

The Phases of Faith in the Call of Jeremiah

Thesis: The call of Jeremiah in Jeremiah chapter one is significant to the modern believer for many reasons. One reason is that the way in which God called His servant to a particular task can be generalized in such a way that we can apply it to the call of God to an individual today. Though many details of the manner and message of Jeremiah's call may be different than yours or mine, the Old Testament prophet's experience can give us encouragement, insight and guidance. Secondly, the three-part structure of the phases of faith -- seen most overtly in the life of Abraham, the father of our faith—can be seen in the call of Jeremiah as God gives a promise, deals with the contradictions in the form of objections and fears, and finally promises resolution.

Generalizing from the call of Jeremiah

The terms generalize and generalization, as used in representational research, refer specifically to the use of Bible scriptures as a source to derive principles that may be applied to everyday life. Though secular literature may speak of generalizing from personal experience or observation (applying experience and observation to other experience and observation), this is not the case in Biblical generalization; for in Biblical generalization, Scripture is the sole source and agential element, and human experience and observation always the element acted upon, or the patient.

A generalization is a conclusion that a Bible reader reaches after reading a Scripture passage; one that is true both to the specific passage under consideration as well as consistent with the rest of Scripture and the nature of God as portrayed in Scripture. Such a conclusion or generalization may be extracted from the specific instance and applied in other similar situations in a believer's life. Our brother Mike Strawn, who has pioneered study on generalizing, uses several familiar Bible passages to illustrate how a generalization is derived from each passage. With the story of David's defeat of Goliath, for instance, Strawn shows that an appropriate generalization would be that physics and physiology always yield to the power and will of God. That generalization is true not only to the situation of David and Goliath, but is consistent with all other Scriptural examples and teachings.

But few of us today are faced with nine-foot giants. A true and consistent generalization, such as this one derived from the example of David and Goliath would enable a believer facing an obstacle to use the conclusion: the power and will of God in any situation will always triumph over any physical circumstance.

In generalizing from the call of Jeremiah, we can derive several important principles as we go along, but this study will conclude with an overall generalization about this call that can be applied by the believer to similar situations.

The Phases of Faith: Background

Another foundational principle of representational thinking involves the three-part sequence known as the phases of faith. These phases occur throughout the Bible and are explained in great detail in the monograph entitled *The Phases of Faith*, qq.v.

By way of review and summary, the phases of faith are not a process in that each phase does not inevitably lead to the next. However, they are often seen as a sequential unit in Scripture. In the life of Abraham, for instance, we see promise, contradiction and resolution. He was promised a son, but the passage of time and his infertility and that of his wife seem to contradict that promise. However, God Himself resolved the contradictions (as He always does when He grants a command, promise or prediction) and Isaac was born. Later, Abraham faced an additional contradiction when he was commanded to take his son to a mountain and offer him as a burnt offering. Abraham reasoned from the resolution of the first situation and all the promises made to him that God would resolve the contradiction he faced at the top of the mountain – and God indeed did so. (Third-phase resolutions, in fact, are always meant to build faith and to provide a basis for action whenever an additional contradiction might arise.)

There are certain ways, we learn from Abraham and others, that second-phase contradictions are to be regarded by the believer. One must 1) elevate the promise above the contradiction 2) don't let the contradiction define the situation 3) look for the resolution 4) think non-naturally about the situation (in other words, don't look for "natural" or worldly solutions) 5) wait 6) look to the Lord and 7) rejoice.

With this background in mind, let us now look at the call of Jeremiah in light of the three-phased sequence of all trials of faith.

The Call / Promise

1. A call, like a promise from God, originates not in the mind of man but in the unseen.
2. A call has the sense of appointment (see verse 10).
3. Such a call indicates an individual's status before God and shows His attention toward him or her.
4. In the phrase "The word of the Lord came to me, saying..."
 - a. Unger in his commentary says this presupposes that there existed in the mind of Jeremiah a state of turmoil and mourning
 - b. See Isaiah 49:1-23 for parallel elements of what God said to Jeremiah
 - c. There is also a similarity to the predestination of purpose we see in Ephesians 1:4-5, Ephesians 2:10, and Hebrews 7:10.
5. All such calling is ordination by the Lord.

6. All such calling is sanctification of the individual, because it takes one away from the profane (those things to which you are not called) and makes a distinction between such things and that which is “sacred” or set apart (verse 5—“I set you apart”). See Leviticus 8:30 and 2 Chronicles 5:11.
7. The Hebrew root word of “prophet” means “one who is called” (Elwell in his *Evangelical Commentary*. It also carries the idea of speech that “gushes forth.” See Moses in Deuteronomy 18:18 and Exodus 7:1.
8. A call, like a promise can be specific to a particular individual, though there are general calls in the New Testament (we are all called to a holy priesthood, for example) that can be generalized to the individual as well. However, the call of Jeremiah and those of other prophets show that specific calls to specific tasks have a different character than these “general” callings. (A question for consideration: how would an individual know that a call is not from his or her own consciousness?)
9. Jeremiah’s call and similar ones to other prophets show that calls that have existed even before one’s own birth are announced by God. In the same way that God’s nature and inclination to bless precede, but do not negate the absolute need for such promises, the promise would have to be communicated to an individual by Him.
10. Here, a call, like a promise, is linguistic and not sensory-motor (“a feeling.”) Could we not conclude that something outside a vague feeling or a “default position” (“I’m a Christian and since I don’t know what else to do with my life, I guess I should go into ministry”) should indicate a call from God?
11. Jeremiah’s call was apparently one that he would not have himself chosen.
 - a. He objected to it
 - b. He had to be convinced and supported
 - c. It was a call to the nations, even though his heart mourned for his people the Israelites
12. The nature of such calls sets the stage for coming contradictions—all inherent to the three-phase structure.
13. I conclude that a call functions as a promise.

Phase Two –The Contradictions

1. Jeremiah offers objections that he sees as contradictions to the call/promise.

- a. “I don’t know how to speak” – refers to what he sees as *inability*
 - b. “I am only a child” –Jeremiah’s perception of his *position*
2. How God teaches Jeremiah to deal with the contradictions
- a. He elevates the promise above the contradiction: “You must go..”
 - b. Do not let the contradiction define the situation: “Do not say...”
 - c. Look for the resolution: “I will rescue you.” However, “they will fight against you” implies there will be further contradictions, but He assures Jeremiah that “My word will be fulfilled.”
 - d. Think non-naturally. In verse 14, God promises geo-political help that will not come from Jeremiah’s personal resources or even from his God-enhanced abilities.
 - e. Wait. “I am watching to see that My word is fulfilled.” God Himself waits with the called one.
 - f. Look to the Lord: “I am with you,” assures God, “Go to *everyone I send you to* and “*say whatever I command you.*” Jeremiah’s self-direction was nullified and replaced with dependence on God’s direction.
 - g. Rejoice – “Don’t be terrified by them.”

The Fortifications of a Call

1. The strength and effect of the call upon Jeremiah is pictured in vivid imagery of *being built up* as a) a fortified city b) an iron pillar and c) a bronze wall.
2. The elements of the fortification that were intended to strengthen Jeremiah
 - a. A sense of pan-temporality (“before I formed you in the womb....before you were born....”)
 - b. A sense of God’s involvement with him on a personal, first-name basis
 - c. A prohibition against the language of contradictions: “Do not say. . . “
 - d. A giving up of the called one’s own restrictions on the task: “Go to everyone I send you to, say whatever I command you.”
 - e. A prohibition against the language and mechanisms of fear: “Do not be afraid” (verse 7). God threatens Jeremiah: “I will terrify you before them” – the implication is that the only credible source of fear for Jeremiah would be disobedience that would displease God.
 - f. A sense of accompanying presence of God – “I am with you” –verse 8.
 - g. A sense of presence in turmoil
 - h. An eventual rescue. In the life of Jeremiah, we see, it was repeated rescues, many of them after humiliating and protracted trials (for example, his time in a pit.)
 - i. An observation: when God puts words in the mouth of the called one, it is *after* personal contact (verse 9.)

- j. An observation: an appointment or call may not be even mostly constructive. In Jeremiah's case, his task was 2/3 tearing down and only 1/3 building up and planting (verse 10.) It is logical that God would anticipate Jeremiah's fear, because he would not be seen most of the time in his ministry as strengthening anything. For example, when King Jehoiakim burned Jeremiah's scroll (chapter 36), it was because he read the messages of coming destruction.) Even the eventual restoration that Jeremiah's message promised would come after a repentance (a tearing-down of sinful ways.)
- k. God lets Jeremiah see His watchful nature. The words of His pronouncements (both about 1) the nations and 2) Jeremiah's enablement to speak) are being hovered over by God. The almond tree – the “watchful tree” implies both God's sense of haste and hope that emerges like leaves from the deadness of winter.
- l. God had to use forces outside Jeremiah to define and expedite His judgments. Thus from outside the called one, God uses unmistakable, external elements to bring things along.
- m. Verse 17 shows how readiness of heart is essential once God has announced a call.
- n. The nature of God's message to Jeremiah shows how coming contradictions are both foreknown and effectively pre-quieted on behalf of the called one.

The Resolution:

God's presence (“I am with you”) and intervention (“I will rescue you”) are the essential elements that enable the called one to be able to do what he or she is called to do.

Overall generalization:

All internal, inherent, positional and/or oppositional elements must be viewed as contradictions that will be overcome and subsumed by the power of the call and promise and the Caller and Promiser.