

Call and Response

<sup>4</sup> The word of the LORD came to me, saying,

<sup>5</sup> *"Before I formed you in the womb I knew you,  
Before you were born I set you apart;  
I appointed you as a prophet to the nations."*

<sup>6</sup> "Ah, Sovereign LORD," I said, "I do not know how to speak; I am only a child." <sup>7</sup> But the LORD said to me, "Do not say, 'I am only a child.' You must go to everyone I send you to and say whatever I command you. <sup>8</sup> Do not be afraid of them, for I am with you and will rescue you," declares the LORD.

<sup>9</sup> Then the LORD reached out his hand and touched my mouth and said to me, "Now, I have put my words in your mouth. <sup>10</sup> See, today I appoint you over nations and kingdoms to uproot and tear down, to destroy and overthrow, to build and to plant."



It would be hard to overstate the importance of the LORD's first words to Jeremiah both in his life and in the spiritual history of the world. Had the LORD not determined to appoint Jeremiah as His prophet "to the nations," Jeremiah would have gone on his way in complete anonymity and we would be bereft of an important witness "...of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment."<sup>1</sup> Verses 5a and b are temporal. They tell us about of the operation of divine providence in time. "Before I formed you ... Before you were born." In verse 5a, small mention is made of the instrumentality of Jeremiah's parents. The LORD says simply, "I formed you in the womb." Jeremiah is also told of the divine foreknowledge of his person before his formation. "Before I formed you ... I knew you." This should not surprise us. Thought preceding action is characteristic of much of human activity. Before we produce, we plan. The psalmist sensed this mystery of divine providence.

My substance was not hid from thee,  
When I was made in secret,  
And curiously wrought in the lowest parts of the earth.  
Thine eyes did see my substance, yet being imperfect;  
And in thy book, all my members were written,  
Which in continuance were fashioned,  
When as yet there was none of them.<sup>2</sup>

The phrase that the Apostle Peter uses to describe our spiritual case as Christians fits Jeremiah. He was "Elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father."<sup>3</sup> Not that we are appointed to be prophets like Jeremiah. But the LORD creates each one of us according to His foreknowledge of our person. "For he chose us in him (*i.e., In Jesus*) before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will -- to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves."<sup>4</sup> In that sense, we find in Jeremiah's call to the prophetic office, something akin to our own call to eternal life in Jesus.

Verse 5b presents the second temporal aspect of the LORD's choice. Just as Jeremiah is known before he is formed, so he is set apart for the LORD's special purpose before he is born! Verse 5c further explains *what* Jeremiah is set apart for.

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<sup>1</sup> John 16:8 – 11 "And when he (*i.e., the Comforter or the Holy Spirit*) is come, he will reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment: of sin, because they believe not on me: of righteousness, because I go to my Father, and ye see me no more: of judgment, because the prince of this world is judged.

<sup>2</sup> Psalm 139:15 - 16

<sup>3</sup> 1Peter 1:2 Elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through sanctification of the Spirit, unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ: Grace unto you, and peace, be multiplied.

<sup>4</sup> Ephesians 1:4 - 6

Jeremiah is appointed to be a prophet *to the nations*, not just a prophet to the nation of Israel. Taken together, these three verses give us some sense of the scope of divine authority: from the womb to the world. All is under the watchful eye and the almighty hand of the LORD. All things serve His purposes and those purposes are not hindered by the constraints of time and space.

Jeremiah is among those to whom the word of the LORD came when they were young. John the Baptist leapt in his mother's womb at the sound of Mary's greeting.<sup>5</sup> Samuel heard the voice of the LORD calling him three times before he responded as Eli instructed him.<sup>6</sup> Verse 6 tells us that Jeremiah was older because he knew who was speaking to him and what that summons meant. He was old enough to understand his limitations "I do not know how to speak" and "I am only a child." Neither objection succeeded. LORD simply responded, "Do not say, 'I am only a child.'" As far as his inability to speak, the LORD told him, "You must go to everyone I send you to and say whatever I command you." To reinforce the command "the LORD reached out his hand and touched my mouth and said to me, 'Now, I have put my words in your mouth.'" It is very likely that the fear of men lay behind Jeremiah's reticence. So, the LORD tells him "Do not be afraid of them, for I am with you and will rescue you." That promise would follow Jeremiah his entire life.

When the LORD asks us to do something that He has intended for us,<sup>7</sup> His command seems to awaken our sense of frailty and inadequacy. When tasked with the deliverance of Israel from Egypt, Moses objected, "I am not eloquent ... I am slow of speech, and of a slow tongue."<sup>8</sup> God understands our infirmities. Jesus, Himself, experienced our them.<sup>9</sup> The apostle Paul tells the Corinthians, "For ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called: But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; And base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are: That no flesh should glory in his presence."<sup>10</sup> The call of God exposes our weakness and smallness. It calls to mind others who despised us, who 'put us down.' It is not God's intent, however, to awaken self-limiting assertions about ourselves, however well founded. They do not play a role. If the fulfillment of the tasks the LORD sets before us depended on our abilities, then the glory of their achievement would be ours. But, as above, the operative principle nascent in His call is that no flesh should glory in His presence. How then are we to accomplish His appointed task and fulfill our appointed role? When confronted by a painful limitation, a "thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet" him, Paul besought the Lord to remove it. The Lord refused and instead taught Paul the important lesson that we all need to understand. "My grace is sufficient for thee"<sup>11</sup> lies behind Jeremiah's call (and ours). In Jeremiah's case, the LORD's grace was sufficient "to uproot and tear down, to destroy and overthrow, to build and to plant ... nations and kingdoms." Jeremiah's words were those of the LORD and in Jeremiah's life and ministry he would reveal "thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever."<sup>12</sup> Whatever role the LORD has for each one of us, the operating principle is the same. He calls us and by His grace we can respond, "Here am I send me"<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Luke 1:43 - 44 "But why am I so favored, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? As soon as the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy."

<sup>6</sup> 1Samuel 3:4- 10 "Then the LORD called Samuel. Samuel answered, "Here I am." And he ran to Eli and said, "Here I am; you called me." But Eli said, "I did not call; go back and lie down." So, he went and lay down. Again, the LORD called, "Samuel!" And Samuel got up and went to Eli and said, "Here I am; you called me." "My son," Eli said, "I did not call; go back and lie down." Now Samuel did not yet know the LORD: The word of the LORD had not yet been revealed to him. The LORD called Samuel a third time, and Samuel got up and went to Eli and said, "Here I am; you called me." Then Eli realized that the LORD was calling the boy. So, Eli told Samuel, "Go and lie down, and if he calls you, say, 'Speak, LORD, for your servant is listening.'" So Samuel went and lay down in his place. The LORD came and stood there, calling as at the other times, "Samuel! Samuel!" Then Samuel said, "Speak, for your servant is listening."

<sup>7</sup> Ephesians 2:10 For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.

<sup>8</sup> Exodus 4:10

<sup>9</sup> Hebrews 4:15 - 16 "For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need."

<sup>10</sup> 1 Corinthians 1:26 - 29

<sup>11</sup> 2 Corinthians 12:7 - 10

<sup>12</sup> Matthew 16:13

<sup>13</sup> Isaiah 6:8 "Also I heard the voice of the Lord, saying, 'Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?' Then said I, 'Here am I; send me.'"