
A. Introduction, 1:1-3: dates the life and times of the prophet “. . . is followed in 1.4-19 by a self contained composition. The call account (4:1-10 [sic 1:4-10]) is developed into two visions (vv. 11f. 13f.) and a saying of YHWH (vv. 15-19): YHWH's word (vv. 7, 9) will be fulfilled (v. 12) as YHWH summons the nations (vv. 5, 10) from the north to judge Israel (vv. 14f.); he will protect Jeremiaiah despite all attacks (vv. 8, 17-19).”2

B. The call account, 4-10.

1. vs. 4-5: The setting apart of the prophet before his birth as a prophet to the nations.

2. v. 6: The prophetic protestation which a study of the prophetic call narratives suggests this genre argues for a prophet like Moses (cf. Exod 3-4 and Isa 6).

3. v. 7-9: Encouragement from Yhwh, also part of this genre (cf. Exod 3-4 and Isa 6).

4. v. 10: The appointment of the prophet.
   a. Of significance is the fact that Jeremiah is appointed, not a prophet over Israel, but the nations, with power "to uproot and tear down, to destroy and overthrow, to build and plant."
   b. This expands and demonstrates the authority of the prophet, only hinted at in v. 5c.
   c. Jeremiah's message then embraces all nations and kingdoms affecting Israel, meaning that whatever comes, whether, death, sword, exile, blessing, etc. comes by the authority of Jeremiah!

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1 For details regarding the exegesis of this passage see, Randall C. Bailey, Images of the Prophets: Metaphors and Epithets that Describe Prophets and Prophetic Activity (Ph.D. Dissertation: Drew University, 1987), 20ff.

C. **The visions, 11-16.**

1. The visions of verses 11-16 probably were independent of the call of Jeremiah.³

2. In fact, they are usually regarded as expansions either added to the end of the call proper (4-10), or, assuming that 17-19 concluded 4-10, inserted in their present place, thus splitting the call proper and the encouragement recorded in 17-19.⁴

3. If correct, this would mean that the phrase “Be not afraid of them” in v. 8 refers to the nations in the context of the commission, but in the expansion it refers to Jeremiah’s countrymen (cf. vv., 8, 10, 16, 17).⁵

4. The first vision involves a word play while the second uses an image of boiling pot, tilted toward the north and about to spill.

   a. In the vision of the almond tree God asks Jeremiah what does he see and he replies דָּקִיבָּה (almond tree), God replies, “I am ḫוּלי דָּקִיבָּה (watching) my word to accomplish it.” As Jeremiah watched the almond tree, God watched his word.

   b. The vision of the boiling pot tilted toward the north is explained:

      (1) Just as an "accident about to happen," so is God about to bring a disaster from the north in the form of an army.

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⁵Carroll, *From Chaos*, 50; cf. id., *Jeremiah*, 107, 109..
which subjugates the towns of Judah and encamps at the gates of Jerusalem.

(2) This vision may bear a relationship to the disaster from the north in 4:5ff.

5. Both visions bear a relationship to Jeremiah and his prophetic authority, in that God who watches over his word to bring it about and who will bring an enemy from the north, reveals it to his prophet, who himself has authority to announce that word, and thus to bring it about.

D. **The nature of Jeremiah's ministry, 17-19.**

1. Verses 17-19 are often seen as the conclusion of the chapter:

2. The metaphors “fortified city,” “iron pillar,” and “bronze walls” are the heart of this conclusion

3. They form the climax of the chapter and very poignantly describe Jeremiah's prophetic work among the people.

4. Most scholars see the metaphors of v. 18 as encouragement for Jeremiah (see Rendtorff's observation, quoted above). They are seen as:

   a. Equipping Jeremiah for his ministry
   b. Arming Jeremiah for a difficult mission
   c. Describing God's protection of Jeremiah
   d. Renewed comfort due to God's protection
   e. Assurance of God's strengthening

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f. Furnishing Jeremiah with courage

5. More succinctly, some scholars have argued the text depicts the coming fight for which Jeremiah was to prepare.

   a. Specifically, the metaphors "fortified city," "bronze walls," and "iron pillar" describe the warlike nature of Jeremiah’s ministry.

   b. Jeremiah was made a prophet against the whole land, against everyone mentioned in the passage.

      (1) Protection for Jeremiah was only secondary.

      (2) That is Jeremiah would be protected only so long has he remained strong.

6. **Bronze walls and fortified city.**

   a. Many of the events of Jeremiah's life occurred just prior to, as well as at the beginning of, the captivity.

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13Carroll, From Chaos, 51; Carroll elaborated this position in *Jeremiah* (109f.), arguing that 17-19 represented the social conflict begun when the exiles returned from Babylon, though he admitted (110) “the more popular exegetical understanding of them [vs. 17-19] as the fortification of Jeremiah against the opposition of the people is unlikely to lose its appeal to many readers of the book.”


15The phrase "iron pillar" should be deleted.
(1) During this time wars and rumors of wars were likely rampant. Emotions among the people ran high.

(2) Battle lines were drawn on all fronts.

(3) People were forced to choose the course of their actions. They could delay their choice no longer.

(4) It is in such a socio-political context that Jeremiah lived and worked, speaking the message he received from the Lord.

b. In this context "bronze walls," with its basic image of protection against attack, functions to describe the warlike nature of Jeremiah’s prophetic ministry.

(1) As the bronze walls of a fortified city, Jeremiah is the forward obstacle against which the people attack.

(2) Bronze walls as a defensive weapon of a fortified city represented the ultimate in defensive warfare. They did not exist, but could only be imagined.

(3) Jeremiah is pictured as being the ultimate in his ability to defend against these attacks.

(4) Finally, Jeremiah as "bronze walls" offers no protection "for the people," as is in the case in Egypt.

(5) Jeremiah is bronze walls against those people.

c. "Fortified city" functions in this context to describe Jeremiah as being well defended or impregnable, and perhaps inaccessible to the people when they attacked him.

(1) As a fortified city, Jeremiah is portrayed as an individual engaged in warfare with the community he seeks to save.

(2) In the language of warfare, he represents the enemy.
(3) Not only an enemy in the external sense, but an enemy in the internal sense.

(4) Jeremiah would be perceived as a traitor to his people.

(5) Jeremiah was a fortified city against those people.

7. **Iron pillar** does not fit as well with “Bronze walls” and “fortified city” as the latter two terms do.

   a. "**Fortified city**" and "**bronze walls**" call up images of warfare, but what is an "**iron pillar**"?

   b. The insertion of this term between the other two seems to break, or interrupt, the warfare imagery.

   c. Further, the phrase “iron pillar” (עִלַּאֹמְדָּא בַּרְזֶל, úlê'ammûd barzel) does not occur in the Septuagint.

   d. Consequently, scholars often perceive the term as secondary. We must admit that its occurrence of "**iron pillar**" in the Hebrew text *does* provide imagery that describes Jeremiah's prophetic role in a different way than the other two metaphors.

   e. **Giesebrecht** has attempted to show how "**iron pillar**," though missing in the LXX, still gives prominence to the concepts of invincibility, resistance, and the impossibility of being overthrown—concepts shared by the other two terms.\(^{16}\)

(1) Whether Giesebrecht's description of the imagery provided by the metaphor “iron pillar” is entirely correct remains to be seen.

(2) The same can be said for his observation that its imagery offsets its absence in the Septuagint. At the present these observations seem unlikely.

\(^{16}\) Friedrich Giesebrecht, *Das Buch Jeremia* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1894), 5.
f. **Fischer**\(^{17}\) has argued:

1. That elsewhere in Jeremiah "pillar" refers to the two bronze pillars of the temple, which were broken up and carried off (27:19; 52:21-27) and that the prophet replaced these, which he prophesied would be destroyed (chapters 7 and 26) because of the people’s false confidence (50:28; 51:11).

2. That "iron" functions much as the image of the iron yoke (chapter 27ff.)—just as the change from a wooden to an iron yoke signified the increasingly powerful subjection under Nebuchadnezzar, so, in a similar way, is the change from “bronze” to “iron” be interpreted, in which Jeremiah is a stronger better replacement for the original bronze pillars.

3. That speeches such as the temple sermon (7, 26) indicate the temple's lost significance was replaced by Jeremiah’s preaching.

4. Seen in this way, Jeremiah, from the beginning of the book, is described as a firmer, better replacement for the temple, which was essential forth faith. Though the real pillars were carried off Jeremiah remained standing with God’s help, undefeated.

g. Other scholars who have attempted to discuss the imagery of "iron pillar" have been content to discuss it in terms of the permanency, or indestructibility, of Jeremiah's work.\(^{18}\)

h. **Iron pillar**, like **fortified city** and **bronze walls**, is an inanimate metaphor the root image of which is a concrete object.

1. In Jeremiah’s day a "**fortified city**" was an object which could easily be pictured in one's mind.

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(2) But the terms "iron pillar" and "bronze walls" are different. While "pillar" or "walls" could easily be imagined, their existence being an everyday occurrence, walls made of bronze and a pillar made of iron were things which could exist only in the mind.

(3) Bronze walls and iron pillars simply did not exist, except in the imagination.

(4) This "imaginary existence" illustrates that God could make what man was unable to make—objects that could withstand any opposition.¹⁹

i. **Supporting Column:** Jeremiah described as an "iron pillar" forms an image of some kind of supporting column visible in the architecture of that day.

(1) But instead of any normal column then observed, this column was made of iron indicating its strength and indestructibility in a way similar to the man named "Barzillay."

(2) Just as he was no "normal man," but an "iron man," Jeremiah was no normal pillar, but an "iron pillar."

(3) As an iron pillar, Jeremiah’s prophetic duty was to support the word he received from Yahweh.

(4) That is, Jeremiah was to render a support of Yahweh's word which could not be destroyed. This interpretation is not without problems.

j. **Problems** with these interpretations:

(1) If Jeremiah is designated an iron pillar in order to describe his support of the divine word, there remains the problem of how he supported the divine word.

(2) On the other hand, if Jeremiah is an iron pillar in a way similar to that of the vizier in the Middle Kingdom of Egypt, then he is the only example of any one in Israel ever being designated a pillar in the figurative sense.

(3) The fact that this is a Middle Kingdom usage in Egypt presents still a further problem.

(4) Finally, in addition to the above, the lack of similar figurative language in the biblical literature serves to negate this hypothesis.

(5) What can be said with certainty is that the imagery of support (whatever it may be) provided by iron pillar is quite different from the imagery provided by both "bronze walls" and "fortified city."

8. It is no wonder then, that Jeremiah and his ministry are described in terms of "a fortified city," "bronze walls." and "iron pillar."

   a. He certainly was a "fortified city and bronze walls against the whole land."

   b. And, if Fischer is correct, as an “iron pillar,” Jeremiah’s work certainly outlasted the temple with its pillars.

E. Summary:

1. The call of vs. 4-10 give Jeremiah authority involving:

   a. power over the nations, v. 4.

   b. no fear of enemies, v. 8.

   c. the power “over nations and kingdoms to uproot and tear down, to destroy and overthrow, to build, to build and plant,” v. 10.
2. The visions set the stage for the warfare and the enemy from the north, vs. 11-16.

3. As they approach and attack from the outside, Jeremiah is to prepare for war from the inside, v. 17.

4. He will be able to stand such assaults from the rulers of Israel due to his strength as a bronze wall and fortified city, and outlast the temple as an iron pillar, 18-19.

5. The chapter must be seen "setting the pace" for the rest of the book.
   a. It sets the tone for what will come later.
   b. This chapter is a clue to the general arrangement of the book.