all His created humanity, not to Israel alone. Jesus came to the house of Israel, but in course of His earthly ministry we see Him constantly extending grace to the Gentiles. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 14, Part 1)

**1:6** *I do not know how to speak.* Like Moses (Ex 4:10), Jeremiah claimed inability to be a prophet; God nevertheless made him his spokesman (15:19). (CSB)

Jeremiah wasn’t the first to use this excuse. Moses used it when God asked him to go to Pharaoh. Out sinful nature would have us quickly want to find a reason not to do what God asks.

*only a youth.* See 1Ki 3:7. Jeremiah’s objection is denied immediately by the Lord (v. 7). (CSB)

Though the date of Jeremiah’s birth is unknown, he was likely under 20 years old. God overcame this young man’s hesitation to assume his task just as He did in the case of others called to His service (Ex 3:1-4:17; Jdgs 6:11-18; cf 1 Sam 17:33, 42; Gal 1:15-16; 1 Tim 4:12). (TLSB)

**1:7** Youth and inexperience do not disqualify when God calls (see 1Ti 4:12); he equips and sustains those he commissions. (CSB)

*do not say* – God does not go for our excuses.

**1:8** *Do not be afraid.* This much like the phrase “fear not” which Jesus used often. Some have said that one can find it 365 times in the NT (one for each day of the year).

*I am with you.* See v. 19; 15:20. God’s promise of his continuing presence should calm the fears of the most reluctant of prophets (see Ex 3:12; see also note on Ge 26:3). (CSB)

Jesus also said this when he was about to ascend into heaven. He even added “always, to the very end of the age.” Matthew 28:20. God never asks us to do something that he isn’t right there be by our side.

*deliver.* † See v. 19; 15:20; 39:17. The Lord does not promise that Jeremiah will not be persecuted or imprisoned, but that he will never be beyond the Lord’s help. (CSB)

God will have none of Jeremiah’s objection, for he fails to appreciate that God’s call in nonnegotiable. A divine “because I said so” is reason enough for acquiescence, but even more reason is given: “Fear not, for I am with you, to deliver you.” God’s presence alone will provide the basis for Jeremiah’s work. That presence will later offer Jeremiah consolation in the midst of the prophetic task (Jer 20:11). What manner of deliverance and how it will occur is left to divine discretion with an implied call to trust that it will be the deliverance needed for every circumstance. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 14, Part 1)

**1:9** *touched my mouth.* Either in prophetic vision (see note on v. 11) or figuratively—or both (cf. Isa 6:7). (CSB)

*I have put my words in your mouth.* Continues the figure of speech begun earlier in the verse and provides a classic description of the relationship between the Lord and his prophet (see 5:14; Ex 4:15; Nu 22:38; 23:5, 12, 16; Dt 18:18; Isa 51:16; cf. 2Pe 1:21). (CSB)

Jeremiah’s words are God’s words. Jeremiah repeatedly uses prophetic statements such as “declares the Lord,” “thus says the Lord,” and “the word of the Lord came.” No allowance is made for the possibility that God’s Word is no longer true in all respects because it is transmitted by a fallible prophet. (TLSB)

Jesus promises the same thing when he states “...do not worry about to say or how to say it. At that time you will be given what to say, for it will not be you speaking, but the Spirit of your father speaking through you.” Matthew 10:18-20. He said this to his disciples before sending them out for ministry.

**1:10** *I have you this day.* We are never sent on unimportant errands. Whatever he has to do for us helps to build his kingdom.

*Pluck up and break... destroy and overthrow ... build and ... plant.* † See 12:14–15, 17; 18:7–10; 24:6; 31:28; 42:10; 45:4. The first two pairs of verbs are negative, stressing the fact that Jeremiah is to be first a prophet of doom, while the last pair is positive, indicating that he is also to be a prophet of restoration. The first verb (“uproot”) is the opposite of the last (“plant”), and fully half of the verbs (“tear down,” “destroy,” “overthrow”) are the opposite of “build.”(CSB)

Four verbs of destruction are used (in contrast with two verbs of construction) because destruction will dominate Jeremiah’s message to sinful Judah. Melancton says, “The voice of the Law condemning sins must constantly be set forth and taught in the church, and indeed it would be a monstrous crime to conceal God’s judgment and His voice which announces His wrath against sin” (Chem, *LTh* 2:438). *build ... plant.* Thorough destruction will clear the way for the Lord to restore the nation. (TLSB)

**1:11–19** It was only natural for the timid, inexperienced young man from a country town to stand aghast at the worldwide results his ministry was to produce. The Lord therefore reveals to

Jeremiah that he is simply to announce what is to happen; the responsibility for bringing about the threats and promises belongs to the Lord Himself. (TLSB)

**1:11-12** An object lesson gives Jeremiah additional assurance that the words put in his mouth would come true because they were the Lord's. The message is conveyed by means of a wordplay on the Hebrew noun "shaked" (almond) and participle "shoked" (watch or awaken). AS the almond tree awakens and blossoms early in spring, so the Creator of the universe, from the very beginning, is alert to perform His word. Similar visionary experiences were accorded the prophet Amos (Am 7:1-9; 8:1-2). (TLSB)

**1:11** *What do you see ... ?* Often spoken by the Lord (or his representative) to introduce a prophetic vision (see v. 13; Am 7:8; 8:2; Zec 4:2; 5:2).(CSB)

**1:12** *watching.* Just as the almond tree (v. 11) blooms first in the year (and therefore "wakes up" early—the Hebrew word for "watching" means to be wakeful), so the Lord is ever watchful to make sure that his word is fulfilled. (CSB)

**1:13–14** Because the fire under the boiling pot was fanned by a wind from the north, it would be from that direction that disaster would come. The Babylonian invaders entered Judah from the north and inundated it, as Jeremiah was ordered to prophesy (6:22; 25:9). (TLSB)

**1:13** *boiling pot.* The Hebrew for this word is translated "caldron" in Job 41:31 and stresses its large size (see Eze 24:3–5). (CSB)

**1:14** *shall be loose upon.* The Hebrew for this word has a similar sound to that for "boiling" in v. 13. Although the verb usually means "be opened," in Isa 14:17 it is translated "let ... go," a meaning similar to that in this verse. (CSB)

*land.* Judah. (CSB)

**1:15** *tribes of the kingdoms of the north.* Since Assyria posed a minimal threat to Judah after the death of Ashurbanipal in 627 B.C., reference is most likely to Babylon and her allies. (CSB)

*set up his throne ... entrance of Jerusalem.* For the fulfillment see 39:3. Since the gateway of a city was the place where its ruling council sat (see notes on Ge 19:1; Ru 4:1), the Babylonians replaced Judah's royal authority with their own (cf. 43:10; 49:38). (TLSB)

**1:16** *my judgments against them.*† God judges his own for their sins, using the Babylonians as his agents of judgment. (CSB)

*made offerings to to other gods.* A common feature of pagan worship (e.g., 7:9; 11:12–13, 17; 18:15; 19:13; 32:29; 44:17). (CSB)

*works of their hands have.* Idols (see 16:19–20; 25:6; 2Ki 22:17; 2Ch 33:22; Isa 46:6). (CSB)

**1:17** *dress yourself for work.* Lit. "Tighten your belt around your waist!" For related expressions see Ex 12:11; 1Ki 18:46; 2Ki 4:29; 9:1; Job 38:3; 40:7. (CSB)

**1:18** *do not be dismayed by them.* A symbol of security and impregnability (see 5:17; Pr 18:11, 19). (CSB)

*iron pillar.* Unique in the OT, the expression signifies dignity and strength. (CSB)

*bronze walls.* See 15:20. Jeremiah would be able to withstand the abuse and persecution that his divine commission would evoke, even though his enemies themselves would be “bronze and iron” (6:28). (CSB)

*kings ... officials ... priests ... people.* The whole nation would defy the prophet and his God (see, e.g., 2:26; 23:8; 32:32). (CSB)

All attempts to intimidate or silence Jeremiah would prove as ineffectual as attacks against the tightest of defenses. (TLSB)

**1:19** *they fight against you* – The Lord did not commission His prophet under the illusion that his task would win him popular acclaim. The violent opposition Jeremiah would encounter foreshadows the hostility that Jesus, the Prophet of Nazareth, had to endure. (TLSB)

*I am with you* – This assurance serving as the source of the prophet's strength in the coming trials. It has happened more than once in the history of the Church that practically a single man was obliged to stand against the enmity of the mighty ones of the earth and of the masses of people as well, but that he maintained his righteous cause in the power of the Lord. (Kretzmann)

**1:4–19** Jeremiah records the details of his call to the prophetic ministry, including two visions and God's promises to be with him. Through Jeremiah, God would warn His people of impending judgment for their sins. Idolatry and immorality eventually bring disaster upon sinners. God wants His people to repent and turn back to Him, averting disaster and receiving God's mercy. • Grant us confidence in Your Word, O Lord. Turn us from sin so we may rejoice in Your salvation, serving You faithfully in Jesus Christ, our Savior. Amen. (TLSB)