

Dr. Gary Yates, Jeremiah, Lecture 7, Jeremiah 1, The Call of Jeremiah

© 2024 Gary Yates and Ted Hildebrandt

This is Dr. Gary Yates in his instruction on the book of Jeremiah. This is session 7, Jeremiah 1, The Call of Jeremiah.

Our current session is going to focus on Jeremiah chapter one and the calling of Jeremiah as a prophet.

We'll also be looking at ways that Jeremiah, as the opening chapter of the book of Jeremiah, is also an introduction to the message of the book as a whole. We've taken some time in our earlier sessions to get the big picture and sort of the playing ground of Jeremiah. We've understood, or we've taken time to look at Jeremiah in light of the message and the theology of the prophets.

We took some time to look at the historical background. First of all, what was Jeremiah's perspective on the international scene and things that were happening with regard to Babylon. We also looked at Jeremiah's interaction in the domestic scene with the five last kings of Judah and how God is bringing about the collapse and the fall of the house of David because of its unfaithfulness.

In our last two sessions, we looked more at Jeremiah as a book and thought about the composition of the book, the way that it was written, the way that it was put together. Then, in our last section, we talked about the arrangement of the book of Jeremiah and how the book is arranged according to three sections. We have the words of judgment in chapters 1 to 25.

We have the stories of Judah's rejection of the word of God in 26 to 45. And then we have the oracles against the nation in 46 to 51. In Jeremiah chapter one, we have the beginning point, not just of the book, but of Jeremiah's ministry because we have the story of Jeremiah's calling.

Now in chapter one, verse one, we have this statement, the words of Jeremiah, the son of Hilkiyah, one of the priests who were in Anathoth in the land of Benjamin. As we look just at that brief biographical statement and identify a summary of Jeremiah's life, I'm reminded of the fact that God calls a specific individual. God calls a human being who in many ways was just like us, the weaknesses, the passions of an individual.

God is going to call this individual, Jeremiah, to maybe one of the most difficult ministries that anyone has ever encountered. Just some quick things about Jeremiah

as an individual that I think it's important for us to remember. Number one, Jeremiah is from the town of Anathoth.

It's mentioned in verse one. Anathoth was a small village about three miles northeast of Jerusalem. Joshua 21, verse eight, tells us that it was one of the 48 cities given to the Levites.

Also tells us in verse one that Jeremiah was the son of Hilkiah and Hilkiah was a priest. That meant that Jeremiah was from a priestly family. And maybe as a young man, as he was thinking about and mapping out the plans for his life, he was thinking about serving the Lord in the capacity of a priest in the way that his father had.

But Numbers chapter four, verse three seems to indicate for us that a priest began serving at the age of 30. And so, Jeremiah never had the opportunity to do that. God had some other plans in mind for him.

The third thing that we see in the calling about Jeremiah as an individual he's going to says in verse six, when God calls him, ah, Lord God, I do not know how to speak for I am only a youth. Jeremiah was called to be a prophet at a very young age. We don't know exactly what age Jeremiah was, but he began his ministry in 626 in the 13th year of Josiah.

And his ministry is going to extend until about 580. So, Jeremiah has a ministry of almost 50 years. So, we can imagine that he was very young at the time of his calling.

He says, I'm but a youth, I don't know how to speak. Now, when Jeremiah says, I am but a youth, he uses the word naar. And that word has a wide range of meanings and usage.

It can refer to a child that's an infant, or it can refer to someone who is an older boy. In Genesis chapter 22, it's the word that's used for Isaac when God commands Abraham to sacrifice him. And we know that Isaac is at least old enough to help his father carry the implements for the sacrifice as they're going up to the mountain.

But the word naar can also refer to a young man who is old enough to marry, or someone who is a servant, or someone who is old enough to go into war. We don't know exactly the age that Jeremiah is as he says this, but whatever age he is, Jeremiah believes that he's too young to do what God has called him to do. I'm but a child, Lord, I don't know how to speak.

Another thing about the calling of Jeremiah related to his personal life is that part of God's calling on Jeremiah's life meant that the Lord would ask him not to marry or to have children. And so in chapter 16, verses one to four, here's another aspect of the

calling of Jeremiah. It says there, the word of the Lord came to me, you shall not take a wife, nor shall you have sons or daughters in this place.

For thus says the Lord, concerning the sons and the daughters who were born in this place and concerning the mothers who bore them and the fathers who fathered them in this land, they shall die of deadly diseases. And so, the Lord, and this is probably conveyed at a later time in Jeremiah's ministry, the Lord did not allow Jeremiah to marry or to have children. Jeremiah's family life was going to become a sign act to the people of Israel that they were going to be deprived of family.

And we're reminded of the fact that the Lord often uses the family situations or the families, the children of prophets to convey a message to the people of Israel. The prophet Isaiah had a son named Shear-jashub that gave a message of hope to Israel. But he also had a son named Maher-shalal-hash-baz that talked about judgment that was going to come.

The names of his sons conveyed a to the people of Israel. The prophet Hosea was commanded to marry a woman who was going to be unfaithful to him. And they would give birth to children that were reflective of that broken relationships.

And the names of those children convey something. The prophet Ezekiel was told that his wife was going to die when the city of Jerusalem was captured by the Babylonians. And he was not allowed to grieve or mourn as a message to the people.

So, I think we see one of the most difficult components of the prophet's ministry is that often their families were involved in the message that God wanted to convey to the people. And so, Jeremiah, can you imagine this? With all of the struggles, with all of the things that he's going to go through, he never had the encouragement or the blessing of knowing family. And I think about my own wife and my three children.

The greatest blessing that I've ever had in life, the greatest thing that God has ever allowed me to enjoy outside of my own salvation is my family. At times in ministry as a pastor, the only thing that kept my sanity was being able to talk to my wife and the encouragement that she gave to me. I know that when I was going through doctoral studies, the only thing that helped me finish my dissertation was my wife and her insistent encouragement.

Jeremiah's deprived of all of that, and that's part of the calling that God places on his life. Something else we know about the personal life of Jeremiah is that he was assisted in his call by his scribe Baruch. And later on in the book, Baruch is going to play a significant role.

He had a part in the composition of the book of Jeremiah. He's mentioned in chapters 32, 36, 43, and 45. And so we'll come to know him a little bit better, but that's part of Jeremiah's ministry.

And then, finally, the last thing that we know about Jeremiah is that Jeremiah died as a refugee in Egypt, as best we can tell. His ministry seems to conclude there. One Jewish tradition about the prophet Jeremiah said that he was stoned to death.

In light of the confrontive message that Jeremiah preaches to the people in Egypt at the end of the book, we can imagine that that's a very strong possibility. Jeremiah goes through incredible hardship, persecution, and opposition. And I think it's important for us just to remember at the very beginning of this book, God calls a man, God calls an individual, and the Lord is going to work through that individual.

And God still continues to call individuals. With all of our failures, with our unique giftings, we can't compare ourselves to others because God makes us unique. God calls unique individuals, and Jeremiah is one of those.

One of the reasons that I've come to really love studying this book is that I've come to deeply respect and admire Jeremiah for the courage that he had to preach God's word and to tell the people what God wanted them to hear, no matter what it cost him as an individual. Now, as we get into the actual record of Jeremiah's call and the passage there, I won't read the entire text, but there are a couple of things that I think emerge from the call itself. As we read God calling Jeremiah to this commission, we're reminded of the urgency and the divine compulsion that is on Jeremiah's life to preach the word of God.

And the first thing that the Lord is going to say to Jeremiah in verses four and five of this, it says, the word of the Lord came to me saying, 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.

One of the things we definitely understand about the call of prophets in the Old Testament and even in the New, as God calls his apostles there as well, is that the calling of a prophet is an act of God's sovereignty. God has determined the role that Jeremiah will have before he's ever born. And this sense that God has his hand on the life of his spokesman, even before they are born, actually comes out in Paul's life as well in Galatians.

The Lord has called him from the womb to be an apostle and to fulfill the role that he has given to him. Paul is walking down the road one day and sees a light from heaven that slams him to the ground. And God says you're going to become my spokesman and my missionary.

In a sense, that's exactly what happens to Jeremiah. This is not by Jeremiah's design. Jeremiah does not open the book saying, I became a prophet because I always wanted to be one.

Jeremiah does not take an aptitude test or a spiritual gifts inventory and determine, yeah, I think being a prophet is really what works for me. God, in his sovereignty, steps into his life and says, you're going to be my spokesman. Again, this might not have been the plan that Jeremiah had for his life.

He was from a priestly family, but God had other plans for his life. And I think as we look at the prophets in general, we understand that God has the right to interrupt their plans—Ezekiel, also from a priestly family, was called to be a prophet in his 30th year.

At the time when Ezekiel would have thought, I'm going to be a priest, and he's an exile in Babylon. He's no longer at the temple and God calls him instead to be a prophet to the exiles that are in Babylon. Amos was a wealthy landowner in Judah.

And Amos says, I am not the prophet, or I was not a prophet. I was not the son of a prophet. It wasn't part of the family occupation, but God called me to be a prophet.

And God actually calls him to leave his home in Judah and go north to the land of Israel. God has the right to rearrange the plans of his servants. Moses and Gideon.

Moses is tending sheep out in the desert. He's been doing that for 40 years. It looks like God has put him on the shelf.

God intervenes. God appears to Gideon in the middle of the night. You're going to be the deliverer of the people of Israel.

Gideon is absolutely surprised by this. The call of God on an individual is an act of sovereignty. And as we look at the call of a prophet in the Old Testament, it is a calling that an individual does not really have a choice to accept or to reject.

God is going to call this person. God is going to accomplish his purposes. And they cannot say no, thank you, God.

This is not really convenient for me right now. No, thanks, God. I've got other plans for my life.

When God calls, the prophet responds. Jonah is a reminder that a prophet, even if he tries to resist and tries to get away or tries to run, God is going to chase him down and ultimately accomplish his sovereign purposes. Elijah tries to retire from prophetic ministry.

He says, Lord, it's enough. I'm ready to die. Out of fear for his life, he runs from Jezebel.

But as he's running, God takes him and brings him back to Mount Sinai and Mount Horeb and recommissions him to fulfill his prophetic ministry. Now, as Jeremiah is talking about that and the sense of divine calling on his life, the compulsion, this is something that God has placed on me. There's an urgent message that I have to preach.

I don't have a choice about this. Jeremiah will speak about this divine, compelling urge that he has to preach God's word. And this is what he says in verse nine.

If I say, I will not mention him or speak anymore in his name. And at times that's what Jeremiah felt like doing because he was experiencing all kinds of opposition because of the message that he was preaching. So, Jeremiah says, if I try to stop, if I'm not going to speak in God's name, he says, there is in my heart, as it were, a burning fire shut up in my bones.

I am weary of holding it in, and I cannot. And so, there is this divine sense that God has called me to do this. I have a responsibility and an urge to preach the gospel.

I can't get away from this calling that God has placed on my life. Paul is going to say later on same sense of divine compulsion. Woe is me if I don't preach the gospel.

In our first video session, we talked about the prophet as God's watchman and God has assigned them to stand on the wall and warn the people of the approaching judgment and the enemy that's coming. As God explains to Ezekiel what it means to be a watchman, he says, if you see the danger that's coming to the people and you warn them of that danger, your responsibility has been fulfilled. And if they don't listen, then their blood is on their own hands.

However, if I have commissioned you as God's servant, if I've sent you as a watchman, if you do not warn the people of the judgment that's coming, then ultimately, their blood is going to be on your hands. So, as we're looking at this calling in chapter one, we see that there is a divine urgency. This is not something that Jeremiah agrees to because this is what he wants to do.

God compels him to do this. And it's a fire in his bones. The word of God is a fire in his mouth.

He can't get away from that. He can't escape that. One of the things that I've been that I have found interesting in studying Jeremiah chapter one is to take this passage and lay it beside other call passages that we see in the Old Testament.

And I've done that with Moses and with Gideon, with Ezekiel and with Isaiah. The thing that I've found, as I've looked at these passages and read studies that have done the same thing, is that there are four basic elements that appear in practically all of these Old Testament passages. Let me summarize what these elements are and then we'll talk about them in Jeremiah chapter one.

The first element is that there is always going to be a vision of God or a voice where God directly communicates to this person. It's not simply an inner sense, I need to compel. They see a vision.

They see something that represents God or they directly hear the voice of God. Moses sees a burning bush. Ezekiel sees perhaps the most amazing vision of God in a chariot moving through the sky.

Isaiah sees the Lord lifted up on his throne. There is always a vision of God or the voice of God. Number two, there is going to be a commission to a specific task.

This is where I'm sending you. This is what I'm calling you to announce. And for the prophets, in most cases, it was announcing God's judgment.

For the prophet Isaiah, who will go and speak for us? Isaiah says, Lord, here I am, send me. And the Lord sends him and says, I want you to preach judgment on the people of Judah until houses and cities are destroyed, and I have reduced the nation to nothing more than a tree stump. Now, the third thing in all of these prophetic calls that's a common feature is that there is usually an objection to unworthiness.

Lord, I am not the man for the job that you have just given me. And we've already seen in Jeremiah that when Jeremiah is called by God, his reaction and his response is, ah, Lord God, I'm but a child. I don't know how to speak.

In Moses's case, and in many ways, Jeremiah sounds an awful lot like Moses. Moses says, Lord, why did you call me? I'm not eloquent of tongue. If at all possible, find someone else.

And in Moses's case, the objections continue. And Lord, please don't. Finally, God agrees that he'll send Aaron with Moses.

But there's an objection of unworthiness. Gideon says, Lord, I'm not sure that you have the right person. I'm from the smallest of the clans and the tribes of Israel.

Why would you call me to be a deliverer? And it takes place in the middle of the night and Gideon wants to fulfill his commission in the middle of the night. And he's

afraid. Isaiah, when he sees the Lord, he hears the voices saying, holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty.

Isaiah is reminded of his own unholiness. And he says, Lord, again, do you have the right person? I'm not sure that you do. I am a man of unclean lips and I live in the midst of a people of unclean lips.

Ezekiel does not give an expression of unworthiness, but when he sees the vision of God, he's unable to speak for several days. He's just overwhelmed by the presence. Now, I think, at times, there is a misunderstanding of this particular aspect of the call.

Often people are going to explain this is that, you know, these men did not have the faith in God that they needed to believe that God was going to use them. I want to suggest to us that the objection of unworthiness is a good thing. And in fact, it is exactly the way that all of us should respond when God calls us into ministry.

I cannot imagine anyone in the presence of God who sees either a vision of God or a voice of God; they're given a commission to a specific task. I can't imagine the proper response being, Lord, you have made excellent use of your draft choices. I am just the man to do the job that you have.

The objection of unworthiness is exactly what God would want to hear. I've heard a story of Peyton Manning when he was drafted out of college as a quarterback. The Indianapolis Colts wanted to make sure that they had the right man and that they were going to draft the right person to be their leader.

And so, they called him in for an interview, and we want to know what do you like. What's your personality? Should we draft you as a quarterback? At the end of the interview, Peyton Manning said this: he said, I hope you draft me as your first pick. If you do not draft me, I will spend the rest of my career making you wish that you had. And that's exactly, I think, the kind of response that a football team wants to hear about their quarterback.

That's not the way that we respond when we're called by God. We realize, we recognize our unworthiness. This carries over into the New Testament as well.

Peter says, as Jesus is calling him to be a fisher of men and he sees a powerful miracle that Jesus does as part of that, Lord, depart from me. I'm a sinful man. I don't deserve to be what you're calling me to be.

Paul constantly would dwell on the fact that I'm the chief of sinners. In one place, reflecting on his own ministry and talks about the life of being called by God to change people's lives and teach the word of God, disciple them, evangelize them,

and be a minister of the gospel. He says, who is sufficient for these things? The answer is no one is.

But what he comes along to say is that our sufficiency comes from God, from the power of his word, from the power of his spirit, from the power of the new covenant that's working in the lives of the people that we minister to. That's where our sufficiency comes from. So, I don't think the objection of unworthiness is a lack of faith.

In Moses's case, where he restates it and he constantly insists to God, that becomes an issue. But the right response to anyone being called to an overwhelming task, like what Jeremiah is being called to do, the right response is unworthiness. Going along with that, the Lord is going to meet those objections of unworthiness.

The fourth element is that there are going to be promises of God's protection and enablement. For Jeremiah, that protection and enablement, Jeremiah is going to say, ah, Lord God, behold, I do not know how to speak for I am only a youth. God is going to give enablement in verse nine that directly answers that.

The Lord is going to say to Jeremiah, the Lord put out his hand and touched my mouth. And the Lord says, behold, I have put my words in your mouth. So if the Lord has put the words in Jeremiah's mouth, Jeremiah doesn't have to worry about what to say because the Lord's words are going to be the basis of his ministry.

And then, in verse 10, the Lord says to Jeremiah: I have set you this day over nations and over kingdoms. That doesn't sound like a prophet. That sounds like a king.

I have set you to pluck up and to break down, to destroy and to overthrow, to build and to plant. You're actually going to do these things. Now, again, it's not Jeremiah.

It's the power of Jeremiah's word, but that's the enablement. That's the empowerment. In verse 18, the Lord is going to say this to Jeremiah in terms of his enablement and empowerment.

And behold, he says, I make you this day a fortified city, an iron pillar and bronze walls against this whole land, against the kings of Judah, its officials, its priests, and the people of the land. They will fight against you, but they shall not prevail against you. For I am with you, declares the Lord to deliver you.

Now, if I had heard that part of the call from God, that would have been definitely a time to maybe reconsider. But the Lord is telling Jeremiah, look, you're going to encounter great adversity. It's going to come from the people.

It's going to come from the officials. It's going to come from the kings. It's going to come from every direction, but I'm going to make you like a fortified city.

And ultimately, I am going to deliver you. There's an interesting poetic device in Jeremiah that reminds us of the difficulty that Jeremiah is going to experience in his ministry. In chapter one, verse five, the Lord says this to Jeremiah, before I formed you in the womb, I knew you.

All right. So, I want you to remember, think about this reference to the womb that's there in verse five. In Jeremiah chapter 20, verse 18, I think we have kind of an inclusio that unifies these sections.

And it says in chapter 20, verse 18, Jeremiah says he curses the day of his birth, and he says, I wish that I had never come out of the womb of his mother or of my mother. So, when you hear the reference to the womb in chapter one, verse five, you need to go to chapter 20 and hear Jeremiah say, I wish that I had never come out of my mother's womb. It's a reminder of how difficult the ministry that Jeremiah is going to experience.

It's how difficult that ministry is that God's calling him to. Now, looking at those four elements, there's the vision of God, there's the voice of God, there's the commission, there's the objection, and then there's the promises of protection and enablement. I'd like us to go back to that second part, the commission to a specific task.

All right. And we're going to look at this beginning in verse nine. The Lord put out his hand and touched my mouth.

The Lord said to me, behold, I have put my words in your mouth, and I have set you this day over nations and kingdoms. Specific responsibility, the specific calling of Jeremiah, not just to be a prophet to Judah, his ministry is actually going to be one where he's a prophet to the nations. Now, that doesn't mean that Jeremiah normally is going to go on preaching tours to other countries, but it does mean that he has a message for these other nations.

Back in verse five, I have appointed you as a prophet to the nations. Can you imagine Jeremiah just thinking about the scope of that? And speaking to my own people is one thing; speaking to the nations at large is an even greater thing. The Lord also says in verse 10, I have set you this day over nations and kingdoms, and remember these key words that we talked about in the last section: to pluck up and to break down, to destroy and to overthrow.

Those four verbs, pluck up, break down, destroy, overthrow, Jeremiah is a prophet of judgment. And those verbs are going to appear again in various places in the book.

And as you hear them, you should be reminded that this is what God had called Jeremiah to do.

God also calls Jeremiah to build and to plant. Ultimately, after he's preached this message of judgment, he also preached a message of salvation. So that's the specific commission.

That's the specific task that God has given to Jeremiah. You're my prophet. I'm putting my words in your mouth.

You're a prophet to the nations and you're a prophet of judgment and salvation. Now, as we go further into chapter one, there is going to be more specifics about the commission that the Lord is giving to Jeremiah. I'd like us to look at verses 11 and 12.

And part of this commission is going to be expressed to Jeremiah in a visionary way. And so here's what we read in verse 11. The word of the Lord came to me saying, Jeremiah, what do you see? And Jeremiah said I see an almond branch.

Then the Lord said, you have seen well, for I am watching over my word to perform it. And as you're reading that, you might have said, well, I'm not sure I understand the connection. What does an almond branch have to do? What does that have to do with the specific commission that God is giving to Jeremiah? Well, what we have here is that we have a wordplay in Hebrew.

The word almond branch, shakad, is very closely related to the verb to watch over, which is the word shokad. So, in the Hebrew, Jeremiah says, I see a shakad, I see an almond branch. And the Lord says, you have seen well, for I am shokad, watching over my word to perform it.

So, the almond branch symbolically represents the judgment of God. I'm calling you to announce that. The almond branch was also one of the first trees to bloom in the springtime.

And so, it announced that the time of God's judgment was ripe. Prophets had come along for generations preaching about God's judgment, but the blooming of the almond tree signified the time of the end; the time of the harvest was coming near. So that was part of Jeremiah's commission.

There's another visionary element given to us in verses 13 and 14. The word of the Lord came to me a second time and said, what do you see? And Jeremiah said I see a boiling pot facing away from the north. Then the Lord said to me, out of the north, disaster shall be set loose upon the inhabitants of the land.

For behold, I am calling all of 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 of its walls and against all of the cities of Judah. And I will declare my judgments against them and for all of their evil in forsaking me. So, the other thing that Jeremiah sees, the other visionary element that's there, is that he sees a scalding, burning pot.

And the scalding liquid of that pot is leaning out from the north and it's going to pour down on the land of Judah. And that represents the army. Ultimately, it's the Babylonians.

They're not identified at this point. We simply know them as an enemy from the north. They are referred to that way, to in that way, in chapter 4, verse 6, in chapter 6, verse 22, chapter 10, verse 22, chapter 13, verse 20, and in chapter 15, verse 12.

So, part of the specific commission that God was giving to Jeremiah was not just judgment, but judgment in the specific form of armies that would come and they would dominate and they would subjugate the people of Judah. And that's what the judgment was going to be like. And so, in many ways, the call and the commission of Jeremiah as a prophet reminds me very much of the call and commission of Isaiah that's given back in chapter 6. Isaiah says, who will go and the Lord says, who will go and who will speak for us? And Isaiah says, here I am, Lord, send me.

And, okay, here's what I want you to preach, Isaiah. Make the hearts of this people dull and their ears heavy, their eyes blind, lest they see with their eyes and hear with their ears, or see with their eyes and hear with their ears and understand with their hearts and turn and be healed. Isaiah, you're not even going to preach to save them.

You're going to preach to confirm them in judgment. Again, the Lord wasn't causing them to act in this way. That's simply the way they were going to act.

And the judgment and the words that the prophet preached would make them more accountable. Isaiah goes along, and he says, well, Lord, how long, oh Lord? And sometimes, at the end of this passage, we leave off when we study the call of Isaiah. Isaiah says, how long, oh Lord, how long do I have to preach this kind of message? And he said, until the cities lie waste without inhabitant and houses are without people, and the land is a desolate waste, and the Lord removes the people far away.

And ultimately, he tells Isaiah they're going to be left like the stump of a tree. And then there's going to be a remnant purged even out of that little stump. So, Isaiah was commissioned in many ways a century before Jeremiah to preach the same kind of message.

And in Isaiah's time, the Lord brought judgment against the Northern kingdom. He came to the point where he almost destroyed the Southern kingdom. The faith of Hezekiah, in a sense, was the thing that delivered them.

Jeremiah is being called in effect to finish the job. And with Isaiah, when he said, Lord, I'm a man of unclean lips, and I live in the midst of a people of unclean lips. The Lord empowered him by sending an angel with a coal from the heavenly fire and purging his lips so that he could speak.

Isaiah prefigures Jeremiah in the sense that Jeremiah says, Lord, I don't know how to speak. I'm but a youth. And the Lord touches his mouth, purges his words, and makes it possible for him to deliver the message that God has given to them.

I'd like to think about a practical question that arises out of this whole idea of the calling of a prophet. Oftentimes, when I was counseling people as a pastor or maybe talking to a young person about their future when I'm discussing ministry plans with seminary students, or when there are personal conversations after messages, the idea of how does God call people today? How can I know that I'm called to minister? What does that look like? What does that experience like in our lives today? I'd like us to think about that in light of the experience that Jeremiah had. There is a sense and there is a way that I believe all believers experience a divine call on their lives.

And let me explain what I mean by that. I believe that, first of all, we come to faith in Christ because there is a call to salvation. Regardless of how we understand the way that the will of God and the will of man work in salvation, however, we explain that, whether we're Calvinists or Arminians, we understand that God is the one who initiates salvation.

Paul, in one place in Galatians, says I have come to know the Lord, but then he corrects himself and says, I have come to be known by the Lord. And those that the Lord chooses, he calls, and we believe that. That's how we come to faith.

I did not become a Christian because I was smart enough to figure out the gospel. I became a Christian because when I was dead in my trespasses and sin, God called me and brought me to Himself. So, there's a call to salvation.

I think beyond that, as we begin to live the Christian life, there is a sense of divine calling and vocation on every Christian. You are not a second-class Christian if you have a secular job versus a sacred job in full-time Christian ministry. God doesn't look at things in that way.

There are many people who are in vocations outside of professional Christian ministry who are just as much or maybe even more missionaries than those who are. They can glorify God as much in the place that God has called them as in any

Christian ministry or Christian vocation. So, I believe that God gifts us and enables us; whether you're a missionary, an evangelist, a pastor, a doctor, or a teacher, whatever God has called you to do, there's a sense of divine calling and vocation on every Christian.

But I also believe that in a special way, there is still a calling that God places on people's lives when he is calling them to be his messengers and his spokesmen. Whether it's a pastor, a missionary, or a seminary professor, when God calls us to teach and to minister his word, there's a special calling that goes along with that. And I think we have to be careful here because what is often communicated when we talk about the call to ministry is that we may give the idea that the experiences of Jeremiah or Isaiah or Gideon or Ezekiel or Moses are going to be exactly like our callings.

And I believe that there are aspects of this passage that are not normative, even for those that are called into things like pastoral ministry. We have to remember that Jeremiah and Paul were called prophets and apostles to be instruments of divine revelation. And so often there was a visionary element, there was a vocal element where God would literally speak to them and tell them precisely what God wanted them to do.

Paul receives a vision at a time in his ministry where the Lord actually directs him where he wants to go in his missionary travels. I don't believe that God will necessarily speak to us in that way today. God may.

God has the right to work in any way that he chooses to, but that is generally not the normative way that God calls people into ministry. But I believe that what we do learn from the prophets is that if God is calling us to preach and to teach God's word, there's an overwhelming sense of that divine calling on our lives. To where we realize that that is what God has called us to do and we really, in a sense, can't be happy doing anything else.

You will know, I believe, that if God has called you into a ministry of preaching and teaching his word, that there's an urgency in that, that you realize that there is, that's what God wants you to do, and there's nothing else that you can do in life and be happy with that. There's an urgency to preach God's word. Remember, Jeremiah says, chapter 20, verse 9, there's a fire in my bones.

Paul says woe is me if I preach not the gospel. And I believe that, at least in some way, when God calls us to Christian ministry, there's that sense of urgency in our lives. I believe that's one of the things that, in some sense, needs to be returned to ministry today.

I remember one of my seminary professors telling us, he said, too many of you are interested in a career, but what you have forgotten about is that you came to seminary because of a calling. Ministry is not a career, but ministry is a calling. And I think as a pastor, one of the things that will give you a sense that God has called you to this place and you're going to be there to minister through thick and thin is the realization that God has put you there.

When we have statistics that say that the average ministerial stay at a church is two years or three years, it's a sense that, in many ways, too many of us are interested in a career rather than a calling. If Jeremiah had looked at prophetic ministry as a career rather than a calling, I'm not sure that he would have been able to endure. It was not financially lucrative for him.

And that sense that God has called you to do this and there's nothing else in life, this is what you are here for, there's nothing greater than the joy of being able to fulfill that calling. I sometimes tell my students about the privilege of ministry; I would rather teach God's word to people than be the president of the United States because I believe there's just joy and a blessing when this is what God has called you to do. This is what gives you joy and meaning in life.

As you get older, you begin to realize that I may have a limited time left in my life; I want to make use of every advantage, every opportunity to preach, to teach, and to impact people with God's word because I believe this is my calling in life. But to wrap all of this up and to try to help us to understand this, recognizing the uniqueness of how God called a Jeremiah or how God commissioned a Paul may in some ways take away sometimes the superstitious ideas that we've attended, I need to hear a voice from God, or I need to see a vision from God. Finally, even perhaps it can help all of us, whether we're called to Christian ministry or not, to have a better understanding of the idea of what it means to find the will of God. Or how do I discover the will of God for my life? I've read a couple of books that have helped me with that.

One of them a number of years ago was Gary Friesen's book, *Decision Making and the Will of God*. And then Bruce Waltke in a tiny book with a more direct title, *Finding the Will of God*, a pagan notion. And sometimes we've reduced this to sort of this magical process.

Dr. Friesen talks about how many people believe that God's will is like a dot in the center of a circle. God wants me to spend the rest of my life finding that dot in the center of the circle. That means I have to be married to the one person in the world that God has created for me, doing the one job in the one place that God has called me to be.

And if I mess up any part of that plan, there's the chance that I'm going to be outside of the will of God. The problem with that is that I'm not sure that God reveals those kinds of things. I've taken ministry.

I've been a pastor in Kansas and Virginia. I never saw a burning map in the sky that said, you need to go to Virginia or to Kansas. When God called me to go to the seminary that I'm teaching at now, there was not a voice from heaven that said, Virginia is the place where you need to be.

God doesn't necessarily reveal those kinds of details to us. And if we spend our lives trying to find the dot in the center of the circle, in many ways, that can end up becoming a very frustrating process. I think a better way to understand the will of God is more that the will of God is like a box.

And there are things that God has clearly revealed to us in his word that are inside of that box. There are moral commandments and instructions that God has given to me about my marriage. God commands me to be faithful to my wife.

Living inside the box means being faithful to that. Living outside the box would be being unfaithful to that marriage. Inside the box, God tells us it's the will of God that we are thankful for all the things that come into our lives and that we pray at all times and in all circumstances.

That's living inside the box. If I'm not praying, if I'm not thankful, then I'm outside the box. And what God is asking us to do is not to find the will of God.

The will of God has been laid out for us and revealed to us in his word. Our job is to live within the will of God that he's revealed in scripture. Live inside the box.

And then, as we do that, inside of that box, there are going to be all kinds of opportunities, decisions, and choices that we can make. And as we prayerfully seek God's direction, as we ask God to lead us, to guide us, as we talk to Christians who have other experiences that they can share with us what God has taught them in life, we begin to discover the plan that God has for our life. But I'm not looking for a dot in the center of the circle.

I'm living within that box and prayerfully and wisely, making the decisions that God allows me to make as I live within his will. And as we do that, I understand I don't always make the right decisions. I don't always make the right choices.

But ultimately, God, in his providence, has, even in my life, used bad decisions that I've made or maybe the decision that wasn't the perfect career opportunity. God has blessed them and used them in ways that I could never imagine. I believe the way that typically the call will come into your life as you serve the Lord is that as you're

faithful to him and as you're obedient and you're doing the things that God has called you to do, the Lord will create opportunities.

The Lord will impress upon you a desire to teach his word, and that will become a passion for you in the same way that it was for Jeremiah when he says, God's word was like a fire in my bones. I had to speak it. And even if God does not lead you into professional Christian ministry, God will begin to take your personality, your gifts, your abilities, and your vocational choices.

I believe that God has an absolute plan for our lives. I believe that God knew before the foundation of the world that I was going to marry the woman that I married. I believe that God had that one woman planned for me.

But I believe that if I'm faithful and obedient to God as I'm seeking a partner, God may lead me to any different. My goal is not to find that one person but to trust that God will help me to do so. As we look at Jeremiah's call on his life, I believe that God may not speak to us in the same way that he spoke to Jeremiah, but God will lead us and direct us and help us as we make these kinds of choices and decisions.

There's a lot of magical ideas about finding the will of God. Some people take the story of Gideon and Gideon putting out the fleece. And if the fleece is wet and the ground is dry or the ground is dry and the fleece is wet, they will pray for God to do things like that.

But rather than looking for God to necessarily speak to us in direct ways or to give us a vision or to confirm things in some sort of special set of circumstances, our role is to be obedient to God and then to trust that God will direct and lead our lives as we're faithful and obedient to him, the same way that he did with Jeremiah. I want to mention just a couple of other things about chapter one in Jeremiah. It's not only a call passage, but I believe that Jeremiah chapter one is, in a sense, a programmatic introduction to the book of Jeremiah as a whole.

Now, I want you to imagine we have the book of Jeremiah in book form, and it's a tiny portion of our Bible. But imagine a large scroll with 52 chapters on it. It's large, it's unwieldy.

You can't look at chapter one and say, I'm going to quickly unroll this and look over at something in chapter 37. I believe that one of the things that the prophets, especially the larger prophets, intentionally do is that at the very beginning of the book, they will give us what we could call a programmatic introduction. The major themes that are going to be in the book of Jeremiah are going to be revealed to us and enveloped in the first chapter and then unfolded as we look at the rest of the book.

Particularly in Jeremiah, here are themes in chapter one that are going to be developed in the rest of the book. We are going to be reminded throughout the book that Jeremiah is a prophet to the nations, Jeremiah 25, Jeremiah 26 to 41. We are going to be reminded that Jeremiah is going to be a prophet of building up and tearing down.

First, there's going to be judgment, and then there's going to be salvation. God is going to say in Jeremiah chapter one, I have put my words in your mouth. In a sense, in the rest of the book, Jeremiah himself becomes the living word of God.

It's not just his words, it's actually his actions as well. Jeremiah, chapter one says that there is going to be an enemy from the north, and the rest of the book is going to unfold for us that that enemy from the north is going to be the Babylonians. God says to Jeremiah, you're going to experience opposition from the people, the officials, the king themselves.

There's going to be opposition and hardship. We're going to see that in the stories where people resist Jeremiah's message, where they do not listen, and where they are actually going to put him in prison and inflict all kinds of persecution on them. And then finally, in the same way that we have seen that there's a parallel between Jeremiah and Moses in that both of them say, Lord, I don't know how to speak.

We're going to see that throughout the book of Jeremiah, and one of the things that we're going to develop as we study the book is that Jeremiah becomes a prophet like Moses. Jeremiah's experiences, in many ways, are going to parallel those of Moses. And then as we work through that, we're going to see ultimately ways that Jeremiah's ministry goes beyond that of Moses.

But all of the themes that the book of Jeremiah as a whole is going to unfold are basically laid out for us in this first chapter. We have the call of the prophet, and we have a programmatic introduction to the message of the book as a whole.

This is Dr. Gary Yates in his instruction on the book of Jeremiah. This is session 7, Jeremiah 1, The Call of Jeremiah.