

# The Voice of Jeremiah (Concluded) V

by T. Austin-Sparks

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*Jeremiah's ministry is a representative and inclusive figure, highlighting the features of all the Prophets, and emphasizing the cost and importance of prophetic ministry.*

**Scripture:** 2 Chronicles 36:22, Ezra 1:1, Acts 7:52, Acts 13:27, Romans 9:27

**Topics:** "Prophetic Ministry", "Spiritual Decline"

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## Description

T. Austin-Sparks delves into the prophetic ministry, focusing on the inclusive and representative position of Jeremiah, highlighting the various characteristics and features of all the Prophets. The prophetic function stands at the center of the conflict between God's intentions and man's decline, emphasizing the unrelenting stand against spiritual decline and the loneliness and costliness of the prophetic ministry. Despite feelings of inadequacy, God's strength is made perfect in weakness, as seen in Jeremiah's ministry and sufferings being vindicated in the Remnant, both temporal and eternal.

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## Transcript

"They knew not... the voices of the prophets which are read every sabbath" (Acts 13:27).

"Which of the prophets did not your fathers persecute?" (Acts 7:52).

Thus far we have been occupied with the many notes in the voice of the Prophet Jeremiah. Before we leave this Prophet we want to say a word regarding Jeremiah's representative and inclusive position. Perhaps some readers have wondered why we should have taken Jeremiah first in prophetic ministry. Most writers would - most probably - have put Isaiah first. "Jeremiah" is not an easy or happy Prophet to read. Isaiah is so much more likeable and readable. We may have our preferences among the Prophets, but - preference apart - there are reasons why we have commenced with Jeremiah, and there will be reasons why we do what we do in other cases.

Our main reason for this priority is that, in a fuller way than any other, Jeremiah accentuates the features of all the Prophets. What variety of features there is when we look at all the Prophets! Sorrow, hope, despair, joy, bitterness, light, darkness, love, anger, etc. While each Prophet may have more than one aspect, each one has some predominant feature. It is possible to say of each one: 'This is the Prophet of...' (and give a respective definition). When we look at Jeremiah we are impressed with many characteristics. But there is an inclusiveness here. If the predominant impression is tears and sorrow, this is alternated with hope, promise, God's sovereignty, and day of Salvation to come. The point is that many

aspects go to make up the calling and vocation of prophetic ministry. Let us note some of these, to which Jeremiah is a pointer. We have dealt with this matter much more fully in our "PROPHETIC MINISTRY" and "GOD'S REACTIONS TO MAN'S DEFECTIONS", but it will not be unhelpful to indicate some points here. The Prophet and his ministry is the focal point of

### God's Recovery Movement

That means that the function of prophetic ministry is introduced when things have departed from God's full intention. But it means more than that. The departure is marked by an element of strength which involves the Prophet in positive conflict. In such a ministry there is no passive accommodating to the situation, no compromise or appeasement. There may be appeal, entreaty, tears and sorrow, but there is no truce with spiritual decline. This is very apparent in all the Prophets from Samuel onward. They are fighting men, and the Chief of all was Jesus Christ Himself. God has a mind, and it is a full mind. This mind had been intimated, and the Bible is the history of the battle for its full realization. There is an intense downgrade element in creation. Left to itself nature declines, runs wild and loses character. Nothing rises - ascends - without a counter to this propensity. The Bible sees this element introduced as a part of one tremendous downward step by man; thorns and thistles for ever became symbols of a wrong direction, and toiling by the sweat of the brow the warfare to overcome that tendency. This inherent strain has marked man's relation with Divine things, and the history of the things of God has been: God moves - man countermoves - God moves again.

As we have said, the prophetic function stands at the centre of this conflict. It is here that the second of the two Scriptures at the head of this chapter has its place. Indeed, it is here that Stephen's martyrdom comes in.

"Which of the prophets did not your fathers persecute?"

Because the fulfilment of this kind of ministry means an unrelenting stand against the incorrigible desire to play down to the easy level, those who have this ministry committed to them are not popular, and - like Jeremiah - are looked upon as really not concerned for people's interests. This is probably why Jeremiah, like Moses and Isaiah, did shrink from such ministry. When Jeremiah said to the Lord: "I am a child; I cannot speak", he referred to his sense of not having the prophetic qualifications of the prophet - to "speak". The ministry for him held none of the attraction of preaching, as preaching has for so many. It had to be thrust upon Jeremiah against his own sense of insufficiency, for Jeremiah well knew what he would be up against as a Prophet; and he got what he expected. But, the very survival of these Prophets through all that they encountered shows that God was with them; that He had called them; and that their ministry was of particular importance and value to Him.

The ministry of recovery of lost values, lost standards, and lost spiritual measure is a lonely way for those in it. The Prophets were very lonely men, and their ministry was very costly.

If Jeremiah did feel himself to be so inadequate and such a "child" alongside of the big situation to be met, the Lord - while doubtless appreciating his sense of insufficiency - would not allow His servant to limit Him (God) to Jeremiah's measure. It is one of the paradoxes of Scripture that, while the Lord takes care to have His servants weak and empty in themselves, He will not permit them to excuse or exempt themselves on the ground of this insufficiency. So, an Apostle will cry out of an overwhelming sense of inadequacy: "Who is sufficient for these things?" and then answer his own cry: "Our sufficiency is of God." Jeremiah had the answer to his cry of weakness in: "I have this day set thee over the nations." The voice

of this Prophet, and all the Prophets, says:

"My strength is made perfect in weakness."

We must not forget that the Books of Ezra, Nehemiah, Zechariah, and more, are the definite result of the ministry of Jeremiah. (See 2 Chronicles 36:22 and Ezra 1:1.)

But remember also that Jeremiah's ministry and sufferings were vindicated in the Remnant. First the Remnant that returned to rebuild the temple and wall, and Jerusalem. Yes, but not only that temporal Remnant, but an eternal spiritual remnant, for the Apostle Paul uses this very truth in his argument concerning the inclusion of a remnant of Israel in the heavenly Zion, the New Israel (Romans 9:27-33). True, he quotes Isaiah, but, as we have indicated, the whole of the ministry of all the Prophets related to God's recovery movement; and that recovery is always in Remnants. May not the Overcomers of the Revelation be the Remnant at the end, embodying God's full mind? It is in those early chapters of the Revelation that we see that downgrade tendency so evident. Let us beware of playing down the full purpose of God. The false Prophets of Israel were not false in the sense that they never had been called to the Prophetic ministry. They were men who had been in the School of the Prophets; academically trained, and heirs of the tradition of Elijah, Elisha, etc. They were false in the sense of declension, compromise, time-serving; using their office officially and not spiritually; to gain popularity; men of policy and not principle; seeking to be men-pleasers, and to keep on pleasant terms with the people; not true at great cost to their trust and responsibility.

The criterion of our ministry at the end will be: 'Did the people of God really gain eternally by our having been with them, or did they lose what God wanted them to have?' Is the responsibility with us or with the people? This is the inclusive "voice" of all the Prophets.

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