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THE ALMOND SHOOT

A STUDY OF THE COMMUNICATIVE GENIUS
OF THE PROPHET JEREMIAH

by

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A THESIS

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THE COMMUNICATIVE GENIUS OF THE PROPHET JEREMIAH

INTRODUCTION

"Thoughts rule the world."¹ This from one of the most prominent Christian leaders of present day Africa (Southern Rhodesia), Ndabaningi Sithole, writing in African Nationalism. He goes on to say, "It is to be recognized that the African is hungry for learning, and he will learn whatever presents itself to him until the right things come his way."²

The preoccupation of "New Africa" with the importance of thoughts and ideas as instruments to helping the African man find his place or make his place in the world is the major challenge of today to modern missions.

This is at root a matter of communication -- that is, of someone saying something worthwhile and being understood. The message of the gospel has not altered fundamentally, but the conditions under which the message is to be given have altered radically. Added to the perennial barriers of language and culture differences, are the problems associated with what has been called by James Truslow Adams, "a

¹Sithole, Ndabaningi, African Nationalism, (Cape Town: Oxford University Press, 1959), p. 173.

²Ibid.

the thirteenth gate, to admit Africans.¹ (There are said to be twelve gates in heaven for whites and the thirteenth for "Natives Only".) "We wonder sometimes, mused a Zulu journalist, "whether we might not have got the wrong God. It might have been better if we had had our own God."²

There is moreover a great resurgence of faith in the power of the spirits, divined and interpreted by the so-called "witch-doctor". This is the world of intimation and oblique reference rather than fact. A language within a language is employed by the masters of this art. It is their intention to confuse rather than to clarify. Their work is done in the shadows. Mystery is their companion and fear is their ally. Imagination and emotion combine to stimulate a condition of hysteria in which fearful deeds are done -- the doers claim innocence on the tenuous grounds that they are not themselves when they do these things.

The challenge to the church is in the field of faith. It is as we have said already, a matter of communication of the Word of God. There is a hunger for God -- for the "abiding things",³ but those who would meet this challenge must learn to communicate their faith effectively.

Searching for some guidance and help in the problem of communicating to the new Africa, the present writer found what appealed to him as a "mine" of resource in the life

¹Sundkler, Bengt, "Bantu Messiah and White Christ", Frontier, (Spring, 1960), p. 16.

²Ibid, p. 15.

³Sithole, op. cit. p. 171.

and writings of the prophet Jeremiah -- the man from Anathoth of 626 B. C.

While doing a piece of inductive study of these prophetic writings there emerged the conviction that if Jeremiah were to suddenly appear in the courts of the Hague, or Geneva, or Pretoria, or Brussels, or London, or Lisbon, he would be similarly unpopular and yet as devastatingly relevant and in a subtle way, effective as he was in the courts of Josiah, and Zedekiah.

There is an eternal quality in the man and in his writings. He was an influence in his day and he is an influence still. His character, his style, his power are as vital as ever. What is his secret? Why is it that we read Jeremiah like today's newspaper? What is the nature of the communicative genius of this man? And what is its relevancy to the modern messengers of truth who today are finding themselves tragically aware that much and loudly though they speak, nobody is listening?

The aim therefore of this treatment of the writings of Jeremiah is to bring out the elements of genius in the character and method of the man. Related as it must be to the actual message of the prophet, the message itself is not primarily the writer's concern. Related as it must also be to the historical situation, again passing reference is made to this only to give background to the story of the prophet's character and procedure. In every aspect

the writer limits himself to the search for elements of genius, seen to be rooted in the personality of the individual, expressed in the methods employed by him in communicating his message and evaluated by the recorded effect on the man's contemporaries.

The title of this thesis is "The Almond Shoot" being a study of the Communicative Genius of the Prophet Jeremiah. This title was chosen to call attention to the frequently inconspicuous but powerful influence of the Spirit of God which animates His Word with life and meaning. We begin at this point with the assurance that we shall conclude at the same point. For although the analysis of the communicative genius of the Prophet will deal largely with the qualities of the man and of his work, the underlying inspiration and power stems from the living presence of the Spirit of God. He who is "early awake", watching over his plan to perform it, is the Source without whose stimulating energy nothing else avails.

The principal source is the text of Holy Scripture, the Word of the Lord as spoken by the prophet and recorded by Baruch, his secretary. The procedure is one of inductive analysis of the text with an occasional reference to an authority in the field of communication or in comment upon the Biblical text.

Chapter one defines the problem of communication and outlines the prior requirements which fit an individual to be the receptacle of the divine Word.

Chapter two delves deeper into the qualities of the one who has received the message and is now responsible for its delivery, stressing the contribution of the mind.

Chapter three probes deeper by emphasizing the moral and spiritual side of the personality of the prophet. These two chapters consider what kind of a man it takes to deliver the message.

Chapter four then calls attention to the quality of the prophet's writings, giving special consideration to his methods of presentation.

Chapter five examines the effects of the prophet's methods as demonstrated by the reactions of those who felt most keenly the impact of his words.

In conclusion, Chapter six summarizes the findings of this investigation into the secret of the communicative genius of the prophet Jeremiah.

CHAPTER I

GETTING THE MESSAGE: RECEPTIVITY

I. COMMUNICATION DEFINED

Communication, "the interchange of thoughts"¹ is the art of speaking and being understood. It is bridging the gap between two people or as in the case of those who spoke for God, between people and God. Wilfred Garrett in his article, "The Church and Industry" asks the question, "What do we mean by saying that communication is bridging the gap between the church people (the pew) and industry people (the bench)?"² "Dr. MacLeod of Iona Community has said that in the early days of that community the ministers who worked as labourers to the craftsmen discovered that they got better contact with the craftsmen while working with them than while talking with them, and far better than while talking at them; and this may be the secret of the new approach of the Church to industry."³

This illustration is taken from one of the areas of

¹Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary, (Springfield, Massachusetts, G. & C. Merriam Company), 1953.

²Garrett, Wilfred, "The Church and Industry", World Dominion, (January, 1956), p. 6.

³Ibid., p. 7.

modern life where the gap is greatest, that between pew and bench and where the art of communicating the Word of God is most difficult and badly managed. It serves to draw attention to the importance of making contact, a factor which is indispensable to communication. In this connection then we consult the experienced wisdom of the prophet. From the vantage point of later years he wrote of the early encounter with his God which sparked his ministry. Jeremiah had contact with God. Whatever communicative genius he may have had took its root in this fact.

The dialogue of Jeremiah, chapter 1:4-10, goes to the root of effective communication. In this "poetic distillation of Jeremiah's years of reflection on his call"¹ the factor of contact is primary. Communication presupposes a relationship and in this passage of encounter there is forged the living relationship between a man and God which constitutes the basic stuff of the communicating genius of Jeremiah.

To be sure, spoken communication depends on language and a common denominator of word perception, but the origins of this art are not in language. Behind the profound desire to say something and the medium of language by which to say it there is in the instance of the prophet, the consuming desire on the part of Some Other to get something said.

The speaker as an agent enters here, the agent of

¹Hopper, Stanley R., "Exposition of Jeremiah", Interpreter's Bible, Vol. 5 (New York, Nashville, Abingdon Press, 1956), p. 798.

Another. As Hopper has said, "conscious of God as someone over against him -- as a genuine and invincible otherness,"¹ the agent of Another speaks not his own words but the words of the One for whom he is the agent. There must be an element of helplessness, an inability to do otherwise, on the part of the speaker in that he acts simply as a channel as it were for the city water supply unable to determine the quantity of water flowing through it or its power to bless or curse the recipients. So a prophet, as a genuine agent of God, cannot restrict the contents of God's message, nor its effect on the hearers. What then has the prophet to teach us about the connection between communication and contact with God? Let us see the importance attached to knowing the Source.

II. COMMUNICATION: CONTACT WITH GOD

Importance of knowing the Source: As a scholar is judged by knowledge of his sources so is the prophet or the preacher. The bearer of a message must be prepared for the question, "From whence cometh this word?"

The prophet Jeremiah was compelled to face a variation of the same question. His colleague and contemporary, Hananiah, challenged the authority of his word by disdainfully removing the yoke-bars from his neck and breaking

¹Ibid.

them in pieces. In effect he was challenging Jeremiah to answer the query, "Whose man are you?"

Confident in reply Jeremiah cried, "Listen, Hananiah, the Lord has not sent you, and you have made this people trust in a lie."¹ It was a bold response but so confident was Jeremiah of the source of his strength that he proceeded to pronounce the death sentence on Hananiah, leaving it to events to prove him right -- which they did. Hananiah died within the year.

Possessed and Directed of God. Meaningful and effective communication is possible when a man knows for whom he speaks. God's man speaks for God. The devil's man speaks for the devil. As yet no one can say what the message will be, or how it will be delivered, to whom or with what effect but at the heart of the matter lies this principle: Before a message of any kind can be spoken, to say nothing of being understood, there must be utter and complete surrender of the agent to his agency, of the prophet to his God, of the gospel messenger to his Christ.

We have said that Jeremiah made contact with God and that the secret of his genius to communicate the Word of God to men was rooted in this living relationship. Now then contact with God was made possible for two reasons. Jeremiah was a God-possessed man and a God-directed man.

¹Jeremiah 28:15-16.

A brief analysis of Jeremiah, Chapter 1:4-11, brings to light the significant "I--You" relationship, the personal encounter, the shocking encounter which the prophet experienced at the outset of his work. Came the Word of the Lord to him, "I formed you.....I knew you.....I consecrated youI appointed you....." The young man protests in effect, "Not me!!" And the voice of the Lord replies, "Yes, you!!" "I send you.....I command you.....I am with you."

Known even before he was capable of knowing, chosen, consecrated, appointed, Jeremiah was God's man. Sent, commanded as to what he would say, accompanied by God, Jeremiah was a God directed man.

Possessed by God, directed by God, this is the nature of the prophet's surrender to the point where he could be touched by God and given the "Word" which was to be his burden, his life, his task.

"Once he had passed the basic shock of encounter in which," as Tillich says, "nobody wants to be known",¹ he was ready for the definition of his task."

"Then the Lord put forth His hand and
touched my mouth;
and the Lord said to me,
'Behold, I have put my words in your mouth...'"²

The outcome of this "divine-human encounter" is for Jeremiah "the word of the Lord which came to me saying." Surrender has led him to the crowning but he can feel the

¹Hopper, op. cit. p. 804.

²Jeremiah 1:9.

"thorn-pressure"¹ and the "awful daring of a moment's surrender."² For the words are words of terror and dismay.

"See, I have set you this day over nations
and over kingdoms,
to pluck up and to break down,
to destroy and to overthrow,
to build and to plant."³

Jeremiah sought escape, he pled his youthfulness, but in this encounter and conflict of wills, God had already acted, his energizing word had been spoken with his initiative, in his early awakedness he had made his choice and his choice was Jeremiah. Jeremiah's task is two fold: to be a prophet to the nations and to root up and destroy the wickedness of Israel that the time of planting and building might come. To this end says the Lord: "I have put my words in your mouth."⁴ Divine authority and divine commission are contained in the proclamation which the prophet must make.

As God's man he must take up the divine appointment and so become the host to the very presence of God,

"O Lord thou knowest
remember me and visit me...
Thy words were found and I ate them,
and thy words became to me a joy
and the delight of my heart;
for I am called by thy name
O Lord God of Hosts."⁵

¹Eliot, George, quoted from Interpreter's Bible, Vol 5, (New York, Nashville, Abingdon Press, 1956), 802.

²Eliot, ibid, p. 802.

³Jeremiah 1:10.

⁴Jeremiah 1:9b.

⁵Jeremiah 15:15a, 16.

III. CONTACT WITH THE PEOPLE AND THE CONTEMPORARY SITUATION

We have seen that the prophet Jeremiah became the instrument of the Word of God because he was God-possessed, God-directed, God-chosen and God-ordained. Thus it was possible for him, being on such intimate terms with God, to hear what God was going to say. Certainly hearing is the prior responsibility to speaking.

In his book Christianity and Communication, Dr. Dillistone reports the concern of business agencies who found it the next thing to the impossible to establish a firm connection with potential buyers. Fortune Magazine made a nation wide survey of the mass communication media and found little amiss. The question, "Why isn't Joe Dooker listening?" remained unanswered. One of the main conclusions was this, "Only with trust can there be any real communication."¹ Commented author Dillistone, "Exceedingly suggestive."² Indeed apropos of what we have posited as the root of the prophet's genius of communication, it is not only suggestive but conclusive to assert that faith laid open completely the lines of communication between Jeremiah and God. When all the world stood against him, ready to slay him in order to silence him, the prophet stood confident in the recollec-

¹Dillistone, F. W., Christianity and Communication, (London: Collins, 1956), p. 12.

²Ibid, p. 13.

tion of the covenant made that day when the Lord spoke and said:

"Do not be dismayed by them, lest I dismay you before them. And I, behold, I make you this day a fortified city, an iron pillar, and bronze walls against the whole land, against the kings of Judah, its princes, its priests, and the people of the land. They will fight against you, but they shall not prevail against you, for I am with you, says the Lord, to deliver you."¹

Whereas on the one hand, the prophet, God's intimate, so to speak, was able to hear what God was saying, on the other hand he was equipped to serve as the bridge in the dialogue between the Lord of Hosts and his people Israel because he was familiar with the contemporary situation.

We shall now see that Jeremiah knew his people and their ways. He was sensitive to their needs and thus he could qualify as the interpreter of the Father's will to the Father's willful children.

Three major events shaped the pattern of these early prophetic years. The death of Ashurbanipal, the discovery of the Book of the Law which had important religious overtones and the ill-fated Battle of Megiddo which brought down the curtain on an age of enlightenment under the good king Josiah, a contemporary of the prophet Jeremiah.

Of special interest in these three events is the role of the prophet and his involvement in the political and religious arena. A brief review then of this will

¹Jeremiah 1:17b-19.

serve to reinforce the assertion that the prophet lived close to the daily thrust of life in the court, the streets and the fields and not only had he eyes to observe and ears to hear but he had also the mind to interpret the passing parade in terms of the Word of the Lord to the people of his day.

The death of Ashurbanipal: Josiah came to the throne at 8 years of age in c. 638,¹ and by 627 had initiated certain temple reforms. Jeremiah was a young man about twenty-five to thirty years of age at the time of his call in 626. Great changes were taking place on the international stage. Assyria had been in her ascendancy under the bold and enterprising general, Ashurbanipal. The year 626 brought his death and the strong hand was gone from the tiller of the nations. Jeremiah was alert to the significance of these events and their effect upon the political status of Judah and Jerusalem.

The Chaldeans under Nabopolassar and the Medes under Cyaxares were in political alliance and rapidly rising to power. Nabopolassar assumed control in Babylon. It was to be expected that new conquests to control the territories in the great Assyrian empire would touch Judah and possibly cause her to suffer the same fate as her sister

¹Davis-Gehman, "Josiah", Westminster Dictionary of the Bible, (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1944), p. 331.

Israel had suffered nearly seventy years previous. Imminent calamity calling for urgent reform is the mood of the times of Jeremiah's call.

"The Word of the Lord came...saying:
'What do you see?'
And I said, 'I see a boiling pot,
facing away from the north.'
'Out of the north evil shall break
forth upon all the inhabitants of the
land...and they shall come...against
Jerusalem...and against all the cities
of Judah.'"¹

The great Ashurbanipal, the self-chosen ruler of the nations had fallen but another ruler, a God-chosen "ruler", the one "set over nations and kingdoms",² the "fortified city, the iron pillar, the bronze walls...,"³ the one against whom neither the kings nor princes, nor priests nor people should prevail, was raised up. Jeremiah's ministry of communicating the Word of the Lord to the nations began at the moment when the political barometric pressure registered "storm-warning."

The Discovery of the Book of the Law: The religious bent of king Josiah led him to effect extensive repairs to the temple in Jerusalem. Operations began c. 621. The repair work uncovered a hidden copy of the Book of the Law. It was read to the king who was deeply

¹Jeremiah 1:13-15.

²Jeremiah 1:10a.

³Jeremiah 1:18.

impressed by the prophecy¹ that if the people forsook Jehovah, terrible consequences would follow. Temple reforms were urged in earnest. Appropriate to the calling of a man to speak his words, God saw fit to reveal anew his word in the reappearance of the ancient covenant hidden in the disorder of the neglected temple. Jeremiah came, eventually, to speak of a new covenant² at a time when the rediscovery of the old showed all too clearly how grievously it had been neglected.

The climate of revolt on Judah's borders was counter-balanced by the climate of reform within her tiny domain. Idolatry and sodomy were attacked. The idols to Baal were burned and the ashes thrown into the brook Kidron. The houses of the sodomites were destroyed throughout the breadth of the kingdom of Judah and beyond. Bodies of idolatrous priests were cremated upon the altars they had used to offer their sacrifices to Baal, Asherim and Molech. Every evidence of the cult of Molech was destroyed. A great passover was held "so well attended and so solemn that nothing like it had been celebrated since the time of Samuel."³

Jeremiah was born and reared at Anathoth, an hour's walk from Jerusalem. His was a priestly family, accomplished in the arts of serving in the local sanctuary and in the

¹Deuteronomy 28, 29, 30. Especially 29:25-28 contain the prophecy which so affected Josiah.

²Jeremiah 31:31f. "Behold....I will make a new covenant with Israel...and with Judah...I will put my law within them and I will write it upon their hearts..."

³Davis-Gehman, "Josiah" op. cit. p. 332.

temple. Jeremiah himself never performed these priestly duties but certainly he was familiar with the details of the program of reform that Josiah had instituted and although he seemed to differ in certain aspects from the aims of the reformers¹ there is little doubt that he actively supported those aspects that called for moral reform, a return to obedience and recognition of covenant responsibilities. So the word came to Jeremiah from the Lord:

"Hear the words of this covenant, and speak to the men of Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem...."²

"Listen to my voice, and do all that I command you....."³

"Proclaim....in the cities of Judah, and in the streets of Jerusalem: Obey my voice..."⁴

Born on the threshold of political intrigue and reared in the bosom of religious revolt, the man from Anathoth lived only an hour's walk from the homes of princes and the haunts of prince-pretenders. Jeremiah was familiar with the circles of court and church. He was no stranger to kings and princes, priests, and people. Nor was he unaware of the implications of Judah's fascination for her southern neighbor Egypt.

¹Jeremiah 7:1-15; 26:1-6. The temple sermons would imply that the prophet took serious issue with the centralization of all sacrificial worship in the Jerusalem temple.

²Jeremiah 11:2.

³Jeremiah 11:4.

⁴Jeremiah 11:6.

The Battle of Megiddo: The time was 608 B.C.

Nineveh had fallen and Pharaoh Neco was on his way to set his hand also against Assyria. Josiah entered the lists on behalf of Assyria and died by the Euphrates at Megiddo, the victim of a fruitless intrigue. Jeremiah came from the writing of a lament for the good king¹ to pronounce the first of many judgments of the Lord upon His faithless, idolatrous and scheming children.

"I will utter my judgments against them, for all their wickedness in forsaking me; they have burned incense to other gods, and worshipped the works of their own hands."²

"....Your fathers...went far from me... the priests...did not know me; the rulers transgressed against me; the prophets prophesied by Baal and went after things that do not profit."³

"My people...they have forsaken me, the fountain of living waters, and hewed out cisterns for themselves; broken cisterns that can hold no water."⁴

"My people...they have forsaken me," is the lament of the prophet as he speaks the Word of the Lord who looks and weeps for his children as they run to "drink the waters"⁵ of the Nile and the Euphrates.

"What do you gain by going to Egypt... or to Assyria...? he asks. Your wickedness will chasten you.

¹II Chronicles 35:25.

²Jeremiah 1:16.

³Jeremiah 2:5,8.

⁴Jeremiah 2:13.

⁵Jeremiah 2:18.

Know and see that it is evil and bitter to forsake the Lord your God; the fear of me is not in you, says the Lord God of Hosts."¹

Thus the prophet came into bitter conflict with the agents of the court and their counterparts in the temple.

"...in the prophets of Jerusalem I have seen a horrible thing: they commit adultery and walk in lies; they strengthen the hand of evildoers..."²

"....from the prophets of Jerusalem ungodliness has gone forth into all the land."³

Obviously the implications of the contemporary situation were not lost upon Jeremiah. He had seen the vision of the almond branch.⁴ He had perceived a facet of the character of the One who not only had formed a plan for his people but was "early awake" to see that it was carried out. What but judgment swift and terrible, could fall upon those who by their capricious infidelity frustrated such a plan and such a Planner.

He had heard the Word moreover of just such a judgment because the people of Israel and Judah had set themselves over against the one with whom they had long ago covenanted to love and serve.

¹Jeremiah 2:18, 19.

²Jeremiah 23:14.

³Jeremiah 23:15.

⁴Jeremiah 1:11, 12.

"Long ago you broke your yoke
and burst your bonds;
and you said, 'I will not serve'."¹

"You said, 'It is hopeless, for
I have loved strangers, and after
them I will go'."²

The implications of the activities of the princes,
priests, prophets and people, as they conflicted with the
purpose and plan of God, were plain to the prophet.

"Behold, I will bring you to judgment..."³

"I bring evil from the north,
and great destruction.
A lion has gone up from his thicket,
a destroyer of nations has set out...
to make your land a waste."⁴

"This is your doom, and it is bitter;
it has reached your very heart."⁵

Opinion is varied as to the historical identification
of the "peril" from the north, the lion gone up from his
thicket to destroy and lay waste all the land and its inhabi-
tants. Textually and historically the evidence favors the
Scythians⁶ who came down from the Transcaucasian Steppes
about the time of the death of Ashurbanipal (626 B.C.),
the Assyrian general and pillaged the coastlands as far as

¹Jeremiah 2:20

²Jeremiah 2:25.

³Jeremiah 2:35b.

⁴Jeremiah 4:6,7.

⁵Jeremiah 4:18.

⁶Binns, L. E., The Book of the Prophet Jeremiah,
(London: Methuen and Company Limited, 1919), p. 39.
See also: Driver, S.S., The Book of the Prophet Jeremiah
(London, Hodder and Stoughton, 1906), p. 21.
Skinner, John, Prophecy and Religion, (Cambridge University
Press, 1926), pp. 38, 39.

Egypt. It is not known that Judah was invaded but the land of Palestine was thrown into consternation by the event.¹ Possibly this was the threat to Judah's life that Jeremiah prophesied. For him the almond branch and the boiling-over pot spelled the doom of Judah. That this was the plan of God and that its early development would take place he could not doubt. The "evil" from the north was to come as an instrument in the hand of God. The terror and the waste, the ruin and the exile were the fruits of Judah's faithlessness and apostacy, a skin-deep religion. The peril from the north was the symbol of the prophet's perception of the true relationship that existed between his contemporaries and their God. There was the thorny road of ruin before those who would not be turned from their wicked ways.

Now that we have seen the prophet against the background of revolt on Judah's frontiers as the Chaldeans rose to prominence, reform within arising from the rediscovery of the ancient covenant in the Book of the Law and the collapse of the beneficent reign of Josiah at the disastrous battle of Megiddo, we can be sure that Jeremiah was cognizant of the events of his time and content not merely to observe but stirred with the responsibility to interpret and to speak.

¹Calkins, Raymond, Jeremiah the Prophet, (New York: MacMillan Company, 1930), p. 7.

His was the spirit of the reformer. He saw the need to begin with his own profession, the priests in Anathoth and in Jerusalem. As he spoke in Anathoth they saw a threat to their livelihood if sacrificing were to be centralized in Jerusalem while in Jerusalem the house of Zadok resented the criticism of reforms they themselves only pretended to carry out.¹ As we see in Jeremiah 2:8 the priests were joined in apostasy by the rulers and the false prophets. This climate of opposition and resentment of the prophet's words is in itself evidence that he spoke as one who saw plainly the implications of the progress of events and who understood the attitudes, the fears and the hopes of the people -- his people, who were caught up in the inexorable march of time.

This brings us to the conclusion of chapter one. We began by saying that contact is indispensable to communication. If something is to be said and understood, the process can only be completed in a climate of receptivity which in turn depends entirely on the establishment of contact between the communicating parties. This does not presuppose acceptance or rejection, agreement or disagreement. It simply registers the basic need for contact established in order for communication to take place.

Chapter one affirms that Jeremiah qualified pre-eminently in this matter of contact, both with God for

¹Jeremiah 3:40.

whom he was chosen to speak and with the people to whom he was charged to speak. The basis in getting the message is therefore laid and one may proceed with the important matter of getting the message across. This is the subject of Chapter two.

CHAPTER II

GETTING THE MESSAGE ACROSS -- DELIVERY

THE MENTAL CALIBRE OF THE PROPHET

What kind of a man did God choose to speak and act for him? What special qualities did he possess? What of the capacity of his mind to penetrate the issues of the day and the ultimate destiny of his contemporaries? What of his moral strength and spiritual stature? How well was he equipped? In view of the important part played by the personality in getting a message over to an audience, it is of strategic value to the development of this subject that we examine the mental calibre and the moral foundations of this individual charged with the task of being the "mouth" of God.

It is the purpose of this chapter to examine the prophet's capacity to think. We shall view the range of his understanding in four major areas: (1) the nature of God, (2) the political situation in Judah and Israel, (3) Judah's moral condition and (4) the nature of sin. These have been chosen because it is the opinion of the writer that within this framework we shall get the best of the interpretive mind of the prophet.

I. THE PROPHET'S UNDERSTANDING OF GOD

Under the title, "Communicating the Gospel" and with a view to emphasizing the importance of having something truly worthwhile to say, Carl Michalson writes, "Before the physicist Helmholtz could arrive at the nature of vision he had to do more than study the human eye. He had to study the properties of light."¹

A man who undertakes to speak for God must know God the source of what he speaks, in almost the parallel or equal of the One who knew Him so intimately as to be able to say, "I, and the Father are one!"²

If he would impart the nature of truth about God, he must possess and be possessed of its essential elements as seen in the character of God -- the source of truth. We examine now a variety of ways in which the prophet experienced the living presence of God.

In companionship: "The Lord talks with Jeremiah" says George Adam Smith, "as a man with his fellow."³ Thus Smith calls attention to the absence of reference to the infinite and the transcendent in comparison for example to Isaiah who sees the Lord "high and lifted up" surrounded by cherubim and seraphim. The thoughts of Jeremiah and his

¹Carl Michalson, "Communicating the Gospel," Theology Today, XIV, (October, 1957), p. 321.

²John 10:30

³Smith, George Adam, The Book of Jeremiah, (New York and London: Harper and Brothers, 1929), p. 352.

country-born imagination did not run along these lofty lines. He saw rather the symbol of God in the almond branch, the fountain, the vinedresser and the shepherd. Jeremiah's ideas of God partake of a deeply intimate, personal element and find their expression in articles of common use. Jeremiah's God is "near...not far,"¹ his "familiar"² as Smith puts it.

The intimacy of this relationship is revealed in the manner of his call and consecration in chapter one. "I formed you....I knew you....I consecrated you....I appointed you...."³ It was commonplace to speak of a chosen race or a chosen nation but few had ever before implied that God should be concerned to choose and use an individual to do his work. The relationship of the "I...you" marked a new epoch in a man's understanding of the ways of God.

In activity: Jeremiah's account of God at work is rich in action words. He is ever calling, delivering, redeeming, contending, restoring, uprooting, building, breaking down, planting, giving and hoping. He has toiled diligently in the past and may be counted upon to continue into the future. He is the one who is "early awake" watching over his "word" to carry it out. He remembers, contends, smites, brings to judgment, and to salvation.

¹Jeremiah 23:23

²Smith, op cit., p. 352.

³Jeremiah 1:5.

In conflict: "I will contend", says the Lord.¹ Contention is the keynote of the prophet's experience of God. Often perplexed and angry he cries, "the word of the Lord has become for me a reproach and a derision all the day long."² Again seated alone while the sounds of the merry makers ring in his ears, he laments, "I sat alone because thy hand was upon me, for thou hadst filled me with indignation. Why is my pain unceasing...? Wilt thou be to me like a deceitful brook, like waters that fail?"³

To which outcry comes the refreshing rebuke, "If you return, I will restore you, and you shall stand before me. If you utter what is precious, and not what is worthless, you shall be my mouth. They shall turn to you, but you shall not turn to them. They will fight against you but they shall not prevail over you, for I am with you to save you and deliver you."⁴

God is known to the prophet in the warfare of life. The conflict rages around him and within him but one factor remains constant, one deep note keeps sounding constantly in the prophet's ears, "I am with you." Over and over again he is reminded of the unfailing resource of strength in God. This is the testimony from a man who frequently found himself so oppressed by his detractors, so overcome by his self-conscious doubt, so exasperated and so completely

¹Jeremiah 2:9.

²Jeremiah 20:8b.

³Jeremiah 15:17b f.

⁴Jeremiah 15:19-20.

weary of his task, that there seemed no alternative but death and perhaps a blessed escape. The seed of confidence however planted in the bed of conflict, grew into knowledge of the "hidden kinship,"¹ that had sustained the hearts of the prophet's ancestors the patriarchs, Jacob, Moses, and David, and which now sustained his soul in the "jungle of the Jordan."

"My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, says the Lord."² So spoke the prophet Isaiah and we are not encouraged to think that God's ways may be known within the tiny frame of reference available to man. Yet the ways of God may be known at least in part, and were revealed to the prophet in terms of reference common to man's experience, the home, the court, the family.

Let us now see how the prophet described the ways of God, as Husband, Father, Judge and Sovereign Lord.

God as Husband: "I remember the devotion of your youth, your love as a bride."³ Here the bridegroom reflects upon the happy days long past when Israel was faithful to her covenant ties.

"I still contend....I will contend...."⁴ This is the husband-lover who loves in spite of his mate who "went after worthlessness, and became worthless."⁵ This is the

¹Otto, Rudolph, The Idea of the Holy. (Trans. by John W. Harvey), (New York: Oxford University Press, 1939), p. 11.

²Isaiah 55:8

³Jeremiah 2:2.

⁴Jeremiah 2:9

⁵Jeremiah 2:4

God who will be the only God of Israel who will tolerate no other affections for gods "that are no gods,"¹ or that "you made for yourself."²

"Would you return unto me?" This is the faithful husband who pleads (and yet marvels at the prospect) for the return of her who has played harlot with many lovers.³ Israel would run from the only One who could save her, into the arms of surrounding political powers seeking protection. But there is yet hope for her return and this is the role of the faithful husband--to continue to plead while there is yet time and hope.

God as Father: "Israel's false sister Judah did not return to me with her whole heart but in pretence."⁴ Here the Father is angry and sick at heart, tired of false worship, words and rituals of pretence which serve only to hide the infidelity of Judah's heart.

"Return, O faithless children...for I am your master."⁵ Again the Father, unrelenting yet caring still for wayward Judah.

"I thought you would call me, My Father."⁶ Here the Father grieves and is sad. A heritage "among my sons", "a pleasant land," "most beautiful of all nations,"⁷ all this

¹Jeremiah 2:11

²Jeremiah 2:28.

³Jeremiah 3:1.

⁴Jeremiah 3:10.

⁵Jeremiah 3:10

⁶Jeremiah 3:19b.

⁷Jeremiah 3:19.

prepared and ready for Israel if she would not turn from following. But she, alas "as a faithless wife leaves her husband, so have you been faithless to me, O house of Israel,"¹ says the Lord.

God as Judge: "Run....search....Jerusalem to see if you can find a man, one who does justice and seeks truth: that I may pardon her."² God's way is the way of justice, truth and mercy but for those who rebell against him, who forsake him, who turn from their prosperity to lust and evil intent, he has another way. It is the way of the lion, the wolf, or the leopard³ who comes up from the forest with the intent to kill. It is the way of the pruner⁴ who goes up the rows stripping away all the non-productive branches. It is the way of the fire⁵ that burns up this people as though they were wood. These prophets who had said, "He will do nothing..."⁶ are to discover that he will do far more thoroughly than they ever imagined the work of destruction and terror to those who know no bounds in wickedness⁷ and who "love to have it so."⁸ Just as surely as God will not fail in love neither will he fail in judgment.

¹Jeremiah 3:20.

²Jeremiah 5:1.

³Jeremiah 5:6f.

⁴Jeremiah 5:10.

⁵Jeremiah 5:14.

⁶Jeremiah 5:12.

⁷Jeremiah 5:28

⁸Jeremiah 5:31b.

"I will break this people and this city as one breaks a potter's vessel, so it can never be mended."¹ This is the God in Judgment that cannot be turned back. It is the divine response to persistent "stiffening of the neck",² and refusal to hear and obey the Word of the Lord. It is the other side of his faithfulness, the terrible side and as the pieces of the broken flask scatter and are trampled underfoot, the image is clear of the way the people will be scattered and broken and buried. Once and for all the nation of the inviolate character of this people, the covenant people; and this city, Zion, is to be obliterated.

God as Sovereign: "I formed you"³ "To make is the property of God, but to be made that of man."⁴ Thus the creator exercises sovereignty over his creation. Thus we travel naturally to the analogy made by Jeremiah in Chapter 18 of the potter and his wheel and his work with the clay.

The root of the word "potter" means to "form, fashion, frame, or make." Early use of this word was made in Genesis, where God (Yahweh) forms man of the dust of the ground. Later and much more frequently the word is used by the prophets such as Isaiah⁵ and the Psalmist⁶ and several times by Jeremiah⁷

¹Jeremiah 19:11 ²Jeremiah 19:15b ³Jeremiah 1:5.

⁴Iraanaeus, "Against the Heresies" IV.39.2 quoted in Interpreter's Bible, Vol. V., (New York: Abingdon Press, 1956), p. 962.

⁵Isaiah 27:11; 43:1, 21, 44:2.

⁶Psalms 94:9; 95:5; 33:15.

⁷Jeremiah 1:5; 10:16; 51:19; 38:2.

but the best illustration is in chapter 18:1f and it has been classified by John Skinner as "the classical illustration of the divine sovereignty."¹

A brief analysis of the segments of chapter 18:1-17 puts before us several of the principal aspects of the rule of God.

1. Patience, persistence and purpose: (vv. 1-4)

These three characteristics are stressed in the image of the potter at work, shaping and reshaping his product "as it seemed good to the potter to do." There is in the mind of the maker of pots an image of what he ultimately desires. The plan of the design is there in idea which later takes shape in actual material. In the process, if the shape is marred or the quality is affected, the thing must be redone. This is the model of God's purposing for Judah. Thus He forms and reforms the destiny of his people.

2. Power, prerogative, procedure (vv. 5-11). Three more characteristics are stressed in the shift from the image of the humble potter at work with his clay, to the image of God at work with his people. "House of Israel, can I not do with you as the potter has done?"² The implication of the rhetorical question is that he most assuredly can. He is able indeed. "Like the clay in the potter's hand, so are you in my hand..."³

¹Skinner, John, Prophecy and Religion, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1922), p. 162.

²Jeremiah 18:6

³Ibid.

The predominance of the pronoun "I" (14 occurrences, 3 understood) calls attention to the main subject, the principal note, by which all others are pitched. The mind of God is shaping the destiny of men. "I declare...", this is the great prerogative of God. He is the supreme initiator, free to act according to his sovereign will.

The predominance also of the conditional clauses introduced by the conjunction "if" (vv. 7, 8, 9, 10) calls attention to the alternatives allowed in the procedure of God's rule. It is of primary importance to note that here the initiative shifts from God to man. "If that nation... (any nation, not only Israel) turns from evil....I will repent of the evil I intended" (v.8); and the alternative is, "If (the nation)...turns to evil...I will repent of the good which I had intended." (v.9 and 10). The force of this interchange is that within the rule of God, the freedom of the will of man is operative. He may choose, he may "return...and amend his ways..." (v.11) or he may do as did the people of Jeremiah's day. They said, "That is in vain. We will follow our own plans..." (v.12)

3. Providence, promise and penalty: Three concluding aspects of God's rule are stressed in the final segment (vv.13-17) . The "snow" and the "cold flowing streams" picture the providence of God, a faithfulness that does not falter. In contrast is pictured also the prodigality of Judah which gives rise to a further aspect of God's rule

-- his promise.

"I will scatter them before the enemy" (v.17). This promise is not according to the regular pattern. It is a promise to deal hardly with the people rather than kindly; but it is a promise nonetheless in keeping with the characteristics of God's procedure already indicated, i.e. it is the promise of penalty. "I will show them my back, not my face, in the day of their calamity." (v.17b.)

This analysis of the various aspects of the sovereignty of God in sum serves to fortify the central idea which is expressed in the phrase "Like the clay in the potter's hand, so are you in my hand, O House of Israel." (v.6) The preservation of the Person of God and the person of man is here implied. God is a free Person who exercises his sovereignty over people who have freedom of will. This may turn out for good or ill as evidenced in the prophet's day but whatever be the outcome, the principle of freedom of choice remains basic in the prophet's concept of the sovereignty of God.

This brief review of the prophetic understanding of God draws attention to seven significant insights into the character and nature of God. In setting these down we must keep the point of perspective in mind that was stressed in the beginning of this chapter, viz: the prophet himself is host to the God-spirit that he seeks to comprehend and interpret. His comprehension of the character of

God is charged with the vitality and permanent validity of the living presence of God himself.

The main points are these:

1. God's dealings with a chosen race of people are here focused upon a single individual and the relationship is intimate.

2. God works ceaselessly and vigorously.

3. God is known in the struggles of life.

4. God's love is untiring.

5. God cannot be deferred or deceived.

6. God will not fail in love; neither will he fail in judgment.

7. God is a free Person who exercises a sovereign will over his people who also have freedom of choice.

Each of these seven major premises concerning the nature of God demonstrates the vigor and courageous outspanning of the prophetic mind. These concepts are both timely and timeless reflecting the exceptional capacity of the prophet to penetrate deeply the theological fabric of his day.

II. THE PROPHET'S UNDERSTANDING OF THE POLITICAL SITUATION

Now we turn to his understanding of the political situation. By way of illustration, we have selected two close-up shots of incidents during the prophet's ministry in Jerusalem and one long range shot of twenty-five years of experience seen in retrospect in Jeremiah, chapter 25.

This portraiture of the political situation, seen through prophetic eyes, competently attests to the sensitivity of the prophet's political radar and accumulates fresh evidence to support the view that in matters worldly, as in matters Godly, the prophet knew how to think and did not fear the consequences of unrepressed mental endeavor.

The first close-up view is of the Rechabites in Jerusalem.

The Rechabites in Jerusalem: Jeremiah faced his critics at home with the striking example of a small tribe of people who had come for fear of the invaders to live in Jerusalem. Part of their discipline was that they should not drink wine. Temperance was far from the ideals of the people of Jerusalem but Jeremiah caused these men to be brought to the Temple and there wine was set before them. "Drink wine," they were urged, but they replied, "We will drink no wine...for the sake of our father Rechab who so commanded us."¹

Fidelity is the keynote of this illustration. It is to this characteristic of national life that Jeremiah points and which is found to be so clearly lacking in Israel. The Rechabites were simply obeying the injunctions of their father. But Israel, how far she had fled from obeying not

¹Jeremiah 35:5,6.

merely her earthly fathers but her Father God.

"I have spoken to you persistently,
but you have not listened to me."¹

"I have sent you all my servants the
prophets, sending them persistently,
saying, 'Turn now everyone of you from
his evil way and amend your doings, and do
not go after other gods to serve them,
and then you shall dwell in the land which
I gave you and to your fathers.'
But you did not incline your ear or listen
to me."²

Such is the infidelity of Judah in contrast to the simple Rechabites. In spite of persistently speaking, and more than that, the sending of messengers, messengers of promise and prosperity, still "you did not incline your ear..." Return and dwell, the appeal of a loving Father has fallen on stopped up ears.

A lesson in fidelity is what Jeremiah has presented to the people by the Rechabites. Here is nationalism at its best for true nationalism is rooted in fidelity and true fidelity is a right relationship to God. Here is the foundation, the base line, from which this prophetic statesman moves. The persistent voice from on high is heard, Return and dwell" but first "obey". It is in part because the prophet understood this fundamental relationship so well that he was able to keep his feet and his head when the storms of seige and exile broke over the land.

God's Indictment: (Chapter 25) We turn now to the

¹Jeremiah 35:1-4.

²Jeremiah 35:15.

long range view and the prophetic perspective of chapter 25 which sums up 23 years of persistent witness to the Word of the Lord.

On the international stage great events are taking place. The Assyrian hand that has heretofore guided the tiller of the nations has been replaced by a Babylonian hand. Nebuchadnezzar has assumed control and Judah languishes in the fourth year of the villainous regime of Jehoiakim.

Still the refrain, the persistent refrain, "Return and dwell", do not go after other gods, then I will do you no harm. But Judah as persistently has refused to listen. Ruin and waste has come upon the land, banished are

"the voice of mirth and the voice of the bridegroom and the voice of the bride, the grinding of the mill stones and the light of the lamp."¹

It is the hard task of the prophet to proclaim naught but waste and ruin and servitude for seventy years to the king of Babylon. The prophetic insight is deep and true. On the slate of time appears the dread name of the enslaver of the nations. Here is God's indictment against the nations by the hand of Nebuchadnezzar "my servant"² says the Lord. Judgment shall be Judah's part for she refused to listen. The "cup of the wine of wrath"³ is

¹Jeremiah 25:10.

²Jeremiah 25:9.

³Jeremiah 25:15.

hers to drink but not hers alone for all the nations must drink as well.

Thus the vision and understanding of the prophet ranges over the international scene. The same fundamental principle holds true. A nation not built upon right relations with God cannot stand. God is the "lion"¹, the tempest"², the "sword"³ whose fierce anger works destruction upon the earth that cannot be avoided.

"The clamor will resound to the ends of the earth, for the Lord has an indictment against the nations, he is entering into judgment with all flesh..."⁴

Some have trusted in idols, some in strongholds and treasures, some have been proud and arrogant, some confident in their wisdom, some content at their ease, even Babylon shall not escape,

"for the Lord has opened his armory and brought out the weapons of his wrath... the Lord God of Hosts has a work to do in the land of the Chaldeans."⁵

Looking to the day far off of vindication the prophet sees even the destruction of Babylon, the very Babylon that was "the golden cup in the Lord's hand",⁶ the instrument of his wrath,

"The broad wall of Babylon shall be leveled to the ground and her high gates shall be burned with fire."⁷

The prophet could with confidence speak of the fall

¹Jeremiah 25:38.

²Jeremiah 25:32.

³Jeremiah 25:38.

⁴Jeremiah 25:38.

⁵Jeremiah 50:25

⁶Jeremiah 51:7.

⁷Jeremiah 51:58.

of Babylon, the lion of the north, because he believed in the ultimate vindication of God's promise to redeem. This is the thread that binds the prophet's witness together -- faith in the ultimate will of God to redeem and save. The great "I" that marches across the pages of the doom of the nations to destroy is the "I" who covenanted in the beginning not only to 'destroy and to overthrow' but "to plant and to build."¹

Counsel of Surrender: (21:1-10) A second prophet close-up demonstrates his integrity. When circumstances almost obliged him to give way the prophet is summoned by a fearful Zedekiah to "inquire of the Lord"² in a moment of extreme crisis. Nebuchadnezzar is at the gates of the city. Siege has been laid. It is a time for last-straw tactics.

With determination and courage characteristic of a man whose feet are firm and whose head is clear, Jeremiah gave the word of the Lord to the king:

"I set before you a way of life and a way of death....he who stays shall die....he who goes out and surrenders ...shall live..."³

This is the counsel of a quisling it would seem, but there is here the mark of clear understanding. The basic issue is between trusting in the power of God or the power of political alliance to defend the city.

¹Jeremiah 1:10.

²Jeremiah 21:2.

³Jeremiah 21:9.

Faith in the sovereign power of God, is the principle of action which the prophet enjoined the king to adopt. This was the way of life. The king chose the way of death. It is apparent that again the prophet understood the root matter and therefore was able to accurately interpret the times to the local constituency. Chosen from many instances of conflict with the king and princes, this incident illustrates the secret of the prophet's ability to accurately judge the times both in Israel and beyond her frontiers.

Personal courage fortified this perceptive power. He stood ready to offer his life rather than to deny the truth of the divine utterances placed on his tongue. His offer was almost at the point of being taken up when he dared to question Judah's right to defend herself. Though he was made the victim of torrential abuse he would not be swayed.

Not by caprice but by conviction, inescapable conviction, did the prophet stake his life on the fundamental validity of his deductions. Such valiant testimony made a singular impression then and continues to do so. Age has not dimmed the force of such conviction rooted in sound deduction and firm faith.

III. THE PROPHET'S UNDERSTANDING OF JUDAH'S MORAL CONDITION

We are moving in a progressively narrowing field

of investigation in an endeavor to probe more deeply into the subject of the prophet's understanding. We began with the most important but wide ranging subject of God. We moved to the next most important but more restricted area of research on the subject of people and the political situation. We continue now, still on the subject of people but in connection with the narrower limits of Judah's moral condition. To conclude this chapter we will range widely again over the topic of the prophet's concept of and cure for sin. Flexibility, adaptability, these are words that describe the workings of the prophet's mind as he confronted the moral enigma of his day. The voice within commanded: "Run...look...take note...search...see if you can find a man one who does justice and seeks truth..."¹ Under this mandate we now look into the prophet's concept of Judah's double peril, from without and from within and what in fact lay at the root of Judah's moral paralysis.

The Peril of Judah from without: Jeremiah looked beyond the borders of Judah and saw the signs of the approaching Babylonian scourge. Others saw it too. The king and the princes, gathered in conclave with the envoys from the neighboring kingdoms, studied the possibilities of alliance and hoped for deliverance by negotiation.

Jeremiah, the "chief inquisitor"² and "God's Assayer"³

¹Jeremiah 5:1

³Jeremiah 6:27.

²Browning, Robert, "How it Strikes a Contemporary", quoted from Interpreter's Bible, Vol. V, (New York: Abingdon Press, 1956), p. 845.

also looked within the borders of Judah and saw a more destructive scourge threatening the moral fibre of the people. It was a situation already far advanced. Death could be seen approaching literally on horseback from without but for those who had eyes to see it, within the citadels of moral principle, death had already partially completed his work.

Cried the prophet, "Ah Lord God, surely thou hast utterly deceived this people and Jerusalem, saying, 'It shall be well with you'; whereas the sword has reached their very life."¹

Already the "alarm of war" is heard on the heights. Doom threatens the gates but what of Judah's preparation? Her leaders look to the help from their neighbors and forget the help from God. They pretend a confidence in each other and ignore the One who waits to save them.

The Peril of Judah from within: A people estranged from God, they have chosen to run from Him, to forget him and to ignore him, this is the root of the real trouble in Judah. At this point the prophet has looked with eyes to see the truth. This is the real doom of Judah, the doom that "has reached her heart"²; she knows not the Lord. Laments the Lord of Hosts,

"My anguish, my anguish...my people are foolish, they know me not; They are stupid children, they have no understanding. They are skilled in doing evil, but how to do good, they know not."³

¹Jeremiah 4:10

²Jeremiah 4:18

³Jeremiah 4:22.

Chapters 4:5 - 6:30 present in a careful juxtaposition of each section, a series concerning the peril from without and the peril from within. Here in the account of the early days of the prophet's ministry appear the fundamental features of his understanding of the thoughts and aspirations of the people to whom it was his task to speak.

Infidelity: Infidelity is at the heart of the paralysis of the intercommunication between the people and their God;

"they all alike had broken the yoke
they had burst the bonds."¹

Gone from rich and poor alike was the integrity of the heart which in the days of the covenant making had bound Israel to her God. Running through the streets of Jerusalem, looking, noting, as "recording chief inquisitor" searching diligently, the prophet could not find even one who "does justice and seeks truth"², so critical is the moral condition of Judah.

"they swear falsely.....
they feel no anguish.....
they refuse to take correction.....
they refuse to repent....."³

It has been said that people are most truly known in the doing of things they ought not to be doing. So the

¹Jeremiah 5:5b

²Jeremiah 5:1.

³Jeremiah 5:2,3.

prophet learned to know the people as he observed the "fat and sleek" ones engaged in treachery to fill their coffers; oppressing the weak and needy without concern for justice; the prophets speaking false prophecies, crying "peace, peace, when there is no peace"; and the priests cooperating in their deception. The catalogue of wickedness climaxes in the assertion that stubborn resistance to all that is right and just is reinforced by the attitude of complacency, "my people love to have it so..."¹ The people do not simply say, "This we will do," but rather, "This we enjoy doing. We like it this way." Where is the limit to such waywardness?

God has set bounds upon the sea beyond which it may not pass. Nature knows her limits but do the people? NO! "They knew no bounds in deeds of wickedness."² The elements and the seasons submit to the controlling hand of God, the layer of the world's foundations,³ but this "eyeless and earless"⁴ people do not fear him.

"They do not say in their hearts,
'Let us fear the Lord our God...'"⁵

The sea may know the limits of the sandy shores upon which it runs but the people have not learned to know the limits of the will and purpose of God for them. Instead

¹Jeremiah 5:31

²Jeremiah 5:28.

³cf. Job 38:4.

⁴Jeremiah 5:21.

⁵Jeremiah 5:25.

they are hard after the pursuit of their own devices and with the twin preoccupations of self-interest and self-enjoyment to spur them on. There is here the curious contradiction in human nature, difficult for the prophet to understand. God's creation obeys except for men "seeking a blessed life in a land of death."¹ God seeks to give "the rains and the seasons"² but his own people persist in their rejection of the gift and the Giver.

"Your ways and your doings have brought this upon you. This is your doom...."³

The last stage of the sin of infidelity, it would seem, is insensibility to the utter folly of revolt against love.

2. Indifference: The twin of infidelity is indifference. The people have sunk from the level of "I won't" to the more dismal level of "I don't care."

"The house of Israel and the house of Judah have been utterly faithless to me, says the Lord, They have spoken falsely of the Lord, and have said, "He will do nothing....."⁴

How can complacency be overcome? How can a man be compelled to listen who doesn't care? To what avail is the word of the Lord to one who is quite indifferent about it? Strong measures are needed:

¹The Confessions of St. Augustine (trans. by J. G. Pilkington, New York: Liveright Publishing Corp. 1943), p. 74.

²Jeremiah 5:24,25. ³Jeremiah 4:18 ⁴Jeremiah 5:12.

"I am making my words in your mouth a fire,
and this people wood, and the fire shall
devour them.
Behold I am bringing upon you a nation from afar.
They shall eat up your harvest, your food;
They shall eat up your sons and your daughters;
They shall eat up your flocks and your herds;
They shall eat up your vines and your fig trees;
Your fortified cities
They shall destroy....."¹

The fire of God's wrath is fanned by the stale breath of complacency. The consequences cannot be imagined. But they are coming. The mood of the prophet's words reflect his understanding of the inevitableness of two things: the people's constancy in wickedness and God's constancy in bringing the pain of judgment upon them.

There is however another side to God's constancy. He never gives up. "This is the city which must be punished..."² says the Lord. It would seem there is no help for the inhabitants of Zion except for the never dying hope of God to save if he can.

"Be warned, O Jerusalem
Lest I be alienated from you
Lest I make you a desolation."³

"To whom shall I speak and give warning
lest they may hear?"⁴

The "assayer" and "tester" for the Lord is also the grape gatherer, passing his hands carefully over the vines seeking out the hidden clusters, the remnant who perchance may have remained faithful. "Glean the remnant...."⁵ thus says the Lord of Hosts.

¹Jeremiah 5:17.

²Jeremiah 6:6.

³Jeremiah 6:8.

⁴Jeremiah 6:10.

⁵Jeremiah 6:9.

Infidelity and indifference describe the human condition into which the prophet must project the judgment of God. Despair clouds the issue between God and man in deepest gloom. But the element of hope persists as well. At this point the prophetic insight probes deep, deeper even than the gloom of despair. Is God not also the planter and the builder? To the prophet it is given to see farther than most into God's far reaching intentions for his people. For thus says the Lord,

"Stand by the roads and look,
and ask for the ancient paths,
where the good way is; and walk in it,
and find rest for your souls."¹

There is a better way. This is the root of the prophetic tree of faith, faith in God to provide and faith in the people eventually to respond and return to the bonds of covenant from which they had so long and so far departed.

As observer and interpreter, competence has again been demonstrated by the prophet in the analysis of Judah's moral paralysis and the indication of the outcome. Everyone was preoccupied with the danger to life and limb of invasion from outside but the prophet was unerringly skillful in identifying the greater peril from within that threatened to destroy not only the body but the spirit of Judah as well.

¹Jeremiah 6:16.

IV. THE PROPHET'S UNDERSTANDING OF THE NATURE OF SIN,
ITS SCOPE, ITS COST AND ITS CURE.

Now we come to the subject of sin. This is the crowning stage of the development of the theme of the mental calibre of the prophet. Here the exposition broadens in scope to cover the universal topic of sin. Analysis and characterization of the subject are the prophet's specialty. On a subject common to the experience of all men, it is predictable that the prophet's insights will have universal appeal. As at the outset of this chapter we felt the force of his comprehension of the universal constructive significance of the doctrine of the sovereignty of God, so now we look for evidence to substantiate the claim that the prophet saw sin as a force with power to destroy the whole universe. What is sin? Who can be called upon to speak from experience? What bounds may be set to sin? What is the price of sin and is there a cure? Mr. Everyman of all ages and races seeks the answers to these questions. The prophet is at his best as he takes the measure of this important subject.

The Nature of Israel's Sin: 1. Disloyalty to the Covenant.

"What wrong did your fathers find in me that they went far from me and went after worthlessness and became worthless?"¹

¹Jeremiah 2:5.

"They did not say: "Where is the Lord!"¹

"Where is the Lord"? This is the question that the fathers of Israel and the priests and princes did not ask. For they had ceased to be concerned about the One who had led their forefathers from slavery out of Egypt into the promised land. Preoccupation with other things is the birth stone of infidelity and this is Israel's sin. Reference has already been made to the precarious political balance Israel was attempting to keep. Egypt on the one hand, Assyria on the other, whom or which to choose, this seemed to be the pressing preoccupation of the moment. But "evil came upon them, says the Lord."² "Your fathers went far from me....,"³ and "those who handle the law did not know me."⁴

The burst bonds, the broken yoke, are the symbols of Israel's forsaking of the rule of God. "What do you gain," he asks, "by going to Egypt....or to Assyria?"⁵ "Know and see that it is evil and bitter...to forsake the Lord God of Hosts."⁶ The bitter fruit of infidelity is promised early. Sweet fruit cannot be expected from a thicket of thorns.

2. Idol Worship:

"Though you wash yourself with lye
and much soap, the stain of your guilt
is still before me."⁷

¹Jeremiah 2:6,8.

²Jeremiah 2:3.

³Jeremiah 2:5.

⁴Jeremiah 2:8.

⁵Jeremiah 2:18.

⁶Jeremiah 2:19b.

⁷Jeremiah 2:22.

The restive young female camel and the wild ass sniffing the wind and dashing madly to and fro in their consuming desire are the symbols of Israel's madness in her pursuit of other gods, gods which are no gods, trees and stones and idols, "gods that you have made for yourself."¹ In the day of tribulation no tree or stone, not even the "queen of heaven"² can save the people from the consequences of their sin. Apostasy brings its own reward. "Is it I whom they provoke?" says the Lord. "Is it not themselves, to their own confusion?"³

3. Abandonment of the principles of justice, mercy and righteousness:

"Also on your skirts is found the life-blood of guiltless poor."⁴

4. Outward show of sincerity but inward pretence:
"My Father..."⁵ "You have spoken but you have done all the evil that you could."⁶ Israel's adulteries with stone and tree have dulled her ears to the call of God to return to faithfulness. She merely pretends to worship him. The words and the place of worship are the same but the will is gone to harlotry on the high hills and beneath the verdant trees. "Judah did not return to me with her whole

¹Jeremiah 2:28.

²Jeremiah 7:18.

³Jeremiah 7:19.

⁴Jeremiah 2:34.

⁵Jeremiah 3:4.

⁶Jeremiah 3:5.

heart, but in pretence, says the Lord."¹ Echoes of this sin of religious pretence ring out from the oracles of Isaiah as the Lord of Hosts puts the question to Sodom and Gomorrah "What to me is the multitude of your sacrifices?"² "I cannot endure iniquity and solemn assembly."³

5. Misplaced confidence in the heritage of race and place:

"This is the temple of the Lord,
the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord."
Do not trust in these deceptive words."⁴

"Will you steal, murder, commit adultery,
swear falsely, burn incense to Baal, and go
after other gods that you have not known,
and then come and stand before me in this
house, which is called by my name, and say,
'We are delivered! -- only to go on doing all
these abominations."⁵

God will not be any one's convenience nor will he be relegated to one area of life or another. Israel's sin was in setting thoughts of God aside for cases of emergency. In the perilous days between Megiddo and Carchemish opportunity offered for reflection upon the sanctity and inviolability of the temple of the Lord when the need should arise. But said the Lord, "You trust in deceptive words to no avail."⁶ False confidence in sacred rites and practices, false confidence in the belief that God would never allow his holy place or his chosen people to be touched, this is Israel's mistake. Outward show of zeal for ceremony --

¹Jeremiah 3:10.

²Isaiah 1:11.

³Isaiah 1:13b.

⁴Jeremiah 7:4

⁵Jeremiah 7:9,10

⁶Jeremiah 7:8.

nothing of this can substitute for inward reform. "Amend your ways and your doings, says the Lord."¹

6. Rebellion, disobedience, refusal to acknowledge guilt: "Only acknowledge your guilt, that you rebelled against the Lord your God and that you have not obeyed my voice, says the Lord."² Judah defected in breaking her yoke and saying, "I will not serve" and "I have loved strangers, and after them I will go." Judgment was inevitable tempered with mercy. But when she insisted "I am not defiled," "I am innocent," "I have not sinned," then the anger of the Lord was sealed upon her. The condition of mercy is acknowledgement of guilt. This is the first step to repentance but this step Judah refused to take. Thus her doom was sealed for "I will bring you to judgment"³ says the Lord.

Something of the nature of Israel's sin has been discussed, as infidelity, as idol worship, as forsaking the principles of justice, mercy, as pretence, as misplaced confidence in heritage of race and place, as rebellion and refusal to acknowledge guilt. Now we shall examine the scope of sin.

The Scope of Sin: The horizontal character of Israel's sin is depicted in the messenger running up and down the streets of Jerusalem hunting for perhaps one example of truth and justice.

¹Jeremiah 7:3.

²Jeremiah 3:13.

³Jeremiah 2:35.

"Run to and fro through the streets of Jerusalem, look and take note! Search her squares to see if you can find a man, one who does justice and seeks truth: that I may pardon her."¹

Apparently the prophet was unable to find even one example. This is incredible to him but he is prepared to find excuse in view of having consulted only the poor and uneducated, "They have no sense..."² To the great, the educated and the strong went he too but to his utter dismay he found that they too knew not the way of the Lord. Rather, "they all alike had broken the yoke...and burst their bonds."³

They know no bounds in deeds of wickedness."⁴ The sea acknowledges its barrier in the sands that surround it. The seasons acknowledge the rule of God in their returning but the people have cast aside all bounds. The waves cannot "pass over" the limits set on them but the wickedness of the people "over passes" any thing that could be imagined.

"Shall I not punish them?"⁵ muses the Lord.

From the horizontal we turn to the vertical character of Israel and Judah's sin, it reaches to the very depths.

"An appalling and horrible thing has happened in the land: the prophets prophecy falsely, and the priests rule at their direction: my people love to have it so."⁶

"My people love to have it so." This is the most appalling aspect of their sin. This is the region farthest out. There is no thought or desire to return. Perils from

¹Jeremiah 5:1.

²Jeremiah 5:4.

³Jeremiah 5:5b.

⁴Jeremiah 5:28.

⁵Jeremiah 5:29.

⁶Jeremiah 5:30,31.

without threaten and are such as to make the stoutest hearts to tremble; but this is the focal point of the people's peril from within -- the selfish desires of the human heart.

This is the root of the trouble, the sin that is written with an iron pen and engraved with a diamond point on the tablet of the heart of the people. They have gone far from God and this is according to their own desire.

With exceptional penetration into the true state of things the prophet says, "The heart is deceitful above all things and desperately corrupt: who can understand it?"¹

And God replies: "I the Lord search the mind and try the heart, to give every man according to his ways, according to the fruit of his doings."²

To every man according to his ways. This is the prophet's barometer. To predict the fate of Israel, one must look at the record. "Thus says the Lord concerning their people. They have loved to wander thus, they have not restrained their feet: therefore the Lord does not accept them. Now he will remember their iniquity and punish their sins."³

The Cost of Sin in Terms of Judgment: "Therefore..."; "Now..." these are the leading connectives of the last paragraph and they also serve to take us into the discussion of the prophet's appreciation of the frightful cost of sin.

¹Jeremiah 17:9.

²Jeremiah 17:10.

³Jeremiah 14:10.

Of the "boiling pot", "Facing away from the north."¹ and the peril from the north, mention has been made. Judgment was to fall upon Jerusalem in the form of invasion. "Raise a standard toward Zion, flee for safety, stay not, for I bring evil from the north, and great destruction."² "A lion has gone up from his thicket, a destroyer of nations has set out....to make your land a waste."³ "This is your doom...."⁴ a "nation from afar...an enduring nation...an ancient nation...they shall eat up your food...your sons and daughters...your flocks...your vines...your fortified cities, and they shall destroy...."⁵

The theme of judgment roots in chapter one, where we find the promise of it. In chapters 2 and 3 is elaborated the occasion for it; in 4,5,6, the character and alternatives to it; in 14-20, the aspects of its inescapability, its severity, its inevitability and the justification for it. The better to appreciate the cost of sin we now examine these latter aspects as enlarged upon in chapters 14-20.

1. The inescapability of judgment: "Your fathers have forsaken me...and gone after other gods...and have not kept my law and you have done worse than your fathers... therefore....no favor."⁶

The thread of the responsibility of the covenant agreement entered upon at Sinai between God and his people runs through these three chapters. Everyone understood that

¹Jeremiah 1:13.

²Jeremiah 4:6.

³Jeremiah 4:7.

⁴Jeremiah 4:18.

⁵Jeremiah 5:15-17

⁶Jeremiah 16:10-13.

God's part would be the protection of his people and the prospering of them and the people's part would be faithfulness to Him, the one and only true God and obedience to his laws. God had frequently demonstrated his ability and willingness to carry out his share of the agreement,¹ but the people had performed miserably in carrying out their part of the agreement.

Now calamity in the form of a drought has struck. The people gather at the gates, gazing up into the brassy skies and cry for rain. One reads a form of judgment in the drought itself. It serves to bring to light the true apostasy of Judah for in their distress they remember the God who was the hope and saviour of Israel in days gone by. Devotion soon turns to doubt when no rains fall. Perhaps the mighty God of old is no longer mighty and no longer omnipresent and no longer unswerving in His purpose.²

The pattern of disloyalty and doubt and backsliding reaches far back into the history of the fathers of the present generation. They too had indulged in insincere repentance in times of stress.³

In their hearts they "loved to wander"³ and now the people have found themselves faced with calamity more terrible than they had ever imagined. The Lord who rejected their fathers in their backslidings is consistent

¹Jeremiah 2:5-10. ²Jeremiah 14:8b-9a.

³Jeremiah 14:10.

in rejecting and punishing the sons and daughters of the present age. Punishment is certain, as certain as death to grass and flowers when no rains fall. Equally as certain is the vain hope of deliverance so long as the peoples' repentance is not genuine. "Leave us not,"¹ the people cry, but the Lord says, "They have loved to have it so, they have not restrained their feet, therefore the Lord does not accept them, now he will remember their iniquity and punish their sins."²

We may read the vindication of the terrible activity of God in the carrying out of his plans purposed of old. If people purpose otherwise and break themselves upon the stones of self-will, preferred ignorance and unrepentent desire, there is nothing even God can do. "I will make them know...my power and my might, and they shall know that my name is the Lord."³

2. The severity of judgment: Judgment is deserved and severe, its severity is matched by the lengths of Judah's departure from the ways of righteousness, and reprieve is impossible.

"They have loved to wander...they have not restrained their feet."⁴

"Do not pray for the welfare of this people....Though they fast...though they offer burnt offering...cereal offering... I will not accept them; but I will consume..."⁵

¹Jeremiah 14:9.

²Jeremiah 14:10. ³Jeremiah 16:21

⁴Jeremiah 14:10.

⁵Jeremiah 14:11,12.

Faithlessness, infidelity to the One True God and stubborn, willfull disobedience have brought upon the people the fruits of wrath that they deserve. The God who exercises kindness, justice and righteousness in the earth¹ is compelled to punish people who will not see that these principles are the basic formulae for true security and permanence in human-divine relationship.

3. The inevitability of judgment: The inevitability of judgment lies in the immutability of the foundation principle. If people will resist and forsake and reject Truth then the price is punishment. The imagery of the prophet is suited to the times. The devastation of Judah was at hand historically. The prophet's perception sharpened to the ethical meaning and significance of events saw the reverse of God's mercy at work, i.e. his hatred of insincerity and disloyalty and unrighteousness.

People always want to know why. "Why this great evil? What is our iniquity?"² as though God kept a ledger which required a balancing of good deeds and thoughts against the bad ones. Deep and clear insight is revealed in the prophetic reply³ as he lays down the implied principles for God's behaviour in response to evil that is intended and desired and projected. Indeed his patience may endure for a season but if people "keep going backward"⁴

¹Jeremiah 9:23.

²Jeremiah 16:10.

³Jeremiah 16:11-13.

⁴Jeremiah 15:6a.

he grows "weary of relenting;"¹ "the divine anger kindles into flame"² and the end is death and destruction.³ This is the prophet's dramatic representation of the fate of people from whom the light and the warmth of the "peace" and the "steadfast love and mercy"⁴ has been taken. This, the absence of God's love and mercy is indeed the essence of desolation.

4. The justification of judgment: Judgment is vindicated in the ultimate purpose of God. "I will make them know...my power and my might, and they shall know that my name is the Lord (Jehovah, the God who dwells with his people).⁵ The mighty and terrible acts of God are justified when it is possible to view the end from the beginning. People break themselves upon the rocks of rebellion, self-will, preferred ignorance and unrepentant desire. They suffer but even the suffering in right relation to God has meaning. "They shall know that my name is Jehovah"--the God of revelation and grace who comes to dwell with his people.

This is another of the timeless contributions of the prophet's mind. The man whose life is cursed with self-adoration has an alternative open to him, the possibility of blessing in place of bondage.

"Cursed is the man who trusts in man..."⁶

"Blessed is the man who trusts in the Lord..."⁷

¹Jeremiah 15:6b.

²Jeremiah 15:14.

³Jeremiah 16:1-9;
16:16-20.

⁴Jeremiah 16:5;

⁵Jeremiah 16:21.

⁶Jeremiah 17:5.

⁷Jeremiah 17:7.

The dilemma of the man who trusts in man is provoked by ignorance and self-will but there is an alternative. There is a way out. The same self-will that provoked rebellion against God can be brought into allegiance to him. In other words sin can be cured. This is the prophet's conviction. It is in this confidence that he puts the case for the cure of sin which we now examine.

The Cure of Sin: The case for the cure of sin lodges firmly on the promises of God. Let us review some of them. "Behold I will bring them to health and healing," he said. "I will reveal to them abundance of prosperity and security, I will restore...I will cleanse...I will forgive."¹

"I will make a new covenant...I will put my law within them, and I will write it upon their hearts, and I will be their God and they shall be my people...they shall all know me...I will forgive...and remember their sins no more."²

"I am your master", says the Lord. "I will take you and bring you to Zion. And I will give you shepherds after my own heart, who will feed you with knowledge and understanding."³

"I know the plans I have for you," says the Lord, "plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope. Then you will call upon me and come and pray

¹Jeremiah 33:6f. ²Jeremiah 31:31f. ³Jeremiah 3:13-15.

to me, and I will hear you. You will seek me and find me: when you seek me with all your heart."¹

"I am with you, to save you and to deliver you..."²

Garnered from every corner of the prophet's masterpiece this marvelous catalogue of promise formulates the grounds for the firm hope that there is a cure for defection of every man and every nation. This deep note of the redeeming element in God's character undergirds the entire prophecy of Jeremiah. This is the stream by which the tree, if it sends out its roots, remains forever green and fruit-bearing.³ Faith is the means to blessing. Without faith the entire treasury of God is a phantom dream.

A decision to accept the promises of God puts them within reach of the returning sinner. The road of return is then marked with some useful guideposts to lead the traveller from one "inn" to the next on the way to his destination. These are in fact conditions which on being met, open the way to a deeper and richer fellowship with God. As the evangelist preacher would say, these are the conditions by which a sinner tests his progress back to God. They serve here however to demonstrate the prophetic penetration of the psychology of the progress of repentance.

Acknowledge guilt. "Return, O faithless children, acknowledge your guilt...."⁴

¹Jeremiah 29:13.

²Jeremiah 42:11.

³Jeremiah 17:8.

⁴Jeremiah 3:13.

Amend your ways. "Return, everyone from his evil way, amend your ways and your doings..."¹

Practice obedience. "Obey the voice of the Lord... and it shall be well with you."²

Seek the good way. "Stand by the roads, and look, and ask...where the good way is; and walk in it, and find rest for your souls."³

Care only to know God and his will. "...let him who glories, glory in this that he understands and knows me, that I am the Lord who practices kindness, justice and righteousness in the earth..."⁴

Careful exploration of the nature and the cure for sin marks the prophet's work on this subject. Israel's rejection of covenant responsibilities provoked him to probe to the roots of her defection. Five significant characteristics emerged. Sin is an attitude of revolt, not simply an act or a series of acts. Sin is a killer of ideals and positive desires. Sin exposes its victims to a harvest of desolation. Sin plays no favorites. Its scope is universal. Sin can be cured. There is a way out.

This study of sin and its implications concludes the review of the elements here gathered to illustrate the interpretive capacity of the prophet's mind.

It was our purpose, we said, to examine the prophet's capacity to think. In the four major areas of theology, politics, moral responsibility and the problem of sin, the prophet has linked knowledge with imagination and contrived to express in the language of the daily encounter, the pri-

¹Jeremiah 18:11b. ²Meremiah 38:20. ³Jeremiah 6:16.

⁴Jeremiah 9:24.

mary rules of life. A wide range of incisive detail has been recorded in each of the areas indicated. Clearly he lived in close association with the brutal facts of every day. In fact much of his knowledge of the character of God and his contemporaries came to him at first hand out of long and bitter experience, engaged as he was himself in the conflict between the two.

Something must be added however to knowledge to give it life and power. Imagination plays an important role as ideas come to birth in the crucible of thought. The prophet's unique contribution to the understanding of the ways of God and the ways of men acquired permanent status and lives vigorously in the pages of his writings yet today because, as we have found, he knit knowledge with imagination and gave new expression to old truths in the vivid context of the conflict of the hour.

CHAPTER III

GETTING THE MESSAGE ACROSS -- DELIVERY

THE MORAL AND SPIRITUAL STAMINA OF THE PROPHET

Ability to deliver the message derives from more than intellectual excellence. There must be a spiritual dynamic as well, if the Word is to penetrate and remain effectively lodged in the mind of indifferent hearers. Discussion of this point brings us naturally to an investigation of the element of authority in the prophet's work.

The impact of his writings, when read today is strengthened by the mark of authenticity that is stamped upon them, as though guaranteed to last. They have indeed lasted and in digging deeper to find out some of the reasons why they seem still to be so pertinent and potent, we proceed to the subject of certainty, the grounds for it and the tests of it.

I. GROUNDS OF CERTAINTY

One question that a hearer has the right to ask of a speaker is, "Do you know what you are talking about?" Knowledge of the subject and/or the situation is a vital prerequisite to speech and in the foregoing under the topic

of Jeremiah's understanding this paper has attempted to demonstrate that the prophet did have a wide and accurate appreciation of the situation in which he lived, of the people who shared this situation with him, of their personal and national folly and of their God who would save them from the consequences of it. It may be confidently affirmed that the prophet in the first instance did know what he was talking about. Having a keen eye, a ready ear, an inquiring mind and a sound memory, he was able to outfit himself adequately with the facts.

But although too much importance cannot be attached to having on hand the facts, the real genius of communication is to be found at a deeper level than knowledge. As has been pointed out, Communication is the art of saying something and being understood. Two sides are implicit here. It is not enough to impart knowledge, sound and accurate as the impartment may be, but as teachers know well, there is the problem of getting the matter into the heads of the hearers. The circulation director of a current magazine says: "Our magazine asks to be judged, not by how much information it gets between its covers, but by how much it manages to get off its pages and into the minds of its readers." Subtle forces come into play in this process. It is not our concern to enter into a pedagogical discussion but it is certain that unless there are certain forces at work on a deeper level than the memory and tongue of the speaker, real and effective communication is diffi-

cult, if not impossible.

There is a sense in which mind and spirit cooperate to get the message across. The message is delivered clothed in the elements of the personality of the speaker. Some would say that it is the personality that bridges the chasm between the mind of the speaker and the hearer. And because personality partakes of the deep inner feelings and experiences of a man, it is to an examination of the inner experiences of the prophet that we now turn.

We have seen something of the character and personality already of Jeremiah in terms of what he understood of life but because "Communication is much more a matter of what we are than what we say,"¹ that is, strength of character and spiritual resources predetermine the effect of loquaciousness and eloquence, we look now for the roots of certainty and authority in the prophet's experience. From whence came his power to stand and speak with courage and deadly effect to angry princes, foolish kings, false prophets and the clamoring mob? How can the prophet, (preacher or missionary) be sure that the word he speaks is God's word and not some fancy of his own? This is the question.

The fact of experience of God: "The preacher (or prophet) who takes his stand on the fact of experience as the ground for all certainty finds himself in good company."²

¹Jenkins, Daniel T., "The Communication of the Gospel", Theology Today, (April - January, 1949-50), p. 175.

²Calkins, Raymond, The Eloquence of Christian Experience, (New York, MacMillan, 1927), p. 48.

"Then the Lord put forth his hand and touched my mouth; and the Lord said to me, 'Behold I have put my words in your mouth...'"¹

It would seem that we are here very close to the source or root of the certainty and assurance which marks the prophet's witness. The degree of certainty is determined by the degree of simplicity, reality and directness of the contact with God. As Calkins has pointed out "one's degree of religious certainty depends on the degree of possession of the mystical element in his religious experience, that is to say, certainty depends upon one's own immediate experience of God."² "Now my eye seeth thee..."³ cried Job in a moment of spiritual triumph. "In truth the Lord sent me to speak"⁴ avowed the prophet Jeremiah to the crowd in the temple court as the priests and the prophets and the mob rushed upon him in anger, shouting, "You shall die!"⁵ for he had prophesied against the city.

"I am in your hands. Do with me as seems good and right."⁶ This is the ultimate in bravery and steadfastness born of certainty that was established when God spoke directly to the prophet and communicated personally his words and will to him. "You shall be as my mouth..."⁷ "Do not be dismayed by them..."⁸ "They will fight against you, but

¹Jeremiah 1:9.

²Calkins, op. cit., p. 43f.

³Job 42:5

⁴Jeremiah 26:15b.

⁵Jeremiah 26:8.

⁶Jeremiah 26:15.

⁷Jeremiah 15:19b.

⁸Jeremiah 1:17b.

they shall not prevail against you, for I am with you, says the Lord, to deliver you."¹

"I am with you...."² "This", says Kierkegaard, "is the initial crisis point in Jeremiah's inner experience. Here 'His own law' and the law of the Lord became one. To be a prophet or an apostle on one's own terms, would be arrogance. Divine authority is the decisive factor."³ The primary credential then offered by the prophet as proof of his capacity to speak for God is prior and intimate acquaintance with the One who speaks. Not that he functions as a soul-less trumpet but rather as a personality, one through whom the divine message may be transmitted by responding to the ebb and flow and stress and strain of daily life. How intimate was Jeremiah's experience of God is seen in the honesty and ruggedness of his appraisal⁴ of his difficulties in 12:1,5.

"Why does the way of the wicked prosper?
Why do all who are treacherous thrive?"⁵

And the answer in paraphrase, "Things will get worse before they get better."

"If you have raced with man on foot,
and they have wearied you,
How will you compete with horses?"

"And if in a safe land you fall down,
how will you do in the jungle of the Jordan?"⁶

¹Jeremiah 1:19.

²Jeremiah 1:19.

³Kierkegaard, Søren, The Present Age (trans. Alexander Dru and Walter Lowrie; London: Oxford University Press: 1940), p. 144.

⁴Calkins, op. cit., p. 98.

⁵Jeremiah 12:1.

⁶Jeremiah 12:5.

Certainty and confidence realized in personal experience of God is the unique and central element of the prophet's testimony. They (the true prophets) knew that they had the mind of God. "They were in tune with the infinite and they knew it."¹ This is the innermost secret of the prophetic inspiration and power. Divine truth breaks through into the human scene because God chooses to make himself known in a personality and the products of that life, certified by suffering, confront and compell the conscience of his generation.

Perception and Vision:

"Jeremiah, what do you see?"...²"a rod of almond...." "A boiling pot..."

"Amos, what do you see?"... "A plumb line"...
"a basket of summer fruit..."³

"Zechariah, what do you see?".... "....a lampstand all of gold..."⁴

Jeremiah among the great prophets enjoyed the gift of spiritual insight. In this consisted his prophetic vision. For definition we look to Calkins, "A vision is simply an immediate insight into the being, the purpose, the will of God. It is the sense of immediacy which makes up the meaning of vision. It is a direct, immediate communication of Divine truth."⁵

¹Calkins, op. cit. p. 46.

²Jeremiah 1:11,13.

³Amos 7:8; 8:2.

⁴Zechariah 4:2.

⁵Calkins, op. cit., p. 62.

Thus in the development of the theme of prophetic certainty discussion of the method of perception has its place. It is thus precisely that God wrote his word on the mind of his man.

The gift of vision is a factor of central importance in religious experience, in fact in knowing what God is saying. Dr. Hugh T. Kerr in an article entitled, "God's Terrible Springtime" has made this issue clear. "When God asks the question "What seest thou?" he has already prepared the answer. He himself has trained the soul to see what he has revealed. It is this gift of vision, God's revelation and man's response which constitutes the central reality in religion. It is this gift of spiritual insight, inspired by God himself which makes a prophet."¹

John Ruskin said: "The greatest thing a human soul ever does in this world is to see something...To see clearly is poetry, prophecy, religion all in one."²

God's truth in terms of sticks and stones and pots and baskets and tools, this is reality. Conviction rooted in such vivid representation and already trained to understand, lends wings to speech. Thus did the Lord put his word in the mouth of the prophet. Thus did the "eyes and mouth of Jeremiah, serve as the eyes and mouth of God. And the whole of nature provided the props.

¹Kerr, H. T., "God's Terrible Springtime", Theology Today, (April, 1944), p. 16.

²Ibid.

Inspiration: We have looked to the foundations of the prophet's faith in God from the viewpoint of the grounds that he had for certainty in the proclamation of his message. We have seen also in this section from whence he drew ever fresh and compelling simile to translate the cosmic into the real. There is a positive vitality in this that presents itself irresistably to the imagination and the will. But now we ask, how could he keep on with it? A cursory reading of the writings of the prophet show that he was rejected and scorned and threatened with death. He was subject to a great many indignities and insults. In fact it cannot be said that he was appreciated at all by those he desired most to help. The point of greatest sensitivity is reached when his detractors question his own motives and mock at his sincerity. So it is from the very depths of his soul that the cry burst forth,

"O Lord thou knowest....know that for thy sake I bear reproach....I sat alone, because thy hand was upon me, for thou hadst filled me with indignation."

"Why is my pain unceasing....
Wilt thou be to me like a deceitful brook,
like waters that fail?¹

When the fire of faith burns low indeed, as at this critical moment of the prophet's life, what is there to see him through? If here the secret of inspiration can be found have we not the answer to the question of every

¹Jeremiah 15:15-18.

flagging Christian pilgrim as he asks himself, how can I keep on?

Yes, the answer is here and from it may be drawn the vital truth that when man has gotten as far down as he can get spiritually speaking, he is most ready for the restorative that God has to give him.

The tears of loneliness and frustration flow down the cheeks of this desolate man. He has himself fallen into the hands of the enemy. The questioning of his own motives was the final stroke. And he has given way to the same doubts and faithlessness that are the cause of his nation's preposterous infidelity.

But the voice of the Lord is heard in the midst of the tears and the crying:

"If you return, I will restore you,
and you shall stand before me."

"If you utter what is precious not
what is worthless, you shall be as
my mouth."¹

The conditions of safety and strength, namely returning and dwelling are found to apply not only to the people to whom he is charged to speak but most profoundly to God's messenger himself. Thus is God's man brought into personal comprehension of the true nature of the issue and the condition to which he must speak. His identification with the problem of Judah's infidelity is complete. From

¹Jeremiah 15:19.

this point he is able much more deeply to understand and sympathize and prescribe according to the Word (the mouth) of the Lord.

The prophet's consciousness of his redemptive task is brought home to him as he lies figuratively helpless at God's feet, crying out for help and finding it fully and completely given. For if the conditions are met, (the same conditions which the prophet has been calling upon the people to meet) then the reward is assured for the voice of the Lord is heard as there wells up in the prophet's soul a new hope for himself and for his people.

"I will make you to this people a fortified wall.... they shall not prevail over you.... I am with you.... I will deliver you and redeem you."¹

Cries the prophet in a shout of glad relief:

"Blessed is the man who trusts in the Lord!"²

"Heal me O Lord and I shall be healed
Save me, and I shall be saved;
for thou art my praise."³

By no means for the last time was it the prophet's lot to plumb the depths of personal despair but it is here in the soul searching revelations of what have been called the Confessions⁴ of Jeremiah that the source of his inspiration to go on, is found. Here was established a point of reference to which he was ever afterwards able to look

¹Jeremiah 15:20,21. ²Jeremiah 17:7. ³Jeremiah 17:14.

⁴Cf. Jeremiah 15:10,11; 15:15-18; 18:19-23; 20:7-18.

back upon. At the hour of his own deepest need, at the moment when he was least able to help himself, God came to the rescue. The solution or the remedy was not new. It was the old cure but applied to the prophet himself. **And** having been through this devastating yet restoring experience himself it was thereafter possible for him to keep on with the delivering of a message of redemption that had proved so entirely adequate in his own experience. "I know", he could say, "I've been through it myself."

Prayer: Implicit in the discussion of prayer as a fourth aspect in this section dealing with the grounds for certainty is the element of the personal, direct experience of God. This has been touched upon already in a more general context at the beginning of this section, and although a vital factor, here gives place to a consideration of the extent to which these spontaneous outbursts of the prophet reveal by their very pertinency and urgency the assurance of the man and the certainty of his message.

The prayers of Jeremiah¹ arise spontaneously out of the circumstance of the hour. In chapter 14, the land languishes under a terrible drought. Every spring has dried up, the grass is gone, burned up by the heat, the rain has failed. Even the wild asses are suffering from thirst.

¹Ref. 14:7-9; 13, 17, 19ff; 10:23,25; 9:1; 13:17; 15:15-18; 17:14-18.

Cries the prophet, "Though our iniquities testify against us, act O Lord, for thy name's sake;O Thou hope of Israel..."¹ Clearly this is a cry for rain to water again the parched earth and bring back life and vigor to it. But the very circumstance is to the prophet whose eyes see the people of Israel afflicted by their infidelity as the land is stricken with the drought, the great and terrible need for the return of the divine presence to their midst to restore them to spiritual health and strength.

Circumstance here serves to reinforce the petition of the prophet. Not a shadow of uncertainty clouds the mind of the man who sees in the drought the need of Israel for the refreshment of repentance which is like the refreshment of water to wet parched lips.

Circumstance serves also to bolster the prophet's courage to the point of brashness.

"Why", he shouts, "shouldst thou be like a stranger in the land, like a wayfarer who turns aside to tarry for the night?"

"Why shouldst thou be like a man confused, like a mighty man who cannot save?"²

The Hope, the very Heart of Israel is acting like a careless stranger who comes for the night and goes again in the dawn shorn of the cares of his resting place; or like a great man with power to help but confused and impotent. Thus it would seem to the unbeliever. Cries the

¹Jeremiah 14:7,8.

²Jeremiah 14:8,9.

prophet, "Thou, O Lord art in the midst of us. We are called by thy name; leave us not."¹ Now the situation is made clear. The certainty of judgment is made plain. First the reason why, then the outcome and its twin aspects of desolation and punishment.

Thus says the Lord concerning this people, "They have loved to wander...they have not restrained their feet; therefore the Lord does not accept them, now he will remember their iniquity and punish their sins."²

Let us look at the rapid fire sequence of intercession from the lips of the prophet:

"Act, O Lord, for thy name's sake..."³

"O Lord, leave us not, we are called by thy name..."⁴

"O Lord, do not spurn us, for thy name's sake..."

"Do not dishonour thy glorious throne..."

"Remember, do not break thy covenant with us..."⁵

"O Lord our God, we set our hope on thee..."⁶

Circumstances and appearances to the contrary there is the unmistakable note of confidence on the part of the prophet in God. The prophet's hope and certainty is rooted in what he already knows of the character and design of the One by whose name his people are called. Moreover his con-

¹Jeremiah 14:8,9.

²Jeremiah 14:10

³Jeremiah 14:7.

⁴Jeremiah 14:9b.

⁵Jeremiah 14:21.

⁶Jeremiah 14:22b.

fidence rests in the certainty of the justice of God, that he will remember and keep his covenant. The most poignant certainty is the prophet's conviction that judgment shall come, needlessly, with certainty -- but with justice.

Wellhausen has indicated the prophet Jeremiah as being the "father of true prayer."¹ The note of cleansing intimacy with God marks the prophet's intercessions with a uniqueness born of a confidence that he knew well the One who had been present at the choosing and appointing of the prophet in the beginning and who had already allowed such intimacy with His person as to be a thing unique in Hebrew history. "For the first time in Hebrew history the penitential element in prayer falls into the background and prayer assumes its highest form, that of intimate spiritual communion with God."²

II. THE TESTS OF CERTAINTY

We have been seeking to highlight the note of certainty and authority in the prophet's experience of God, his vision, his periods of inspiration and his prayers. We affirm that it was present but the more convincing procedure is to put it to the test in the crucible of life

¹Wellhausen, quoted in Calkins, R., Jeremiah the Prophet, (New York: The MacMillian Company, 1930), p. 222-223. A

²Ibid.

experience. This element of certainty is of primary importance as we pursue the secret of the prophet's communicative power.

Is it real? Is it constant? Does it have the mark of divine initiative upon it? We cannot be sure until we have seen it under testing.

Can we depend on the voice of a man speaking from prison to reveal whether he is really sure of the truth of his message? What then of the Word of a man called to speak at the moment that the enemy is battering at the gates of his city? Or when the erstwhile champion of God's word discovers that his very own will and desire have risen up in revolt against the very thing he must continue to say, what then of convictions and certainties? Or when a man's professional equals brand him as a charlatan and a liar, is not this a time for the true character of his convictions to come to the fore?

Hence it seems appropriate to examine briefly the following incidents as representative of many others, for proofs of the certainties which we have already affirmed existed in the prophet's thought and ministry.

The Prophet under Siege

The Prophet under Arrest and Trial

The Prophet under Professional Criticism

The Prophet under Divine Compulsion

*order
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The prophet under siege:¹ "I set before you the way of life and the way of death."² In a single phrase the prophet has outlined the choice that faced the people and the leaders of the people at the time of crisis, the siege of Jerusalem by Nebuchadrezzar, king of Babylon; and the choice which he faced himself in pronouncing the word of the Lord.

"He who stays in the city shall die....he who goes out and surrenders....shall live...."³ It was the awful task of the prophet to pronounce the utter and inescapable doom of the city he loved. Ballantyne has commented, "It is only when we admit what the fall of Jerusalem meant to one so clear-eyed, so healthful, so elastic as Jeremiah that we begin to see how dreadful that fall really was,"⁴

At a time like this the task of interpreter of history in the light of his knowledge of God weighed most heavily on the prophet. We cannot otherwise do him credit than to say that his preoccupation with the impending fate of the city and its inhabitants far outweighed any consideration he might have had at that time for his own personal safety either within the walls or without them.

Nevertheless the risk he ran of immediate execution by angry princes or the weak king must not be discounted as we make evaluation of the steadfastness with which the

¹Book of Disaster: cf. Jeremiah 21:1-10; 34:1-17, 8-22; 37:1-10, 11-21; 38:1-28.

²Jeremiah 21:8

³Jeremiah 21:9.

⁴Ballantine, William G., Jeremiah, New York: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1892, p. 10.

oracle of the Lord spoke the truth as he knew it -- awful as it was.

Courage, clarity and certainty seem to sum up in brief the testimony of the prophet during this crisis as he foretold the coming events, in particular the withdrawal of Egypt and the certain return of the Chaldeans.

The role as the public conscience is difficult. The king seeks advice. It is contrary to his will, the desire of the people, and apparently out of step with the times. The prophet could be forgiven for having recanted his dire pronouncement in the face of events and ruling powers to the contrary.

He did not recant. On the contrary he attacked the people on the matter of the treacherous slave dealing and their failure to be true to their bargain that all Hebrew slaves of six years should be freed. The breakdown of the moral fibre of the nation was exemplified in this affair. Thus did the Lord declare, "You have not obeyed me by proclaiming liberty, everyone to his brother and neighbor, behold I proclaim to you liberty to the sword, to pestilence, and to famine...."¹ Obedience or death, this was the issue. Judah had become a nation of covenant breakers, a sacred trust defiled.

The prophet was seized and taken into custody on circumstantial evidence. The Chaldean army was withdrawing

¹Jeremiah 34:17.

at the approach of the Egyptians. Jeremiah attempted to leave the city on business. He was accused of running away to the Chaldeans. The actions of a traitor now seemed to be added to the pronouncements of a quisling. A heavy burden indeed for the man of God to bear. He was put in prison.

From prison he was moved to the court of the guard but again from there under arrest, bearing the burden of false accusation on his heart and daily increasingly aware of the impending doom of his beloved city--still he cries to the people within earshot, "Thus says the Lord, he who stays in this city shall die...., he who goes out to the Chaldeans shall live..."¹

Accused now by the furious princes of undermining the power of resistance of the soldiers and the people and charged with seeking the harm of the people rather than their welfare, the voice of God is plunged into a miry pit, there to meditate upon the incredible pattern of events that have seemingly conspired to prove him to be the traitor and self-seeker that he most definitely was not.

Drawn at last from the filthy mire through the salutary intervention of an Ethiopian eunuch of the court and summoned again to a secret conference with the king, faced with the prospect of probable and sudden assassination, again the voice of the Lord by the mouth of his servant is heard, Obey and Live! The alternative is death, destruction and desolation. And thus it came about.

¹Jeremiah 38:2.

Further evidence is hardly needed to support the view of the certainty of the prophet that his word was the true word, the word of God. Faced with a similar barrage of personal and public recrimination who would not have been tempted to doubt and perhaps at least review the case in terms of the national circumstance and personal risk? Not so the prophet. He spoke the word of truth in terms of the certainty of his experience and knowledge and vision of God.

The prophet on trial: The scene¹ is the courtroom, the prophet is on trial for his life. Public opposition, the priests and prophets and all the people thirst for blood. "You shall die!"² they shriek, "why have you prophesied in the name of the Lord, saying, "This house shall be like Shiloh, and this city be desolate, without inhabitant?"³

The princes opined, "This man deserves to die because he has prophesied against this city." And Jeremiah replied, "The Lord sent me to prophesy against this house (the temple) and this city all the words you have heard."⁴

It is not in fact the prophet that is on trial, it is the nation against whom he is accused of conspiring. Her security and permanence are at stake. This is the real issue of this event.

¹Ref. Jeremiah 26:1-24.

²Jeremiah 26:8.

³Jeremiah 26:8.

⁴Jeremiah 26:12.

"Listen...walk...heed..." These are the injunctions of the Lord and the nation is in danger of impeachment for having in fact done the very opposite.

But the whole weight of public aversion to the unpalatable truth falls on the man on trial, "This man deserves the sentence of death."¹ -- for calling the nation's attention to its real danger, the inner peril of spiritual and moral desolation.

"Amend your ways and your doings and obey the voice of the Lord your God."² At the risk of his life the prophet still cries out the message of positive truth to his people. Concern for personal safety is thrust aside.

"Behold I am in your hands.
Do with me as seems good and right to you...
but know in truth the Lord sent me to you
to speak all these words in your ears."³

The prospect even of death could not silence the one who knew the meaning of true safety and security and who thus spoke with utter confidence that he had been sent of the Lord.

The prophet under professional criticism: "Listen, Hananiah, the Lord has not sent you, and you have made this people trust in a lie....you shall die, because you have uttered rebellion against the Lord."⁴

The princes, the priests, and the people all, at one time or another vented their grievance and frustration on the prophet. Here⁵ however is added the quarrel of his

¹Jeremiah 26:11.

²Jeremiah 26:13.

³Jeremiah 26:14,15.

⁴Jeremiah 28:15,16.

⁵Ref. Jeremiah 27, 28. Final Warnings.

contemporary fellow prophets with him. We see more clearly the true stature of the man in his dispute with Hananiah, a combination of firmness and humility, a willingness to be proved wrong but strong in the certainty that his word, his apparently spurious interpretation of the march of events, was in fact the truth, the word of the Lord.

The historical situation contemporaneous with the quarrel between Jeremiah and the other prophets and Hananiah in particular saw the young, irresolute king Zedekiah on the throne (594), surrounded by envoys who have come from Judah's neighbors to arrange a plan of mutual defense against Babylon, the common foe. Nebuchadnezzar's tenderness is already known for this is the second time his armies have been encamped at the gates of the city. In the temple circles debate continues as to the disposition of the sacred articles and vessels still in possession of Judah and when, if ever, the ones carried away to Babylon by the invader shall be returned. Not of course, until the exiles, sweltering in the muskeg of Babylon have also returned, set free. Rumor has it that the sacred vessels were shortly to be returned and various prophetic pronouncements have been made to this effect. The leaders and the people reach for every straw of hope in a time of desperation and crisis. The prophets, the diviners, the soothsayers, the dreamers, the sorcerers, all have contributed to the rumor that salvation from national disaster is at hand.

But the man from Anathoth comes striding into the midst of them all. On his neck he wears a yoke-bar of wood, tied with thongs, the symbol of servitude. "It is a lie," he shouts. "Do not listen to the words of the prophets who are saying to you, 'You shall not serve the King of Babylon', for it is a lie which they are prophesying to you."¹ "Do not listen to them; serve the King of Babylon and live."²

Once again it is the prophetic task to stand in the opposite camp to his contemporaries.. Especially difficult is it indeed to oppose to their faces those who profess to speak for God, as he does himself. Who then has the truth? The encounter between Hananiah and Jeremiah brings the whole matter to focus.

Hananiah said, "Two years will see the pilfered temple vessels and the exiles home again from Babylon. The yoke of Babylon has been broken. And to demonstrate his conviction he took from Jeremiah's neck the wooden yoke he was wearing and broke it in the presence of the people. Jeremiah having warned Hananiah, went his way, apparently defeated, willing indeed to be wrong if it was for his nation's welfare.

But the word of the Lord came to Jeremiah, "Go, tell Hananiah...you have broken wooden bars, but I will make in their place bars of iron...the iron yoke of servitude I have put upon the neck of all these nations to the king of Babylon..."³

Thus Jeremiah returned to Hananiah to pronounce upon him the indictment of sudden death for said he, "You have

¹Jeremiah 27:14. ²Jeremiah 27:17. ³Jeremiah 28:13,14.

made this people trust in a lie" and "You have uttered rebellion against the Lord."¹ The real traitor is the one who speaks without "perception of the nature and purpose of God."²

This was the ground on which the prophet set his feet. Speaking as a prophet of God, Jeremiah knew where his responsibility lay. "It was the effort by his prophetic word to bring God's people back from their evil deed."³ His was the task morally to seek the purpose of God through and beyond the local scene; intellectually to interpret carefully what he saw of God's purpose in terms of the local scene. To the conference table of messengers from the kings of Judah, solemnly discussing by what political method or military strategy they could combine to stave off the power of the invader, comes the envoy of the Lord of Hosts, saying,

"It is I who by my great power....have made the earth and I give it to whomsoever it seems right to me.

"Now I give all these lands to the king of Babylon, my servant...."⁴

The prophet Jeremiah met the test of encounter with the false prophets because of his certain knowledge of this cardinal aspect of the sovereignty of God. No

¹Jeremiah 28:16

²Westminster Bible Edition of the Bible, p. 1103.

³Leslie, Elmer, A., Jeremiah, (New York, Abingdon Press, 1954), p. 222.

⁴Jeremiah 27:5,6.

place for wavering or misinterpretation at this point no matter what the cost to person or nation. Lofthouse comments, "Victory could be worse than defeat if gained at the expense of Judah's misunderstanding of God."¹ And indeed, the prophet-advocate of servitude, suffered "the slings and arrows" of outraged public opinion not as an enemy of his country, desiring its ruin as vindication of his words, but as a fervent patriot desiring its truest welfare.

The Prophet under divine compulsion: In conclusion of this section in which we have tried to show by various examples how the certainty of the prophet's convictions stood the tests of encounter with the social, political and religious elements of his day, we glance briefly at one other field of encounter and conflict within the prophet himself.

"Why did I come forth from the womb to see toil and sorrow, and spend my days in shame?"²

"O Lord thou has deceived me...

"....everyone mocks me.

"The Word of the Lord has become for me a reproach and a derision all day long.

"I will not....speak any more in his name.

"There is in my heart as it were a burning fire shut up in my bones. I am weary with holding it in, I cannot."³

Here in a single stroke of the artist's is the picture of a man caught up in a spiritual contradiction

¹Lofthouse, W. F., Jeremiah and the New Covenant, (London: Student Christian Movement, 1925) p. 144.

²Jeremiah 20:18.

³Jeremiah 20:7f.

assailed by "foes without" and "fears within."

The man revolted from his task. He rebelled against the thing which an irresistible "divine impulse"¹ compelled him to perform.

Earlier in the "intimate papers"² of Jeremiah other aspects of the man's soul conflict are touched upon. Mirrored there in his innermost being are the frustrations and fears of the nation, the jibes of the mockers, the bitterness of the lonely heart and the cryings of the spirit at times set loose from its mooring in the heart of God. The struggle intensifies as the prophet soliloquizes upon the treachery of Pashur the priest who caused him the discomfort and shame of a night in stocks and worse still, what appears to be deception on the part of God himself.

"O Lord, thou hast deceived me....
Thou art stronger than I,"
Thou hast prevailed...."³

Anger, frustration, shame, and dread climax in utter helplessness. At this point sanity returns. "But the Lord is with me..."⁴ In the context of his current troubles with the treachery and mockery of his persecutors, hope and courage rise again on the old promise made in the beginning and still valid,

"They will fight against you
but they shall not prevail....
for I am with you....to deliver you."⁵

¹Calkins, op. cit., p. 25.

²Leslie, op. cit., p. 137.

³Jeremiah 20:7.

⁴Jeremiah 20:11.

⁵Jeremiah 1:19.

Faith, and the power to fight back, return. The cause of the prophet is a cause committed to God. He does not journey and fight alone. There will be terrible moments again but in recovering balance and gaining the victory over the most subtle of all enemies, the self, the prophet can confidently sing,

"Sing to the Lord, Praise the Lord,
For he has delivered the life of the
needy from the evildoers."¹

And who more needy than the prophet himself? Who more helpless and powerless in the grip of anger and despair? Who then, better fitted to understand and speak to the needs of a despairing yet truculent, unrelenting people?

The case for righteousness, fidelity, and truth is won in the heart of the prophet.

"Out of the heart are the issues of life."
"I, the Lord keep reaching the heart..."

The test of certainty is met in the hardest struggle of all, the battle within.

The evidence before us concerning the prophet's spiritual stamina, its roots and its viability in the face of severe testing justify the view that here again, as we saw a superior intellectual fibre in the prophet's understanding of theology, politics, morals and the human problem so we see here a forthrightness, a conviction, an assurance in spiritual things that permeated the man and his writings and manifestly contributed to their permanency as documents

¹Jeremiah 20:13.

within which a reader of any age may expect to find the secrets of a living fellowship with God.

CHAPTER IV

GETTING THE MESSAGE ACROSS -- DELIVERY THE QUALITY OF THE PROPHET'S WRITINGS

"Then I saw in my dreams," says Bunyan, "that the Interpreter took Christian by the hand, and led him into a place where there was a fire burning against a wall, and one standing by it, always casting much water upon it, to quench it; yet did the fire burn higher and hotter." When Christian inquired the meaning of this strange sight, he was led to a place behind the wall, "where he saw a man with a vessel of oil in his hand, of the which he did also continually cast (but secretly) into the fire."¹

Bunyan's allegory which pictures the secret resources of the Christian life also serves as an eloquent symbol of the vitality of the spiritual writings and in particular the work of Jeremias the prophet.

It is the claim of this essay that there is an eternal quality in the man and in his writings such that the influence he exerted 2600 years ago, persists. A considerable share of the credit for this may be given to the author's style of writing. In this chapter we shall display some

¹Bunyan, John, The Pilgrim's Progress, Part 1, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1907), p. 163.

of the more important characteristics of the prophet's composition and endeavor to evaluate them from the point of view that they contribute in greater or lesser measure to the persistent influence of his work.

I. USES OF THE LAWS OF ARRANGEMENT

We have sought out certain elements in the character and personality of Jeremiah that contribute to the vitality of the man. Now we turn to an examination of his work. Whence cometh its eternal quality, this vitality, this fire which continues to burn ever "higher and hotter"?

Let us then examine the characteristics of the prophet's composition which contribute to its lasting effectiveness and vitality.

"Composition means putting several things together, so as to make one thing out of them; the nature and goodness of which they all have a share in producing."¹ John Ruskin goes on to affirm that "the power of composition in the fine arts is an exclusive attribute of great intellect. The gift of composition is not given.....to more than one man in a thousand; in its highest range it does not occur above three or four times in a century."²

Thus although no one can set himself down to compose

¹Ruskin, John, The Elements of Drawing and Perspective, Everyman's Library #217, edited by Ernest Rhys, (London: J.M. Dent and Sons Limited) (reprinted 1932), p. 141.

²Ibid., p. 143.

by a set of rules, (and it is quite certain that the prophet in particular was not pre-occupied by the rules of good composition), yet the product of his hand may be measured by the yard stick of the essential laws of arrangement and thus we may be able to appreciate the scope of the prophetic imagination and the power it exercised over his materials.

For practical purposes we shall confine this investigation to one selected unit;¹ albeit protracted and concise, the call of Jeremiah in chapter one. It promises to yield a rich harvest of compositional excellence which it is our primary concern to illustrate at this stage.

THE ARRANGEMENT OF JEREMIAH, CHAPTER ONE: This segment entitled "The Call of the Prophet" divides into three natural parts or "words" that came to the prophet at this crucial time of his life. These three are:

The word concerning his appointment, vv. 4-10.

The word concerning his vision of the presence of God., vv. 11, 12.

The word concerning his vision of the plan and purpose of God., vv. 13-19.

(Writer's note: It is a temptation to include in this segment one further word, the word of the prophet's commission to Jerusalem, vv. 2:1-3, but this is perhaps better left as part of the following segment² of "Earliest Recorded Utterances" treating of the root, nature, and scope of Israel's defection).

¹ See Appendix for further illustrations of Ruskin's laws of arrangement.

² Jeremiah 2:1-4:4.

The essential unity of this segment is assured by the author's skillful use of at least eight of the basic laws of arrangement:

The Law of Principality: By this law of arrangement one feature is made more important than all the rest and its importance is emphasized by subordinating all other features to it.

The dominant characteristic of the segment under consideration is the encounter of God with a man and a man with God. Conflict results. The predominance of interchange between the personal pronouns "I" and "You" keep ever before us the elements of the struggle. It is as though we sat at the ring-side watching two contestants matching strength of wit and body against one another. One feels drawn into this contest. It calls for total attention. The outcome is reached by successive thrusts and counterthrusts and the whole constitutes a single unit whose parts can be distinguished only by careful observation.

Other laws of arrangement subservient but essential to the laws of principality contribute to this effect.

Law of Continuity: This is the principle of orderly succession by which unity is achieved as in the following:

Verse 5: I formed you.....
I knew you.....
I consecrated you.....
I appointed you.....

and again Verse 7: I send you.....
I command you.....
I am with you.....

or again in a succession of infinitives:

Verse 10: to pluck up and to break down
to destroy and to overthrow
to build and to plant

or again in a succession of simile:

Verse 18a: I will make you this day
a fortified city
an iron pillar
bronze walls.

and again in a succession following the adverb against:

Verse 18b: against the whole land
against the kings of Judah
against its princes
against its priests
against the people of the land

Law of Repetition: By this mode of expressing unity certain parts imitate or repeat one another. For example the entire segment is tied together with the conjunction "for" meaning "because" as the following:

Verse 7: for to all to whom I send you, you shall...
Verse 8: for I am with you to deliver you...
Verse 12: for I am watching over my word...
Verse 15: for I am calling all the tribes...
Verse 19: for I am with you...

Within this pattern binding it together and already illustrated in vv. 8 and 19 runs the basic theme of the invincibility of God. His resources are unfailing. Here is the "hidden kinship"¹ the which is rooted in God and which may be counted upon to endure because it depends not upon man's fickle desire but God's unflagging affection.

¹Otto, op. cit., p. 11.

The Law of Contrast: Comparison and contrast is here made to serve the cause of unity. The conjunction "but" is the clue, as in the following:

vv. 6,7: Then I said, "Ah, Lord God! Behold, I do not know how to speak, for I am only a youth."

But the Lord said to me, "Do not say 'I am only a youth!....'"

and again vv. 16b, 17a: "...they have burned incense to other gods, and worshipped the works of their own hands.

But you, gird up your loins; arise, and say to them everything that I command you."

also: v. 19: "They will fight against you but they shall not prevail against you..."

and again in inverted comparison using the conjunction "lest" as in v. 17b: "Do not be dismayed by them, lest I dismay you before them."

The Law of Radiation: "The most simple and perfect connection of lines," Ruskin says, "is by radiation; that is, by their all springing from one point or closing towards it: the boughs of trees, though they intersect and play amongst each other irregularly, indicate by their general tendency their origin from one root...."¹

The pronoun "I" occurs 16 times with reference to the Lord in this brief segment. From this "root" there

¹Ruskin, op. cit., p. 162.

radiates the lines of entreaty, command, promise, and threat to the next most central figure, the prophet; to the whole land and thence in a descending order to the kings, princes, priests, and people.

Each pronoun is connected with a personal verb in the active voice. This is a concentrated description of the activity of God in the past, present, and future. The power of expression radiates from a single source, penetrating deeply into every level of society.

Ruskin further says: "This law of radiation...enforcing unison of action in arising from, or proceeding to, some given point, is perhaps, of all principles of composition, the most influential in producing the beauty of groups of form"¹ -- and their expressive power.

Radiation in another pattern is also exemplified here. The pronoun "I" indicates the connection of lines springing from one point; and the pronoun "You" calls attention to the reverse process, the closing towards one point of all the lines in the design.

In spite of the almost monotonous recurrence of the pronoun "you" (16 times in the accusative, 6 in the nominative) the effect is one of harmony and concentration. One's attention is fixed upon the main subject -- the young prophet; and not allowed to wander. Clearly the resource or root of this intimate concern is God but the object is Jeremiah and this would seem to be the principal effect that it is the author's intention to create.

¹Ibid., p. 170.

The Law of Curvature: "In literature," says Kuist, "this law is known as climax. Good narrative must lead from a lesser to a higher...point of interest, in order to reveal an author's intention. This may be done by proceeding from cause to effect or from effect to cause."¹

The climax of this vigorous segment that treats of the prophet's call and commission is found in verses 18 and 19. "And behold I make you this day a fortified city, an iron pillar, and bronze walls, against the whole land, against the kings of Judah, its princes, its priests, and the people of the land. They will fight against you but they shall not prevail against you, for I am with you, says the Lord, to deliver you."

The preposition "against" occurs 5 times and is implied twice more. At the highest level of opposition God's man may expect to know the deepest assurance that he does not travel alone.

This is the supreme moment in the calling of the prophet to his vocation as the "mouth-piece" of God. Chosen, commissioned, counselled, challenged, he is finally commanded to speak and given the character of the "fortified city", the "iron pillar" and the "bronze wall" to face the opposition. From the lesser to the greater, to the highest point of interest, the law of curvature brings out what is the author's intention to reveal.

¹ Kuist, Howard Tillman, These Words Upon Thy Heart, (Richmond, Virginia: John Knox Press, 1947), p. 84.

The symbols of security amid peril; strength under stress; and resistance to shock are the markers of the characters of the man God has picked to speak his word for him.

The Law of Interchange: Much akin to the law of contrast, this law "enforces the unity of opposite things, by giving to each a portion of the character of the other."

Juxtaposition of the two visions, the almond branch (verse 11) suggesting absence of activity, and the boiling pot (verse 13) suggesting activity of the most vigorous kind, achieves the double effect of heightened interest and deepened significance. The two articles, the twig and the pot are not intended allegorically but taken together have the curious effect of commenting upon each other.

Again unity is effected in verse 10 by the placing side by side in the definition of the prophet's task, the corollary but opposite responsibilities of "plucking up" and "planting"; of "destroying" and "building".

The Laws of Consistency and Harmony: ".....not so much laws of composition as laws of truth....tests by which the unity of a composition may be judged."¹ Has the work balance and proportion? Has the display of opposites been subdued so as to preserve the power of unity and sympathy? What power-giving qualities have been emphasized in the organization of the material?

¹Ibid., p. 86.

As Ruskin has pointed out, "while contrast exhibits the characters of things, it very often neutralizes or paralyzes their power.....it is unity and sympathy which employ them, concentrating the power of several into a mass."¹

Consistency contributes vitality and strength to a work of art. Balance and proportion lend a sense of confidence. This is the contribution of the sustained dialogue, in chapter one. The effect is heightened in the repetition of the phrase, "And the word of the Lord came to me, saying" which in each case introduces a new phase of the dialogue. The connective word "then" (four occurrences) aids in the linking together of the parts. Bold colors are used in verses 18 and 19 to paint in the characteristics of the man God has chosen but these are in harmony with the deep shades that were used to depict the threat from the north, the boiling cauldron.

We have now concluded a brief but somewhat microscopic viewing of the use which the author of the writings of Jeremiah has made of the laws of arrangement as they apply to chapter one.

It is clear that although Ruskin's rules were not likely in his mind when he wrote these lines, nevertheless the product of his hand stands the tests for sound composition.

¹Ruskin, op. cit., p. 180, 181.

Hidden though the principles may be, nevertheless the outcome as a piece of competent arrangement has a lasting and a power-giving quality. This quality derives from the fact that the author has succeeded in enfolding the audience in what he is attempting to express. We are made to see and feel as well as hear what he is trying to say. This is the influence of form which is the author's ability to impart. Form is the key to intelligent understanding; but it also makes a definite claim upon the reader. "It not only portrays life, it requires life."¹ It is the instrument by which the vitality of the "Word" is released, and the serious reader who offers himself as a willing participant is captured and compelled to respond.

II. USES OF A VARIETY OF METHODS

"Symbols make up the language through which God discloses himself to man."²

We come at this point to a study of the methods employed by the prophet to communicate his message. First of all to list several of the more important ones, then to demonstrate their use and finally to draw some conclusions regarding the elements of genius revealed in the choice and application of these methods. "God", says Dr. Dillistone,

¹Kuist, op. cit., p. 108.

²Sherrill, Lewis J., The Gift of Power, (New York: MacMillan, 1955), p. 123-124.

"has used the images of the words of the human scene, the names and proclamations of the history, events, and natural phenomena to express himself and man also uses the same media to tell what he has seen and heard."¹

The pictorial method: that is, the use of simile and metaphor in the creation of thumb-nail sketches.

The slogan method: that is, the repeated use of meaningful, well-chosen phrases.

The historical reference method: that is, through the use of famous names of places to call to mind memorable events of the past.

The object-lesson method, or symbolic article method:

The keynote expression method: that is, the use and repetition of meaningful words.

The symbolic drama method:

The rhetorical question method:

Now to the demonstration of the use of each of these methods:

The pictorial method: "The basic elements of all communication are the image and the word."²

Although many of the writers of the time of Jeremiah freely used simile and metaphor to give life and relevance to their utterances, Jeremiah himself is the peer in the range and variety of his choice. He calls frequently upon

¹Dillistone, F. W., Christianity and Communication, (London: Collins, 1956), p. 59.

²Ibid., p. 26.

the wide world of nature but intersperses with references from the intimacies of the home and the family. The life of the city rises in contrast to the life of the country, the bronze walls in contrast to the open stretches of hill and vale. Other sketches arise from the courtroom and the smelter; still others from the lush green of the well-watered valley and the parched desert sands. The sounds and events of war are pictured in staccato phrases; the funeral lament, the festive board; the breathless runner and the skillful archer, the animal kingdom; the birds, the sea, the parching sun, the deep darkness of the night.

The genius of Jeremiah is not merely in the variety of his choice of illustration. It is more especially the fact that he seemed to have eyes that saw things in two dimensions. He looked at a branch of the almond tree¹ just breaking into bud. He saw in that simple thing the purpose and plan of God. He looked at a pot boiling on the fire², he thought of the scalding contents spilling out and by this saw the fate in store for Israel. He stood in the vineyard surveying the wild vines twining around and choking the pure, choice cultivated plants³. He saw the withering of Israel's love and devotion, choked by disaffection. He went to the hills and saw the wild ass sniffing the wind⁴. It presented a picture to him of Israel's lust for new gods. While there he saw a lion

¹Jeremiah 1:11.

²Jeremiah 1:13.

³Jeremiah 2:21.

⁴Jeremiah 2:24.

creeping from thicket to thicket, advancing on its unsuspecting prey¹. He saw again the threat to Israel's safety in the shape of the lion that purposes to kill. And he saw Israel as the prey, unsuspecting, unprepared.

Looking upon the stale brackish water in one of the city cisterns, there came to him a recollection of the splashing fountains of the country². The contrast was so vivid to a country-born man. He saw the inexplicable folly of the people of Israel who preferred the stale water of the broken cistern to the fresh sweet water of the fountain. He asked, "Has a nation changed its gods, even though they are no gods?"³ and cried, "my people have changed their glory for that which does not profit."⁴

He went into the city and saw a man hurrying from one to another apparently in search of someone. It seemed to him that it might be he himself hunting someone who "does justice and seeks truth"⁵. Or again as he walked in the vineyard in the time of the harvest he saw a man making a final check of the vines, running his hands carefully under the leaves to discover if by chance some of the ripe fruit had been overlooked. He saw the picture of the Lord, "gleaning the remnant"⁶ carefully seeking out any who might have remained faithful.

On another occasion he came to a crossroads as he

¹Jeremiah 4:7.

²Jeremiah 2:13.

³Jeremiah 2:11.

⁴Jeremiah 2:11.

⁵Jeremiah 5:1.

⁶Jeremiah 6:9.

journeyed. There a stranger was inquiring the best route into the city and Jeremiah saw a sudden snapshot of himself standing by the crossroads directing the people into the "good way"¹. All too few however bothered to ask. It is a picture of the one who cared to be of assistance being passed by.

Another day he went to the smelter. There he found at his work, the assayer, the tester of the metal, the one who determines when the refining process is complete. Again the prophet saw himself at work, the one who tests the people, the "assayer" of their ways"².

The scarecrow that stood mutely in his garden spoke to him of the idols of Israel. "They are like scarecrows in a cucumber field", he thought, "they cannot speak... they cannot walk....they cannot do evil, neither is it in them to do good."³

A visit to the engravers showed him that Judah's wickedness could never be erased. He watched the man chipping the letters into the stone with an iron chisel and he saw the deeply cut inscription of the sin of Judah etched on her stony heart with a "pen of iron"⁴.

He sat by a brook in the shade of a spreading tree. Rejoicing in the coolness he remembered the parched shrubs

¹Jeremiah 6:16.

²Jeremiah 6:27.

³Jeremiah 10:5.

⁴Jeremaih 17:1.

of the desert from whence he had come. It seemed to him a vivid picture of the contrast between a man who "trusts in man" and another "whose trust is the Lord."¹

On a visit to the house of the potter he saw him shaping and reshaping the clay into a vessel of value. He saw in the hand of the potter the hand of the Lord shaping and reshaping the destiny of Israel "as it seemed good to the potter to do."²

He lay at table and as he was about to take his cup from his servant's outstretched hand, he saw it suddenly as the cup "of the wine of wrath"³ which Israel and her neighbors would be obliged to take from the hand of the Lord and drink to their destruction.

Journeying in the country he noted the signposts, "the guideposts"⁴ with indications of the direction and how far to the neighboring towns. They show the traveller his way out and also his way back. To the prophet they spoke a message concerning the way back to the people of Israel. He appealed to them, "Set up waymarks for yourself, make yourself guideposts; consider well the highway, the road by which you went. Return, O virgin Israel, return to these your cities."⁵

As the prophet took part one afternoon in the covenant making process of the law, as he bound himself as one of the parties to the agreement he saw in a moment

¹Jeremiah 17:5,7.

²Jeremiah 18:4)

³Jeremiah 25:15.

⁴Jeremiah 31:21.

⁵Jeremiah 31:21.

of supreme insight the Lord making a new covenant with his people. There would be no signing and sealing of parchment in this new agreement for the Lord said, "I will put my law within them, and I will write it upon their hearts, and I will be their God and they shall be my people."¹

These illustrations of the pictorial method emphasize first, the variety of the prophet's choice, and second, the ability of the prophet to see ordinary things with an imaginative eye. That is to say, he related immediately what he saw with what he was thinking and so when the Lord asked him, Jeremiah, what do you see?" he understood the implication of the question and went for the truth hidden beneath the surface.

In a considerable measure the prophet has made it possible for the reader of his work to follow him and so to apprehend the truth he is at pains to present. In other words his pictorial illustration serves as a visual aid to the apprehension of the message. The word and the image are welded together. It is in this that another aspect of his communicative genius resides.

The slogan method: "Symbols are a means of discourse wherever men communicate with one another." The word "Slogan" has its root in the Gaelic sluagh-ghairm (from sluagh - army + ghairm, call) army-call, i.e., the war cry, or gathering

¹Jeremiah 33:33.

word of a Highland Clan in Scotland. Modern usage -- catch-
word.¹

"Return and dwell" falls most naturally into the classification of a rallying cry, a summons to the gathering in of the clan. Here we have a whole philosophy in a single phrase, the doctrine of penitence and permanence expressed in a simple, bidding phrase "return and dwell."

The word "return" and its near relatives occur thirty-six times. The general theme of the "return" of Israel is one of the greatest themes of the prophet.

Some variety is noted in the use of the word "return"². In chapter 3:1-4:4 a collection of references appears almost as if the material had been gathered into one place on account of the recurrence of the word "return". At any rate several different meanings appear.

As in 3:1a the husband's return to his wife is indicated and the return of Israel to her God is implied in 3:1b, 7, 10, 12, 14a, 22; 4:1.

As in 3:6, 8, 11, 12, 3:14a the meaning is that of faithless or backsliding.

As in 3:14, 18, the reference is to return from exile. Some say that in this case the editor had misunderstood the meaning of the word as used in the previous verses.

In any event the word "return" implies the necessity, possibility, and urgency of a true coming back to God. In

¹Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary, p. 937.

²Ref. Exegesis, James Philip Hyatt, Interpreter's Bible, Vol. V., (New York, Nashville, Abingdon Press, 1956), p. 823.

Israel's case the contrast is sharply drawn between a pretended repentance and a true return to God.

"If you return, O Israel, says the Lord, to me you shall return.

"If you remove your abominations from my presence, and do not waver, and if you swear, (As the Lord lives,' in truth, in justice and in uprightness, then nations shall bless themselves in him, and in him shall they glory."¹

The prophet has indicated the nature of a true return to God. It is nothing facile or superficial. It is something that demands full cooperation of the mind, the heart, and the will of the individual to obey and serve.

Truth, justice, uprightness, these are the elements of the reformed state. These are moreover the fibres of a strong nation and with which a community can be established to endure and persevere.

Perseverance, preservation of the national identity, permanence, a dwelling place forever, these were the important issues that came to focus in the prophet's mind as he stood at time's crossroads and surveyed a hundred years of Israel's history.²

Looking back twenty-three years to the thirteenth year of Josiah, looking ahead for seventy years to the return of the exiled captives, what hope was there for Israel as the wards of Nebuchadnezzar, the victor at Carchemish, and the Babylonian ruler of the world, except in a right

¹Jeremiah 4:1-2.

²Jeremiah 25.

relation to God. To this the prophet called his people to return. For this is the root of true nationalism.

"Turn now, everyone of you from his evil way and wrong doings, and dwell upon the land which the Lord has given to you and your fathers from of old and for ever; do not go after other gods to serve and worship them or provoke me to anger with the work of your hands."¹

"Turn now....and dwell...." The philosophy of a nation right with God and right within itself is implied in the phrase. Penitence is the condition for permanence. It was the time for this message but it fell on unwilling ears.

"Yet you have not listened to me, says the Lord..."²

"Because you have not obeyed my words, behold, I will send for...Nebuchadnezzar... my servant...."³

"I will utterly destroy...."⁴

"This whole land shall become a ruin and a waste and these nations shall serve the king of Babylon seventy years."⁵

"God in history" is the theme of his perspective shot as the prophet surveys the past and the future. Both are dismal, the former because God's children persisted in their refusal to listen; the latter because God who is truth and justice and uprightness, shall persist in punishing his foolish, headstrong children.

"Return and dwell" the rallying cry of the prophet to his people, the basis for a sound national spirit is

¹Jeremiah 25:5,6.

²Jeremiah 25:7.

³Jeremiah 25:8,9.

⁴Jeremiah 25:9b.

⁵Jeremiah 25:11

the answer to the peril within and the peril without -- but it is ignored.

Repeatedly the cry is raised. Deep penetration is here to the heart of the issue between people and God. The prophet's genius is demonstrated in this: A penetrating analysis is made of a critical situation; a relevant solution is proposed in simple, clear, challenging terms; a faith in the initiative of God is implied; a condition is laid down and a consequence is pointed out -- in two words: return and dwell.

The historical reference method: Memory and emotion are two essential arches of the communication bridge. The prophet makes use of these elements in calling to mind and flavoring his speech with references to names and places well known and deeply stirring to the national conscience.

The name of Tophet for example, "A word of doubtful origin, disputed etymology, rare occurrence, and somewhat uncertain meaning,"¹ nevertheless a word (a place name) with power to stir the memories and emotions of the people. Such is its significance from the stand point of communication.

The term is found in II Kings 23:10; Job 17:6; Isaiah 30:33; and in Jeremiah 7:31, 32; 19:6, 11, 12, 13, 14, which would indicate a special interest on the part of the prophet in emphasizing this word.

In its context attention is drawn to the nature of

¹Salmond, S.D.F., "Tophet", Dictionary of the Bible, Vol. IV., (ed. James Hastings, New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1911), p. 797.

evil which Israel has engaged in, the defilement of the house of God. The name "Topheth" calls to mind at once the deeds done in that place, acts of worship but worship of Molech not the worship of God.

From the place he stood that day in the temple gate it is possible that the prophet pointed across the valley to the south and west to the place where stood the high altars of Molech and the scene of sacrifice where children were forced to pass through the fire of Molech.

At another time standing in the actual place of sacrifice, Jeremiah took in his hands the potter's earthen flask and smashed it to the ground -- in token of the future fate of the people and the city, "broken so that it can never be mended."¹ Thus declared he, the place which had witnessed their wickedness would also witness their punishment.

"Behold the days are coming, says the Lord, when it will no more be called Topheth or the valley of the son of Hinnon, but the valley of Slaughter...."² Destruction so complete is to come that Topheth shall be filled with dead bodies "till there be no place."

From the various conjectures as to the etymology of the term Salmond³ distinguishes two reasonable explanations: a. From the Arabic meaning "to spit out" and "so to regard with contempt or loathing." The idea in this respect is

¹Jeremiah 19:11.

²Jeremiah 7:32.

³Salmond, S.D.F., "Tophet", Dictionary of the Bible, op. cit. Vol. IV., p. 799.

that of a "place of abhorrence," "place of abomination".

b. From the Hebrew root designating the "notion of burning," i.e. "a place of burning." Some think this refers "to the disposal of the dead" (not too common in Hebrew practice) while others think it refers to "the burning of human sacrifices, as in the worship of Molech."

Legend and Semitic history combine to indicate that Topheth was a "place of fire", a "deep pit dug in the valley of Hinnom for the purpose of burning the victims of sacrifice" -- "a glowing furnace (Ewald) in the valley," a place of horror dedicated to the worship of an idol -- "the valley of Slaughter."¹

We can now appreciate a little better what effect the mention of this place must have had upon the prophet's audience, many of whom had undoubtedly participated in the slaughter and burning of victims, even children, in the worship of Molech, and who could clearly remember the horror and frenzy of the occasion. What feelings would have been stirred for example in the breasts of those who had contributed members of their family, even their children to these awful rites. It is incontestable that the prophetic reference to Topheth made a profound impression upon his hearers as he sought to make clear to them the certainty of God's wrath because of the evil done in his sight and the extent of judgment that was to be their due until Topheth the place already known and remembered for the frightful deeds done there should

¹Jeremiah 7:32.

have added to its fame the distinction of the name of the Valley of Slaughter. There the dead would be laid out in the open for the lack of a place to bury them, "the dead bodies of this people will be food for the birds of the air, and for the beasts of the earth; and none will frighten them away."¹

Thus we have a glimpse of the prophet's genius as he dips into the rich fields of emotion and memory simply by making reference to a place of historical renown. Hence another instrument is added to the repertoire of skillful devices employed by this master in the art of communication.

In contrast to Topheth, a place name of ill repute, as a second example we take the name of Shiloh², another place name, but of the opposite distinction. Shiloh was the principal Israelite sanctuary throughout the period of the Judges,³ "all the time that the house of God was in Shiloh" till the age of Samuel.⁴

Pilgrimages were made to Shiloh (the pilgrimage of Ingathering)⁵ and others. Religious festivals were held there very early in Israel's religious development. Judges 19-21 recounts the annual "pilgrimage of Jahweh" to Shiloh and how the maidens came out to dance in the choruses. On

¹Jeremiah 7:33.

²Jeremiah 7:12,14; 26:6,9.

³cf. Judges 18:31.

⁴Driver, S.R., "Shiloh", Dictionary of the Bible, Vol. IV., (ed. James Hasting, New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1911), p. 499.

⁵Davis, John D., Gehman, Henry S., The Westminster Dictionary of the Bible, (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1944), p. 557.

one occasion the Benjamites hid in the vineyards, they captured them and carried them off as wives. The ark of the covenant was kept at Shiloh and to it pilgrimages were made at various seasons of the year, for purposes of sacrifice. The ark was not kept in a tent or a portable structure while at Shiloh, but in a permanent abode, a fixed structure, a temple complete with door-posts, doors, etc.

The word Shiloh denotes "tranquility",¹ "The most noticeable feature in the natural situation of Seilun (modern name) is its seclusion."² It is located about ten miles north-northeast of Bethel. Bare, high hills of grey limestone shut it in on the east and north with a deep valley between, also on the north. A few fig trees dot the hillside. On the south only does it open on to a plain.

Whatever tranquility may have derived from the secluded location in the lee of the limestone mountains, disaster eventually destroyed it. It was utterly devastated by an invasion of the Philistines (probably) and the ark of the covenant was removed. "The recollection of this disaster was so vividly impressed upon the people's memory that long afterwards Jeremiah could refer to it as a token of what Jahweh might do to his temple in Jerusalem."³ "When I spoke to you.....you did not listen. When I called you, you did not answer therefore I will do to the house

¹Driver, "Shiloh", Hasting's Dictionary of the Bible, Vol. IV., op. cit., p. 499.

²Ibid.

³Ibid., p. 500.

which is called by my name and in which you trust, and to the place which I gave you and to your fathers, as I did to Shiloh."¹

Reaching back into the early religious history of Israel the prophet seeks to impress upon his hearers the reality of the possibility of a re-enactment of the ancient scene. Again, only the name is mentioned but to the people brought up in the tradition it is sufficient to carry great weight. All be it they did not heed the prophet's warning but it can be confidently affirmed that here is further evidence of the prophet's communicative genius as by the use of the name of "tranquility that was changed to disaster" he seeks to enlist the aid of the memories of his hearers and their reverence for tradition, in getting his message over to them and into their minds and hearts.

The Object-Lesson Method or Symbolic Article: "There is no surer way to bring the truth home...than by effective illustration."²

Among the prophet's extensive collection of illustrations we find a number of articles which offer themselves for special consideration as having what Luther Weigle refers to as a "sense and a fact value."³ An object, a thing of wood, brick, stone, or clay speaks in its own right as a

¹Jeremiah 7:13,14.

²Weigle, Luther A., The Pupil and the Teacher, Book II. (Philadelphia: The Lutheran Publication Society, 1909), p. 156.

³Ibid, p. 165.

fact and as having a part in the round of daily experience, but it may also convey as well an ideal, a deeper and more significant meaning, according to the intention of the interpreter. Thus the bridge is made from the world of the actual into the realm of the spirit.

From among the many possibilities, let us see what the prophetic choice of the clay, the pen, the snow, the figs, and the cup, the fire and the hammer offers in terms of a demonstration of his genius for communicating his message.

"Behold, like the clay in the potter's hand, so are you in my hand, O house of Israel.....Can I not do with you as this potter has done?"¹

"The sin of Judah is written with a pen of iron...."²

"Does the snow of Lebanon leave the crags of Sirion?"³

"What do you see, Jeremiah?
I said, Figs, the good figs very good, and the bad figs very bad, so bad they cannot be eaten."⁴

"Take from my hand this cup of the wine of wrath..."⁵

"So I took the cup from the Lord's hand..."⁶

"Is not my word like fire....and like a hammer which breaks the rock in pieces?"⁷

There are at least three things that mark a good illustration: Simplicity, Lucidity, and Aptness, that is to-the-pointness. The same three characteristics mark a

¹Jeremiah 18:6.

²Jeremiah 17:1.

³Jeremiah 18:14.

⁴Jeremiah 24:3.

⁵Jeremiah 25:15.

⁶Jeremiah 25:17.

⁷Jeremiah 23:29.

good object for an object lesson. It should be clear, concrete and concise if it is to do good work in casting the light of the known upon the unknown; in building the bridge from the practical to the philosophical or spiritual with the concrete and the familiar.

It is hardly necessary at this point to do more than list the articles that the prophet has chosen as symbols of deeper truth. His writings are amply supplied with them but we call attention to these few:

The clay in the hands of the potter. This is a splendid example of the object that has both a "sense" and a "fact" value. Everyone knew at first hand the work of the potter and the material he used. The implications of this incident are three: The sovereignty of God, the dependence of man and the purposefulness of existence. As the potter shapes and re-shapes the clay to suit his purpose, so God moulds and re-moulds life to suit his plan. As the potter, so God. He may choose to break down and destroy in order at a later time to build up -- but with purpose not out of caprice or as a result of willful carelessness.

As the clay in the potter's hand so man furthermore in the hand of God, dependant and depending, subject to the Maker's plan -- essentially pliable and as it were, willing, this is the role of man -- obedience and faith.

As the final product in the potter's hand, so the

purposeful working out of God's plan according to and in harmony with the conditions imposed from the beginning of time and shaped by circumstance to divinely appointed ends. Thus the role of God is seen in the products of his hand.

Here then is seen the genius of the prophet in using the symbol of the clay to interpret and illuminate the essential relationship that must exist and be understood between God and man if man's life is to have any significant meaning whatever. Existence is rooted in this relationship of obedience and purpose and the events of today can only be understood in terms of the experience of yesterday and the expectation or the promise of tomorrow.

The Pen of iron with which the sin of Judah is written. Again a sound choice of a simple, concrete, instrument to epitomize an idea of "foreverness". The thought duplicates itself in the idea of "engraven by a point of diamond" on the hearts of the people. As though their hearts were slates of stone on which their indictment had been inscribed in a manner none could erase. The notion of eternalness is here coupled with the idea of the inevitable and the inescapable. This is the introduction to the section that deals with the root cause of man's disaffection -- the uncommitted heart, the unstable will, the wandering thought, the base desire, that is not God inspired nor God directed. There comes a time when effect must answer to cause. The pen of iron has written it -- Judah must face the penalty. What

is so written cannot be erased nor ignored nor disdained. There is something so final about a written, an engraved document. This is the mood and the meaning of the object lesson on the "pen of iron".

The Snow on the peaks of Sirion -- the symbol of perpetuity -- a thing familiar to the eye of every inhabitant of the region, an object of admiration and remark, concrete evidence of permanence, something to be relied upon as a source of essential waters. The symbol of the snow epitomizes the dependableness of God. Further reading of the passage brings us to the shocking realization¹ that he may be depended upon to carry out his judgments as well as his plans for good.

"Like the east wind I will scatter them
before the enemy."

"I will show them my back, not my face
in the day of their calamity."

The Figs, some good, some bad, very bad. The prophet is his own commentator in this instance. The good figs represent the exiles from Judah; the bad figs, the rotten ones, represent the remnant who remained in Jerusalem, Zedekiah the king and the princes, those who made truck with Egypt placing their confidence in political alliance.

This is a vision in which the prophet is asked to tell what he sees in the two baskets sitting at the temple entrance. His sight is of two dimensions, the object, the

¹Jeremiah 18:17.

figs, and the ideal they symbolize. Again the power of this lesson lies in its simplicity and directness. The familiar calls attention to the unfamiliar, the known to the unknown. It is difficult to see how the defection of the people could still after so many allusions, be unacknowledged but it is evident that the best efforts of the prophet had had little positive effect. Nevertheless their reactions¹ are evidence that the prophet at this and on other occasions made his point clear.

Thus with some certainty the genius of the prophet may be confirmed in that he chose to phrase the essentials of his understanding of history and the implications of the events of his time in terms of the most common of articles, and the most despised when in a rotten condition -- figs.

The Cup of the wine of wrath. The cup as a symbol of blessing² and conversely as a symbol of wrath³ is frequently found in Old Testament literature. On the one hand the "cup" stands for good fortune, man being thought of as receiving it from the hand of God as a guest receives the wine-cup from the hand of the host. On the other hand the "cup" stands for bitter fortune generally considered to be the desserts of the wicked.

This is the boldest figure,⁴ the cup of the wine of wrath and it symbolizes the awful punitive wrath of God

¹Jeremiah 26. ²Psalms 16:5; 23:5, and others.

³Jeremiah 49:12; 51:7; Ezekiel 23:33, Isaiah 51:17-22. Lamentations 4:21, Psalms 116:6; 75:8.

⁴Others: cup of salvation: Psalm 116:13.
cup of blessing: I Corinthians 10:16.
cup of consolation: Jeremiah 16:7

which the wicked, i.e. the Israelites and their heathen neighbors must receive from the hand of God and drink to the last dregs. Thus the cup of fury¹; the cup of trembling or staggering²; horror and desolation³; the cup of reeling⁴ symbolize and graphically portray the lot of the nations who have come under judgment.

"Drink, be drunk and vomit, fall and rise no more...."
You must drink....thus says the Lord of Hosts...."⁵

The symbolism of the cup of fury is advanced in the act of drinking and the consequences thereof. This is the figure of the progress of judgment and it cannot be averted or arrested, or escaped. "You must drink, says the Lord." The divine imperative is portrayed in the symbol of the cup.

In a word the fate of the wicked is summarized and brought graphically to their attention, while at the same time the character of God is defined in terms of the logical imperative, the gradual but inevitable triumph of justice. This is a great deal to say in one word. Such is the genius of the master craftsman.

The fire and the hammer. "Is not my word like fire (which burns)....and like a hammer which breaks..." It is the special effect of these two objects that is of special

¹Jeremiah 25:15f. ²Isaiah 51:17f. ³Ezekiel 23:32f.
⁴Zechariah 12:2. ⁵Jeremiah 25:27-28.

interest. The reference is to the effect of the Word of God as compared to the vaporous dreams of the false prophets. As fire consumes and a hammer-blow has the capacity to smash, so things may be counted upon to happen when the true word of God is spoken. The ideas of certainty and completeness are present. The word of God is exceedingly powerful and utterly competent to accomplish his ends.

To all the ancient traditions and tried truths, the true prophet opposes the word of the living God, a word able to act in the context of present needs. As fire is known by its consuming power; as the hammer is known by its breaking power; so the true word of the Lord is recognized as it issues from the lips of his "mouth". The true prophet is tested by the effect of the word he speaks.

Familiarity with the function of the hammer serves to clarify people's understanding of the distinction between the true and the false prophet.

"The hammer is probably the most ancient of all tools.¹ Many and varied were the hammers used by workers in stone among the Israelites. A great variety of handicrafts required an equal variety of hammers, each with a different name. Thus the suggestion that the true word of the Lord should be like a hammer blow undoubtedly struck a familiar chord in many minds.

¹Carslaw, W., "Hammer", Hasting's Dictionary of the Bible, op. cit. Vol. II, p. 291.

Similarly the idea of fire, one of man's oldest companions, (used so often in the Scripture that exhaustive classification is impossible)¹ struck a real and familiar note in reference to its all-consuming power. Undoubtedly many heard those words who had watched in sorrow and grief as their houses and/or their wheatfields dissolved into smoke and ash. Personal experience of its consuming power surely helped them to appreciate the effect of the prophet's allusion.

In concluding this section on the object-lesson method, it is worthy of remark that simple, common articles of everyday experience have been freighted with profound meaning. This is again the mark of true genius in the task of getting a message across to others. The Word communicated in these familiar terms avails itself of the bridges of recollection, of present acquaintance and future contact for as long as people continue to meet and use these objects. Such well known, frequently encountered objects serve as reference points for the hearer and are the pegs upon which memory hangs the products of reflection.

Keynote Expression Method: The word "keynote" by definition in writing and speaking refers to the fundamental fact or idea. It would appear that certain words have been employed with deliberate purpose by the author of the book of Jeremiah to draw attention to and place repeated emphasis

¹Patrick, James., "Fire", Ibid., Vol. II. p. 9.

upon certain fundamental facts or ideas. It is intended now to examine a few selections of these expressions. Some purely descriptive words call attention to themselves by the frequency of their occurrence. This is true of the word "heart" which occurs approximately fifty times in the fifty-two chapters of the book of Jeremiah.

This investigation is of value to us in forming an idea of the prophet's communicative ability because if, as Gustaf Wingren says, "Words are the feet upon which Christ walks when he approaches us and seeks to enter our lives,"¹ so words and especially keynote expressions are the instruments of the art of communication which the prophet utilizes to effect "entry" into the minds of his contemporaries.

Other words such as glory, judgment, covenant, burden, occur less frequently but belong in this category of keynote expressions under the heading of descriptive nouns.

Verbs however also serve as keynote expressions. They simply action and involve the emotions of the participants in the story as well as the reader. The word "listen" belongs in this class of verb.

The discussion of keynote expressions will be limited to these two words. They represent many others that could also qualify for inclusion but for which space does not permit.

¹Wingren, Gustaf, "Preaching: a Study of its Basic Character, quoted in Theology Today, Vol. VIII, No. 3, (October, 1951), p. 357.

We proceed then to the meaning, the use of the word and an evaluation of it as a communicative instrument.

The expression: "Heart." In its meaning, broadly speaking the word "heart" includes those aspects of man's inner nature which have to do with the mind, the will and the intentions. To speak of the heart of God is to speak of these elements of his character. Similarly it is so of the people's heart or the prophet's heart. Numerous references attest to the prophet's conception of the heart as the seat of intelligence (the mind), the citadel of purpose (the will) and the throne of passion whence cometh the edicts of good and evil; joy and sorrow; fear and faith; strength and weakness.

The Use of the expression "Heart": Many and varied are the expressions employed by the prophet such as an evil heart, an unclean heart, a stubborn and rebellious heart, an uncircumcized (unrepentant) heart, a deceitful heart, a burning heart, a broken heart, a haughty heart, a moaning heart, a feeble heart, a proud heart.¹

On the other side of the ledger, the prophet speaks of a whole heart (the heart devoid of cupidity) my own heart (the shepherd heart of God full of knowledge and understanding), your own heart (the depth of one's inner being), my wildly beating heart (the anguished heart of the prophet), my sick heart (the prophet's despair), my

¹Jeremiah 3:17; 4:14; 5:23; 9:26; 17:9; 20:9; 23:9; 48:29; 48:36, 41; 49:16.

wounded heart (the prophet's vicarious pain), a tested heart (the prophet under discipline), a heart searched (by God who understands the vagaries of the heart of man), a heart to know that I am the Lord, a whole heart, all your heart, one heart (one ideal, a single minded devotion).¹

These selections illustrate the wide range of man's inner activity that the prophet covers by the use of the word "heart". "Heart" stands for character. This is it in a word. And to refer to the heart of a man, or of a nation or of God is to speak of the character, the inner personality of each one.

The evaluation: The word "heart" is a peg upon which the prophet has hung the major themes of his discourses. For example:

Man's deepest predicament: "The heart.... deceitful....corrupt....who can understand it?"²

God's cure: "I the Lord search the mind and try the heart, to give to every man according to his ways...."³

Judah's error: "Judah did not return to me with her whole heart, but in pretence..."⁴

A father's promise: "I will give you shepherds after my own heart, who will feed you with knowledge and understanding."⁵

Judah's judgment: "Your ways and your doings have brought this upon you. This is your doom, and it is bitter; it has reached your very heart."⁶

¹Jeremiah 3:10, 15; 4:18, 19; 11:20; 17:10; 24:7; 29:13; 32:39.

²Jeremiah 17:9.

³Jeremiah 17:10.

⁴Jeremiah 3:10.

⁵Jeremiah 3:15.

⁶Jeremiah 4:18.

The prophet's anguish: ".....my heart is, beating wildly; I cannot keep silent...."¹

A nation's hope: "I will give them a heart to know that I am the Lord; and they shall be my people and I will be their God, for they shall return to me with their whole heart."²

In sum it may be said that the prophet's entire message stems from his preoccupation with the condition of the heart of his people. The significance of this observation in terms of communication is that he managed to chain his contemporaries (and his readers of today) to one simple category of human expression which encompassed the whole problem of the eternal contest between man and God. Who shall sit upon the throne of the heart; man himself or God? Who shall determine the direction of will or the object of affection; man himself or God? The persistence of his inquiry and the inescapable nature of it is emphasized by the constant repetition of the word "heart".

The Expression: "Listen." What, one might ask, qualifies the word "listen" for review as a keynote expression to other action words such as "restore", "seek", "surrender", "forsake", "serve", and "repent"? There are at least three reasons: One, its frequent use. It is quite impossible to read the prophecy of Jeremiah without becoming aware of the word "listen" or its close relatives, "hear",

¹Jeremiah 4:19.

²Jeremiah 24:7.

"give ear", "heed" and so on. Obviously it was the prophet's intention to impress upon the people the importance of the activity of listening and the modern reader cannot help but be similarly impressed.

The second reason is that examination of the repeated use of the expression reveals a certain amount of repetition, doubtless for emphasis, but more significantly, out of the whole picture there emerges a framework of ideas which outlines the main thesis of the prophet's work. That is to say, by checking through the references to the word "listen", it is quite possible to get at the major outlines of the situation which the prophet confronted and what he insisted (speaking for God) should be done about it.

The third reason is that incidently by an ingenious use of the three moods of the verb, the imperative, the subjunctive, and the indicative with some variations on the latter in the past, present and future, the writer has succeeded, it seems, in clothing his narrative in attractive and meaningful raiment. It is after all important not only what one says but how one says it and it is in this particular respect the prophet merits special remark.

As to usage, by careful count, the expression occurs thirty-six times in the writings which in contrast to less than six for each of the others gives it first place and about this point we shall say no more.

We come now to the keynotes of the prophetic word that are emphasized by the repeated use of the word "listen"

or "hear" and how the effect is heightened by the moods employed.

The Universal Invitation of the Word of the Lord: "Hear the Word of the Lord all you men of Judah."¹

"Hear you kings of Judah and all Judah and all the inhabitants of Jerusalem."²

"Hear this, O foolish people."³

"Hear O nations....."⁴

"Hear O earth....."⁵

From the men of Judah to the nations of the earth in an ever widening sphere the prophet challenged the covenanted people of God to give ear and listen to his words. The force of the imperative mood is that of command but this is not all. The command is also an invitation, a bidding of the covenant peoples to remember their agreement and to take up again voluntarily their responsibilities as a covenanted race.

"Listen, listen; be not proud,
for the Lord has spoken.
Give glory to the Lord your God
before he brings darkness....
deep darkness."⁶

The pleading note of these words is strengthened when we remember that they were spoken on the eve of the great deportation of 597 during the brief tumultuous reign of Jehoiachin.

¹Jeremiah 7:2b.

²Jeremiah 7:20.

³Jeremiah 5:21.

⁴Jeremiah 6:18.

⁵Jeremiah 6:19.

⁶Jeremiah 13:15,16a.

The Root of Israel's problem, and the Reason why her suffering, though needless, was inevitable: Two almost identical phrases clothed in the mood of the indicative past and the indicative future highlight the root and the reason for Israel's distress.

"They did not listen...."¹

"They will not listen...."²

The instructions of the Lord were made quite clear to the children of Israel as they left the land of Egypt. Obedience to the voice of God was to take precedence over all other preoccupations including sacrifices, burnt offerings and other forms of worship. But the people did not listen. The kings and princes, the elders, the priests, and the people closed their ears to the voice of God and ignored their covenant responsibilities. Oppression of the poor, political intrigue, worship of idols, pagan festivals contrived to occupy the attention of everyone save the few like Jeremiah who saw the outlines of national and spiritual disaster taking shape and cried out alone to stop it.

He appealed to the Lord to stay his judgment. He appealed to the people to give ear to the voice of God but defection and disobedience contrives to perpetuate itself. What is in the beginning occasional, becomes habit and a people who would not listen, will not listen.

Needlessly but inevitably the day of judgment comes because indifference has dulled the sensitive apparatus of

¹Jeremiah 7:26.

²Jeremiah 7:27.

response. Indifference and busyness are twin destroyers of the spiritual sensitivity to respond to the voice of divine command. This was why Israel's day of doom could not be averted.

There was another reason perhaps even more significant than the faded resolve of the people. It was the ultimate resolve of the Lord not to hear them when and if they did call to him.

"I will not listen...."¹

This is the sign of the direst state of all -- the culmination of years of rebellion, the fruit of taking the persistent love of God for granted, the door of patience shut.

"There is a revolt among the men of Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem. They have turned back to the iniquities of their forefathers, who refused to hear my words.....other gods....broken.covenant... therefore I am bringing evil upon them which they cannot escape; though they cry to me, I will not listen to them."²

The prophet is instructed:

"Do not pray for this people..... for I will not listen when they call, to me in the time of their trouble."³

The mood of the future indicative strengthens the impact of the resolve. Men are men and may foolishly will their own destruction. This is needless. But when God wills it too, this is inevitable.

¹Jeremiah 11:14.

²Jeremiah 11:9-11.

³Jeremiah 11:14.

There were alternatives however and these also are highlighted by the usage of the keynote expression "listen".

Israel's alternatives:

"If you listen...then..."¹

"If you do not listen...then..."²

The choice between life and death is emphasized by the use of the subjunctive mood in this instance. The initiative of course remained with Judah. The choice was to be hers, it couldn't be made by anyone else. How the prophet anguished over this as he stood in one gate after another and cried: "Take heed for the sake of your lives."³ He saw the only way out for this people but they were proud. They ignored him.

"They did not listen or incline their ear, but stiffened their neck, that they might not hear and receive instruction."⁴

The prophet's point of view is further amplified in the use of the keynote expression "listen" in chapter 27.

The prophet's advice:

From the Lord: "Do not listen..."⁵

To the king: "Do not listen..."⁶

To the priests and the people: "Do not listen..."⁷

This was the occasion of the prophet's appearance wearing a set of yoke-bars to emphasize the sovereignty, not of Nebuchadnezzar but of God. The yoke-bars symbolize

¹Jeremiah 17:24. ²Jeremiah 17:27; 26:4.

³Jeremiah 17:21. ⁴Jeremiah 17:23.

⁵Jeremiah 27:9 ⁶Jeremiah 27:14. ⁷Jeremiah 27:16.

the way out for Judah -- the way of obedience and loyalty.

Of the soothsayers, diviners, dreamers, sorcerers and other prophets who had also counselled the king and the people, Jeremiah, wearing the symbol of his message, cried, "Do not listen to them" (the false advisors), "Serve the king of Babylon and live."¹

The impact of the imperative mood is heightened in this case by the negative setting and the situation of contrast and conflict. It has always been the prophetic role to cry, "Listen!" but here as he cries, "Do not listen" to the priests, the rulers, the people and the king, the light of contrast is focused on the central issue of his life and ministry.

In tragic commentary upon the effectiveness of his work, the recorder notes of king Zedekiah and his household:

"Neither he nor his servants nor the people of the land listened to the words of the Lord which he spoke through Jeremiah the prophet."²

We have seen enough of the expression "listen" to appreciate the importance of its place in the prophet's vocabulary and its unique role in development of some of the major prophetic themes. A word of evaluation now brings the matter to a conclusion.

Evaluation: Communicative interchange presupposes a speaker and a listener, the latter being subject to the former. A condition of receptivity on the listener's part

¹Jeremiah 27:17.

²Jeremiah 37:2.

is a basic requirement for a successful interchange.

It was precisely this quality that the people of Jeremiah's nation had not. "Their ears are closed." fumed the prophet. Not only will they not listen but they have lost the ability, "they cannot listen."

Kuist has pointed out that "the prophets of Israel recognized two particular obstacles to the enthronement of divine truth in human relations. The first of these was preoccupation, the second, insensitivity..."¹ The review of the occurrences of the word "listen" in the writings of Jeremiah calls into clear perspective these two major obstacles to "the enthronement of God in the common life."

Taken together in their contexts the various illustrations impress one also with the prevailing mood of the author's work. Pleading now, commanding later; appealing, threatening, hoping, sorrowing, thus the prophet traces the spiritual decline of his nation while his voice is heard crying out to the people, Listen! Listen! Listen!

Mood is the raiment with which the prophet has clothed his appeal for reform. This is the distinctive merit of the variety in the appearances of the word "listen". As Kuist has pointed out in discussing the importance of form in good composition, "what determines the distinctive merit of any work is not, what it says, but how it says it."² In other words content is helpless without form or expressive

¹ Kuist, op. cit., p. 18.

² Ibid., p. 91.

organization to bridge the gap between speaker and listener. As Thoreau said, "It takes two to speak the truth -- one to speak and one to hear."¹ How a thing is said often determines how it is received. Reception and response largely depend upon the genius or ability of the speaker to clothe his "truth" in appropriate raiment. It is in this particular activity that we have seen the genius of the prophet at work.

The Symbolic Drama Method:

"Make yourself thongs and yoke bars, and put them on your neck..."

"Send word to the envoys...give them this charge...Serve the king of Babylon and live..."²

The impact of the symbol of the yoke-bars suspended around the neck of the prophet is not in the idea of servitude which every farmer would instantly recognize, but in the notion that by service, length of days is assured and a continuance of life in a familiar land.

"Two basic yearnings," says Kuist, "of the common man exhibit themselves in every age and in every nation. They are the yearning for length of days and the yearning for fullness of life in the good land. The prophets in the Old Testament...insisted that these yearnings could neither be satisfied nor realized apart from the enthronement of God in the common life."³

"The enthronement of God in the common life." expresses in a word the issue at stake in this dramatic incident of the thongs and the yoke-bars.

¹Ibid., p. 68. ²Meremiah 27:2f. ³Kuist, op. cit., p. 17.

"It is I who by my great power and my outstretched arm have made the earth...and I give it to whomever it seems right to me."¹ The key of life, the good life, the long life even in the midst of serfdom is found in acknowledgment of the fact that because God rules all things of the earth he must also rule in the human heart. In this confidence and conviction the prophet directs to the envoys of the local kingdoms, to Zedekiah the king of Judah, and to the priests and people the startling message, "Serve the king of Babylon and live."

The reaction is mixed. Other prophets are encouraging allegiance with neighboring kings and an uprising against the threat of Babylon. "Do not listen to the words of the prophets who are saying to you, 'You shall not serve the king of Babylon' for it is a lie..."²

So the great drama rolls on to the climax of the encounter between the prophet Jeremiah and the prophet Hananiah. Each represents opposing views. Hananiah insists that two years will see the power of Babylon broken and the precious temple articles returned. Jeremiah predicts a long period of servitude. "All the nations shall serve him, and his son and his grandson, until the time of his own land comes..."³ Hananiah speaks for peace, Jeremiah for destruction unless the word of the Lord is heard.

Hananiah in a moment of supreme ecstasy took the

¹Jeremiah 27:5.

²Jeremiah 27:9,14,17. ³Jeremiah 27:7.

yoke-bars from Jeremiah's neck and broke them to symbolize the breaking of the power of Babylon within two years.

But Jeremiah went in search of an iron yoke to symbolize the unbreakable character of Babylon's power -- "the iron yoke of servitude to Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, and they shall serve him."¹

Servitude is assured. Whether it will be the road to a fuller better life is the issue and it remains in the power of the people to accept or reject the future.

In a single instrument, coupled with a dramatic encounter the prophet presents effectively the rule for life. It is done in the face of popular opinion and at great personal risk but the combination of suspense and insight serves to create a lasting impression upon the people and upon the modern reader.

The Rhetorical Question Method: Among his many qualifications as a master craftsman in the art of communication, Jeremiah was an able questioner. His work abounds with questions, some obviously from his own mouth, others from the mouth of the Lord, and many others from the people. Interest is created and held by the use of questions. Facts which are the agents of proof and conviction, are presented. Mood and character, so essential to the living quality of a piece of writing are supplied by implication. In fact, the major aspects of the great controversy in the family

¹Jeremiah 28:14.

of God, between the Father and his children, are highlighted by the questions that are asked and the answers that follow them or that are directly implied.

Some organization of the questions is essential and the reporter's recipe of Who, What, Why and How will serve as well as any. Keeping in mind that the main theme is a theme of controversy, let us see if from the "who" questions the participants can be identified.

The Participants:

The Prophet: "Jeremiah, what do you see?"¹

The Lord: "I see a rod of almond..."²

The Invader: "I see a boiling pot facing away from the north..."³

The nation: "Is Israel a slave?"⁴

The fathers: "They (the fathers of Israel) did not say 'Where is the Lord?'"⁵

The priests: "The priests did not say, 'Where is the Lord?'"⁶

The rulers: (they transgressed...)⁷

The prophets: (they prophesied by Ba'al)⁸

Next we examine a few "What" questions in connection with the nature of the conflict.

Traditional infidelity: What wrong did your fathers find in me?"⁹

Exceptional passion for idolatry: "Has a nation changed its gods even though they are no gods?"¹⁰

¹Jeremiah 1:11.

²Jeremiah 1:11.

³Jeremiah 1:13.

⁴Jeremiah 2:14.

⁵Jeremiah 2:6.

⁶Jeremiah 2:8.

⁷Jeremiah 2:8.

⁸Jeremiah 2:8.

⁹Jeremiah 2:5.

¹⁰Jeremiah 2:11.

Political alliance fantasy: "What do you gain by going¹ to Egypt... or to Assyria..."¹

Religious passions of the nation run amok: "What she (Israel) did, have you seen it?"²

Sanity and knowledge disparaged: "What wisdom is in them (the wise men)?"³

Consciences deadened by habit: "What is our iniquity?"

Worship gone stale: "To what purpose does frankincense come to me from Sheba....?"⁴

Now some "Why" questions into the cause of the conflict:

Rejection of confidence in the arms of the Lord by the nation: "Why has he (Israel) become a prey?"⁵

Breakdown of loyalty: "Why do...they say, 'We are free'?"⁶

Unwillingness to admit error or repent: "Why has the people turned away? They refuse to return!"⁷

Predisposition to disobedience: "Why have they provoked me to anger...?"⁸

Misplaced confidence in tradition: "Why shouldst thou (the Lord, Israel's hope) be like a stranger...a man confused like a mighty man who cannot save?"⁹

Misunderstanding of God's purpose and method: "Why has the Lord pronounced all this evil against us?"¹⁰

¹Jeremiah 2:18. ²Jeremiah 3:6. ³Jeremiah 8:9.
⁴Jeremiah 16:10. ⁵Jeremiah 6:20. ⁶Jeremiah 2:14.
⁷Jeremiah 2:31. ⁸Jeremiah 8:5. ⁹Jeremiah 8:19.
¹⁰Jeremiah 14:8,9. ¹¹Jeremiah 16:10.

The "How" questions, and the cure for the trouble:

Recognize folly: "How can you say, 'I am not defiled'?"¹

Pursue pardon: "How can I pardon you?"²

Acknowledge shame: "How to blush, did they know?"³

Seek wisdom: "How can you say, 'We are wise...?'"⁴

Cultivate perseverance: "How will you compete....?"⁵

Accept God's rule: "How can a man make gods for himself?"⁶

Recognize God's presence: "How can a man hide...so that I cannot see him?"⁷

Clearly the prophet with his questions has ranged widely over the field of the controversy in its aspects of participants in the trouble, the trouble itself; what it was, why it was and how it was to be cured. The power in a question is its natural bid for a reply. As it takes two to speak the truth, one to speak and one to hear, so it takes two to participate in an exchange of questions, one to ask and the other to reply. The predominance of dialogue in the prophet's writing animates every page, and contributes largely to the interest factor that caused his contemporaries to give ear to his words. The same technique compels even closer attention on the part of his readers in this present age. The enduring quality of this drama of the ages owes much to the expressive effect of the questions

¹Jeremiah 2:23.

²Jeremiah 5:7.

³Jeremiah 6:15; 8:12.
⁵Jeremiah 5:7.

⁴Jeremiah 8:8.

⁵Jeremiah 12:5.

⁶Jeremiah 16:20

⁷Jeremiah 23:23.

which dot the dialogue of his work.

And now to sum up, if we can, in a paragraph, the main emphasis of this chapter on the quality of the prophet's writings. We have been asking ourselves what it is in terms of character and style that distinguishes the prophet's work. What are the elements that contribute to its continued effectiveness and vigor.

Taken in the order in which they were discussed they are these:

a) Sound composition, i.e., competent arrangement and expressive organization.

b) Variety of method. The variety of methods demonstrate the originality of an agile mind. Each method makes its appeal to a different sense or faculty of reception. The major outlines of the message are presented repeatedly but each time in different dress and appealing to varying preferences.

The characteristics of brevity, aptness, simplicity, and animation are also among others present and this fact lends to the vigor of his presentation as well as to its lasting quality.

The confirmation of the genius of the prophet turns upon his capacity to enrich common things with uncommon meaning, and to rephrase the universal language in local dialect. As was said previously about the power of the word spoken in familiar terms, i.e., the hammer, the fire, the cup, etc., these are the pegs upon which memory hangs

the products of reflection. These are the terms which the man in the street was able to understand and it is in great part because the message of the prophet finds expression in these dynamics of the daily experience that its eternal quality is preserved.

CHAPTER V

EFFECTS AND RESPONSES

DEMONSTRATIONS OF THE EFFECT OF THE PROPHET'S WITNESS ON THE SOCIETY OF HIS TIME

How to present his message in such a way as to be understood by his contemporaries in the court, in the temple and in the fields; and to appeal to their disposition to respond in obedience to God's comand -- this has been the problem of the prophet.

We have seen the imagination and zeal of the prophet at work in the formation of a strategy and the carrying out of a plan in accord with his divine commission. We list the major element in review:

He dealt only in the major issues.

He lived close to the mood of his people and spoke to it.

He faced with courage his opponents in the court and in the temple.

With a singular imagination he painted the cause of Israel versus God in the idiom of the fields and the streets.

Bastioned by a wide and intimate knowledge of the political trends of his time he cut deeply into the philosophy of boot-strap redemption and showed it to be the farce it was.

But with what effect? This is the question. On what demonstrable grounds can it be affirmed that Jeremiah

successfully achieved his end, that of communicating his message to his hearers? Can it be demonstrated that Jeremiah hit the mark in what he had to say?

I. THE GENERAL EFFECT ON PRINCES,
PRIESTS, PROPHETS, AND PEOPLE

Chapter 26 affords a vignette view of the response that the prophet's message effected among the priests and the princes, the prophets and the people. Here in a nutshell is an account of the effect of the prophet's word on his hearers.

The scene is set in the court of the temple, the time between Megiddo and Carchemish. Good King Josiah is dead. Jehoiakim had come to the throne, the vassal of Egypt. Uncertainty and intrigue is the political mood. Events are plastic. It is a time for plain speaking.

"Stand....and speak....says the Lord, to all the cities....all the words....do not hold back a word."¹

The trial scene gathers up into one place all the frustration tinged with fear and fury of a collapsing nation, hemmed in by mortal enemy, and concentrates it upon one person, the one who yet dared to speak God's truth plainly, repeatedly.

"If you will not listen to me....I will make this house like Shiloh....this city a curse...."²

¹Jeremiah 26:2f.

²Jeremiah 26:4-6.

thus says the Lord by the mouth of his prophet.

"You shall die!" cried the priests, the prophets and the people of Jerusalem to Jeremiah. "This man deserves the sentence of death...." charged the priests and prophets to the princes who had come up to the temple court to sit on the case.

"But", cried the prophet in his defense, "The Lord sent me to prophecy against this house and this city.... Now therefore amend your ways....and obey the voice of the Lord..."¹

"As for me....I am in your hands. Do with me as seems good and right to you....but know for certain....the Lord sent me to you."²

This is the turning point in the indictment. Suddenly the focus of attention is shifted from the man Jeremiah to the One who has sent him to speak and plead for reform. The prophet's act of self-surrender and abrogation of self-interest disarms the opposition. From the horizontal the point of view shifts to the vertical. It is clear at once to the accusers, that they are sitting in judgment not upon the words and deeds of a man, albeit cantankerous and persistent but upon the deeds and word of God, the Lord their God.

Thus is shaped the new atmosphere of receptivity. Thus spoke the princes and the people to the priests and the prophets (who should have been the first to see the

¹Jeremiah 26:12f.

²Jeremiah 26:14-15.

light), "This man does not deserve the sentence of death, for he has spoken to us in the name of the Lord our God."¹

William Barclay, writing in his commentary on the Gospel of John about the problem of presenting Christianity to the Greek world quotes Lesky the historian as having said that "the progress and spread of any idea depends, not only on the strength and force of the idea, but on the predisposition to receive it of the age to which it is presented."²

In the offering of himself upon the altar of sacrifice the prophet creates in the minds of his hearers the disposition to receive the truth and the willingness to acknowledge error and the need for repentance and reform.

There is plenty of evidence³ that the predisposition of the princes, the priests, the prophets, and the people to adopt a plan of repentance and reform was short-lived. But it cannot be seriously doubted that at this point in the career of the prophet, a high point of opposition, when the inner turmoil of leaders and people seemed ready to break out in revolt and reprisal against the only one who had kept a grip on the certainty of God's participation in the affairs of men, the prophet spoke in the name of God and was understood.

¹Jeremiah 26:16.

²Barclay, William, The Gospel of John, Vol. I., (Edinburgh: The Saint Andrew Press, 1956), p. 2.

³Jeremiah 7, 8, 9, and 26.

II. THE PARTICULAR EFFECT ON THE PROPHET HANANIAH

Whether or not the prophet gained a hearing from one of his own profession is the concern of the following investigation. It is the purpose of this section to enlist evidence to the effect that Jeremiah hit the mark in what he had to say. That the response to this word was by no means sympathetic or even fair is not the point presently at issue. That he was listened to and understood is the contention of this chapter and we now turn to the evidence supplied in the encounter between Hananiah and Jeremiah in Chapter 28.

"Concerning the prophets:
My heart is broken....."¹

laments Jeremiah, also a prophet.

"They speak visions of their own minds,
not from the mouth of the Lord."²

"Let the prophet who has a dream, tell
a dream, but let him who has my word
speak my word faithfully."³

It is clear to Jeremiah that others of his own profession have claimed to be agents of the word of God when in fact they have not heard his word and have misled the people in falsely prophesying early deliverance from the oppressors without turning of their backs on unfaithfulness and disobedience.

"You are the burden of the Lord....an everlasting reproach and perpetual shame...."⁴ This is Jeremiah's word

¹Jeremiah 23:9.

²Jeremiah 23:16.

³Jeremiah 23:28.

⁴Jeremiah 23:33,40.

to his fellow prophets. This in sum is the status of the ministry of the prophets, false shepherds, dreamers, the "burden" of the Lord rather than his joy and strength.

The issue focuses in the contrast between the real word of God, the word that is like "fire" and like a "hammer which breaks the rock in pieces," the word that does things, and the dreams of the prophets who speak what is popular. Things happen when God speaks. His word is powerful in contrast to the weak, faltering, lifeless word of the prophet who merely dreamed a dream without repentance and a return to obedience.

Now comes Hananiah to the fore. He encounters Jeremiah wearing the yoke of wood, the symbol of Israel's double bondage; many of her sons and daughters languish in exile far from home, but worse than that, many more languish in a spiritual bondage at home. Liberty of the mind and heart is given in exchange for temporary safety as the people are urged by the false prophets to trust in the force of their own arms and the help of their neighbors. Babylon in due course (within two years), is to fall and the return of the exiled people and the holy temple articles is prophesied.

From the neck of Jeremiah, Hananiah takes the yoke of wood and in the presence of all the people, breaks it in token of the manner in which the Lord is soon to break the yoke of Nebuchadnezzar from the necks of the nations.

Jeremiah went his way. But shortly returned wearing

a yoke of iron, the symbol of the unbreakable iron yoke of servitude,¹ which encircled the necks of the nations, the would-be saviours of Israel and themselves.

And to Hananiah, Jeremiah speaks the words of his doom:

"Listen, Hananiah, the Lord has not sent you, and you have made this people trust in a lie. Therefore....this very year you shall die, because you have uttered rebellion against the Lord."²

In a sentence the conclusion is written to the false witness of Hananiah. Indicted on two scores: moral perjury and spiritual revolt, Hananiah paid in full. The word of Jeremiah stood the double test. It was reliable and it penetrated. It stood and it struck home. "In that same year....the prophet Hananiah died."³

The tombstone of Hananiah testifies to the surpassing marksmanship of the man from Anathoth.

III. THE EFFECT ON THE PRIEST PASHUR

"Then Pashur (the priest and chief officer in the temple) beat Jeremiah the prophet and put him in the stocks"⁴

Once again the question is asked, "Did Jeremiah get a hearing?" In this case special reference is made to the hearing he got among the priests and by Pashur, the then chief temple officer in particular. By the violence of

¹Jeremiah 28:14.

²Jeremiah 28:16.

³Jeremiah 28:17.

⁴Jeremiah 20:2.

Pashur's reaction it is safe to assume that Jeremiah did get a hearing and indeed perhaps a more attentive one than he had counted upon.

The message is much the same but recorded in connection with this deed of Pashur's, is one of the best passages to illustrate the rule of God and its consequences. To get the best effect it should be viewed in the light of the priest-officer's vigorous reaction.¹

The prophet was instructed to buy a potter's earthen flask and in company with some of the elders and senior priests (amongst whom undoubtedly was Pashur) go to the Valley of Benhinnom to a predetermined spot and there speak the word of the Lord.

The place on this occasion is one where the people and the leaders have defiled themselves in their relationship to the one God by idol worship and human sacrifice to strange gods. The word therefore of the one true God is that this place of sacrifice shall be called the Valley of Slaughter for it is to be here that the people of Judah and Jerusalem shall perish by the sword of their enemies. There shall not be survivors sufficient even to bury the dead. They shall be eaten by the birds and wild beasts. Utter ruin shall come upon the city, and such a siege shall be laid that the few remaining within the walls shall actually eat one another like cannibals.

¹Jeremiah 19:1-20:6.

The prophet is instructed to smash into pieces the earthen flask and say:

"So will I break this people and this city, as one breaks a potter's vessel, so that it can never be mended."¹

The note of irrevocability is here coupled with the note of doom. This is the harvest that Judah and Jerusalem must look forward to. The word is a word of "breaking" and "never mending" so completely or perfectly again.

Did the prophet's audience on the slopes of Topheth hear this terrible word and understand it? It is clear that the leaders understood the threat to their security and Pashur's reaction typifies the desire of comfortable men everywhere to eliminate the irritant that is most immediate and acute.

But that the leaders did not grasp the appalling implication of Jeremiah's prophecy is also plain in spite of the object lesson of the broken flask -- impossible of mending. This is the sorry state of these men's spiritual condition, shattered beyond hope of repair.

The sequel to this event came on the morning of the day following. Jeremiah released from the stocks directs upon Pashur the full force of his pent-up frustration and conviction. Pashur's personal fate is prescribed and for him there is the morbid future of exile and death in a far-off foreign place.

¹Jeremiah 19:11

The reaction of Pashur in his abuse of Jeremiah, that is, in beating him and confining him to the stocks disclose the effect of Jeremiah's word on this element of society. Opposition here comes boldly into the open and acts. Pashur typifies in his person both the mounting opposition and the impending catastrophe. Antagonism has developed from the placid state of indifference, through the stages of uncertainty and restive tolerance to outright violence. The cumulative effect of this encounter between Pashur, the priest, and Jeremiah, the priest-prophet is to bring into clear focus the deeper issues, the cancer of the nation's soul for which the prophet essayed to prescribe the cure and to clarify the prophet's vision of his people's impending doom.

"To Babylon you shall go,"¹ he shouts at Pashur, meaning not only Pashur but the whole nation. The terrible fate of Judah has been revealed to Jeremiah in the course of his long night suffering in the stocks. The foe from the north is Babylon and Judah's reduction by fire and sword is certain.

IV. THE EFFECT ON KING ZEDEKIAH

The better to get the effect of the "Book of Disaster" and its relation to Jeremiah's problem of communication, a

¹Jeremiah 20:6.

review of the events in their proper sequence is in order.

The time is the latter days of the reign of Zedekiah. The place Jerusalem. Zedekiah is the one who bears the name of "Zeal for Righteousness", the one in whom Israel had hoped to see embodied the hope of a new and better day; but now in the crisis of the terrible siege, with the enemy at the gate, the king is incapable of deciding upon the right course of action. So opens the drama of the Book of Disaster in a mood of indecision and terror.

Dramatis Personae

Jeremiah -- -- -- -- -- The Prophet

Zedekiah -- -- -- -- -- The King

Pashur - -- -- -- -- Chief Official
Messenger

Jehucal -- -- -- -- -- Another Official
Messenger

Irijah -- -- -- -- -- Gate Keeper, Sentry
of the Guard.

Shephatish, Gedalish)
Iucal, Pashur (same as) -- Princes of the Court
above))

Ebedmelech -- -- -- -- -- Ethiopian Eunuch of the
House of the King.

Supporting cast of soldiers, servants, priests,
and officials of the court of the guard and the
temple.

Crowd noises from without signifying the approach
of a great host.

General confusion and much rushing about on the
part of the up-stage cast.

Scene I
(21:1-10)

Pashur, the King's messenger arrives with an urgent request from the king to Jeremiah, "Inquire of the Lord for us.....Nebuchadnezzar threatens....perhaps the Lord will deal with us according to all his wonderful deeds and will make him withdraw from us."¹

Jeremiah's reply, "Not a chance -- in fact not only will I make of no effect your weapons but, I myself will fight against you..."² says the Lord. And afterwards, "I will deliver Zedekiah....his house and his people....into the hand of those who seek their lives."³ He shall not spare them.

This is the frightening decree of Israel's doom. Set before her now is the choice between the two ways, the way of life and the way of death. Those who stay face certain annihilation; those who surrender and go out under the protection of the invading army, face certain exile but there is the hope of survival. Israel's choice lies between the lesser of the two evils. Deliverance full and free is no longer hers to elect.

"For I have set my face against this city for evil, and not for good, says the Lord."⁴

The plot of the siege is set in the larger frame work of the plan of God. The play within the play is the more significant. The Lord speaks of the destiny of his

¹Jeremiah 21:2.

²Jeremiah 21:5.

³Jeremiah 21:7.

⁴Jeremiah 21:10.

people by the mouth of his prophet. Do the people hear?
This is the question.

Scene II

(34:1-7)

The prophet is charged to speak the message of doom.
"Behold I am giving this city into the hand of the king of
Babylon."¹ The sounds of the advancing host can be heard
in the near distance.

Scene III

(37:1-10)

The Court

Another messenger has been despatched by the king
to the prophet.

"Pray for us to the Lord our God."²

Sounds of jubilation are heard in the streets. The
army of Egypt has in the meantime appeared and compelled
the withdrawal of the Chaldeans.

Cries a voice, "The Chaldeans will surely stay away
from us."

Jeremiah appears and thunders, "They will not stay
away. They shall come back and fight against this city.
They shall take it and burn it with fire."³

Cries of "Traitor! Shame! Quisling!"

Scene IV

(34:8-22)

A narrator tells the sad story of the treachery of

¹Jeremiah 34:2b.

²Jeremiah 37:3.

³Jeremiah 37:8.

the people of Jerusalem, how in celebration of the lifting of the siege, Zedekiah proclaimed liberty to the Hebrew slaves and all the slave owners among the people of Jerusalem agreed. But later regretting their enthusiasm they took again the slaves into bondage. Thus was the agreement broken, an agreement based upon the ancient covenant made between the Lord and his people at the time of their release from the bondage of Egypt.

For this treachery in denying liberty to the Hebrew slaves shall their owners be denied the liberty of life itself.

"I proclaim to you liberty to the sword, to pestilence, to famine, says the Lord."¹ This is the reward of unfaithfulness and disobedience. This is the ground from which springs the terror of the drama in which Judah plays the leading role.

Scene V

(37:14-25)

The City Gate

All is quiet. The Chaldeans have temporarily withdrawn. Jeremiah appears dressed for a journey. He attempts to pass through the gate. A sentry, Irijab, challenges him. "You are deserting to the Chaldeans!"

Jeremiah replies indignantly: "It is false. I am not deserting...."²

¹Jeremiah 34:17b.

²Jeremiah 37:13.

But Irijah seizes him and brings him under arrest to the princes. The princes are furious. They beat Jeremiah and fling him into a temporary prison nearby in the house of the secretary.

The curtain falls on a dispute raging among the princes. Here it would seem is proof of the double motive in the prophetic word. A traitor beyond doubt, is the prophet Jeremiah.

Scene VI

(37:16-21)

In a secret chamber of the palace a secret conference is taking place. The king has summoned Jeremiah from his prison house.

"Is there any word from the Lord?" queries the troubled king.

"There is," replies the prophet. "You shall be delivered....to Babylon."

The terrible truth still issues from the lips of the prophet. He protests the injustice of his imprisonment and is transferred to better quarters in the court of the guard -- but still a prisoner.

Scene VII

(38:1--6)

The Court of the King

Present are a band of nobles and loud is their condemnation of the prophet. He is charged with undermining the war effort. "He is weakening the hands of the soldiers

....and the peoples....by such words."

"This man is not seeking the welfare of the people, but their harm."

And now the faltering king consigns his prisoner to their care. The mob seize him and drag him out to an empty pit at the bottom of which the muck and refuse have collected. They let him down and gleefully watch him sink into the filthy mire.

Scene VIII

(38:7-13)

Later, at the Pit

Ebedmelech appears out of the shadows with ropes and rags and three others to help. He calls softly to Jeremiah and instructs him about the rags and the rope. They draw him up out of the wall. Jeremiah is helped off the scene.

Scene IX

(38:14-28)

At a Temple Gate

Zedekiah has again sent for Jeremiah. The siege has resumed. The food situation is desperate. Once more the king seeks some word of deliverance from the Lord. But nothing has changed. There is no new word.

With commendable courage the prophet repeats the word of the Lord: "Obey, surrender and live!" "Disobey and die!" The latter dictum in sum, is the philosophy of failure which has brought about the fall of Israel. Arrangements are made for the safe conduct of the prophet

to his place of confinement. On the way the villainous princes pounce on him but they are put off from their murderous intention. All around are the evidences of collapse. Jerusalem's time is near.

Scene X

(39:1-10)

The City Wall

A breach has been made in the wall. The fall of the city is imminent. Confusion reigns. The king and a few princes attempt to flee. They are overtaken. Zedekiah's sons are butchered before his eyes. Then his own eyes are put out. He is led away in chains. Fires break out. Screams are heard. Shouts and oaths. The end has come.

Scene XI

(39:11-14)

Among the Charred Ruins

Jeremiah is seated alone. He has been rescued from the court of the guard by the Chaldean commander. He has elected to stay with the few of his people who remain. Great is his sorrow. No word is spoken and the curtain falls.

Surely it borders upon idleness to speculate at this point as to whether or not the message of the prophet found its mark in the excoriated soul of a ruined nation. To be sure the people did not "listen" as the editor of the Book of Disaster comments, "Neither he (Zedekiah) nor his servants nor the people of the land listened to the

words of the Lord which he spoke through Jeremiah the prophet,"¹ but nevertheless in spite of the national indisposition to return to obedience and righteous behavior no one can alter the fact that the prophet deeply stirred the conscience of the nation. Witness the repeated queries of the king, the fury of the princes, the sadistic attempts to forever smother the "voice", the voice of the "mouth of the Lord," the only voice raised in agony of protest in the day of Israel's spiritual -- and political collapse. Witness moreover the intrigue, the plot to trap him in a traitorous act, (the act of desertion for which in the time of war the only penalty is death), the beatings, the imprisonments.

In truth the nation would not listen but it could not help but hear. "You shall be my mouth" said the Lord to Jeremiah years before and to the very bitter end, regardless of repeated personal peril and often at the risk of his life, the prophet carried out his mission as the "mouth" of the Lord with courage and lasting effect.

Violence and calumny heaped upon the head of the prophet bear vivid testimony to the impress of his message. Years before the prophet had been charged with the duty to speak, to serve as the "mouth" of the Lord. To the bitter end (and how bitter indeed it was) regardless of personal risk and private reputation, the prophet carried out his divinely appointed task.

¹Jeremiah 37:2.

We have accompanied the prophet over the broad areas of the society of his day and seen the effect of his call to obedience on the priests and the people, the princes and the prophets. More intimately we have stood with him in the presence of the outraged Hananiah, the angry Pashur, and the frightened king.

The welts of the whip, the clots of muck, the scars of the stocks, upon the body of the prophet are the evidence that his message reached its mark.

CHAPTER VI

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

The principal preoccupation of this thesis has been to study and illustrate the elements of communicative genius that predominate in the character and method of the prophet. It has been necessary to attempt to establish certain basic principles with regard to the work of communicating one with the other and to proceed from those basic matters to a study of the mental calibre as well as the spiritual stamina of the prophet. Then we turned our attention to the writings and looked at them for signs of compositional excellence as well as variety of presentation method. And finally we considered the effects of the prophet's witness on his contemporaries. Now we seek to sum up the matter and show in essential outline the more significant findings of this investigation.

At the outset of this work we asked ourselves, "What is the secret of the power and influence of the prophetic witness both in his own day and now?" The basis of this is laid in the first chapter where we discussed various aspects of the intimate relationship which the prophet enjoyed with his God. How this came about it is unnecessary to review here, but we came to the conclusion that the prophet was a God-possessed and a God-directed man. It will

be mentioned later on how sensitive he became to the will of God and it is our conviction that this sensitivity, this eager sensing of the divine commission, had its root in the complete surrender he affected in the very beginning of his prophetic journey. He became as it were "host to the very presence of God" and was able to rejoice, "thy words became to me a joy and the delight of my heart..."¹

Needless to add the journey was not all "delight" but there is one permanent feature of the witness of the prophet and it is the constancy of the divine presence. This was his support and strength when by human standards he should have failed.

The first thing we may say then regarding the secret of the prophet's influence is that he was confident of his source and his resource in the Lord God and he expected his confidence to be honored by the One who had promised to be with him and with whom he enjoyed intimate and constant contact.

The second thing is that whereas he kept close touch with God on the one hand, he kept close touch also with the people among whom he lived. It is a matter of record how he fellowshipped with princes and kings, priests, and prophets, and the common man. The association taught him how frail people are and what wrong-doing they may be led into by uninstructed and unfaithful leaders.

¹Jeremiah 15:16.

We dealt briefly with the historical context of the prophet's time in order to emphasize the social and political stresses which he was enabled to interpret more effectively because he was part of the stress himself.

We have said that the prophet's secret strength lay in his being in touch with God and with the people. Then we proceeded to show that the man himself was possessed of certain significant qualities which gave weight and power to what he had to say.

The first of these qualities was the agility of his mind and the range of his comprehension. We explored the evidence of his surpassing knowledge of the character and ways of God. Then we examined his interpretation of nationalism and found that he reduced this complex matter to a profoundly simple formula (viz.) right relations with God are the key to national security. Next we went with him to investigate the causes of the spiritual suffocation that was afflicting his nation and found the ailment localized in the areas of infidelity and indifference. Finally we came to an examination of sin itself and its contribution to the human condition. We found the prophet to be a specialist in the diagnosis and the cure of sin.

From a study of the prophet's mental calibre we advanced to a consideration of his spiritual stamina. Here the investigation was confined to a review of the grounds for and the tests of certainty. It is the writer's obser-

vation that the spoken word is immensely fortified if the speaker is acquainted with the facts but more than that, if he is sure that what he is saying is true, his word is powerful indeed. Courage and conviction fortify the will and at this point mind and spirit cooperate significantly to get the message across. It was with this factor in mind that a review was made of the grounds for assurance under the headings: The fact of experience of God; Perception (emphasizing the prophet's remarkable ability to see things); Inspiration and Prayer. From this point we proceeded to the testing field and we witnessed the prophet bearing up in a variety of exceedingly trying conditions. Vicariously this man was seen to bear the burden of the nation and it is precisely because he spoke from within the situation that his interpretation was so intensely pertinent and his mode of expression so unforgettable. The cause for righteousness, fidelity and truth was fought and won in the very heart of the prophet himself.

Further clues to the secret of the power and influence of the prophetic witness were found in the writings themselves. In the first place, upon examination in the light of Ruskin's laws of arrangement for good composition the prophet's work was found to measure up splendidly and the outcome as a demonstration of capable arrangement expressively organized, is nothing less than masterful. To repeat the phrase of Dr. H. T. Kuist, "It not only portrays

life, it requires life."¹

In addition to the vitality of the arrangement of his work we found the prophet to be moreover a specialist in methods of presentation. Elements of his particular talent were illustrated in the variety of method employed and the range of his appeal through the human mechanisms of reaction and response. The historical reference method for instance focused on the past and summoned the assistance of memory and sentiment. The pictorial method specialized in the aesthetic preference of many and the common love of illustration. The object lesson method traded upon the natural desire of the listener for the concrete illustration related to the already familiar facts of life. The rhetorical question method depended for its effect upon the natural curiosity of the hearer to cause him to rise to the bait of the inquiry. The keynote expression method operated through the mediums of tradition while the slogan method depended for its effect on the power of repetition. Thus did these and others, each in their own way succeed in awakening a measure of response on every level of the society of the prophet's day.

That the word of the prophet did get across to his hearers is attested to by the recorded opposition of the priests, the prophets, the princes, and the people and the individual case studies of Hananiah, Pashur, and Zedekiah in the chapter about Effects and Responses.

¹Kuist, op. cit., p. 108.

A distinction became evident between hearing and listening. Repeatedly the people were enjoined to "listen" to the word of the Lord but the evidence of the illustrations from the general scene and also from the individual cases supported the conviction that the prophet's hearers were hearers only and not listeners. The sad ending of Zedekiah, one of the most persistent inquirers after the word of the Lord, testified to the fact that although he heard the prophet's repeated injunctions to "obey and live!" he did not listen, he did not obey and his reward was the horror of capture, torture, and death in a strange land. He, more than any other because so much was expected of him as the living example of righteousness, demonstrated the tragic consequences of preoccupation with aspects of living other than those tributary to the will and purpose of God.

It is at this point that the genius and talent of the prophet makes a universal appeal which is as valid today as it was in his own day.

"Obey my voice, and I will be your God, and you shall be my people; and walk in all the way that I command you, that it may be well with you."¹

The persistent call to obedience which sounds over and over again throughout the writings of the prophet and which in effect summarizes his entire message and witness, also emphasizes the two fundamental characteristics of his

¹Jeremiah 7:23.

communicative genius, (viz.) the sensitivity of his inner spirit to every word of God; and his mental and moral pre-occupation with the way of God and that way only.

To listen and to obey were the prerequisites for the effective witness of the prophet. They are still the prerequisites for effective communication of the truth in the day in which we live.

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APPENDIX

FURTHER ILLUSTRATIONS OF RUSKIN'S LAWS
OF ARRANGEMENT FROM THE SECTION ENTITLED
DROUGHT, DOOM AND OTHER UTTERANCES¹

The Law of Principality: One feature predominates.
All others are subordinates to it.

Four instruments of expressions combine forces
to focus attention upon the main feature of the section,
the sovereign identity of the Lord of Hosts.

1) References to the name of the Lord.²

2) Use of the personal pronoun "I" (73
occurrences)³, the adjective and pronoun "thy"⁴, the
possessive pronoun "my"⁵ and the objective case of the
personal pronoun, "me"⁶,

3) The names given to the Lord such as

¹Jeremiah chapters 14 - 20 selected to contrast
with the brevity of Chapter 1.

²Jeremiah 14:7, 21; 15:16; 16:21.

³Jeremiah 15:6-10; 16:21; 17:3b-4,10; 18:5-12;
17; 19:3, 7-12.

⁴Jeremiah 14:9; 15:15,16; 20:12.

⁵Jeremiah 14:14; 16:5, 17-19, 21; 18:1.

⁶Jeremiah 16:11; 17:24; 18:13.

"our Hope"¹, "God of Hosts"², "Hope of Israel"³, "dread warrior"⁴, "who trieth the righteous"⁵, "who seest the heart and mind"⁶

4) The petitions addressed directly to the Lord.⁷

Thus the main objective is kept constantly in view and the subordinate factors made to depend upon it.

The Law of Continuity: The achievement of unity by orderly succession. The dominant idea of the identity of the Lord is advanced by series of positive affirmation such as in the following:

"I have stretched out my hand against you and destroyed you;
I am weary.....
I have winnowed.... 8
I have bereaved...."

and the familiar "I -- You" interchange.

"I will make you..."
"I am with you..."
"I will deliver you..."
"I will redeem you..."⁹

or the succession of adjectives as:

"O Lord, my strength and my stronghold,
my refuge...."¹⁰

¹Jeremiah 14:22.

²Jeremiah 15:16; 19:15.

³Jeremiah 17:13.

⁴Jeremiah 20:11.

⁵Jeremiah 20:12.

⁶Jeremiah 20:12.

⁷Jeremiah 14:7; 14:22; 15:15; 17:14,17; 18:19; 20:7,13.

⁸Jeremiah 15:6b--8, 13, 14.

⁹Jeremiah 15:20,21.

¹⁰Jeremiah 16:19.

or the descriptive nouns:

"I will make them know my power
and my might....my name..."¹

The Law of Repetition: Unity expressed by imitation
or repetition. Attention is drawn to the main theme
by interrogative use of the adverb "why".

"Why shouldst thou be like a stranger...?
"Why shouldst thou be like a man confused...?"²

"Why hast thou smitten me...?"³

"Why has the Lord pronounced all
this great evil against us?"⁴

or again by the negative appeal:

"Do not spurn us....
Do not dishonor thy glorious throne....
Do not break thy covenant...."⁵

or by prohibition of the Lord:

"Do not enter....
Do not (understood) lament....
Do not (understood) bemoan...."⁶

The Law of Contrast: The reinforcement of unity by
comparison and contrast. As emphasized by the conjunc-
tion "though":

"though our iniquities testify against
us, act, O Lord...."⁷

"though they fast, I will not hear their cry.."

"though they offer burnt offering and
cereal offering, I will not accept them..."⁸

¹ Jeremiah 16:21.

² Jeremiah 14:8,9.

³ Jeremiah 14:19.

⁴ Jeremiah 16:10.

⁵ Jeremiah 14:21.

⁶ Jeremiah 16:5.

⁷ Jeremiah 14:7.

⁸ Jeremiah 14:12.

or by the juxtaposition of two opposing conditions:

"Cursed is the man who trusts in man..."¹

"Blessed is the man who trusts in the Lord...."²

or by the insertion of the sub-plot against the prophet within the grand plot of the people against the Lord:

"Come, let us make plots against JeremiahCome, let us smite him with the tongue...."³

The Law of Radiation: Unity is promoted by the development of the theme along several lines originating from one point, the identity of the Lord of Hosts. A series of dramatic incidents and arguments radiate from this focal point:

"I the Lord search the mind and try the heart, to give to every man according to his ways...."⁴

As spokes radiate from the hub so the elements of the description of the nature of the activity and the purpose of the Lord of Hosts radiate from this focal point.

It has been mentioned how often the pronoun "I" occurs as subject of a vast array of activity, mainly connected with the judgment of Israel's wrongdoing. Similarly the drama of the drought⁵, the graphic illus-

¹Jeremiah 17:5.

²Jeremiah 17:7.

³Jeremiah 18:18.

⁴Jeremiah 17:10.

⁵Jeremiah 14:1-6.

tration of the pen of iron¹, the incident at the potter's house², the breaking of the potter's earthen flask³ and the encounter of Pashur with Jeremiah⁴ contribute to aspects of the identity of the Lord and turn upon the hub of his sovereign character summarized and expressed in the phrase, "I, the Lord, search....and try....and give...."⁵

The Law of Curvature: The author's intention is expressed as the narrative or argument moves from the lesser point of interest to the greater in a line of march which at some point climaxes in the most significant point and tapers to a conclusion.

In the foregoing outline of the principle of radiation the climax of the section was noted and identified as a hub from which all the major lines diverged and converged again. It is now to this same point of climax⁶ that we observe the leading of the lesser points such as "Act, O Lord, for thy name's sake"⁷ and "Art thou not he, O Lord our God?"⁸ and the cry of the prophet himself, "I am called by thy name, O Lord, God of Hosts."⁹ So on to the chapter of desolation and the culmination of it in the cry "O Lord, my strength and my stronghold, my refuge....to thee shall the nations come..."¹⁰

¹Jeremiah 17:1. ²Jeremiah 18:1-4. ³Jeremiah 19:1-13.

⁴Jeremiah 20:1-6. ⁵Jeremiah 17:10. ⁶Jeremiah 17:10.

⁷Jeremiah 14:7. ⁸Jeremiah 14:22. ⁹Jeremiah 15:16b.

¹⁰Jeremiah 16:19.

The main point comes to light in the expression, "I the Lord, search...try...give..."¹ and is followed closely by the refrain "O Lord, the hope of Israel..." and further affirmations of the purpose and power of him who searches the heart of man and rewards him according to his ways. The illustrations of the potter as he molds his clay and the broken flask fortify the description of the operation of the sovereign power of the "Lord of Hosts, the God of Israel"³. The personal struggle displayed in the Pashur story and the prophet's soliloquy⁴ bring the matter to a conclusion for the time being in the confession, "Thou art stronger than I, and thou hast prevailed."⁵ and the shout of ecstasy "Sing to the Lord, praise the Lord! for he has delivered the life of the needy...."⁶

The Law of Interchange: The unity of opposite things is stressed. Each partakes somewhat of the character of the other.

The dialogue⁷ stresses the prophets who prophesied falsely in the divine name. This contrasts to the people who had just previously called upon the divine name to save them.⁸ The intervening passage⁹ effects the transition from cause to effect with the adverb "therefore"

¹Jeremiah 17:10. ²Jeremiah 17:13. ³Jeremiah 19:15.

⁴Jeremiah 20:7-18. ⁵Jeremiah 20:7. ⁶Jeremiah 20:13.

⁷Jeremiah 14:11-16. ⁸Jeremiah 14:7f. ⁹Jeremiah 14:10.

and states the reason for the divine rejection.

Again in the personal confession of the prophet¹ the adverb therefore again contrasts the despair of the man and the proffered assistance with the conditions introduced by the conjunction "if".

And possibly there is the best example in the incident at the potter's house which grew out of the demonstration of the potter reworking the clay to suit his purpose. The clue to the interchange resides again in the conjunction "if"². The force of it is to frame the element of sovereign will in the character of God and to show that it operates in conjunction with the decisions of men.

Laws of Consistency and Harmony: Unity is enhanced by balance and proportion, a harmonious blending of opposites, variety of expression and careful linkage of the parts.

The blend of narrative prose³, poetry⁴, dialogue⁵ and drama⁶ make up a balanced whole whose unity is preserved by constant attention to the principal theme.

¹Jeremiah 15:15-21.

²Jeremiah 18:7,9,10.

³Prose examples: 14:1-10; 11-16; 16:1-18; 17:1-4.

⁴Poetry examples: 14:17-22; 15:5-9; 15:15-21; 17:5-18; 18:13-17; 20:7-18.

⁵Dialogue examples: 15:1-4; 16:19-21; 18:5-12; 18:18.

⁶Drama examples: 17:19-27; 18:1-4; 19:1-15; 20:1-6.

Harmony is effected by careful transition introduced by the adverbs "Thus"¹, "Therefore"² and the conjunction "Then"³ the use of questions⁴ and direct address⁵ which give the impression of taking up the identical theme without prior introduction.

¹Jeremiah 14:10; 16:5; 17:5; 17:19; 19:1.

²Jeremiah 15:19; 16:14; 16:21; 18:13.

³Jeremiah 14:13; 15:1; 18:5; 18:18; 19:10.

⁴Jeremiah 14:19; 15:5; 17:9.

⁵Jeremiah 14:7; 14:17; 15:15; 17:7,12,14; 18:19;
20:7.