

Hermeneutics: Observe the Purpose of a Book

Jeremiah 1:4-5

The purpose of a book prepares you for what it is about and how you might read it; but, the various books of the Bible doesn't always provide an introduction. In many instances, you can discover the purpose of a book of the Bible by observing something about the author. Here is an example found in Jeremiah.

Now the word of the Lord came to me, saying,
"Before I formed you in the womb **I knew you**,
and before you were born I consecrated you;
I appointed you a prophet to the nations." (Jer 1:4-5, ESV)

Often, while taking time to learn about the author, you learn something about God. In the above passage, explore the meaning of two phrases:

I knew you

I appointed you a prophet to the nations

What do you learn about the purpose of the book of Jeremiah?

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Teacher Notes

When reading the Bible, encourage the student to take the time to find out about the book's author. This information provides a wonderfully informative background, and the character of that godly author may be helpful to the student. The historical context of the author is also helpful and informative.

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There are many ways to study this; however, one of the best methods is to use a lexicon to understand the actual Hebrew word for "knew." One easy resource to use is BlueLetterBible.org.

1. In the search box, type: "Jer 1" and select the Bible version used for this lesson: "ESV"
2. Click "tools" next to Jer 1:5
3. In the box that opens, look for the phrase "I knew you"
4. Click the Strong's number: H3045 and see all the ways the Hebrew word *yāda'* (verb know) is used. The verbal stem (i.e. qal, niph'al, piel, poal, pual, hiph'il, hoph'al, hithpa'el) nuances the meaning of the word.

Another method is to use a concordance and see all the instances the verb "know" is used in the context of God and a human being.

In essence, God knows each person completely and with certainty.

I appointed you a prophet to the nations

Ask the student if he notices any progression of God's actions. Help the student with probing questions.

1. God knew Jeremiah in the womb.
2. From what God knew of Jeremiah, his character and future choices, God set him apart.
3. God knew Jeremiah would choose to serve Him as a prophet and was accordingly appointed. Using a Bible dictionary, an Old Testament prophet is one who is inspired by God and is His spokesman – a speaker of God's words.
4. Jeremiah prophetic role was not limited to speaking to God's people in Judah.

In reference to this progression, something similar occurred before where God made a choice based on what He knew of a person before he was born, for example, in the case of Esau:

And not only so, but also when Rebekah had conceived children by one man, our forefather Isaac, though they were not yet born and had done nothing either good or bad—in order that God's purpose of election might continue, not because of works but because of him who calls— she was told, “The older will serve the younger.” As it is written, “Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated.” (Rom 9:10-13)

Because of His omnipotent foreknowledge, God knew that Esau, before he was born, would give away his birthright.

What do you learn about the purpose of the book of Jeremiah?

As a spokesman for God and “prophet to the nations”, the book of Jeremiah is a message intended to everyone.

By observing the author’s historical background, when Judah and its capital Jerusalem was being threatened with destruction by the Nebuchadnezzar, Jeremiah is about God’s judgment of His people for their failure to keep their covenant.

In response to their breaking their covenant relationship and destroying the Mosaic Covenant, Jeremiah introduces a whole New Covenant.