

CHAPTER 1

In this chapter we have,

I. The general inscription or title of this book, with the time of the continuance of Jeremiah's public ministry (v. 1-3).

II. The call of Jeremiah to the prophetic office, his modest objection against it answered, and an ample commission given him for the execution of it (v. 4-10).

III. The visions of an almond-rod and a seething-pot, signifying the approaching ruin of Judah and Jerusalem by the Chaldeans (v. 11-16).

IV. Encouragement given to the prophet to go on undauntedly in his work, in an assurance of God's presence with him (v. 17-19). Thus is he set to work by one that will be sure to bear him out.

<200>JEREMIAH 1:1-3

THE INSCRIPTION

We have here as much as it was thought fit we should know of the genealogy of this prophet and the chronology of this prophecy.

1. We are told what family the prophet was of. He was *the son of Hilkiah*, not that Hilkiah, it is supposed, who was high priest in Josiah's time (for then he would have been called so, and not, as here, one *of the priests that were in Anathoth*), but another of the same name. Jeremiah signifies one *raised up by the Lord*. It is said of Christ that he is a prophet whom the Lord our God *raised up unto us*, <585> Deuteronomy 18:15, 18. He was *of the priests*, and, as a priest, was authorized and appointed to teach the people; but to that authority and appointment God added the extraordinary commission of a prophet. Ezekiel also was a priest. Thus God would support the honour of the priesthood at a time when, by their sins and God's judgments upon them, it was sadly eclipsed. He was of the priests in Anathoth, a city of priests, which lay about three miles from Jerusalem. Abiathar had his country house there, <1026> 1 Kings 2:26.

2. We have the general date of his prophecies, the knowledge of which is requisite to the understanding of them.

(1.) He began to prophesy in the thirteenth year of Josiah's reign, v. 2. Josiah, in the twelfth year of his reign, began a work of reformation, applied himself with all sincerity to purge Judah and Jerusalem from the *high places, and the groves, and the images*, ^{<140B>}2 Chronicles 34:3. And very seasonably then was this young prophet raised up to assist and encourage the young king in that good work. Then *the word of the Lord* came to him, not only a charge and commission to him to prophesy, but a revelation of the things themselves which he was to deliver. As it is an encouragement to ministers to be countenanced and protected by such pious magistrates as Josiah was, so it is a great help to magistrates, in any good work of reformation, to be advised and animated, and to have a great deal of their work done for them, by such faithful zealous ministers as Jeremiah was. Now, one would have expected when these two joined forces, such a prince, and such a prophet (as in a like case, ^{<140B>}Ezra 5:1, 2), and both young, such a complete reformation would be brought about and settled as would prevent the ruin of the church and state; but it proved quite otherwise. In the eighteenth year of Josiah we find there were a great many of the relics of idolatry that were not purged out; for what can the best princes and prophets do to prevent the ruin of a people that hate to be reformed? And therefore, though it was a time of reformation, Jeremiah continued to foretel the destroying judgments that were coming upon them; for there is no symptom more threatening to any people than fruitless attempts of reformation. Josiah and Jeremiah would have healed them, but they would not be healed.

(2.) He continued to prophesy through the reigns of Jehoiakim and Zedekiah, each of whom reigned eleven years. He prophesied *to the carrying away of Jerusalem captive* (v. 3), that great event which he had so often prophesied of. He continued to prophesy after that, ^{<240B>}Jeremiah 40:1. But the computation here is made to end with that because it was the accomplishment of many of his predictions; and from the thirteenth of Josiah to the captivity was just forty years. Dr. Lightfoot observes that as Moses was so long with the people, a teacher in the wilderness, till they entered into their own land, Jeremiah was so long in their own land a teacher, before they went into the wilderness of the heathen: and he thinks that *therefore* a special mark is set upon the last forty years of the iniquity of Judah, which Ezekiel bore forty days, a day for a year, because during

all that time they had Jeremiah prophesying among them, which was a great aggravation of their impenitency. God, in this prophet, suffered their manners, their ill manners, forty years, and at length swore in his wrath that they should not continue in his rest.

~~<200>~~ JEREMIAH 1:4-10

JEREMIAH'S CALL TO THE PROPHETIC OFFICE

Here is,

I. Jeremiah's early designation to the work and office of a prophet, which God gives him notice of as a reason for his early application to that business (v. 4, 5): *The word of the Lord came to him*, with a satisfying assurance to himself that it was the word of the Lord and not a delusion; and God told him,

1. That he had *ordained him a prophet to the nations, or against the nations*, the nation of the Jews in the first place, who are now *reckoned among the nations* because they had learned their works and mingled with them in their idolatries, for otherwise they would not have been numbered with them, ~~<920>~~ Numbers 23:9. Yet he was given to be a prophet, not to the Jews only, but to the neighbouring nations, to whom he was to *send yokes* (~~<270>~~ Jeremiah 27:2, 3) and whom he must make to *drink of the cup* of the Lord's anger, ~~<257>~~ Jeremiah 25:17. He is still in his writings a prophet to the nations (to our nation among the rest), to tell them what the national judgments are which may be expected for national sins. It would be well for the nations would they take Jeremiah for their prophet and attend to the warnings he gives them.

2. That before he was born, even in his eternal counsel, he had designed him to be so. Let him know that he who gave him his commission is the same that gave him his being, that *formed him in the belly* and brought him *forth out of the womb*, that therefore he was his rightful owner and might employ him and make use of him as he pleased, and that this commission was given him in pursuance of the purpose God had purposed in himself concerning him, before he was born: *"I knew thee, and I sanctified thee,"* that is, "I determined that thou shouldst be a prophet and set thee apart for the office." Thus St. Paul says of himself that God had

separated him from his mother's womb to be a Christian and an apostle, ^{<415}Galatians 1:15. Observe,

(1.) The great Creator knows what use to make of every man before he makes him. He has *made all for himself*, and of the same lumps of clay designs *a vessel of honour or dishonour*, as he pleases, ^{<415}Romans 9:21.

(2.) What God has designed men for he will call them to; for his purposes cannot be frustrated. Known unto God are all his own works beforehand, and his knowledge is infallible and his purpose unchangeable.

(3.) There is a particular purpose and providence of God conversant about his prophets and ministers; they are by special counsel designed for their work, and what they are designed for they are fitted for: I that *knew thee, sanctified thee*. God destines them to it, and forms them for it, when he first forms the spirit of man within him. *Propheta nascitur, non fit* — *Original endowment, not education, makes a prophet*.

II. His modestly declining this honourable employment, v. 6. Though God had predestinated him to it, yet it was news to him, and a mighty surprise, to hear that he should be *a prophet to the nations*. We know not what God intends us for, but he knows. One would have thought he would catch at it as a piece of preferment, for so it was; but he objects against it, as a work for which he is unqualified: “*Ah, Lord God! behold, I cannot speak to great men and multitudes, as prophets must; I cannot speak finely nor fluently, cannot word things well, as a message from God should be worded; I cannot speak with any authority, nor can expect to be heeded, for I am a child and my youth will be despised.*” Note, It becomes us, when we have any service to do for God, to be afraid lest we mismanage it, and lest it suffer through our weakness and unfitness for it; it becomes us likewise to have low thoughts of ourselves and to be diffident of our own sufficiency. Those that are young should consider that they are so, should be afraid, as Elihu was, and not venture beyond their length.

III. The assurance God graciously gave him that he would stand by him and carry him on in his work.

1. Let him not object that he is a child; he shall be a prophet for all that (v. 7): “*Say no any more, I am a child. It is true thou art; but,*”

(1.) “*Thou hast God's precept, and let not thy being young hinder thee from obeying it. Go to all to whom I shall send thee and speak whatsoever*

I command thee.” Note, Though a sense of our own weakness and insufficiency should make us go humbly about our work, yet it should not make us draw back from it when God calls us to it. God was angry with Moses even for his modest excuses, ^{<044>}Exodus 4:14.

(2.) “Thou hast God's presence, and let not thy being young discourage thee from depending upon it. Though thou art a child, thou shalt be *enabled to go to all to whom I shall send thee*, though they are ever so great and ever so many. And *whatsoever I command thee* thou shalt have judgment, memory, and language, wherewith to speak it as it should be spoken.” Samuel delivered a message from God to Eli, when he was a little child. Note, God can, when he pleases, make children prophets, and *ordain strength out of the mouth of babes and sucklings*.

2. Let him not object that he shall meet with many enemies and much opposition; God will be his protector (v. 8): “*Be not afraid of their races; though they look big, and so think to outface thee and put thee out of countenance, yet be not afraid to speak to them; no, not to speak that to them which is most displeasing. Thou speakest in the name of the King of kings, and by authority from him, and with that thou mayest face them down. Though they look angry, be not afraid of their displeasure nor disturbed with apprehensions of the consequences of it.*” Those that have messages to deliver from God must not be *afraid of the face of man*, ^{<000>}Ezekiel 3:9. “And thou hast cause both to be bold and easy; for *I am with thee*, not only to assist thee in thy work, but to deliver thee out of the hands of the persecutors; and, *if God be for thee, who can be against thee?*” If God do not deliver his ministers from trouble, it is to the same effect if he support them under their trouble. Mr. Gataker well observes here, That earthly princes are not wont to go along with their ambassadors; but God goes along with those whom he sends, and is, by his powerful protection, at all times and in all places present with them; and with this they ought to animate themselves, ^{<480>}Acts 18:10.

3. Let him not object that he cannot speak as becomes him — God will enable him to speak.

(1.) To speak intelligently, and as one that had acquaintance with God, v. 9. He having now a vision of the divine glory, the Lord *put forth his hand*, and by a sensible sign conferred upon him so much of the gift of the tongue as was necessary for him: *He touched his mouth*, and with that touch *opened his lips*, that his mouth should show forth God's praise, with

that touch sweetly conveyed *his words into his mouth*, to be ready to him upon all occasions, so that he could never want words who was thus furnished by him that *made man's mouth*. God not only put knowledge into his head, but *words into his mouth*; for there are *words which the Holy Ghost teaches*, ^{<402>}1 Corinthians 2:13. It is fit God's message should be delivered in his own words, that it may be delivered accurately.

^{<403>}Ezekiel 3:4, *Speak with my words*. And those that faithfully do so shall not want instructions as the case requires; God will give them a mouth and wisdom *in that same hour*, ^{<404>}Matthew 10:19.

(2.) To speak powerfully, and as one that had authority from God, v. 10. It is a strange commission that is here given him: *See, I have this day set thee over the nations and over the kingdoms*. This sounds very great, and yet Jeremiah is a poor despicable priest still; he is not set over the kingdoms as a prince to rule them by the sword, but as a prophet by the power of the word of God. Those that would hence prove the pope's supremacy over kings, and his authority to depose them and dispose of their kingdoms at his pleasure, must prove that he has the same extraordinary spirit of prophecy that Jeremiah had, else how can he have the power that Jeremiah had by virtue of that spirit? And yet the power that Jeremiah had (who, notwithstanding his power, lived in meanness and contempt, and under oppression) would not content these proud men. Jeremiah was *set over the nations*, the Jewish nation in the first place, and other nations, some great ones besides, against whom he prophesied; he was set over them, not to demand tribute from them nor to enrich himself with their spoils, but to *root out, and pull down, and destroy*, and yet *withal to build and plant*.

[1.] He must attempt to reform the nations, to *root out, and pull down, and destroy* idolatry and other wickednesses among them, to extirpate those vicious habits and customs which had long taken root, to *throw down* the kingdom of sin, that religion and virtue might be *planted and built* among them. And, to the introducing and establishing of that which is good, it is necessary that that which is evil be removed.

[2.] He must tell them that it would be well or ill with them according as they were, or were not, reformed. He must set before them *life and death, good and evil*, according to God's declaration of the method he takes with kingdoms and nations, ^{<288>}Jeremiah 18:9-10. He must assure those who persisted in their wickedness that they should be *rooted out and destroyed*,

and those who repented that they should be *built and planted*. He was authorized to read the doom of nations, and God would *ratify it* and *fulfil it* (²⁴⁰⁵Isaiah 44:26), would do it according to his word, and therefore is said to do it *by* his word. It is thus expressed partly to show how sure the word of prophecy is — it will as certainly be accomplished as if it were done already, and partly to put an honour upon the prophetic office and make it look truly great, that others may not despise the prophets nor they disparage themselves. And yet more honourable does the gospel ministry look, in that declarative power Christ gave his apostles to *remit and retain sin* (⁴⁰¹²John 20:23), *to bind and loose*, (⁴⁰¹⁸Matthew 18:18).

²⁴¹¹JEREMIAH 1:11-19

JEREMIAH'S VISION

Here,

I. God gives Jeremiah, in vision, a view of the principal errand he was to go upon, which was to foretel the destruction of Judah and Jerusalem by the Chaldeans, for their sins, especially their idolatry. This was at first represented to him in a way proper to make an impression upon him, that he might have it upon his heart in all his dealings with this people.

1. He intimates to him that the people were ripening apace for ruin and that ruin was hastening apace towards them. God, having answered his objection, that he was *a child*, goes on to initiate him in the prophetic learning and language; and, having promised to enable him to speak intelligibly to the people, he here teaches him to understand what God says to him; for prophets must have eyes in their heads as well as tongues, must be seers as well as speakers. He therefore asks him, "*Jeremiah, what seest thou? Look about thee, and observe now.*" And he was soon aware of what was presented to him: "*I see a rod, denoting affliction and chastisement, a correcting rod hanging over us; and it is a rod of an almond-tree, which is one of the forwardest trees in the spring, is in the bud and blossom quickly, when other trees are scarcely broken out;*" it flourishes, says Pliny, in the month of January, and by March has ripe fruits; hence it is called in the Hebrew, *Shakedh*, the *hasty tree*. Whether this rod that Jeremiah saw had already budded, as some think, or whether it was stripped and dry, as others think, and yet Jeremiah knew it to be of an

almond-tree, as Aaron's rod was, is uncertain; but God explained it in the next words (v. 12): *Thou hast well seen*. God commended him that he was so observant, and so quick of apprehension, as to be aware, though it was the first vision he ever saw, that it was *a rod of an almond-tree*, that his mind was so composed as to be able to distinguish. Prophets have need of good eyes; and those that see well shall be commended, and not those only that speak well. "Thou hast seen a *hasty tree*, which signifies that *I will hasten my word to perform it*." Jeremiah shall prophesy that which he himself shall live to see accomplished. We have the explication of this, ³¹⁷⁰Ezekiel 7:10, 11, "*The rod hath blossomed, pride hath budded, violence has risen up into a rod of wickedness*. The measure of Jerusalem's iniquity fills very fast; and, as if their destruction slumbered too long, they waken it, they hasten it, and I will hasten to perform what I have spoken against them."

2. He intimates to him whence the intended ruin should arise. Jeremiah is a second time asked: *What seest thou?* and he sees *a seething-pot* upon the fire (v. 13), representing Jerusalem and Judah in great commotion, like boiling water, by reason of the descent which the Chaldean army made upon them; made *like a fiery oven* (³¹⁷¹Psalm 21:9), all in a heat, wasting away as boiling water does and sensibly evaporating and growing less and less, ready to boil over, to be thrown out of their own city and land, as out of the pan into the fire, from bad to worse. Some think that those scoffers referred to this who said (³¹⁷²Ezekiel 11:3), *This city is the cauldron, and we are the flesh*. Now the mouth or face of the furnace or hearth, over which this pot boiled, was *towards the north*, for thence the fire and the fuel were to come that must *make the pot boil thus*. So the vision is explained (v. 14): *Out of the north an evil shall break forth, or shall be opened*. It had been long designed by the justice of God, and long deserved by the sin of the people, and yet hitherto the divine patience had restrained it, and held it in, as it were; the enemies had intended it, and God had checked them; but now all restraints shall be taken off, and the *evil shall break forth*; the direful scene shall open, and the enemy shall come in like a flood. It shall be a universal calamity; it shall come *upon all the inhabitants of the land*, from the highest to the lowest, for they have all corrupted their way. Look for this storm to arise *out of the north, whence fair weather usually comes*, ³¹⁷³Job 37:22. When there was friendship between Hezekiah and the king of Babylon they promised themselves many advantages *out of the north*; but it proved quite otherwise: *out of the*

north their trouble arose. Thence sometimes the fiercest tempests come whence we expected fair weather. This is further explained v. 15, where we may observe,

(1.) The raising of the army that shall invade Judah and lay it waste: *I will call all the families of the kingdoms of the north, saith the Lord.* All the northern crowns shall unite under Nebuchadnezzar, and join with him in this expedition. They lie dispersed, but God, who has all men's hearts in his hand, will bring them together; they lie at a distance from Judah, but God, who directs all men's steps, will call them, and they shall come, though they be ever so far off. God's summons shall be obeyed; those whom he calls shall come. When he has work to do of any kind he will find instruments to do it, though he send to the utmost parts of the earth for them. And, that the armies brought into the field may be sufficiently numerous and strong, he will call not only the *kingdoms of the north, but all the families* of those kingdoms, into the service; not one able-bodied man shall be left behind.

(2.) The advance of this army. The commanders of the troops of the several nations shall take their post in carrying on the siege of Jerusalem and the other cities of Judah. They shall set *every one his throne*, or seat. When a city is besieged we say, The enemy sits down before it. They shall encamp some at the *entering of the gates, others against the walls round about*, to cut off both the going out of the mouths and the coming in of the meat, and so to starve them.

3. He tells him plainly what was the procuring cause of all these judgments; it was the *sin of Jerusalem* and of the *cities of Judah* (v. 16): *I will pass sentence upon them* (so it may be read) or *give judgment against them* (this sentence, this judgment) *because of all their wickedness*; it is this that plucks up the flood-gates and lets in this inundation of calamities. They *have forsaken God* and revolted from their allegiance to him, and have *burnt incense to other gods*, new gods, strange gods, and all false gods, pretenders, usurpers, the creatures of their own fancy, and *they have worshipped the works of their own hands*. Jeremiah was young, had looked but little abroad into the world, and perhaps did not know, nor could have believed, what abominable idolatries the children of his people were guilty of; but God tells him, that he might know what to level his reproofs against and what to ground his threatenings upon, and that he

might himself be satisfied in the equity of the sentence which in God's name he was to pass upon them.

II. God excites and encourages Jeremiah to apply himself with all diligence and seriousness to his business. A great trust is committed to him. He is sent in God's name as a herald at arms, to proclaim war against his rebellious subjects; for God is pleased to give warning of his judgments beforehand, that sinners may be awakened to meet him by repentance, and so *turn away his wrath*, and that, if they do not, they may be left inexcusable. With this trust Jeremiah has a charge given him (v. 17): "*Thou, therefore, gird up thy loins; free thyself from all those things that would unfit thee for or hinder thee in this service; buckle to it with readiness and resolution, and be not entangled with doubts about it.*" He must be quick: *Arise*, and lose no time. He must be busy: *Arise, and speak unto them* in season, out of season. He must be bold: *Be not dismayed at their faces*, as before, v. 8. In a word, he must be faithful; it is required of ambassadors that they be so.

1. In two things he must be faithful: —

(1.) He must speak all that he is charged with: *Speak all that I command thee*. He must forget nothing as minute, or foreign, or not worth mentioning; every word of God is weighty. He must conceal nothing for fear of offending; he must alter nothing under pretence of making it more fashionable or more palatable, but, without addition or diminution, *declare the whole counsel of God*.

(2.) He must speak to all that he is charged against; he must not whisper it in a corner to a few particular friends that will take it well, but he must appear *against the kings of Judah*, if they be wicked kings, and bear his testimony against the sins even of *the princes thereof*; for the greatest of men are not exempt from the judgments either of God's hand or of his mouth. Nay, he must not spare *the priests thereof*; though he himself was a priest, and was concerned to maintain the dignity of his order, yet he must not therefore flatter them in their sins. He must appear against the *people of the land*, though they were his own people, as far as they were against the Lord.

2. Two reasons are here given why he should do thus: —

(1.) Because he had reason to fear the wrath of God if he should be false: “*Be not dismayed at their faces, so as to ??desert thy office, or shrink from the duty of it, lest I confound and dismay thee before them, lest I give thee up to thy faintheartedness.*” Those that consult their own credit, ease, and safety, more than their work and duty, are justly left of God to themselves, and to bring upon themselves the shame of their own cowardliness. Nay, *lest I reckon with thee for thy faintheartedness, and break thee to pieces*; so some read it. Therefore this prophet says (^{<2477>}Jeremiah 17:17), Lord, *be not thou a terror to me*. Note, The fear of God is the best antidote against the fear of man. Let us always be afraid of offending God, who after he has killed has power to cast into hell, and then we shall be in little danger of fearing the faces of men that can but kill the body, ^{<2114>}Luke 12:4, 5. See ^{<1344>}Nehemiah 4:14. It is better to have all the men in the world our enemies than God our enemy.

(2.) Because he had no reason to fear the wrath of men if he were faithful; for the God whom he served would protect him, and bear him out, so that they should neither sink his spirits nor drive him off from his work, should neither stop his mouth nor take away his life, till he had finished his testimony, v. 18. This young stripling of a prophet is made by the power of God as an impregnable city, fortified with iron pillars and surrounded with walls of brass; he sallies out upon the enemy in reproofs and threatenings, and *keeps them in awe*. They set upon him on every side; the kings and princes batter him with their power, the priests thunder against him with their church-censures, and *the people of the land* shoot their arrows at him, even slanderous and bitter words; but he shall keep his ground and make his part good with them; he shall still be a curb upon them (v. 19): *They shall fight against thee, but they shall not prevail to destroy thee, for I am with thee to deliver thee* out of their hands; nor shall they prevail to defeat the word that God sends them by Jeremiah, nor to deliver themselves; it shall take hold of them, for God is against them to destroy them. Note, Those who are sure that they have God with them (as he is if they be with him) need not, ought not, to be afraid, whoever is against them.