

Jeremiah and the role of the prophet

Jeremiah's story is poetic, tragic, morbid even and extremely challenging to the reader. Although he was derided by his peers as a pathological pessimist, his words are infused with vitality and hope. He witnessed some of the most traumatic events in Israel and Judah's history.

What is prophecy?

Read Jeremiah 1v9-10

Definition: Having God put words in your mouth

Expressions and purposes of prophecy

The Oracle

Balaam - Numbers 22-24 _____

Micaiah - 1st Kings 22v19 _____

The Seer

Samuel - 1 Sam 9 _____

The Intuitionist/Discerner

What do you see? - Jeremiah 1v11 _____

What does this mean? - Jeremiah 18 _____

The Thinker/Historian/Politician

Throughout the book of Jeremiah it's very clear that this man knows his international politics and how poor leadership decisions disable and destroy nations.

The Poet

Sounds like? - Jeremiah 48v2 _____

The Wordsmith

Letter to exiles - Jeremiah 29 _____

Monumental dissing - Jeremiah 36 _____

The Comedian

The mud reference - Jeremiah 38v22 _____

Amen, Brother! - Jeremiah 28v6 _____

The Performance Artist / Publicist

Buries new waistcoat, smashes flask, walks around town bound to a yoke, buys a field at a terrible time, makes sure a scroll is thrown into the Euphrates

Fancy a pint? - Jeremiah 35 _____

Purposes of prophecy

Jeremiah 23v29 - 'Isn't my word like fire? Like a hammer smashing rocks?

To predict future events

Jeremiah 8

To encourage repentance

Jeremiah 6v14

To prepare a nation for disaster, trauma and exile

Jeremiah 23 and 51

Jeremiah 14

Jeremiah 31v33, 34

The emotional turmoil of being a prophet

Twice the turmoil – prophecy as I've stated is God putting words in your mouth, but in Old Testament prophecy it also means feeling the God's pain in your heart. As well as God's pain, the prophet has to contend with his or her own humanity and sensitivities.

Physical pain of symbolic acts, torture, accusations of betrayal and blasphemy and death threats – Jeremiah experienced them all

Slo-mo trauma and despair

During a car-crash things seem to move slower. How did the 40 years of prophetic public service feel to Jeremiah?

Doubt and questioning

Jeremiah 20v7 - the prophet actually accuses God of deceiving him!

Possibly looking stupid for getting things wrong

The superb prophetic diss in Jer22v19 doesn't appear happen. Why not?

Jeremiah's emotional palate

In this book we also get a rare opportunity to grasp how a prophet feels about the individual kings he admonishes and advises, how he perceives himself and his role as prophet to monarchs who met very different fates.

For **King Josiah** Jeremiah felt respect
For Josiah's short-lived reform - disillusionment

For **Jehoahaz** - regret
His exile - enough pity that Jeremiah composed a dirge for him

For **Jehoiakim** - opposition
His extravagance and evil - 11 years of harsh, probably witty criticism

For **Jehoiachin** - sympathy
His 100 days and savvy surrender – Jeremiah writes a sad little poem about him: 'Why will he and his children be hurled out?' Jeremiah 22v28

For **Zedekiah** - understanding and firmness
His weakness - gracious advice despite the king failing to stop his almost fatal trauma in the muddy cistern

For **Gedaliah** - deep sadness
His unmet potential and lost friendship - grief

Further reading: **'The Indomitable Prophet' [R.E.O White]**
'The Hebrew Prophets – Visionaries of the Ancient World' [edited by Lawrence Boadt]
'Prophets and Poets' [edited by Grace Emmerson]