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Prophet, Priest, and King

As Christians we confess that Christ executes three offices as our Redeemer: the office of a prophet, of a priest, and of a king. Now as servants and ambassadors of Christ, these offices translate to a tri-fold calling in our lives.

As Christians we hold to the doctrine of the “priesthood of the believer” by which we are called both to share of the good news of Christ with the lost and to pray. And as Christians we are to reflect Christ’s office of king. We all know that we have been called in Christ to “co-reign with our Lord” over this world and the next.

Yet, what about His office as a prophet? How does that apply? Many Christians fudge a bit, for

there was an official office of prophet in the Old and New Testament by which God gave His word to His people by way of revelation. We read throughout God's word, "Thus says the Lord..." And that raises the question, "Does embodying the office of a prophet mean today that we ought to expect to speak by way of revelation?" We immediately can say "No!" to that one... the canon clearly is closed (cf. Hebrews 1:1-3; Revelations 22:18-19). So what practically does it mean to serve as a "prophet" in the world in which we live? And don't think that the answer revolves around evangelism... that is the embodiment of the priesthood whose work it is to address the sin of God's people- which we do with the gospel.

The book of Jeremiah helps to answer that question. By way of Introduction, we've been looking at the various and sundry background information on the Book of Jeremiah. Thus far we've considered the life-setting in which Jeremiah lived. Now by way of further introduction, we turn now to Jeremiah himself. Who was he? Where did he live? When was he called? And why was he called?

The Particulars of Jeremiah

Jeremiah 1:1-3, "The words of Jeremiah, the son of Hilkiah, of the priests who were in Anathoth in the land of Benjamin, 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. It came also in the days of Jehoiakim, the son of Josiah, king of Judah, until the end of the eleventh year of Zedekiah, the son of Josiah, king of Judah, until the exile of Jerusalem in the fifth month."

"Jeremiah" was a common name in the Old Testament. In fact in the book of Jeremiah we read of two other "Jeremiahs"- one a Rechabite (Jeremiah 35:3) and the other the maternal grandfather of King Zedekiah (Jeremiah 52:1; 2 Kings 24:18). The meaning of the name is uncertain, but two proposals have been made, either "Yahweh loosens (the womb)" or "Yahweh exalts."

Jeremiah's father's name, "Hilkiah," also was quite common. In fact, the priest who found the book in the temple during Josiah's reformation was also named, Hilkiah (2 Kings 22:8).

Of "the city of Anathoth" we know much. At one time the city was known for its pastureland (Joshua 21:18). It was situated three miles northeast of Jerusalem (about an hour's walk) such that one can look up from Anathoth and see the royal city! By the time of Josiah, it had become an *important* priestly city- all on account of "Abiathar."

Abiathar, is first spoken of in 1 Samuel 22 where he was serving as a priest in Nob. He escaped the massacre of his family by Saul to join David at Keilah, bringing with him an ephod (1 Samuel 22:20-22; 23:6, 9). Because of his close friendship with David, Abiathar helped to take the ark to Jerusalem, where he became one of David's most trusted advisors (1 Samuel 15:11; 27:34). As a result, years later when David was fleeing from Absalom, Abiathar was sent back to Jerusalem as a spy.¹

The “rest of the story” has him conspiring against Solomon in the last days of David to make Adonijah king! Once the plot was discovered, Solomon executed Adonijah and banished Abiathar.

1 Kings 2:26-27, “Then to Abiathar the priest the king said, ‘Go to Anathoth to your own field, for you deserve to die; but I will not put you to death at this time, because you carried the ark of the Lord God before my father David, and because you were afflicted in everything with which my father was afflicted.’ So Solomon dismissed Abiathar from being priest to the Lord, in order to fulfill the word of the Lord, which He had spoken concerning the house of Eli in Shiloh.”

It just got a little more complicated! What was God’s word concerning “the house of Eli in Shiloh”?

Recall that in earlier times, Eli and his family were the main priests of God called to serve in the presence of the Lord in his Tabernacle/Temple. Yet because of his faithless service to God where he was moved more by his sons than God’s glory (1 Samuel 2:30-33), Eli’s family would be removed from serving God as high priests! It was this promise concerning the family of Eli (being removed from the office of High Priest) that was fulfilled when Solomon banished Abiathar to Anathoth. So by the time of Jeremiah, almost every priest in Anathoth could trace their heritage back to Eli and the city of Shiloh! As such, it is most probable that Jeremiah was of the priestly line of Eli- which no doubt is why he frequently used “the destruction of Shiloh” as a metaphor of the destruction that awaited God’s people in his day (Jeremiah 7:12, 14; 26:6, 9; 41:5).

Did Jeremiah serve as a priest?

It seems rather doubtful since he was called into the office of prophet at such an early age. However, he would have been well-aware of the responsibilities and duties of a priest which no doubt is why he was so critical of the priests of his day.² In fact, Jeremiah placed on them the blame for the spiritual decay of the nation!

As to Jeremiah’s era Jeremiah 1:2 places Jeremiah’s call to the prophetic office in the thirteenth years of Josiah’s reign which was 627 BC.³ Furthermore, Jeremiah’s reference to being “a youth” (Jeremiah 1:6) at the time of his call indicates that he was not an established man. The word for “youth” is used variously of a “child”/“infant” (Exodus 2:6; 1 Samuel 4:21) to that of a “young man,” possibly in his early twenties (Gen. 14:24; 34:19). Accordingly, most believe that Jeremiah was around sixteen to twenty years old when he was called into the office of a prophet. That would put his birth at the tail end of Manasseh’s reign, around 643 BC.

Jeremiah 1:2-3 gives us reason to conclude that Jeremiah’s service as a prophet spanned more than forty years; ministering from 627 BC beyond the exile of 586 BC.

The book of Jeremiah is a difficult book to outline. First off it is what is known as a Bifid; a book containing two distinct sections containing relatively the same message which probably at some point were separate, individual writings. Notice that in Jeremiah 36 Jeremiah was called by God to:

Jeremiah 36:2: "Take a scroll and write on it all the words which I have spoken to you concerning Israel, and concerning Judah, and concerning all the nations, from the day I *first* spoke to you, from the days of Josiah, even to this day."

If you read on into vv. 4 and 5, you will note that Jeremiah dictated his first writing to his servant, Baruch, who then read it aloud in Jerusalem. To make a long story short, the message reverberated throughout the royal household so that a man by the name of Micaiah had the document read to Jehoiakim's high advisors and officials. They were genuinely moved (cf. Jeremiah 36:19) and so brought the scroll to the king while he sat on his throne holding court. The message did not move Jehoiakim in any way. In fact, he used it to mock the Lord having it burned column by column as it was read!

Jeremiah was commanded by God to rewrite the scroll (Jeremiah 36:28). It is believed that this is the genesis of the prophecy we have in our hands today. However, because of the threat of burning or because of a concern for length (or both), it is believed that in time Jeremiah penned two different scrolls which toward the end of his life were combined into one- and hence, the Bifid! Clearly, Jeremiah can be broken into two sections, an autobiographical section (Jeremiah 1-20) and a biographical section (Jeremiah 21-51). R. K. Harrison commented on the Bifid nature of Jeremiah :

In antiquity this device was sometimes adopted for coping with writings of considerable length, the purpose being to circulate the material in two approximately equal halves so that whichever section was read, the thoughts of the writer would be conveyed adequately. (Harrison, 1981, p. 33)

Now to make outlining the prophecy even that much more difficult, the prophecy also is an anthology. An "anthology" is a collection of literary works whether that be songs, poems, writings, or the like. For example, Isaac Watts wrote well over five hundred hymns. If we were to assemble into a hymnbook we'd no doubt organize them alphabetically. However in so doing, the historical order in which the hymns were written would be all messed up. For example, there'd be hymns written say in 1701 right next to hymns written in 1740. As you look at the chart before you, you will note that that is exactly what we have in Jeremiah. Unlike Isaiah which seems to have been written over an abbreviated time span, Jeremiah was written and assembled over the course of Jeremiah's life. Hence in places it is out of order. Notice chapter 13; chapters 21 and 22! Again, outlining this book is a daunting challenge!

As to how Jeremiah influenced other prophets, notice because of his heritage (which is traced to the north) AND no doubt because God had deigned to use his singleness as a vehicle of revelation (Jeremiah 16:1-4), Jeremiah had an affinity for the book of Hosea. There are many

allusions to Hosea in Jeremiah! (Thompson, 1980, pp. 81-87) Furthermore, there is little doubt that portions of Jeremiah were either taken directly from⁴ or were inspired by⁵ the book of Isaiah.

And as to how God used this prophet to influence others in Redemptive History, the list is vast.

- Daniel was having a devotion in Jeremiah when he realized that the seventy year promise regarding the exile was completed (Daniel 9:2).
- Paul was inspired by Jeremiah's account of the potter's house (Romans 9:20-24).
- In fact, the New Testament quotes Jeremiah no less than forty times!
- And most impressive of all, however, is the way in which Jesus was associated in the popular mind with Jeremiah! R. K. Harrison wrote this:

It is hardly surprising that some mistook the Man of sorrows for the prophet of the broken heart, for Jeremiah and Christ both lamented and wept over their contemporaries (cf. 9:1 and Luke 19:41). (Harrison, 1981, p. 37)

And much, much more could be said by way of similarity.

If you pick up Jeremiah and read the entire prophecy in a sitting, two or three things will come to your mind (at least they did to mine). First off, it is difficult to understand unless you are aware of the historical background at the time of the writing- that is why we spent two weeks on the historical background. Secondly, you will note that though God did not allow Jeremiah to get married (Jeremiah 16), nevertheless the Lord gave the prophet a companion who would serve alongside the prophet. His name was Baruch. Baruch came from a family of some influence in Jerusalem.⁶ However, he faithfully served alongside Jeremiah throughout the prophet's ministry serving as a scribe, an attendant, a spokesman, a co-sufferer, and finally a companion.

Following the death of Zedekiah, Baruch is said to have joined Jeremiah in the house of Gedaliah in Mizpah. (Josephus & (Translator), 2011, p. 10.158) After Gedaliah was murdered, Baruch was arrested for "inciting Jeremiah against the people" (Jeremiah 43:3). As such, he was taken with Jeremiah to Egypt (Jeremiah 43:6) where he most likely died along with Jeremiah.^{7,8}

Now perhaps the most obvious thing that sticks out about Jeremiah is that it contains the writings of a man who really struggled with God, His calling, and His providence. We see it at the beginning of Jeremiah's call.

Jeremiah 1:6: "Then I said, 'Alas, Lord God! Behold, I do not know how to speak, because I am a youth.'"

So much for, "Here am I! Send me!" Clearly from the outset, Jeremiah did not want to serve the Lord in the capacity of a prophet. Yet he yielded to God's divine decree which set him apart

long before he was conceived in his mother's womb! We see his struggle in Jeremiah 4. In this passage, Jeremiah prophesies of a "lion" (v. 7) which has been roused from its sleep and is on the prowl. It was going to destroy Judah because of the nation's sin. Through the vehicle of telescoping, this had reference both to an attack by the Scythians (which occurred early in Jeremiah's ministry⁹) as well as the Babylonians! This genuinely impacted Jeremiah because those who would suffer were his friends and family.

Jeremiah 4:19-20a, "My soul, my soul! I am in anguish! Oh, my heart! My heart is pounding in me; I cannot be silent, because you have heard, O my soul, the sound of the trumpet, the alarm of war. Disaster on disaster is proclaimed, for the whole land is devastated..."

Yet, the land was filled with false prophets who deluded the people crying, "Peace! Safety!" (cf. Jeremiah 5:12; 6:14; 8:11) And this bothered Jeremiah, because God in His sovereignty could have NOT raised these men up. Or, God could have opened the ears of Jeremiah's countrymen such that they heard only the truth and rejected all the lies. BUT GOD DID NEITHER! Instead, God raised up Jeremiah to preach judgment to a people whom the prophet knew would not see or hear that they might be saved!

And so Jeremiah struggled with God's providence. Why didn't His sovereign God do something else?

Jeremiah 4:10, "Then I said, 'Ah, Lord God! Surely Thou hast utterly deceived this people and Jerusalem, saying, 'You will have peace'; whereas a sword touches the throat.'"

Jeremiah is angry at God here! Yet if you read on, Jeremiah realizes that the problem lay with man and his hardened heart on account of his love of sin.

Jeremiah 5:3, "O Lord, do not Thine eyes look for truth? Thou hast smitten them, *but* they did not weaken; Thou hast consumed them, but they refused to take correction. They have made their faces harder than rock; they have refused to repent."

Let me give you another example. In Jeremiah 20, Jeremiah is given a prophecy which he then preaches on behalf of God to warn the people (Jeremiah 19). And what did Jeremiah get in return? Thanks? Gratitude? Blessings from the Lord for carrying out the divine will? NO!

Jeremiah 20:2: "Pashhur had Jeremiah the prophet beaten, and put him in the stocks that were at the upper Benjamin Gate, which was by the house of the Lord."

You must see that this is not the first time Jeremiah got in trouble for doing God's will,¹⁰ nor would it be the last. Yet that didn't soften the pain and heartache Jeremiah underwent as a result. Jeremiah is brought to a dark place in his walk with God.

Jeremiah 20:7-8, "O Lord, Thou hast deceived me and I was deceived; Thou hast overcome me and prevailed. I have become a laughingstock all day long; everyone mocks me. For

each time I speak, I cry aloud; I proclaim violence and destruction, because for me the word of the Lord has resulted in reproach and derision all day long.”

In fact, it was so bad Jeremiah not only renounced the ministry (Jeremiah 20:9), but he wished that he had never been born (Jeremiah 20:14-18)! And yet as we saw last time, at these low times, knowledge of the sovereignty and goodness of God lifted the prophet out of the muck and mire of disbelief and disillusionment and so enabled Jeremiah faithfully to execute the calling that God had placed on his life. With that, consider with me, finally, the particular call that Jeremiah had as a prophet, the call which rests on our lives as well in Christ.

The Particular Calling of a Prophet

Jeremiah 36:1-4, “And it came about in the fourth year of Jehoiakim the son of Josiah, king of Judah, that this word came to Jeremiah from the Lord, saying, ‘Take a scroll and write on it all the words which I have spoken to you concerning Israel, and concerning Judah, and concerning all the nations, from the day I *first* spoke to you, from the days of Josiah, even to this day. Perhaps the house of Judah will hear all the calamity which I plan to bring on them, in order that every man will turn from his evil way; then I will forgive their iniquity and their sin.’”

This passage is quite clear as to the calling of God on Jeremiah’s life as a prophet. Like Christ someday would do, the prophet was called by God to be a revealer of the will of God regarding the salvation of His people. God is very specific here, His word came to Jeremiah that the prophet might proclaim it not to create a people of God (it wasn’t evangelism), but to sustain them and so bring them to the point of maturation, health, and healing in their relationship with God. That is the essence of the prophetic calling!

For us today, since the canon is closed, the ministry of being a mini-prophet will NOT be in the form of “revelational statements” received from God in a dream or vision. RATHER, it will be in the form of taking the revelation given to us in the Scriptures and using it to encourage, equip, correct, and train the people of God in righteousness (2 Timothy 3:16-17)! This clearly was Jeremiah’s aim, and this clearly must be ours.

However you must see that this was never intended to be a cold, detached activity where we simply proclaim the word of God, return again to our ivory tower, and let the people deal with the message given. If we don’t get anything else from Jeremiah, let us at least walk away with his heartbeat! That Jeremiah was the “weeping prophet” there is little doubt. Throughout this book you can find statement after statement which reflects his broken heart on account of the people of God. After you’ve read Jeremiah, pick up Lamentations, you’ll see it there too!

From this it might be tempting to conclude that Jeremiah was a cry-baby and so a whiner! Yet this is mitigated when we come upon a passage like Jeremiah 14. Jeremiah has just complained to God that many of His prophets were contradicting the message that he had received from

the Lord to which the Lord said this:

Jeremiah 14:15-16, "I didn't send them! The word of judgment I gave to you is real!"

Then we read the instruction that God gave to Jeremiah:

Jeremiah 14:17, "And you will say this word to them, 'Let my eyes flow down with tears night and day, and let them not cease; for the virgin daughter of my people has been crushed with a mighty blow, with a sorely infected wound.'"

This verse gives us an implication for our ministry. Jeremiah was not only to be a man through whom God gave His word, the prophet also was to be a vehicle through which God shed His tears!¹¹ Jeremiah was a weeping prophet not because he was weak, but because our Lord is a weeping God who is genuinely moved by His peoples' sufferings, frailties, and tears (cf. Exodus 3:7)!

Christian, this sanctifies the pastoral calling that rests upon all believers. Through Jeremiah God has set the pace for ALL His servants! Did Jeremiah weep? So did Paul.

Philippians 3:18, "For many walk, of whom I often told you, and now tell you even weeping, *that they are* enemies of the cross of Christ."

In fact, Paul took on the visage of Jeremiah when he wrote this:

1 Thessalonians 2:7-8, "But we proved to be gentle among you, as a nursing *mother* tenderly cares for her own children. Having thus a fond affection for you, we were well-pleased to impart to you not only the gospel of God but also our own lives, because you had become very dear to us."

Though Paul was persecuted severely in Thessalonica, nevertheless his heart's desire was for them; their growth in grace, their love and devotion to the Lord, their passion for Christ! We see this also in Paul's speech to the elders of Ephesus.

Acts 20:36-37a, "And when he had said these things, he knelt down and prayed with them all. And they *began* to weep aloud and embraced Paul..."

Ministry brings with it a joining together of hearts! This is wonderful when the love of the brethren grows. But it is equally as difficult when people trample your heart! Hear this: you cannot serve in Christ's Kingdom without pain!

Luke 19:41, "And when He approached, He saw the city and wept over it."

Christ is the perfect man! If ministry moved Him to tears, so it will in our lives as well. To care about people is to risk a lot of pain. Yet that is the calling.

Romans 12:15, “Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep.”

Galatians 6:2, “Bear one another’s burdens, and thus fulfill the law of Christ.”

A major part of our philosophy of ministry should be that God has called us to bring His face and affections to a lost and dying world. Don’t allow this statement to become trite. It was the ministry of Jeremiah, it is the calling of the prophetic ministry, it is THE way of all pastoral care!

End Notes

¹ 2 Samuel 15:35ff; 17:15.

² e.g., Jeremiah 2:26; 4:9; 5:31; 13:13; 19:1; etc.

³ Any and all debate as to whether this was a reference to Jeremiah’s birth or call is resolved by looking at Jer. 25:1-3.

⁴ Jeremiah 50-51 cf., Is. 13-14.

⁵ Jeremiah 10 cf. Is. 40, 41, 44, 46.

⁶ His brother, Seraiah, served as one of the “princes” and so governors/commanders in Zedekiah’s court (Jer. 51:59).

⁷ Cf. Jerome on Isaiah 30:6.

⁸ Josephus, however, implies that they were both carried captive to Babylon after Nebuchadrezzar had invaded Egypt in 583 bc (*Ant.* 10.182). Josephus also said that Baruch was of noble family (as Baruch 1:1).

⁹ According to Herodotus (1.116, 4.1) they dominated the Near East for 28 years (653–625 BC).

¹⁰ John MacArthur wrote, “Jeremiah ministered as a prophet for 42 years- during which time he experienced seemingly unceasing trial and difficulty. He was persecuted by his own family. He was plotted against by the people of his hometown. He was rejected and reviled by his peers in the religious world... He was almost murdered by a wild mob of priests and prophets after one of his messages. He preached a sermon at the temple gate and was nearly killed by an angry mob for predicting the temple would be destroyed. ¶ Jeremiah was accused of lying by a false prophet named Hananiah. He was threatened By King Jehoiakim. On one occasion Jeremiah attempted to visit the land of Benjamin to inspect some property he had bought. However, a guard named Irijah arrested him at the city gate and accused him of defecting to the Babylonians. Jeremiah denied this, but was flogged and thrown into prison. He was soon secretly sent for by Zedekiah the king. Zedekiah placed him in the palace prison instead of returning him to the dungeon he was in formerly. In the palace, however, pressure from the religious officials who despised Jeremiah eventually forced Zedekiah to return the prophet to a more crude confinement. This time he was lowered by ropes into an empty cistern in the prison yard where he soon sank down into a thick layer of mire at the bottom. Eventually an Ethiopian friend, Ebed-melech, persuaded Zedekiah to remove him from this filthy place. It took 30 men to haul him from the cistern. He was returned to the prison palace. Jeremiah again predicted the fall of Jerusalem. He remained in prison until the city was taken.” (Online notes on Jeremiah)

¹¹ I am not here disagreeing with the doctrine of the Impassibility of God. God is not moved with or by emotion (cf. Acts. 14:15). However, that is not to say that God doesn’t feel. Hodge wrote, “The schoolmen, and often the philosophical theologians, tell us that there is no feeling in God. This, they say, would imply passivity, or susceptibility of impression from without, which it is assumed is incompatible with the nature of God... Here again we have to choose between a mere philosophical speculation and the clear testimony of the Bible, and of our own moral and religious nature. Love of necessity involves feeling, and if there be no feeling in God, there can be no love... The philosophical objection against ascribing feeling to God, bears, as we have seen, with equal force against the ascription to Him of knowledge or will. If that objection be valid, He becomes to us simply an unknown cause, what men of science call force; that to which

all phenomena are to be referred, but of which we know nothing. We must adhere to the truth in its Scriptural form, or we lose it altogether. We must believe that God is love in the sense in which that word comes home to every human heart." (*Systematic Theology* [1871-73; reprint, Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1989], 1:428-29.) In the words of Dr. Kevin Vanhoozer, "Jesus was sinless yet subject to real temptation in the same way that an invincible army is subject to attack. Something similar, I believe, may be said for divine impassibility.... God feels the force of his people's suffering: "I have seen the affliction of my people who are in Egypt, and have heard their cry because of their taskmasters; I know their sufferings" (Ex 3:7). Yet as Jesus feels the force of temptation without sinning, so God feels the force of the human experience without suffering change in his being, will or knowledge. Impassibility means not that God is unfeeling but that God is never overcome or overwhelmed by passion.... God genuinely relates to human persons via his communicative action, but nothing humans do conditions or affects God's communicative initiatives and God's communicative acts." (*First Theology*, p 93 [research professor of Systematics at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School])

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About the Preacher

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