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**JEREMIAH'S PHILOSOPHY OF LIFE**

**By**

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**A Thesis**

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To  
Dr. Howard T. Kuist  
at whose suggestion and under whose direction  
this thesis was written

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"The most practical and important thing  
about a man is his view of the universe."

...Chesterton

## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

#### I. The Problem.

At the outset it is necessary to determine exactly what we mean by "Jeremiah's Philosophy of Life". Whenever the word "philosophy" appears, there is need for a definition. The word probably originated with Pythagoras, and had the sense, "a lover of wisdom".<sup>1</sup> In the centuries since, the word has been applied more and more broadly, until at present its meaning varies directly with corresponding variations in its contexts. Today, the word is used in four general senses, according to John Dewey:

1. The widest sense by which we explain any set of phenomena by reference to its determining principles, thus theory, reasoned doctrine. Hence, we speak of the philosophy of invention, of digestion, of hair-dressing, etc.
2. In the same wide sense, but with a clear ethical implication; behaving in the light of some general principle to which we have referred all events and special facts; "the working theory of things and exhibited in conduct". Thus we say, He took it philosophically.

.....

1. Liddell and Scott, Greek English Lexicon, p. 1678, say: "The first actual use of the word is due to Pythagoras, who called himself φιλόσοφος, 'a lover of wisdom', not σοφός, 'a sage'." The word was used by Plato also. Liddell and Scott, loc. cit., cite this example: τὸν Φίλος. σοφίας φήσομεν ἐπιθυμητὴν εἶναι πάντης.

3. "The technical and most restricted sense: an account of the fundamentally real, so far as from its consideration laws and truths may be derived, applying to all facts and phenomena: practically equivalent to metaphysics."
4. "A theory of truth, reality, or experience, taken as an organized whole, and so giving rise to general principles which unite the various branches or parts of experience into a coherent unity. As such, it is not so much any one discipline or science, as it is the system and animating spirit of all."<sup>1</sup>

Dewey finds three common characteristics of the above senses: (1) totality, as dealing with the whole, or universe; (2) generality, manifesting itself in universals, in principles; (3) application, the carry-over to conduct.<sup>2</sup>

Philosophy, as understood most generally at the present time, falls somewhere within the confines of Dewey's third and fourth classifications above. For some, it has tended to border of metaphysics. Philosophy thus becomes technical and severely intellectual. For example, there is Calkins' definition of philosophy as follows:

"Philosophy is the attempt to discover by reasoning the utterly irreducible nature of anything; and philosophy, in its most adequate form, seeks the ultimate nature of all-that-there-is."<sup>3</sup>

Other philosophers, however, shrink from infusing "into so abstract and bloodless a term as 'metaphysics' the fuller life (and especially the inclusion of ethical considera-

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1. John Dewey, Article on "Philosophy" in J.M. Baldwin's Dictionary of Philosophy and Psychology, Vol. II, p. 290.
2. Ibid, p. 291
3. M.W. Calkins, The Persistent Problems of Philosophy, p. 5.

tions) suggested by the more concrete term philosophy".<sup>1</sup>  
Brightman gives a broader definition than that of Calkins for the term when he says:

"Philosophy may be defined as the attempt to think truly about human experience as a whole; or to make our whole experience intelligible. The world is its parish. Everything in the universe, which in any way enters into human experience, or affects, or is known by human beings, is of interest to philosophy."<sup>2</sup>

And again he says:

"Every human being has a philosophy, such as it is; for every one entertains some opinions about the meaning--or meaninglessness--of his experience."<sup>3</sup>

Royce writes in the same vein when he says:

"Philosophy...has its origin and value in an attempt to give a reasonable account of our own personal attitude towards the more serious business of life."<sup>4</sup>

And, finally, Hocking reduces philosophy to its least common denominator when he says:

"When in the vernacular we speak of a man's philosophy we mean simply the sum of his beliefs. In this sense, everybody or at least every mature person, necessarily has a philosophy, because nobody can manage a life without an equipment of beliefs."<sup>5</sup>

Beliefs, he defines as, "the opinions a man lives by, as distinct from those he merely entertains: in this sense they constitute his philosophy".<sup>6</sup> It is this sense of philosophy that interests us in this thesis.

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1. A. Seth, Article on "Philosophy" in the Encyclopaedia Britannica, quoted by Dewey in Baldwin, op. cit., p. 291.
2. E.S. Brightman, An Introduction to Philosophy, p. 4.
3. Ibid, p. 6.
4. Josiah Royce, The Spirit of Modern Philosophy, p. 1.
5. W.E. Hocking, Types of Philosophy, p. 3.
6. Ibid, p. 3.

A glance at the book of Jeremiah is sufficient to convince one that it is far from a book of metaphysics. There are no metaphysical gymnastics with respect to the nature of reality for the arm-chair metaphysician, no hair-splitting distinction between fact and fancy. There is no philosophical "attempt to discover by reasoning the utterly irreducible nature of anything".<sup>1</sup> If this be all there is to philosophy, Jeremiah has none of it. Throughout the book there is vibrant, pulsating life--life in action. And it is not helter-skelter action, a wild beating of the air; it is controlled, principled action. It is here that Jeremiah's philosophy of life manifests itself. If a man's philosophy, partly at least, is, as Hocking says, simply the sum of his beliefs by which he manages his life, Jeremiah has a philosophy of life, for, as we shall see, his life was dominated and motivated by great, controlling principles. Furthermore, it will be seen that his beliefs conform in general to Dewey's statements of the three characteristics of Philosophy, which we stated above to be: totality, generality, and application. Jeremiah had a philosophy of life, then, to the extent that he had arrived at universal principles of action.

Let us caution ourselves here, however, against thinking that if Jeremiah had a philosophy, then, a priori, he

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1. M.W. Calkins, Ante.

must have been a philosopher. Here is a paradox: he had a philosophy, but he was not a philosopher. Let us return to Brightman. We quoted him above as saying that every human being has a philosophy; but he goes on to say:

"It would be over-flattering to say that every one is more or less of a philosopher; for there is a great gulf fixed between the holding of philosophical opinions and the genuine philosophical spirit which holds no opinion that it has not earned a right to hold by intellectual work."<sup>1</sup>

The philosopher, thus, is forced, whether he will or no, to the method of Descartes, to doubt everything which he cannot absolutely prove, and to proceed with utmost caution from such fundamental postulates as may remain. As Paulsen says, "A true philosopher attacks things".<sup>2</sup> He is a ruthless seeker after truth. He attempts to build an intellectual ladder from his standing ground up to the heart of the universe. It is on this point that the philosopher and the prophet part company. The philosopher acts primarily; the prophet is acted upon. The philosopher criticizes what he finds; the prophet often introduces "de novo". Royce puts it thus: "He speculates, but does not prophesy; he criticizes, but does not create".<sup>3</sup> The philosopher's sanction is the sanction of his own powers of ratiocination; the prophet's is the sanction of a Higher Intelligence. Ormond properly interprets the prophetic consciousness when he

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1. E.S. Brightman, op. cit., p. 6.
2. Quoted by Calkins, op. cit., p. 6.
3. Josiah Royce, op. cit., p. 12.

says:

"His dominating consciousness is that of an agent who receives his message from a higher source, and his certitude as to the truth and authority of his message will spring directly out of his consciousness of being the medium and agent of a higher being."<sup>1</sup>

It is quite clear that Brightman fails to make a place for the prophet. Note what he says:

"The philosopher, of course, aims at true conclusions, as the mountain-climber aims to reach the mountain top. Like the mountain-climber, also, the philosopher searches for the way to the top--a way that leads from the valleys and lowlands of every-day experience to a view of the whole landscape. He who holds his opinions without knowing or caring why, is like one who has been transported to the mountain-top in an aeroplane, and left there alone. He is surrounded by clouds; he does not know whether he is awake or dreaming; he knows neither where he is nor the way to anywhere else. The worst service that can be done to the mountain-top is for such a befuddled visitant to extol its beauties. Likewise, angels weep when they hear divine truth proclaimed by one who has never thought his way up to the heights where truth dwells."<sup>2</sup>

"The philosopher searches for the way to the top"--quite true--but sadly enough, fails to find it. If any one should have found the way to the mountain-top it was Plato. He searched long and diligently, but he failed. He puts on the lips of Socrates the words, "We will wait for one, either God or a God-inspired man, to teach us our religious duties and to take away the darkness from our eyes".<sup>3</sup> It is the philosopher, rather, who is the befuddled visitant. It is the God-inspired man who takes away the darkness from our

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1. A.T. Ormond, The Philosophy of Religion, p. 92.
2. E.S. Brightman, op. cit., p. 7.
3. Quoted by W.H. Fitchett, The Unrealized Logic of Religion, p. 35.

eyes. It is the prophet who is transported to the mountain-top, the clouds are blown away, and from its shivering crags he views the wide expanse below. The angels are far more likely to weep over the befuddled attempts of the philosopher, toiling at the bottom of the mount, than for him who stands on the crags at the peak. Here is the difference between Jeremiah and Heraclitus, between Christianity and the Oriental religions: the difference between perspiration and inspiration or revelation. We cannot here discuss the how of the matter of revelation. But we do know that Jeremiah had none of what Brightman calls "the philosophical spirit". His message began with "Thus saith Jehovah" and it ended with "Thus saith Jehovah". The philosopher would repudiate his company, and he would do no less to the philosopher.

It is clear, then, that a person does not need to be a philosopher to have a philosophy of life. Accordingly, we take "philosophy of life" to mean the sum of an individual's beliefs regarding the scheme of the universe, to which beliefs the individual adheres, and according to which he regulates his life. In the light of this we are ready to state the problem of this thesis as an attempt to determine what Jeremiah's "Weltanschauung" is, what his beliefs concerning the universe are, and how these beliefs affect human conduct. What does Jeremiah make of human existence? What is his answer to the problem of life? These are the questions

that we shall attempt to answer in this thesis.

## II. The Significance of the Problem.

Jeremiah was undoubtedly the greatest of the Old Testament prophets.<sup>1</sup> He gathered up in himself all that had gone before, and anticipated much that was to follow. With him there was consummated 300 years of prophetic effort under the kingdom plan. After him there came no great prophet until the time of John the Baptist. Jeremiah lived during the most critical period of Jewish history.<sup>2</sup> A great civilization was headed for destruction. For forty years Jeremiah waved a red flag, only himself to be borne down by the on-rushing multitudes. No other prophet was truer to his message than he; no other prophet endured such contradiction of sinners as he; no other prophet poured out more of his life-blood for his people than he did. No other prophet lived closer to the heart of God, and no other prophet saw as deeply into the mystery of God's plan for the race as he saw. The character of the man and the character of the times make Jeremiah the outstanding prophet of the Old Test-

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1. Cf. A.S. Peake, Century Bible on Jeremiah, Vol. I, Intro. p. 29 and R.W. Rogers, Great Characters of the Old Testament, p. 124.
2. J.D. Maynard says, "The Old Testament is the Epic of the Fall of Jerusalem. Round that disaster in war which destroyed the national state of Israel gathers all the legend, history, prophecy and song that makes up the Old Testament". From the Venturer Magazine, Nov. 1915, p. 49, as quoted from D. Walton's thesis, Jeremiah's Significance as a Teacher, p. 8.

ament. If this be true, to understand Jeremiah will be a big step toward understanding the Old Testament, and prophetism in particular.

Not only this, but to understand Jeremiah is to understand the basis upon which Christianity rests. Jeremiah marks the turning point from national to personal religion. Jesus built his great gospel of personal religion upon the foundations laid by Jeremiah.<sup>1</sup>

Again, to understand Jeremiah's message to his times is to have a message for our times.<sup>2</sup> Our civilization, too, is cracking under foot. There is idolatry on every hand. We have forsaken our first Love and are running in the white heat of our desire after strange lovers. We have ceased to drink at the Fountain of Living Waters, and, instead, we are drinking the insipid and contaminated waters of our broken cisterns of intellectualism, pleasure, and materialism. False prophets are crying, "Peace, peace", when there is no peace. Corruption and social injustices are rampant. We have lost the track of the feet of the Almighty; we know not which way He is going. Jeremiah speaks out of the centuries. If we will listen, we shall have a message for this age. If Jeremiah can help us to find our way, to recover

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1. In this thesis it will be impossible to enter into a comparison of Jeremiah and Jesus. See, however, Luke 22:20 and Hebrews 8:8-13.
2. C.E. Jefferson says, "It is not true that the ancient world has passed away. Its external features have changed but the heart of that world lives in the present." For many pointed parallels see his Cardinal Ideas of Jeremiah, p.5.

our balance, that is quite sufficient justification for reconsidering him.

### III. Method of Treatment and Sources of Data.

The two factors of a philosophy of life we found to be belief and conduct. Accordingly, we shall study first belief, and then the corresponding action on the basis of belief. We shall find out what Jeremiah's conception of the scheme of the universe was, and then consider what he conceived man's place in this scheme of things to be. The general procedure by chapters will be as follows:

1. A survey of the background of the problem. In examining the character of the times into which the prophet came, we shall look into the international situation and into the internal condition of Judah. Then we shall study the prophet's personal background and environment, followed by a brief sketch of his prophetic experiences.

2. A consideration of Jeremiah's philosophy of God, under two phases: his philosophy of the Divine nature; and his philosophy of the Divine relationships.

3. A discussion of his philosophy of man's relation to God, under three aspects: his philosophy of nationalism; his philosophy of individualism; and his philosophy of universalism.

4. A consideration of his philosophy of the relation of man to man, under two aspects: his political philosophy;

and his social philosophy.

5. A summary of the phases of the subject previously considered and a concluding statement of his philosophy of life.

It will be our aim in this study to adhere as closely as possible to source materials as found in the book of Jeremiah. We are especially fortunate in having several splendid translations of the book, such as Driver, McFadyen, Smith, and Moffatt. There is an abundance of secondary material. Reference will be made to it when it will contribute to the progress of the discussion.

The book of Jeremiah fairly bristles with critical problems. It will not be necessary in this thesis to discuss these problems, however, as there are sufficient undisputed passages to support any of the views of the prophet which we shall set forth.

Let us now turn to consider the background of our problem.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **THE BACKGROUND OF THE PROBLEM**

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- I. The International Situation.
  - A. Egypt.
  - B. Assyria.
  - C. Babylonia.
  - D. Palestine's International Significance.
- II. Judah's Internal Condition.
  - A. The Political and Religious Situation.
  - B. The Social and Economic Situation.
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  - A. His Personal Background and Call.
  - B. The Conflict with His Family and Townfolk.
  - C. The Conflict with the Political Order.
  - D. The Conflict with the Religious Order.
  - E. The Conflict with the People.
- IV. Summary.

## CHAPTER TWO

### THE BACKGROUND OF THE PROBLEM

A philosophy of life is the approved residue from the raw materials of life when the fires of circumstance have done their worst. It is our purpose in this introductory chapter to kindle these fires about the raw material of the prophet's life in order that in the later chapters we may examine the approved residue. The tinder is the historical situation, which now must be drawn together.

#### I. The International Situation.

##### A. Egypt.

Strangely enough, the Children of Israel did not escape from the smoke of the Egyptian furnace when they stumbled their way out toward the clear, bracing air of the deserts. The winds of greed at intervals of varying lengths for eight hundred years before Jeremiah carried the stifling smoke over the land of Palestine and enveloped the little kingdom. The death of Rameses III had cleared the atmosphere for a time, sufficiently for the Jews to take a long breath of freedom and to establish the Kingdom of David, while the fruits of Rameses' efforts were eaten up by the intrigues of his weak successors. After the death of Solomon, the smoke once more began rolling northward. Shishak cast his eyes upon the wealthy little kingdom and prepared to raid

it. In the fifth year of Rehoboam he entered the house of Jehovah and carried off the treasures that Solomon had laid up,<sup>1</sup> and the king of Judah became his vassal.

Egypt's claim over Western Asia soon was to be disputed. With the continued rise of Assyria, Egypt was threatened. For nearly two hundred years she lived in terror lest the Assyrian wolf should suddenly descend on her and devour her. The Assyrian's advance southward was checked temporarily by the defeat of Sennacherib<sup>2</sup> in 701 B.C., but they came back under Esarhaddon, and in 674 pushed their incursion to the Nile. Egypt now passed into the hands of the Assyrians.

Egypt wasn't to be kept down, however. When Assyria was occupied with a revolt around and in Babylonia in the year 655, the Egyptians rallied around Psammetikhos and set up a home rule. Pharaoh-Necho, his son, once more firmly established the independence of Egypt. He at once set about to rebuild the Egyptian empire. Acting on his knowledge of the condition of tottering Assyria, he marched northward through Palestine to share in the booty at the fall of Ninevah, or, perhaps, to secure for himself the territory of Syria.<sup>3</sup>

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1. I Kings 14:25-28.

2. II Kings 19:35-37.

3. R.W. Rogers, A History of Babylonia and Assyria, Vol. II, pp. 309-310, thinks he went up to share in the booty at the fall of Ninevah. A.C. Welch, Jeremiah, pp. 20-21, thinks he went up to assist Assyria against Ninevah; and J.P. Lange, Commentary on Jeremiah, Intro. p.1, says, "He thought this a good time to conquer Syria." This is the most likely of the three, according to II Kings 23:29.

It was on this trip that Josiah was slain and Judah once more brought under the control of Egypt.<sup>1</sup>

With the rise of the Babylonian empire, Egypt's sun had set. Nebuchadnezzar administered a crushing defeat at Carchemish (605 B.C.), and Egypt lost her position in the struggle for the leadership of Western Asia. She attempted a feeble come-back when Pharaoh-Hophra ascended the throne in 587, but both she and her temporary Judaeen ally<sup>2</sup> were repulsed, Jerusalem was destroyed in the time of Zedekiah,<sup>3</sup> and Egypt once more was humiliated. The Babylonians were destined to be the masters of Western Asia.

#### B. Assyria.

In the providence of God, simultaneously with the temporary decline of the Egyptian empire following the death of Rameses III, the great empire of Assyria, which had been built up under Tiglath-Pileser I (1120-1100 B.C.), also declined under his successors. It remained in decay until the time of Tiglath-Pileser III (745-727 B.C.)<sup>4</sup> With both Egypt and Assyria reduced to a comparatively inactive state, opportunity was offered for the development of the great

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1. II Kings 23:31-35.

2. Jeremiah 37:5.

3. Jeremiah 39 and 52.

4. R.W. Rogers, op. cit., p. 108, calls him Tiglath-Pileser III, while A.H. Sayce in the Internat'l Standard Bible Encyclopaedia, Vol. I, p. 294, calls him Tiglath-Pileser IV.

Kingdom of David and for its establishment as a world power. Assyria, however, did not stay down long. With the accession of Tiglath-Pileser III Assyria once more assumed the dominant place. His policy was two-fold: "to weld Western Asia into a single empire, held together by military force and fiscal law, and to secure the trade of the world for the merchants of Ninevah".<sup>1</sup> From this time on, Assyria became a serious menace to the independence of the Kingdom of David. Her problem now was to keep her identity, repulsing by some method or other the predatory encroachments of the larger powers. By 735 B.C. Ahaz, the king of Judah, found it expedient to put himself under the protection of Assyria.<sup>2</sup> By the time of Hoshea, king of Israel, the northern kingdom was fast in the clutches of Assyria. When Hoshea rebelled against paying tribute to Shalmaneser IV, the Assyrian king invaded Samaria.<sup>3</sup> Under Sargon, the capture was effected, and 27,290 inhabitants were carried off.<sup>4</sup> Assyria next cast its eyes on Judah. Had it not been for the miraculous defeat of the invading army, the little kingdom would have been taken.<sup>5</sup>

Under the great Esarhaddon, who came to the throne in 681, the empire strode on toward the acme of its power. He restored the Assyrian power in Babylon, bought over the allegiance of the Scythians in the north west, subjugated Tyre

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1. A.H. Sayce, *ibid.*

2. II Kings 16.

3. II Kings 17.

4. From Sargon's tablet, cf. A.C. Welch, *op. cit.*, p.7.

5. II Kings 19:35-37.

and Sidon, and carried his arms into Egypt.<sup>1</sup> His great genius for conquest was ably supported by Ashurbanipal (c. 660), who captured Egypt, destroyed the Elamites, installed himself as king of Babylon, and drove back the Simmerians in Syria. But "the strength of the old lion suddenly began to give way. The stages of decline are somewhat obscure. Assyria did not chronicle her weakness as she chronicled her strength. But, for the next thirty years, that decline is the dominant fact in the history of Western Asia."<sup>2</sup> Revolts sprang up everywhere. Hatred of the brutal Ashurbanipal grew to a passion because of his bloody policies.<sup>3</sup> Assyria was exhausted both in her finances and in her fighting population. "The shadows were growing long and deep, and the night of Assyria was approaching."<sup>4</sup>

The direct agent of Assyria's downfall was the Scythians, whom Nabopolassar sent against Ninevah. They were warlike barbarians from the north. Nabopolassar craftily stood by and let the Scythians do the work. The scheme was a success.<sup>5</sup> In 606 the city was plundered, never again to be occupied.<sup>6</sup> The "shepherd-dog of civilization...died at his post",<sup>7</sup> and the mighty Nebuchadnezzar came on.

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1. W.F. Lofthouse, Jeremiah, p. 25.

2. Ibid.

3. Cf. Nahum 3:19.

4. R.W. Rogers, op. cit., Vol. II, p. 282.

5. Ibid, pp. 287-295.

6. Cf. Zephaniah 2:13-15.

7. A.T. Olmstead, A History of Assyria, p. 655, explains the metaphor thus: "If after all, we tend to think first of his administrative activities, we will not have in mind the wolf but perhaps the shepherd-dog, savage toward his enemies, never permitting his sheep to stray."

C. Babylonia.

Upon Ashurbanipal's death, Nabopolassar, the viceroy of Babylonia, revolted from Assyria. With the help of the Scythians, whom he later used for the destruction of Ninevah, he succeeded in establishing the independence of Babylonia. With the crushing of Ninevah completed (606), he had only one power of major importance with which to deal-- Egypt. Pharaoh-Necho, as we previously noted, by this time had been northward through Palestine, had secured Assyria's western provinces, and had returned to Egypt with Jehoahaz, whom he had deposed from the throne of Judah in favor of his brother, Jehoiakim.<sup>1</sup> But Pharaoh-Necho was not satisfied. He wanted to extend his borders beyond the Euphrates into northern Mesopotamia, which Nabopolassar now held. Nabopolassar, aware of the danger to his empire, sent his son, Nebuchadnezzar, with a large army to meet Necho. He, himself, was in failing health and was unable to leave the capital. Nebuchadnezzar completely crushed Necho. The Egyptians fell back in confusion and did not make a stand until they had reached Egypt. Nebuchadnezzar pursued the fleeing army. Jerusalem and the surrounding small nations were paralyzed with fear lest Nebuchadnezzar should attack them on his way south,<sup>2</sup> but he passed round by the seacoast and on to Egypt. He was about to enter Egypt when he obtained news

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1. II Kings 23:34.
2. Jeremiah 35.

of his father's death. He immediately gave up his proposed plans and hastened to Babylon to make sure his claim to the throne.

Sometime after the defeat of the Egyptians at Carchemish, Judah passed under the control of Babylon. Jehoiakim paid tribute to Nebuchadnezzar for three years. Then, under the influence of a radical nationalistic party, he refused to pay the tribute, and the issue was fairly joined. Nebuchadnezzar at first sent roving guerilla bands of Syrians, Chaldeans, Moabites, and Ammonites to ravage the country.<sup>1</sup> Finally, he was forced to march against Jerusalem in person. He carried off the newly enthroned Jehoiachin (Jehoiakim meanwhile had died<sup>2</sup>) and 10,000 captives, installing Mattaniah under an oath of vassalage in his place. Mattaniah was given the name, Zedekiah.<sup>3</sup> Zedekiah was true to his oath for a time, but under the influence of court politicians, and probably of secret agents from Egypt,<sup>4</sup> who under Pharaoh-Hophra were trying to stage a come-back, he revolted from Babylon. Nebuchadnezzar's army advanced on Jerusalem and laid siege to the city. When the Egyptian army put in its appearance, the siege was raised long enough to drive the Egyptians back, then re-laid and the proud city captured and demolished. Those who escaped death at the capit-

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1. II Kings 24.

2. II Kings 24:16.

3. II Kings 24:17.

4. See R.W. Rogers, op. cit., pp. 320-323

ulation of the city were taken to Babylon. Nebuchadnezzar's dominant position now was unchallenged.

#### D. Palestine's International Significance.

The geographic position of the little territory occupied by the Jews gave it international significance. Palestine has been called an "international corridor".<sup>1</sup> Through her borders lay the principle trade routes between the great countries of Western Asia. Through her land passed caravans laden with valuable products from India and Egypt, bound for the great shipping port of Tyre. Up and down her maritime plain moved the armies of the great powers of Western Asia. Palestine was the corridor between Egypt and the great northern powers. It made a difference to the kings of these countries who held this corridor.

The desire of the larger powers to hold Palestine made it exceedingly difficult for the little Kingdom of Judah to maintain its independence. Our rapid survey of the course of the great nations reveals the extent to which Judah had become a shuttlecock among the nations. In desperation her leaders tried to play off the strong nations against each other.

It was this struggling Judah into which Jeremiah came. He heard the clash of arms about him; he saw the swing of

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1. D. Walton, Jeremiah' Significance as a Teacher, p. 18

armies along the trails. Egypt was going, Assyria was going, Babylon was coming. What was to be Judah's place? Was it anything to him who had been commissioned a prophet unto the nations?<sup>1</sup> Had he anything to say?

## II. Judah's Internal Condition.

The age of Jeremiah to be understood must be interpreted in the light of the sweep of Israel's history. Its roots were firmly grounded in the past, and to understand this age, it will be necessary to trace out these roots as well as to examine the age itself.

### A. The Political and Religious Situation.

Ahaz made a fatal move for the little kingdom of Judah when, in return for protection from Rezin and Pekah, he pledged fidelity to the Assyrian king, Tiglath-Pileser.<sup>2</sup> The Assyrian king jumped at the damaging confession, "I am thy servant and son",<sup>3</sup> and saw to it that Judah remained a servant. But alliance with Assyria meant more than the payment of a few shekels each year; it meant that in return for her shekels Judah had to take on Assyria's religion, for it was Assyria's policy to insist that her vassal provinces worship the gods of the empire. Proof for this is found in the record of Ahaz' action subsequent to the making of the

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1. Jeremiah 1:5.

2. II Kings 16:7.

3. Ibid.

4. II Kings 23:24-25

alliance. We are told that he introduced an altar of Assyrian design into Jerusalem.<sup>1</sup> With it came every sort of heathen practice that inhered to Assyrian idol worship.<sup>2</sup> This was the cost of foreign alliance.

Upon the death of Ahaz, Hezekiah came to the throne. The Chronicler tells us that "he did that which was right in the eyes of Jehovah, according to all that his father David had done".<sup>3</sup> To do right meant a break with Assyria. This he courageously effected, and with it a thorough-going religious reformation. He destroyed idolatry, cleansed the temple, kept the Passover, and trusted in Jehovah to fight his battles.<sup>4</sup> His trust proved to be well placed; his faith was vindicated. Sennacherib's hosts were destroyed, and the city was spared.

With the accession of Manasseh, Judah once more put herself under the protection of Assyria. Manasseh entirely lacked the courage of his father, and to one of his weak character, it was much easier to serve Assyria than to risk opposing her. The price of vassalship was the same as that required of Ahaz, the payment of tribute and the acknowledgment of the religion of the empire. The latter Manasseh did with a bit of delight, for, we are told, "Manasseh seduced them to do that which is evil more than did the nations whom

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1. II Kings 16:10-20.

2. II Kings 16:3; II Chron. 28:22-27.

3. II Chron. 29:4.

4. II Chron 32:8.

Jehovah destroyed before the children of Israel."<sup>1</sup> During his long reign the nature cults revived. There was a hopeless conglomeration of religions. While the ruling class submitted to religious syncretism as a necessary means to national security, it is quite evident that such religious degeneracy did not go unchallenged. During Hezekiah's time there had been a hearty allegiance to Jehovah. Remembrance of Jehovah's miraculous deliverance of Jerusalem had not yet faded from the minds of the older generation; it was indelibly written there. It is entirely improbable that a change in kingship should immediately effect a change in the religious attitudes of the people. That there was a reactionary party is quite certain from the verse in II Kings which says, "Moreover Manasseh shed innocent blood very much, till he had filled Jerusalem from one end to another".<sup>2</sup> Without doubt there was a revolt against the heathen religions. Manasseh shed innocent blood by a suppression of the revolt. He knew that if the religion of the empire was overthrown, it would involve a break with Assyria.<sup>3</sup> It was a tremendous price that Manasseh and his party paid for political security by this method. The havoc his policy wrought in his

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1. II Kings 21:9.

2. II Kings 21:16.

3. A.S. Peake, op. cit., Vol. I, p. 4 (Intro.), says, "Opposition to the king's religious policy was treated as treason and visited with martyrdom". W.F. Lofthouse, op. cit., p. 26 says, "Manasseh ruthlessly stamped out all opposition in blood. Assyria was to have no more ground for suspecting the loyalty of Judah".

country far outweighed any possible gain. Welch says:

"The price was a heavy one, since the effect of the policy was gravely mischievous in the life of Judah. Manasseh was compelled to break with some of the best elements in the nation, the men who had learned through their prophets that Yahweh was nothing if He was not supreme and that the God of Israel demanded an undivided allegiance."<sup>1</sup>

However, we are not to think that Jehovah worship ceased altogether under Manasseh. Jehovah rather was relegated to a position as one of the gods.<sup>2</sup> This system of syncretism was bound to foster religious insincerity. People were worshipping gods in which they had only a half-hearted belief.<sup>3</sup> Those who refused to recognize the Assyrian gods were put to death. A religion that is enforced always leads to insincerity.

We are not sure how Manasseh met his end. The somewhat obscure account in II Chronicles 33:10-20 gives us to believe that Manasseh was carried to Babylon by the Assyrian king for some offense or other, we are not told what. Perhaps he was

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1. A.C. Welch, op. cit., p. 5.
2. Manasseh "built altars for all the host of heaven in the two courts of the house of Jehovah" (II Kings 21:5), but it is unlikely that he abolished the priestly line. If the repentance of Manasseh, recorded in II Chronicles 33 is authentic, it would indicate that the priests were functioning in the temple. Furthermore, Hilkiah, the priest, is spoken of in connection with the early years of Josiah's reign, and there is no indication that there had been any interruption of the priestly services.
3. Cf. the words of the women in Egypt, Jer, 44:15-19. Here they are referring to the prosperity they had under Manasseh, Amon, and the early part of the reign of Josiah. "They perversely attributed the misfortunes which had befallen their country from the battle of Megiddo and death of Josiah onwards to the attack made upon idolatry by that king; and not to the gradual degradation of the people through the medium of that idolatry during the reigns of Manasseh and Amon and the earlier part of that of Josiah", says A.W. Streane, Commentary on Jeremiah, p. 279. Note that they wanted prosperity.

attempting independence measures against Assyria in line with certain movements that appeared in Syria,<sup>1</sup> or he may have been dallying with Egypt. If he did go to Babylon and repented there, it was a weak repentance, for the reforms indicated in II Chronicles 33:14-17 slightly affected the trend of the religious life of the people as we see it under Amon and the first years of Josiah.

The short reign of Amon, terminated by a court intrigue resulting in his murder, was followed by that of Josiah. It is during the reign of Josiah that we see Jeremiah breaking forth on the scene. The movements under Josiah and his successors will be treated in the latter part of this chapter, under the heading, "The Prophet in Conflict".

#### B. The Social and Economic Situation

With the worship of the gods of the Assyrians and the revival of the native Canaanite cults, the bottom fell out of the moral life of the people. Immorality was the prevailing vice of the Assyrians.<sup>2</sup> When the Assyrian gods came into Judah, the Assyrian vices followed. We are told that Manasseh practiced child sacrifice, and that he conjured with familiar spirits and with wizards.<sup>3</sup> The people participated in the abominable orgies connected with Baal worship. This religion rested on the deification of the sexual in-

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1. This is Kittel's conjecture. See A.C. Welch, op. cit., p.13.

2. A.T. Olmstead, op. cit., p. 653.

3. II Chronicles 33:6.

instinct. Union with the deities was supposed to be accomplished by sexual intercourse with sacred persons at the sanctuaries dedicated to this purpose. This was a system of religious prostitution.<sup>1</sup> Adultery was very prevalent. Jeremiah portrays the men of Judah as lustful stallions, neighing after their neighbor's wife.<sup>2</sup> The false prophets were corrupt adulterers and propogaters of evil.<sup>3</sup> Truth was at a premium; deceit was the accepted thing.<sup>4</sup> Greed was responsible for social injustices. The rich "are waxed fat, they shine: yea, they overpass in deeds of wickedness: they plead not the cause, the cause of the fatherless, that they may prosper: and the right of the needy they do not judge".<sup>5</sup> The rich were grinding the poor into the dirt. The tribute moneys were exacted from the poor;<sup>6</sup> the rulers seem to have had no sense of justice. Jehoiakim impressed laborers and paid them nothing.<sup>7</sup> That which was said about Jehoiakim might well be said about those of his predecessors who were corrupt: They cared for nothing but "dishonest gain, and for shedding innocent blood, and for oppression, and for violence, to do it".<sup>8</sup> The land was in a terrible condition.

What did Jeremiah have to say concerning these appal-

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1. John Skinner, Prophecy and Religion, pp. 68-69.
2. Jeremiah 5:7 f. Cf. 3:2; 9:2.
3. Jer. 23:13-15.
4. Jer. 7:28; 9:2-6.
5. Jer. 5:28.
6. Jer. 22:13.
7. II Kings 23:35.
8. Jer. 22:17.

ing conditions? Did he fall in with the fashion of his day, lend his support to foreign alliances, support the patron gods, participate in the religious excesses, join in the fast and loose life of the age, countenance the oppression of the poor, think in the thought forms of the day, take the whole situation for granted as a true child of his age? Were these the raw materials of his life out of which his philosophy came? We shall have occasion to answer these questions.

### III. The Prophet in Conflict.

#### A. His Personal Background and Call.

Jeremiah was born in the little town of Anathoth, located about three miles north of Jerusalem, somewhere near the year 650 B.C. This town since the time of Solomon had been the residence place of the deposed priestly line, the line of Abiathar.<sup>1</sup> At Jerusalem the rival vested house of Zadok was in power. Jeremiah was born into one of the families of this line of exiled priests.<sup>2</sup> There is something prophetic about his birth into this line. One would naturally expect him to be opposed to the rival professional priesthood at Jerusalem. Without doubt he was reared in true prophetic tradition, and it is quite probable that he had a good literary training, since it was a time when such train-

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1. I Kings 2:26.

2. For a discussion of his possible connection with the Hilkiyah of Jerusalem see A.W. Streane, op. cit., Intro., pp. 10-12

ing as there was, was to be obtained from the priests and the prophets.<sup>1</sup>

Besides the constant training which he no doubt received from his parents and from his priestly associations, there was the training of the great out-of-doors. Anathoth was particularly conducive to the cultivation of the prophetic spirit. It was situated on a group of hills, from which the wide expanses of desert waste, stretching off to the north end of the sea, were plainly visible. The scorching winds from the desert must have made a deep impression upon the young exiled priest. Who knows how many times he swung over those barren hills thinking about the condition of his people, and about the God whom his people had forsaken. To the south lay Jerusalem with its massive towers. There was the temple where the Zadok priests were officiating. What a mockery that round of ceremonialism was! When he made occasional trips to Jerusalem his heart was sick. In the temple of the Most High there were altars to strange gods. The priests were corrupt and vicious; there was violence and injustice on every hand, and no one seemed to care. The priests did not know the law of Jehovah, and neither did the people, nor did they care.<sup>2</sup> These trips to Jerusalem must have troubled his sensitive soul, and it is not improbable that he felt as Christ did when He entered the

1. Cf. II Kings 2:3,5; 4:38 and A.C. Welch, op. cit., pp. 33-34.  
2. Jer. 5:1-6.

temple and found it a den of robbers.

Then, too, he heard the distant clash of arms. The great Assurbanipal had passed through the land on his way to Egypt. Runners brought tidings of Egypt's defeat. But soon revolts sprang up. Psammetikhos once more established the independence of Egypt. Now the little nations were rising. The great Assyrian empire was cracking. Surging out of the north came the Scythians; they threatened to overrun Western Asia. Who could stop them? And what did the whetting of swords and the clash of armaments in far off Babylonia mean? Could the new Babylonian empire handle the Scythians, and, if so, would Judah have to turn and render allegiance to this new power? Jeremiah's mind was in a whirl. Did not the great God have something to say about the world situation? And what could he do to head off a world that seemed to have gone mad?

Suddenly a turn came in the affairs of the nation. The young king, Josiah, in the eighth year of his reign began to seek the God of his fathers.<sup>1</sup> In the twelfth year he began sweeping reform measures. He broke down the altars of the Baalim; he destroyed the graven and moulton images; he burnt the bones of the false priests; he cleansed the land of its abominations.<sup>2</sup> It is quite certain that his motive was more than just a religious motive. He perceived

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1. II Chron. 34:3.

2. II Chron. 34.

that the Assyrian empire was cracking. This was his opportunity to strike for the freedom of Judah. Religious people wanted the destruction of the foreign cults; patriots wanted independence; the common man wanted relief from the empire's galling tribute. Josiah now extended his power over northern Palestine. He tore down the shrines of the foreign gods in Samaria<sup>1</sup> and made the temple of Jerusalem the center of worship. Jeremiah looked on with amazement and hearty approval.<sup>2</sup> The time had come for whole-hearted action. What was his part to be?

The message of Jehovah to the troubled mind of the youth came during the thirteenth year of Josiah's reign.<sup>3</sup> With such a psychological preparation as he had, a religious experience of some sort was inevitable. His anguish of mind drove him into the heart of God; there alone could he find release. It is a mistake to think that the great experience which he had at the time of his call was forced upon him. His hesitancy before the Divine Will was not because of any insecure allegiance; he was heart and soul for the cause of Jehovah. His objection was rather on the score of the particular place he was to play in the carrying out of the Divine Will.<sup>4</sup> In the record of the call we

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1. II Kings 23:15-20.

2. It is not likely that his attitude was essentially different from that at the time of the Deuteronomic reforms; cf. Jer. 11:5.

3. Jer. 1:2.

4. Jer. 1:6.

see two souls in intimate converse, "no Seraphim or Cherubim to mar the impressive simplicity of the scene".<sup>1</sup> Jehovah's commission to the youth is:

"I have appointed thee a prophet unto the nations... to whomsoever I shall send thee thou shalt go, and whatsoever I shall command thee thou shalt speak... I have this day set thee over the nations and over the kingdoms to pluck up and to break down and to destroy and to overthrow, to build and to plant."<sup>2</sup>

From such a blasting mission the timid youth shrank. He protested that he had nothing to say, and that if he had, he would be afraid to say it.<sup>3</sup> But he should have something to say--Jehovah straightway put His words in his mouth--<sup>4</sup> and he need feel no fear, for Jehovah promised to be with him to deliver him.<sup>5</sup> Had He not predestined him for this very work? Complete assurance came with the two visions which followed. He was assured of God's faithfulness, and the content of his message was supplied. He was now ready to face the world.

It is important to note that there is nothing in Jehovah's words to supply Jeremiah with any illusions of startling, personal success in his ministry. The promise is not that he shall triumph over his enemies, but that Jehovah will deliver him from them,<sup>6</sup> not that he soon shall

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1. A.S. Peake, op. cit., Vol. I, Intro., p. 5.
2. Jer. 1:5-10.
3. Jer. 1:6,8.
4. Jer. 1:9.
5. Jer. 1:8.
6. Jer. 1:8,19.

have Judah and the nations at his feet, but that he will have in the face of all opposition the all-sufficient help of Jehovah.<sup>1</sup> It is true that he is told that he is to build and to plant, but the mortar for the new civilization is to be mixed out of the dust of his bones, and the new ear to grow out of the death of the seed--"Except a grain of wheat fall into the earth and die it abideth by itself alone, but if it die, it beareth much fruit."<sup>2</sup> As it was with Christ, so it was with Jeremiah.

"They shall fight against thee."<sup>3</sup> This phrase constitutes a prospectus of Jeremiah's whole ministry. His philosophy of life was smelted out of the heat of battle. Like Athanasius he was "against the world". We shall now view the prophet in conflict, drawing out the dominant features of his life, and asking the question, How ought such experiences to affect one's philosophy of life?

#### B. The Conflict with His Family and Townfolk

It was Jeremiah's lot to begin his witnessing in Anathoth, the "Jerusalem" of his experience, before he could take the message to "Judaea, Samaria, and unto the uttermost parts of the earth".<sup>4</sup> Like Christ, he was "not without honor save in his own country, and among his own kin,

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1. Jer. 1:19.
2. John 12:24.
3. Jer. 1:19.
4. Acts 1:8.

and in his own house".<sup>1</sup> It was in his home town that he met his first serious opposition. It is difficult to determine what the trouble was. It hardly could have been that they resented his denunciations of sin, since the residents were largely priests, and it is not likely that they would have been guilty of the more gross immoralities. Peake's conjecture is that when Jeremiah allied himself with Josiah's program of reform and centralization of worship, he was forced to advocate the abolition of the local sanctuaries that were scattered throughout the land. This meant that Anathoth's sanctuary would have to go. The result would be a monopoly of the religious life of the whole nation by the Zadok priests.<sup>2</sup> This was too much for the exiled priests. They were ready to dispose of any one, even of one of their own brethren, for such an outrageous proposal. Jeremiah was forced to flee for his life, lamenting as he went that even his brethren and the house of his father had dealt treacherously with him.<sup>3</sup> Such an initiation into a life work would be quite sufficient to break the spirit of any boy. With a bleeding heart he faced a cruel world alone. If he had been allowed to marry, he might have had a heart companion for his sorrows. But even this was denied him.<sup>4</sup> He was utterly cut off from the tender delights of fellowship with his people.

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1. Mark 6:4.
2. A.S. Peake, op. cit., Vol. I, Intro., p. 13.
3. Jer. 12:6.
4. Jer. 16:2.

### C. The Conflict with the Political Order.

Jeremiah's open advocacy of the policies of Josiah, while it gave him disfavor with the people, undoubtedly gave him favor with the king and his court. Jeremiah had sincere respect for Josiah and his policies, although most certainly he wished that the reforms might have gone more deeply than they did.<sup>1</sup> With the accession of Jehoiakim and the return of the Manasseh party to power, Jeremiah was forced from a semi-quiescent state to one of intense activity. It is quite likely that at first he did not attack the king directly. Had he done so it, he most certainly would have been punished when he was haled before the court of trial after his temple discourse.<sup>2</sup> Later, however, he took a more open stand against the king. During the fourth year of Jehoiakim the battle of Carchemish was fought. Pharaoh-Necho, Jehoiakim's over-lord, was defeated. Judah was in immediate danger of being overrun by the Babylonians. Jeremiah's indictment, containing quite certainly oracles of doom, which was read at the fast in the fifth year of Jehoiakim, caused a sensation.<sup>3</sup> It was read before the king. Distainfully and angrily he tossed it bit by bit

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1. Jer. 8:8 appears to be a later opinion of the Deuteronomic reform movement. Cf. chapter IV. on Jeremiah's Philosophy of Individualism, p. 99.
2. Jeremiah 7 and 26. A.S. Peake, op. cit., Vol. I, Intro. p. 17, thinks that the zealousness with which Jehoiakim sought out Uriah was due to his personal attack on the king.
3. Jer. 36:9 f.

into the fire and ordered Jeremiah and Baruch to be taken. "But Jehovah hid them."<sup>1</sup> That Jeremiah spoke in no uncertain terms about Jehoiakim is confirmed in 22:13-19. In this passage he condemns him for his policy of forced labor, for his covetousness, for shedding innocent blood,<sup>2</sup> for oppression,<sup>3</sup> and for violence. Such a condemnation could not fail to bring forth the wrath of the king.

Jeremiah appears on the scene again, so far as the record goes, after the captivity under Jehoiachin.<sup>4</sup> Zedekiah was placed on the throne by Nebuchadnezzar under oath of vassalage.<sup>5</sup> Only a small part of the population of Jerusalem had been carried off. Those who were left congratulated themselves on their superiority to those who had been taken into exile. The trouble-makers had been taken away; now those who were left were ready for a prosperous regime under Zedekiah. Over against this unwarrantable self-conceit Jeremiah set the divine declaration conveyed to him in a vision that those who had gone into captivity would find favor with God, while those who remained would be rejected and destroyed by the nations. In the early part of Zedekiah's reign it became apparent that he was determined to

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1. Jer. 36:26

2. Probably religious persecution similar to that of Manasseh's. Cf. II Kings 24:3,4.

3. Forced labor, Jer, 22:13, and may also indicate oppressive taxation.

4. Jer. 24.

5. II Kings 24:17.

attempt to secure the independence of Judah. Jeremiah stood out boldly against any independence movements. He was convinced that safety lay only in unqualified submission to Nebuchadnezzar. Concerning the overtures of the surrounding nations for an alliance against Nebuchadnezzar,<sup>1</sup> he had only one thing to say, "Serve Babylon".<sup>2</sup> But the fanatical independence party won out, and Zedekiah joined hands with Pharaoh-Hophra.<sup>3</sup> The rebellion brought the army of the Babylonians to the walls of the city. As the siege dragged on, Zedekiah became desperate. Four times he hunted out Jeremiah to consult him concerning the word of Jehovah.<sup>4</sup> Each time the prophet had the same answer: Your rebellion is hopeless; the only method of escape from destruction is to surrender to the Babylonians. The Egyptians came, were driven back, and the siege was re-laid.<sup>5</sup> In the temporary respite Jeremiah attempted to leave the city. He was accused of going over to the Babylonians, imprisoned, and finally thrown into a dungeon at the order of the princes for the defection which his traitorous words were causing among the soldiers.<sup>6</sup> At length he was hauled out of the dungeon and kept as a prisoner of state in the court of the guard.<sup>7</sup> In

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1. Jer. 27:3.

2. Jer. 27:7,8,12.

3. Ezekiel 17:15; Jer. 27:5.

4. Jer. 21:1-10; 37:3; 37:16,17; 38:14-23.

5. Jer. 37 and 39.

6. Jer. 38:4.

7. Jer. 38:28.

the eleventh year, the fourth month, and the ninth day of Zedekiah's reign the city capitulated. Zedekiah fled, but was overtaken, his sons slain, his eyes put out, and he was taken to Babylon.<sup>1</sup> Jeremiah, according to his own choice, remained in the land with those who were left.<sup>2</sup> His message at last had been vindicated, but vindication had come only at tremendous personal cost.

#### D. The Conflict with the Religious Order.

The religious situation in Judah had come to such a pass when Jeremiah broke into it that the prophets and the priests worked together in making material profit out of religion. To Jeremiah this was a horrible prostitution of religion:

"An appalling and horrible thing is come to pass in the land: the prophets prophesy falsely, and the priests bear rule at their hands; and my people love to have it so; and what will ye do in the end thereof?"<sup>3</sup>

Throughout his career he fought this unholy alliance. It was the "Priests and the prophets" who accused him before the princes and the elders after his temple discourse,<sup>4</sup> and the statement of acquittal by "the princes and all the people" was addressed "unto the priests and to the prophets".<sup>5</sup> The false prophets had the priests under their thumbs. It

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1. Jer. 39:4-7.

2. Jer. 40:4,5.

3. S.R. Driver's translation in The Book of the Prophet Jeremiah, p. 32.

4. Jer. 26:11.

5. Jer. 26:16.

is not improbable that, as Buhl and Duhm say,<sup>1</sup> the priests got money into their pockets through the suave words of these false messengers to a duped public. At any rate, it is safe to conclude that since "giving Torah or direction was one of the main functions of the priests",<sup>2</sup> the priests taught, guided, governed on their side as the prophets' agents,<sup>3</sup> instead of adhering strictly to the demands of the law. The power of the false prophets over the priests is seen in the letter which Shemiah, a false prophet of Babylon, sent to Zephaniah, the priest, ordering him to put Jeremiah in the stocks on the charge that Jeremiah had prophesied falsely to the exiles.<sup>4</sup> But Jeremiah was no more successful in overthrowing this entrenched evil than he was in overthrowing any other. All he could do was to cry out against it.<sup>5</sup>

Quite apart from the priests, Jeremiah struggled continuously with the false prophets. They were "false" for three reasons: first, they were morally blind; secondly, they were intellectually blind; and thirdly, they were insincere. They were morally blind because they lived too far from the heart of God to divine His attitude toward sin. They failed

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1. See A.S. Peake, op. cit., Vol. I, Intro., p. 136.
2. Ibid.
3. C.V. Orelli, The Prophecies of Jeremiah, p. 61.
4. Jer. 29:24-28.
5. "When Amos and Isaiah attacked the priesthood of Judah, they still felt that there remained the Prophets on whom the nation could fall back. But when Jeremiah mourned for Israel, he felt that there was no reserve in Judah. And when the priesthood closed in hostile array around him, he felt that, as far as Jerusalem was concerned, the prophets were no supporters." (Quoted by A.W. Streane, op. cit., p. 51, from Stanley's Jewish Church, II, 441).

to see that Jehovah's protection is granted only on the basis of righteous living, that unrighteousness would nullify His promises and bring punishment. They were victims of the delusion that whatever the state of the people, Jehovah would not forsake Zion.<sup>1</sup> Contrary to Jeremiah's pronouncements of doom, they lulled the people to sleep with a false song of security: "Peace, peace, when there is no peace".<sup>2</sup> They winked at evil: "Unto every one that walketh in the stubbornness of his own heart they say, No evil shall come upon you".<sup>3</sup> Then, they were intellectually blind because they allowed undisciplined patriotism to close their eyes to the facts. Hananiah, riding on the crest of popular enthusiasm over the proposed alliance against Babylon,<sup>4</sup> predicted in Jehovah's name the defeat of Nebuchadnezzar and the return of the exiles,<sup>5</sup> when any one with half an eye could perceive in the light of Carchemish that thus to predict was folly. Finally, many of the false prophets were insincere. They were remarkably adept at feeling the popular pulse and adapting their prophecies to suit the popular beat. They posed as prophets of Jehovah, but they were only self-commissioned.<sup>6</sup> They used their lying dreams to forward themselves and to elevate their own interests, rather than Je-

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1. Jer. 26:8-11.
2. Jer. 6:14.
3. Jer. 23:17.
4. Jer. 27:3.
5. Jer. 28:2-4.
6. Jer. 23:21.

hovah's.<sup>1</sup> They led double lives, posing as messengers of Jehovah, and all the while living immorally and promoting evil.<sup>2</sup> It is little wonder that Jeremiah withstood them to the face. He was not deluded with any foolish hope of Jehovah's protections of Zion apart from righteousness on the part of the people. He took particular delight in denouncing the wicked practices of these false pretenders, and in portraying in vivid language their destruction.<sup>3</sup> It was a grapple for life; it was Jeremiah or the false prophets. In the long run Jeremiah's prophecies were vindicated, although his daring messages brought him untold personal indignities and suffering. He himself was forced to suffer the catastrophe of the fall of Jerusalem with those who were responsible for it.

#### E. The Conflict with the People.

Desire for the approval of one's fellows is one of the strongest of all desires. When Jeremiah as a boy faced his life's mission, he, of course, had no idea what it would be like to have against him the whole land, the kings of Judah, the princes thereof, and the people of the land.<sup>4</sup> The first taste of his bitter experience came, as we have said, when he was rejected by his home folk. From then on, it was borne

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1. Jer. 23:32.
2. Jer. 23:14.
3. Jer. 23:12;15,39.
4. Jer. 1:18.

continually in upon his consciousness that he was born to be "a man of strife and a man of contention to the whole earth".<sup>1</sup> His Anathoth experience was followed by his Jerusalem experience. When he looked around him in the city, he saw that between himself and the people there was a great gulf fixed, a moral gulf. He ran to and fro in the streets of Jerusalem looking for an honest man, quite like Diogenes of Athens, who, with a lantern in his hand, started out at noon to search for one who appeared honest.<sup>2</sup> Failing to find one among the common people, Jeremiah got him "unto the great men",<sup>3</sup> thinking that surely they would know the law of their God. But they all "with one accord", he says, "have broken the yoke, and burst the bonds".<sup>4</sup> Wherefore, he proceeded to pronounce woes and destruction.<sup>5</sup> One can imagine that the people passed by on the public square, wagged their heads, poked out a finger of ridicule, and called him a wind-bag.<sup>6</sup>

It is quite certain that Jeremiah did not confine his ministry to Jerusalem. When Hilkiyah found the book of the law,<sup>7</sup> and the Deuteronomic reforms first got under way, Jeremiah received a commission to "proclaim all these words in the cities of Judah".<sup>8</sup> It is quite possible, then, that

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1. Jer. 15:10.

2. Cited by C.E. Jefferson, Cardinal Ideas of Jeremiah, p. 16.

3. Jer. 5:5.

4. Ibid.

5. Jer. 5:14-18.

6. Jer. 5:13.

7. II Kings 22; Jer. 11:1-5.

8. Jer. 11:6.

he made a tour of the cities and preached to the people. Everywhere he went he exhorted the people to repent from their wickedness. He warned them to beware of the evil that "looketh forth from the north".<sup>1</sup> The Scythians came as he said they would. They entered Palestine and marched southward down the coast. Without doubt the whole country was terrified at the appearance of these marauders. But they passed through, molesting nothing but the city of Ashdod, finally to be repulsed by the Egyptian king. They retreated along the coast, leaving the cities unmolested.<sup>2</sup> What a laugh Jeremiah must have received! His credit most certainly was impaired seriously with the people.

During the reigns of Jehoiakim and Zedekiah the antipathy of the people for Jeremiah was intense. In one place he cries out, "I have not lent upon interest, neither have men lent to me upon interest; yet all of them curse me".<sup>3</sup> His attitude toward the people, while it was not of the invective kind, was equally intense. His love was a love turned sour, a love that was wounded by disgust.

"Oh that I had in the wilderness a traveller's lodging place; that I might leave my people and go from them! for they be all adulterers, and an assembly of faithless men."<sup>4</sup>

One can imagine the fiendish glee of the people when he who

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1. Jer. 6:1.

2. Cf. the detached note on the Medes and Scythians by G.A. Smith, Jeremiah, p. 381.

3. Jer. 15:10, S.R. Driver's translation, op. cit., p. 89.

4. Jer. 9:2, Ibid, p. 53.

had smashed the jar in such dramatic fashion in the valley of Hinnom<sup>1</sup> was himself smitten by the lash and put in the stocks.<sup>2</sup> There was sufficient provocation for his lament, "I am become a laughing stock all the day, every one mocketh me".<sup>3</sup>

The height of Jeremiah's popular disfavor, we can be quite sure, came during the time of the siege of Jerusalem. He was considered a traitor to the public interests because he had advocated openly surrender to Nebuchadnezzar.<sup>4</sup> There may have been some whom he influenced, but the feeling as a whole must have been that he was a public enemy. He was punished for his alleged traitorous views by the dungeon and prison experiences.<sup>5</sup>

Even the captivity failed to bring Jeremiah and the people together. They overrode his counsel concerning the Egyptian sojourn,<sup>6</sup> forced him to go with them into Egypt,<sup>7</sup> and, "if we may judge of the unknown by the known, the tradition that the prophet was stoned to death by the Jewish refugees in Egypt is only too probable an account of its [his life's] final scene".<sup>8</sup> It would appear from all human points of view that his life had been a miserable failure.

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1. Jer. 19.

2. Jer. 20.

3. Jer. 20:7.

4. Jer. 38:2,3.

5. Jer. 37 and 38.

6. Jer. 43:2.

7. Jer. 43:6.

8. C.J. Ball, Commentary on Jeremiah (Expositor's Bible), p. 3, Insertion *Mine*.

#### IV. Summary.

We have now re-kindled the fires of circumstance through reviewing the age of the prophet. We have heard the clash of arms among the great powers--Egypt, Assyria, and Babylonia. We have seen the grand old empires of Egypt and Assyria struggle for dominance of Western Asia, only to go down before the young and powerful Babylonian empire. We have watched the little kingdom of Judah, tossed about by the larger nations, vainly struggle to maintain her national existence by alliance with first one and then another of the dominant powers, in the end to be caught at her sly game and crushed.

We have examined her internal condition, the political and religious situation--the sacrifice of religious purity that Ahaz and Manasseh made for political security, the religious insincerity that they fostered, and the subsequent corruption of life in the social realm, together with economic injustices and oppression. We have heard the call of Jehovah to the soul of the youth of Anathoth; we have watched him pour out his life for his wicked and stubborn generation, receiving in return for his ill-placed love the scorn of family and town folk, the contradiction of the religious leaders, castigation at the hands of the political authorities, and the enmity of his countrymen. He has been "a man of contention to the whole earth". He has been kicked from pillar to post and lashed at both, mocked, thrown into a dungeon, car-

ried captive by people of his own blood, and what is worst of all, separated from the delights of home and marriage with its heart companionship, and, finally, if we can believe tradition, stoned to death by those in whose behalf he had suffered a life-long martyrdom.<sup>1</sup> What good word concerning the meaning of human experience could one whom life had treated so shabbily have to say? It would not have been a thing to wonder at if years before the fall of Jerusalem he had cursed God, forsaken a mission that had brought him nothing but anguish of soul and body, and turned to a comfortable indulgence in the benefits of life; or at the end of his prolonged martyrdom he might have concluded as Goncourt did, that "life is a nightmare between two nothings",<sup>2</sup> or with Madame Du Deffand, that "there is no role that could be played upon the world's stage to which I should not prefer annihilation".<sup>3</sup> Such a philosophy of life as expressed by these pitiful, disillusioned individuals might naturally be expected of one who was "condemned to watch the lingering agony of an exhausted country, to tend it during the alternate fits of stupefaction and raving which precede its dissolution, and to see the symptoms of vitality disappear one by one, till nothing is left but coldness, darkness, and corruption",<sup>4</sup> and who, himself, was

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1. C.J. Ball, Ibid, p. 3, says, "His life may, in fact, be called a prolonged martyrdom."
2. Quoted by G. Bradford, D.L. Moody, p. 93.
3. Ibid.
4. Macaulay, quoted by G.C. Morgan, Studies in the Prophecy of Jeremiah, p. 1.

destined to go down with the country whose dissolution he frantically sought to avert. We might well expect his philosophy of life to be a philosophy of despair.

But there is another side. May it not be, as George MacDonald has said, that "Some men's failures are eternities beyond other men's successes"?<sup>1</sup> The following pages will tell.

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1. H.W. Robinson, The Cross of Jeremiah, p. 1.

**CHAPTER THREE**

**JEREMIAH'S PHILOSOPHY OF GOD**

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **JEREMIAH'S PHILOSOPHY OF GOD**

- I. His Philosophy of the Divine Nature.**
  - A. Names Applied to God.**
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- II. His Philosophy of the Divine Relationships.**
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  - B. Jehovah's Relation to Other Gods.**
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## CHAPTER THREE

### JEREMIAH'S PHILOSOPHY OF GOD

#### I. His Philosophy of the Divine Nature.

God to Jeremiah was far from a philosophic concept. He was not a God whom he created out of speculation; He was rather a "Ganz Andere", who spoke compellingly in his soul, and to whom he felt he was obliged to respond. Jeremiah's relations with God were of the most intimate nature. He had experienced Him personally. What need did he have for philosophical proof of His existence? He was one of those whose "heart hath reason that reason never knew", as Paschal has put it. His many troubles drove him again and again back upon God. He poured out his soul before Him; he sobbed out his grief and sorrow; he almost irreverently demanded that He, who had thrust him out into a mission that was fast growing repugnant to him, help him. He laid his case before Him as would a friend before a friend, expostulating, almost resenting the treatment accorded him. But when his expostulations were over, he crept into the very heart of Jehovah and found rest, and even a song.<sup>1</sup> We can well afford to consider the statements about God of one who has experienced Him in this intimate fashion. We shall not only come to know Jeremiah's God, but we shall also come to

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1. 20:13. Cf. 12:1-6; 15:10-21. Chapter and verse references hereafter will be to the Book of Jeremiah unless otherwise indicated.

know Jeremiah. It is impossible to study one apart from the other.

#### A. Names Applied to God.

Webster says that a name is "a descriptive appellation". In other words, a name is that designation by means of which the character or nature of an object is called to mind. In Jeremiah's personal relations with God and in the delivery of his message, he uses numerous names for God. These names are windows into the mind of Jeremiah through which we can examine his concepts of God. By an examination of the materials, we find that Jehovah's name in some form is on his lips continually. In prayer, in narration, in authentication of his message, Jeremiah keeps the One Great Fact of the universe before our attention.<sup>1</sup> God is designated by some name 749 times in the book. He is the all-pervading personality; Jeremiah is His mouthpiece, His emissary to the nations. God is referred to more than fourteen times per chapter on the average. This fact alone is convincing that somehow his philosophy of life is related inextricably to this great Personality.

An examination of the distribution of the names reveals a striking fact. When the narrative portions of the book are omitted, it is seen that the number of names stead-

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1. Cf. 32:17; 34:1; 34:2; etc.

ily increases in the successive periods of Jeremiah's prophetic ministry. In his message during Josiah's reign, the average number of designations of God per chapter is fourteen plus, in Jehoiakim's reign sixteen plus, in Jehoiachin's fifteen,<sup>1</sup> in Zedekiah's eighteen plus, and in the post-exilic period twenty-one plus. The reason for the increase is quite clear. The tragedy was fast whirling toward the climax and the speedy denouement. The situation was becoming increasingly critical. Somehow the prophet had to bring the people to their senses. He thundered his message in their ears from year to year, insisting more and more that he was no calamity howler; that instead his message had been given to him by God; that if they would listen to him, they would hear God speak. Hence, the "Thus saith Jehovahs" and the more pretentious titles increase in number as the prophet becomes increasingly desperate. This fact indicates that the prophet's philosophy of life fixed itself more firmly in his soul as his hectic life wore on, and that the emotional content centering in his philosophy increasingly spurred him to action. He became more and more certain that he was right, more and more insistent that his message demanded credence and action. His message was increasingly authenticated. There could be no mistake about its source.

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1. The one chapter only of Jehoiachin's reign is not sufficient basis for a generalization. It may be dropped, and the result is a clear progression.

The names vary from simple designations, such as "Jehovah", to complex ones, such as "Jehovah, the God of hosts, the God of Israel". It is not always possible to account in the context for the variation from the simple to the complex designations. However, some observations will be made as some of the names are considered.

The name which appears most often is "Jehovah", altogether 578 times. It is used largely in narrative passages as the name of simple reference, when the prophet is not authenticating his message by a formal "Thus saith--".<sup>1</sup> It is used also in formal phrases in stronger passages such as 29:10, 27:16, and 6:22, but usually when the message is intended to have only racial application. The tendency to elaborate on the simple "Jehovah" is apparent in the foreign nation chapters. In chapters 46-51 twenty-five per cent of the designations are more elaborate than "Jehovah", whereas in chapters 14-20, a section addressed to Israel, only thirteen per cent are more elaborate than the simple "Jehovah". Evidently, Jeremiah thought that the more pretentious titles would carry more weight in the eyes of the foreign nations; consequently, in these chapters, as an addendum to "Jehovah", we find some form of the "hosts" idea prominent, "Jehovah of hosts", "Jehovah of hosts, the God of Israel," etc.

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1. In chapter 36, which is narrative, it is used exclusively 17 times, and in chapter 52 exclusively 6 times. See also chapters 1 and 12.

The fundamental idea of the Hebrew "Yahweh" is that of "being". A.B. Davidson, in his splendid consideration of this much disputed term, concludes that it should be translated, "I will be", or, "I will be what I will be." He says that it is not a statement of the essential nature of God--not that of existence--but a statement of that which He will approve Himself to others. It sets forth His relation to Israel as the God of the covenant.<sup>1</sup> Later, he affirms that the meaning is "I will be with thee".<sup>2</sup> Thus, when Jeremiah addressed his message to the people of Judah in the name of Jehovah and called them back to allegiance to their God, the very use of His name was a constant reminder that Jehovah had pledged His presence to them. "Thus saith Jehovah, Stand ye in the ways and see, and ask for the old paths, where is the good way; and walk therein, and ye shall find rest for your souls,"<sup>3</sup> rest and security in the great "I will be with thee", fellowship with the ever present Jehovah. The name is a constant testimony throughout the book to the faithfulness of the God of Israel in relation to His people.

It was mentioned above that the "hosts" idea is prominent in the book. Several variations appear, which are: "Jehovah of hosts",<sup>4</sup> "Lord, Jehovah of hosts",<sup>5</sup> "Jehovah,

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1. A.B. Davidson, The Theology of the Old Testament, p. 56.
2. Ibid, p. 71.
3. 5:16.
4. 11:20; 22:46; 18:51, etc.
5. 46:10; 49:5; 50:25, etc.

the God of hosts",<sup>1</sup> "Jehovah of hosts, the God of Israel",<sup>2</sup> "Jehovah the God of hosts, the God of Israel."<sup>3</sup> These names appear notably in connection with the foreign nation chapters, twenty-six times altogether out of the eighty-two times in the book that some form of the "hosts" idea appears. This seems quite convincing when it is noted that the foreign nation chapters embrace only seven of the fifty-two chapters. The object of the prophet was to stagger the surrounding nations with the power of Jehovah. Davidson tells us that "Jehovah of Hosts" probably was used first in connection with the armies of Israel. Then he says:

"Later the hosts were understood of the stars; and the commanding of these, and causing them to perform their regular movements, was held the highest conceivable exercise of power. Hence 'Jehovah of hosts' is nearly our Almighty or Omnipotent."<sup>4</sup>

Smith interprets it to mean "the forces of history and of the Universe".<sup>5</sup> The concept which the "hosts" idea suggests, then, is that of power, omnipotence. It is particularly fitting for the foreign nation prophecies. Before passing, mention might be made of the use of "Jehovah of hosts, the God of Israel" as it appears in chapter 29, where it is used four times. Jeremiah here is addressing the captives in exile. By the use of "Jehovah of hosts", he tells them that the "Almighty I Will Be With Thee" will be with them to give

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1. 5:14; 15:16 etc.
2. 29:4, 8, 21, 25; 46:25.
3. 35:17; 38:17; 44:7, etc.
4. A.B. Davidson, op. cit., p. 165.
5. G.A. Smith, op. cit., p. 364.

them hope in their latter end, and to gather them from all the nations unto their dwelling place.<sup>1</sup> By the addition of "the God of Israel", he calls them to fidelity to their national Deity. The basic idea of the name for God thus fits the message which it authenticates.

Numerous names appear which make it clear that one of Jeremiah's most dominant concepts of God is that God is universal Sovereign. Jeremiah gives expression to this fact in his prayers. His direct form of address to God is, "Ah Lord Jehovah".<sup>2</sup> It appears first in connection with his call.<sup>2</sup> He begins his prayer of remonstrance with "Ah, Lord Jehovah".<sup>3</sup> Morgan, commenting on the phrase, says:

"Jeremiah heard the call of God as that of his Supreme Lord, Who was the mighty God. In the very name he used there was a revelation of his sense of destiny, 'Ah, Sovereign Lord Jehovah!'"<sup>4</sup>

Perhaps the most comprehensive title bearing out the idea of universal sovereignty is that which God applies to Himself: "Jehovah, the God of all Flesh".<sup>5</sup> Jeremiah had done about the maddest thing a man could do. Apparently, he had been taken in on a bad deal. He had bought a piece of land which it was impossible for him to occupy, since it was in the hands of the Chaldeans. Jerusalem was about to capitulate; the whole country was desolate and waste; the nation

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1. 29:11-14.

2. 1:6.

3. 32:17 See also 4:10 and 14:13.

4. G.C. Morgan, op. cit., p. 23.

5. 32:27.

was about to be blotted out. Here was a religious fanatic buying real estate, investing in the future of a country which it seemed had no future. But he weighed out the silver and secured the deed of purchase. Then, in desperation, he began to pray. God had told him to do it; and he had done it. He did not pray long until his answer came: "I am Jehovah, the God of all flesh. Is there anything too hard for me?" To the Universal Sovereign the Chaldeans were puny men. They could never thwart His purpose. The incredible was to happen. Fields were to be bought again in the land, and domestic tranquillity again was to reign,<sup>1</sup> because it was the decree of "the God of all flesh". The much disputed passage, 10:11-16,<sup>2</sup> further emphasizes this point. Jehovah is called the "King of the nations", "the everlasting King". He is set forth as the indisputable and only Sovereign, who is in command of all forces of the universe.<sup>3</sup> The conception of God here is, on this point, entirely in harmony with Jeremiah's.

"The Holy One of Israel", a name frequently used by Isaiah, appears in Jeremiah twice, in 50:29 and in 51:5. Bruce points out that merely because the word "holy" is used is no guarantee that we should thereby presume that Jehovah's character is declared blameless, for other gods were called

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1. 32:43.

2. It is impossible and needless to go into the critical problem here. Whether or not it is Jeremiah's does not affect the total philosophy of God we are presenting in this thesis.

3. 10:12 f.

"Holy gods" even though they were patron gods to all manner of vices.<sup>1</sup> The root idea of "holy" is "cut off", "separate", "removed". "As applied to Jehovah it comes nearest our term 'transcendent'",<sup>2</sup> that is, removed from the sphere of the human or earthly. Although the name itself does not demand that the word "holy" be taken in the sense in which we understand the word, the context of the word in each case seems to demand it. In the context of each, God is set forth as a God who makes extraordinary moral demands. In 50:29 Babylon is condemned for her pride "against the Holy One of Israel". Jeremiah considered that Babylon was the instrument in God's hand for the punishing of Israel, but when Babylon rose against Israel's God who had given her power, God's nature demanded that He punish Babylon. The iniquity of Babylon was definitely antithetical to the purpose of the Holy One of Israel, who was universal Sovereign. Pride is iniquity, and iniquity He could not countenance. The context gives weight to the name.

Smith claims that "Oh thou hope of Israel, the Savior thereof in time of trouble" is original with Jeremiah.<sup>3</sup> The whole title appears in 14:8, while the first phrase only, appears in 17:13. Jeremiah first puts it on the lips of the famine sufferers. There seems to be a bit of pitiful irony here. How shallow is the appeal when Jehovah is plainly

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1. A.B. Bruce, Apologetics, p. 183.
2. A.B. Davidson, op. cit., p. 165.
3. G.A. Smith, op. cit., p. 364.

used merely as an expedient! The only time the people thought of Jehovah was in a time of trouble. It is in keeping with their shallowness and insincerity to add "the Savior thereof in time of trouble." These people were perfectly willing to bemoan their condition and to flatter their tribal God by tributes to His past faithfulnesses, but they were not willing to "hope" in Him when times were prosperous. In spite of the insincerity of the usage of the title we catch a glimpse of Jehovah's fidelity toward His chosen people. He had been in all truth "the Savior thereof in time of trouble". The first part of the name, "the hope of Israel", is used in all sincerity in 17:13. Here Jehovah is "the hope of Israel" because His eternal throne is the place of Israel's sanctuary. Two ways were open to Israel: one way was the way of trust in man; the other way was trust in Him who sits on the glorious and eternal throne. Jeremiah saw no hope in trusting in man, for he knew that he that trusts in man is cursed, like a heath in the parched and desolate wilderness and salt land.<sup>1</sup> Jeremiah saw that the judgments of God were about to break upon the heads of the people for this very man-trust. The only adequate "hope" was in the glorious throne set on high from the beginning. He who flew to the proper refuge became as a flourishing, fruit-bearing, evergreen tree, planted by waters. Much of Jeremiah's philosophy of God is couched in that phrase, "Oh thou hope of Israel".

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1. 17:5-8.

"The fountain of living waters" is a second title which Smith claims is original with Jeremiah.<sup>1</sup> It is a most striking and appropriate designation. It well expresses that which God is in His essential nature as well as that which He is to humanity. The figure is one that would appeal to dwellers in a parched land. Water is the symbol of luxuriant life. A fountain carries the idea of abundance. Here, then, is abundant life, life which man can have for the drinking. Israel had drunk of this water of Life, which issues out of the very heart of God. Drinking had brought new vitality and with it new prospects and new hopes. She had promised to follow Jehovah wherever He led. For a time "Israel was holiness unto Jehovah",<sup>2</sup> but the time came when she went her own way. She made provision for her own water supply. She drank from her own cisterns, but they were leaky, broken cisterns, with contaminated water. Jeremiah saw the folly of Israel's ways. He knew where he could get a cool, satisfying drink. He knew that there was just one source of life, both national and individual. That source was "The fountain of living water".

The designations "Father" and "Husband"<sup>3</sup> are so similar in the common emotional element inherent in the figures as to make it possible to treat them together here, pending fuller treatment in the next section. Quite apart from the

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1. G.A. Smith, op. cit., p. 364. 2:13.

2. 2:3.

3. 3:4,14;31:9.

context, each figure conveys a strong idea. The idea is that of relationship. Two parties at least must be involved. The figures express an identical type of relationship, a relationship of love. Whatever else Jeremiah thought God was, he knew Him to be an eternal Lover.

One other name is significant, "Redeemer".<sup>1</sup> The concept behind this word goes far beyond that couched in the word "Lover". It is possible for a lover to cease loving, but not so for a redeemer. A redeemer loves so much and so constantly that He is willing to stoop to the level to which the beloved one has fallen, and with a tender, yet strong, hand restore the fallen one. A redeemer goes more than half way; he goes all the way. It was thus that Jeremiah saw God. No contrary force was strong enough to frustrate the love and the strong resolve of Israel's Redeemer, even though it be that of the mighty Babylon, for, says Jeremiah, "He will thoroughly plead their cause...their Redeemer is strong".<sup>2</sup> Jeremiah's God was a God of ultimate triumph.

At this point we must summarize the contribution which the names that Jeremiah applies to God make to our understanding of his philosophy of God. From the names alone we learn that Jehovah is Israel's ever-present companion and helper. He is the Almighty Sovereign of all flesh, in

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1. 50:34

2. Ibid

whom are concentrated "The forces of history and of the Universe". He makes extraordinary moral demands upon His people, demands which grow out of His holy nature. He is the source and essence of life, of whom all may partake; in Him only can there be life. He is Israel's loving guardian and her ultimate redeemer. Israel's only hope of fulfilling her destiny as a nation is centered in Him. The names alone furnish quite a comprehensive idea of Jeremiah's philosophy of God.

#### B. Statements Applied to God.

When one examines the book of Jeremiah in an attempt to find out just what God is like as portrayed there, one is indelibly impressed that He is viewed through the most human of human eyes, and described in the most human of human terms. We are almost back to our starting place in this chapter, where we suggested how intimate the relationship between Jeremiah and God was. With God as his personal intimate Friend and Helper it is only natural that he should describe Him in the most human of human terms. Are we to think that Jeremiah's conception of God was an anthropomorphic conception?

At the opening of the book we find Jeremiah narrating the dialogue that went on between God and himself, how that Jehovah promised to put His word in his mouth, and how Jehovah stretched out His hand and touched his mouth.<sup>1</sup>

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1. 1:9

We find that anthropomorphic expressions are also used to describe the moral nature of God. He is endowed with many of the fundamental human emotions. His modes of conduct are similar to man's. He loves,<sup>1</sup> He hates,<sup>2</sup> He laments,<sup>3</sup> He forgives,<sup>4</sup> He is impatient,<sup>5</sup> He is jealous,<sup>6</sup> He changes His mind,<sup>7</sup> He feels intense sorrow.<sup>8</sup> But how can God be spoken of at all unless He be spoken of in human terms? Man knows no other language. Davidson says:

"The use of anthropomorphisms is inevitable if men will think of God; and it has usually been argued that they are legitimate, seeing men were made in the image of God. We are in some measure at least entitled to throw back upon God the attributes of men when speaking of His action and thought."<sup>9</sup>

It is evident that that which Jeremiah wanted to convey is that God is a moral personality. The only way that this great fact could be expressed was by attributing to God these fundamental emotions. With these before our eyes we are able to see the moral reciprocity between God and man. Man's actions are registered on God in terms of emotions, and God's actions on man in terms of emotions. If both were not considered in the same terms, the acts of one would be unintelligible to the other. Man cannot speak God's language; hence, God has to speak man's. Because

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1. 1:9
2. 44:4
3. 8:7
4. 31:34
5. 15:6
6. 1:16
7. 26:19; 42:10
8. 48:31, 36
9. A.B. Davidson, op. cit., p. 108

the prophet uses human terms to describe God does not argue that God is bound within the limits which these terms express. What anthropomorphisms there are, are descriptive rather than restrictive. That God far transcends the human will be seen by a consideration of the outstanding aspects of the Divine nature which comprise Jeremiah's philosophy of God.

1. Spirituality and Omnipresence.

Jeremiah follows the other prophets in the belief that God is a spiritual being. He goes beyond the other prophets in a definite expression of the omnipresence of God. This is definitely stated in 23:23,24: "Am I a God at hand, saith Jehovah, and not a God afar off? Can any hide himself in secret places so that I shall not see him? saith Jehovah. Do not I fill heaven and earth? saith Jehovah." These verses have been claimed as the first expression in Israel of the omnipresence of God.<sup>1</sup> Jeremiah bothers himself little about such questions as that of Jehovah's abode; but we do find definite knowledge of the Great Spirit who is not limited to space, but who fills the universe. Man's secret places are not secret to Him who sees all. This leads us to another phase of the Divine nature, that of the Divine omniscience.

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1. See G.A. Smith, op. cit., p. 366 who cites the authority of Smend.

## 2. Omniscience.

It appears that the Divine omniscience is contingent on the Divine omnipresence. We have abundant expression of the omniscience of God in the book. One of the most striking utterances is from the lips of God, Himself: "I am He that knoweth, and am witness, saith Jehovah".<sup>1</sup> These great words appear in Jeremiah's message to the captives. It was a time when Jeremiah was in sharp conflict with the false prophets as to the method of procedure for the nation after it had been brought under the yoke of Nebuchadnezzar. The false prophets advocated a consolidation of the foreign powers with Judah against Babylon, and avowed that the yoke of Babylon might be thrown off thus.<sup>2</sup> Jeremiah was adamant. Israel's safety and future, he said, lay in submission to Babylon until such time when God would vindicate His people and restore them.<sup>3</sup> The minds of men were twisted in every direction. Who was right, the false prophets or Jeremiah? Then Jehovah spoke. Ahab and Koliah, the false prophets of the exile, were to be cut off because they had spoken false words in Jehovah's name, which words He had not commanded.<sup>4</sup> There was only One who knew with certainty Israel's future, who knew the whole situation, whose eyes were upon all the ways of the sons of men,<sup>5</sup> who was wiser than all the wise men of the nations.<sup>6</sup>

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1. 29:23.

2. Cf. 27:3 with chapter 28.

3. 27:12; 29:4-14.

4. 29:23.

5. 32:19.

6. 10:7,8.

Concerning Jehovah's wisdom Ball says:

"No earthly wisdom, craft or political sagacity, not even in the most powerful empires such as Babylon, could be a match for Iahyah, the All-Wise, or avail to thwart His purposes."<sup>1</sup>

Jeremiah saw Him as a great Counselor.<sup>2</sup> He knew; He was witness. But knowing was not all; He revealed to men that which He knew, His plans and His purposes. His revelation was final and authoritative, because it was based on final and absolute knowledge. What was man's word compared to the word of God? Was not His word like fire, and like a hammer that breaketh the rock in pieces?<sup>3</sup> The false prophets, like the recalcitrant refugees in Egypt, would come to know whose word would stand, Jehovah's or theirs.<sup>4</sup> "I am He that knoweth, and am witness, saith Jehovah." Jeremiah was convinced that Jehovah's knowledge was absolute.

### 3. Eternality.

Furthermore, Jeremiah believed God to be an eternal Being. That great word "beginning", that word which comprehends no beginning, appears in 17:12 : "A glorious throne, set on high from the beginning..". Whatever is meant by the "beginning" here, it certainly is the same "beginning" as that expressed in Genesis 1:1 : "In the beginning God.."; and in John 1:1 : "In the beginning was

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1. C.J. Ball, The Prophecies of Jeremiah (Expos. Bible), p. 231.
2. 32:19.
3. 23:28.
4. 26:24.

the Word". Man's mind must have a starting place; God knows no starting place. The best that man can do by way of expression of this great truth is "in the beginning". The fact of the eternality of God is stated again in 10:10, where Jehovah is called "everlasting King".

#### 4. Holiness.

Much of that which can be said for Jeremiah's conception of the holiness of God was discussed in relation to the name, "The Holy One of Israel". There is nothing expressed directly, outside the possible implications of this title, with respect to this attribute. However, some conclusions may be drawn from Jeremiah's attitude toward the sacredness of the person of Jehovah. An outstanding verse in this connection is 30:21 : "For who is he that hath boldness to approach unto me? saith Jehovah". This startling question appears in a challenging section. It is a section shot through with the virile, pulsating dynamic "I's" of Jehovah. The prophet is glorying in the contemplation of the future of his people. The "captivity of Jacob's tents" is to be turned again, the city to be restored, the palace to be re-occupied. Israel once more is to be established as the people of God. Her lost contact with the great "I" is to be restored. Her ruler once more will approach before God, not because of the boldness that grows out of intrinsic merit, but because "I will cause him to draw near".<sup>1</sup>

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1. 30:21.

It is folly to rush unbidden into the presence of God. He who dares to place a foot before that holy Presence must do so only because he is bidden. Here is a bit of the transcendent that Jeremiah paints only dimly in his portrayal of God. The great "I" is removed from the sphere of the earthly. He is cut off, separate, removed. In other words, He is that which these words interpret--holy.

God's attitude toward sin also is revealing in respect to this aspect of His nature. He hates sin with a holy hatred: "Oh, do not this abominable thing that I hate".<sup>1</sup> That which is "cut off", "separate", "removed", is undefiled, uncontaminated, pure in essence. Since God is holy, He could do nothing else but hate that which is contaminated, impure, abominable. The two are precisely antithetical. A holy God cannot look on sin with the least degree of allowance.<sup>2</sup> Unquestionably Jeremiah presumed the holiness of God.

#### 5. Righteousness

A great deal is said in the book of Jeremiah about the righteousness of God. It is difficult to evaluate the actions of God, to set up criteria by which to judge His acts in respect to righteousness. Indeed, who dares to judge the Almighty? Whatever He chooses to do, who dares say it is not right? "Hath not the Potter a right over the clay?"<sup>3</sup> The

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1. 44:4.

2. Cf. 5:7-9; 5:25-29; 9:9; 13:22,27.

3. Romans 9:21.

question of God's sovereignty in relation to His righteousness cannot be gone into here. Let it suffice to say that God acts on moral principles. He does not act according to caprice in respect to His creatures. The will of the human personality, which He is shaping, enters in to condition the final outcome. The clay has power to resist the hand of the Potter. Be that as it may, what God claims for Himself is the power to do with His creation that which will be for their ultimate success and for their good. He deals in wisdom with the destiny of His people. If there is to be any evaluation of God's acts, it must be on the basis of ultimates. In the book of Jeremiah, God's acts will stand this test.<sup>1</sup>

Let us consider that which Jeremiah has to say about the righteousness of God. He affirms, first of all, that the very essence of God is righteousness: "He liveth in truth, in justice, and in righteousness".<sup>2</sup> More than that, He delights in righteousness.<sup>3</sup> That which a man delights in is that which he is. Since God's delight is in righteousness, by the same logic, He is righteous. The rhetorical question, "What unrighteousness have your fathers found in me?"<sup>4</sup> has the force of an affirmation that Jehovah had ever been righteous in His essential nature, and that He had

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1. See chapter four.
2. 4:2.
3. 9:23.
4. 2:5.

displayed this righteousness in all His dealings with Israel.

A second fact concerning the righteousness of God now appears. Jeremiah insists that God is righteous in all His relationships. The first could not be true without the second. In this instance, the characteristics of the essence are the characteristics of the essence in its manifestations. Even in punishment of Israel, Jeremiah sees that God is justified. Israel had a past, a glorious past. She had run well on the highway of holiness;<sup>1</sup> who did hinder her? For no reason at all she forsook the God who had upset natural law in her behalf, the God who had tenderly wooed her, led her by the hand, and bestowed upon her a goodly inheritance.<sup>2</sup> In it all God had a high and holy purpose.<sup>3</sup> It was morally right for Jehovah to say, "Wherefore, I will yet contend [enter into judgment]<sup>4</sup> with you".<sup>5</sup> Israel not only had rejected her ancestral Deity, which was a thing unheard of among the nations,<sup>6</sup> but she had gone into the grossest of sins. The people were guilty of innumerable adulteries;<sup>7</sup> they were deceitful and covetous;<sup>8</sup> they had become rich and fat through inequitable treatment of the poor;<sup>9</sup> they were stubborn and rebellious;<sup>10</sup> they mocked the prophets;<sup>11</sup> they ignored the

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1. 2:3.
2. 2:7.
3. 13:11; see chapter four.
4. 2:35.
5. 2:9.
6. 2:11.

7. 5:7,8.
8. 5:27; 6:13.
9. 5:28.
10. 5:3; 6:16.
11. 5:13.

the word of Jehovah;<sup>1</sup> they denied that He would punish them;<sup>2</sup> and they deliberately clung to their false gods.<sup>3</sup> They were perfectly brazen about their sin; they had no shame, neither did they blush to commit such abominations.<sup>4</sup> What else could a righteous God do but punish them?<sup>5</sup> He could not pardon them; they would not give Him a chance. They would not repent, and His pardon could be given only on the basis of repentance.<sup>6</sup> "Shall I not visit for these things? saith Jehovah; and shall not my soul be avenged on such a nation as this?"<sup>7</sup> It was a fundamental conviction with Jeremiah that Israel's punishment was just.

The third fact is a positive statement of that which God demands for acceptability. It is nowhere more cogently stated than in the seventh chapter. The prophet was sent by Jehovah to stand in the gate of the temple and to attempt to jar the people loose from their false feeling of security. The Jews were decidedly egotistical in their conception of their place in the universe. They had been a favored people, there was little doubt of that; they had been entrusted with the oracles of God. God had come down and dwelt in their midst in the sanctuary they had built for Him. Now they had the conception that Jerusalem was inviolable as long as the temple stood within her walls. They felt "scot free" of all

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1. 6:10.  
2. 5:12.  
3. 5:7; 44:17.

4. 6:15; 8:12.  
5. 9:7; cf. 2:9, 35.  
6. 5:7-9.  
7. 5:9.

moral obligations. They could steal, murder, commit adultery, swear falsely, join in the immoralities accompanying Baal worship, yet they were cleared by coming to the temple observing the ritual, going through the form of worship. Not so! says Jeremiah. Moffatt's translation of this section is worthy of quotation:

"What? Steal, murder, commit adultery, perjure yourselves, sacrifice to Baal, wander after other, outside gods, and then come to present yourselves before me in this house, which belongs to me, thinking you are now quite safe--safe to go on with all these abominable practices! Do you take this house, my very own house, for a robbers' cave? I see you, the Eternal cries, I see you!"<sup>1</sup>

They would not get away with it; they would get what Shiloh got. There was blood on their hands and sin on their souls that could not be purged away by ritual and by external observances.

"I spake not unto your fathers nor commanded them in the day that I brought them out of the land of Egypt concerning burnt offerings or sacrifices, but this thing I commanded them, saying, Hearken unto my voice..."<sup>2</sup>

obedience rather than sacrifice. A righteous God could be satisfied with no less than righteousness and moral purity in those who stand before Him. Jeremiah was explicit: "Israel, ye are to dwell in this place only if ye thoroughly amend your ways and your doings".<sup>3</sup> God demanded absolute righteousness for acceptance.

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1. James Moffatt, The Holy Bible, A New Translation, 7:9-11.
2. 7:22,23.
3. 7:4-6.

## 6. Justice.

As a corollary Jeremiah emphasized the fact that God is absolutely impartial and fair in all His judgments. He punishes every man according to the fruit of his doing.<sup>1</sup> He has no favorites. Jerusalem was no better than any other city, only as it adhered to the Divine principles of righteousness. Jeremiah declared that Jerusalem, the Holy City, was to become a curse for all nations to see, that they might know what Jehovah will do to those who follow not righteousness.<sup>2</sup> God swore that He, Himself, would fight against His people, that He would send pestilence, famine and the sword into their midst, that He would give them up to be tossed among the nations, a reproach, a taunt, and a curse.<sup>3</sup> Why? Was not Israel His beloved? Jeremiah agreed that she was, but he knew that His righteousness was as great as His love, and that He was obliged to punish for sin wherever He found it. All nations were alike to Jehovah. When the cup of their iniquity was full, the cup of the wine of the wrath of God was pressed to their lips, and they were forced to drink.<sup>4</sup> Jeremiah's God was a God who "...practices...justice and righteousness on the earth".<sup>5</sup> This phase of Jeremiah's concept of God scarcely can be over-estimated. It is a cornerstone upon which the super-structure of his

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1. 21:14.

2. 22:8,9.

3. 21:5-7; 24:9; 34:17-22.

4. 25:15,16,27.

5. E.J. Goodspeed and J.M.P. Smith, The Bible, An American Translation, 9:24.

philosophy rests.

7. Love.

Hand and hand with his philosophy of the righteousness of God is his philosophy of God as a God of love: "I, the Lord, am he who practices kindness, justice, and righteousness on the earth".<sup>1</sup> And He is a God whose lovingkindness endures forever.<sup>2</sup> He rejoices to do good to His people,<sup>3</sup> and He desires them to "flow unto the goodness of Jehovah"<sup>4</sup> and to be satisfied with His goodness.<sup>5</sup> A God who is essentially good in His nature plans that which is good for His people. He has loved Israel with the passionate love of a young husband, which love was reciprocated when Israel went after Him in the wilderness.<sup>6</sup> He redeemed His bride from the curse of servitude and gave her a goodly inheritance.<sup>7</sup> His love was constant: "Yea, I have loved thee with an everlasting love; therefore, with lovingkindness have I drawn thee".<sup>8</sup> That everlasting love, Jeremiah knew, could never be broken. What can break a father's love?--"for I am a father to Israel".<sup>9</sup> His great purpose was to shepherd Israel,<sup>10</sup> to "cause them to walk by rivers of waters in a straight way wherein they shall not stumble".<sup>11</sup> He "yearneth" over His children.<sup>12</sup> He cares for the widows and the

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| 1. E.J. Goodspeed and J. Smith, | 7. 2:6,7.       |
| op. cit., on 9:24.              | 8. 31:3; 32:18. |
| 2. 33:11.                       | 9. 31:9.        |
| 3. 32:41.                       | 10. 31:10.      |
| 4. 31:12.                       | 11. 31:9.       |
| 5. 31:14.                       | 12. 31:20.      |
| 6. 2:2.                         |                 |

fatherless.<sup>1</sup> He delights in lovingkindness.<sup>2</sup> No words are spared to make His love known the nation over.

The interesting thing about the prophet's presentation of this phase of the Divine nature is that he does not present it as an end in itself but rather as a means to the portrayal of Israel's gross ingratitude and sin in spurning the Divine love. To Jeremiah the sin against love is an awful sin. Jehovah was not to blame for Israel's infidelity. His love and tender care had been constant; but Israel had played the harlot with many lovers without a cause:<sup>3</sup> "As a woman is false to her fere, Have ye been false to me".<sup>4</sup> Jehovah feels the pain of unmerited rejection. Chapter three is a tender lament over a lost love. God's heart is torn. He feels deepest emotions. In the oracle against Moab, the effect of Moab's infidelity upon God is expressed thus: "Therefore, will I wail for Moab", and "my heart soundeth for Moab like pipes".<sup>5</sup> Jeremiah sees clearly that the sin against love is Jehovah's great heart-break.

There is intense urgency about Jehovah's love as it is presented in this book. Jeremiah tells us that Jehovah has plead early and late for the return of His people. In expressing this aspect of the Divine love, he gives us that unique phrase, "rising up early".<sup>6</sup> The phrase is very point-

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1. 49:11.  
2. 9:24.  
3. 2:5.

4. G.A.Smith's translation  
of 3:20, op. cit., p. 358.  
5. 48:31, 36.  
6. 25:4; 26:5; 35:14, 15 etc.

ed in relation to the Rechabite incident in chapter thirty-five. Jonadab had spoken once to the Rechabites and they had obeyed; Jehovah had spoken "earnestly and urgently"<sup>1</sup> to Israel, but she had not obeyed. Jehovah's charge against Israel runs as follows:

"I have spoken unto you, rising up early and speaking; and ye have not hearkened unto me. I have sent also unto you all my servants the prophets, rising up early and sending them."<sup>2</sup>

He had gone to every length to which a loving Father could go. He sent them prosperity, but they became ~~self-indulgent~~<sup>3</sup>; He sent them chastening disciplines, but they rebelled.<sup>4</sup> Some of these chastening disciplines are indicated. He winnowed them with a fan in the gates of the land"; He "bereaved them of children"; He destroyed His people. It was lost effort; they "returned not from their ways".<sup>5</sup> What more could a father do?

There is one more phase of the Divine love that Jeremiah emphasizes: its eternality. He sees clearly that Jehovah's love is genuine love. It is not the type of love that turns sour when it is spurned. It is redemptive love, love that stoops and lifts from the muck.<sup>6</sup> The great arms of Jehovah are stretched out in invitation: "Return, O backsliding children, saith Jehovah; for I am a husband unto you: and I will take you one of a city, and two of a family, and I will

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1. J. Moffatt's translation of  
"rising up early".  
2. 35:14,15.  
3. 5:7,8.

4. 5:3; 15:5-9.  
5. 15:7.  
6. 50:34.

bring you to Zion".<sup>1</sup> They can be restored to their pristine position in the plan of the Great Lover if they will meet one condition. That condition is sincere repentance. But if they will not repent, there is still a course open to Jehovah. He will place them in the furnace of affliction that they may come forth as gold, tried in the fire.<sup>2</sup> Jeremiah early saw that the furnace experience was inevitable. Even such an experience would be an expression of the Divine love. John's great proclamation, "God is love",<sup>3</sup> might well have come from the lips of Jeremiah.

One other aspect of Jeremiah's philosophy of God--the sovereignty of God--is of such importance as to warrant the detailed consideration which follows under point B.

In this section we have found Jeremiah's philosophy of God to include the following attributes: Spirituality, Omnipresence, Omniscience, Eternality, Holiness, Righteousness, Justice, and Love. We pass now to consider His sovereignty as manifested in the Divine relationships.

## II. His Philosophy of the Divine Relationships.

### A. Jehovah's Relation to Nature.

The Hebrew starts with God and considers nature in the light of God. He never starts with nature and by a scientific, inductive process arrives at the conclusion that

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1. 3:14.

2. 9:7.

3. I John 4:16.

there must be a God. Robinson says;

"The advance of Hebrew religion from the spiritual to the natural realm stands in direct contrast with the advance of Greek thought from the natural to the spiritual."<sup>1</sup>

God had spoken in the Hebrew heart in unmistakable tones. First of all, and all in all, he knew that God existed. In the light of this knowledge he viewed the surrounding creation. In considering Jeremiah's philosophy of Jehovah's relation to nature, we shall treat two aspects: Jehovah as creator of the natural order, and Jehovah as commander of the natural order.

#### 1. Jehovah as Creator of the Natural Order.

That which Jeremiah says about Jehovah's relation to nature is positive and pointed, "proclaimed with as firm assurance as of God's control of the history of mankind".<sup>2</sup> He does not equivocate in the statement to foreign nations of his claims concerning Jehovah's creatorship of the world. He commands the foreign representatives to bear back to their respective kings bonds and bars and a message which begins, "I have made the earth, the men and the beasts that are upon the face of the earth, by my great power and by my outstretched arm".<sup>3</sup> The gods of Tyre and Sidon were hailed by the Phoenicians as creators of the natural order,<sup>4</sup> but Jeremiah pays no attention to this claim. His message from

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1. H.W. Robinson, The Religious Ideas of the Old Testament, p.71.
2. G.A. Smith, op. cit., p. 365.
3. 27:5.
4. See A.B. Bruce, op. cit., p.179.

the Creator of all is for these cities as well as for the rest. One of the most beautiful of Jeremiah's ascriptions of creative power to Jehovah is this:

"He hath made the earth by His power, he hath established the world by his wisdom, and by His understanding hath he stretched out the heavens."<sup>1</sup>

Power, wisdom, and understanding--these are the essential factors of creative ability. If there are those who doubt the Jeremian origin of the preceding, we might quote the following, which is very similar and undoubtedly Jeremian: "Ah Lord Jehovah! behold, thou hast made the heavens and the earth by thy great power and by thine outstretched arm".<sup>2</sup> In the primal ordering of the functions of the heavens and the earth, Jehovah formed a covenant which, He states, cannot be broken.<sup>3</sup> He gave "the sun for a light by day and the ordinances of the moon and of the stars for a light by night".<sup>4</sup> Jehovah is behind the forces that have been established once for all, for He is the Creator of all. Jeremiah does not bother himself about the how of creation; he merely asserts the fact of creation, declaring simply that Jehovah is responsible for it.

## 2. Jehovah as Commander of the Natural Order.

Jeremiah's attitude toward Jehovah as commander of the natural order is common to all Hebrew writers. He considers

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1. 10:12.
2. 32:17.
3. 31:36; 32:20.
4. 31:35.

Jehovah a personality separate and distinct from that which He has created. Pantheism is entirely foreign to Hebrew theology. The Hebrew did not believe that Jehovah was inextricably involved in the processes of nature; instead, he believed that the processes were caused by Him and directly controlled by Him from without.<sup>1</sup> Jeremiah says that He is in direct control of the sea.<sup>2</sup> He has power to bring rain: "Let us now fear Jehovah our God that giveth rain,"<sup>3</sup> and "Of the worthless gods of the heathen is there one that can bring down rain?"<sup>4</sup> The ability to bring rain in that parched land was made the test of Deity. Furthermore, Jeremiah asserts that Jehovah is in control of the harvests. He "preserveth...the appointed weeks of the harvest"<sup>5</sup> and orders the crops, having power to blight if He desires.<sup>6</sup> Since all nature is in His hands, He can bend its forces to suit His own ends. Jeremiah, with this conviction, portrays in vivid terms certain physical upheavals that Jehovah is about to bring to pass because of Israel's sins. The language doubtless is figurative, but it conveys well the Hebrew concept of Jehovah's direct control over nature.

"I beheld the earth, and, lo, it was waste and void; and the heavens, and they had no light. I beheld the mountains, and, lo, they trembled, and all the hills moved to and fro. I beheld, and, lo, there was no man, and all the birds of the heavens were fled. I beheld, and, lo, the fruitful field was a wilderness, and all the cities thereof were broken down at the presence of Jehovah and before his fierce anger."<sup>7</sup>

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| 1. Cf. Psalm 104.  | 5. 5:24.    |
| 2. 5:22.   | 6. 8:13.    |
| 3. 4:4.  | 7. 4:23-26. |
| 4. J. E. McFadyen, Jeremiah in Modern Speech, trans. of 14:22. |             |

The tragedy of the whole situation, which the prophet sees, is that all nature obeys the voice of Jehovah, but His own people do not. The stork, the turtle dove, the swallow, and the crane heed the voice of their God-given instinct, but Israel, driven blindly on by perverted reason, disregards the call of God.<sup>1</sup> There is tragedy about many of the passages that set forth God's relation to nature. There is usually the tragic antithesis couched in the adversative, "but":

"Fear ye not me? saith Jehovah: will ye not tremble at my presence, who have placed the sand for the bound of the sea, by a perpetual decree, that it cannot pass it? and though they roar, yet can they not pass it. But this people hath a rebellious heart..<sup>2</sup>"

The lesson is clear: God is sovereign in the realm of nature, but self-limited in the realm of human personality. He does not coerce personality by making men obey Him and love Him.

#### B. Jehovah's Relation to Other Gods.

In order to understand Jeremiah's concept of the relation of Jehovah to other gods, a bit of historical background must be considered. Israel was a small kingdom striving to keep her identity among the powerful kingdoms that lay around. It was a kingdom whose life, for the most part was centered in its belief in Jehovah, its national God. Each nation around had its own national god, or gods. The separate peoples, while each adhering to their own gods, did not necessarily deny the existence of the gods of their

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1. 8:7.

2. 5:23. Cf. 8:7; 10:12-16, 19-22.

neighbors. As long as there was little conflict among these nations there was little need for forming conclusions as to the relation of the various deities to each other. Israel's duty was to lead a pure life with the Deity whom she was following. But changes within the nation and without the nation forced Israel to a consideration of the doctrines of her faith. Many within the nation began to fall away to false gods. Then, the great national movements began. Israel's security was threatened by the encroachments of the great world powers. Behind these great world powers were their gods. The question was, What was Israel's relation to be to these gods? and, more basic than that, What was the relation between Israel's God and these gods? The historical situation demanded a theoretical statement of Jehovah's relation to other gods. Bruce has this to say about the historical situation:

"When the great powers of the East rose above the horizon, monotheism became a necessity for the chosen people. It was the only way of escape from submission to the victorious gods of the conqueror."<sup>1</sup>

The prophets came to grips with the problem of the relationship of the gods. Jeremiah marks the acme of the steadily progressing claim for the absoluteness of Jehovah's sovereignty. He goes so far as to assert dogmatically that Jehovah is the only true God,<sup>2</sup> that other gods are "no gods".<sup>3</sup> He calls other gods "broken cisterns that can hold no water";<sup>4</sup>

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1. A.B. Bruce, op. cit., p. 178.  
2. 32:27; 10:10; 16:19.

3. 2:11; 16:20.  
4. 2:13.

they are profitless,<sup>1</sup> vanities (bubbles, breaths)<sup>2</sup>; they are abominations and hence to be loathed;<sup>3</sup> they are a shame.<sup>4</sup> The folly of Israel's actions deeply moved Jeremiah. Many were bowing before stocks and saying, "Thou art my father", and to a stone, "Thou hast brought me forth".<sup>5</sup> What imbecilic nonsense this was to the prophet! There is bitter irony and yet pathos in his words to the false worshippers: "Let them arise if they can save thee in the time of thy trouble".<sup>6</sup> He knew full well that they were utterly impotent to save, for they were the creation of mens hands: "they are all the work of skillful men";<sup>7</sup> "there is no breath in them";<sup>8</sup> they are lifeless fetishes, works of delusion;<sup>9</sup> they will perish.<sup>10</sup> He asserts that ultimately the nations will come to realize the folly of trusting in their false gods, and that they will come to Jehovah and say, "Our fathers have inherited nought but lies, even vanity and things wherein there is no profit. Shall a man make unto himself gods, which are no gods?"<sup>11</sup>

Jeremiah's insistence upon the supremacy of his God was not based upon a feeling of racial superiority, nor was it based upon a desire to promote personal interests in view of his claims that he was a specially commissioned representative of the Deity he was advocating. His life gives the lie

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1. 2:11.

2. G.A. Smith, op. cit., p.356.

3. 4:1.

4. 3:24; 11:13.

5. 2:27.

6. 2:28. Cf. 3:23; 11:13.

7. 10:9; 2:28; 51:17.

8. 10:14; 51:17.

9. 10:15; 51:18.

10. 10:15; 51:18.

11. 16:19,20.

to any such accusation. There was no glamour to the life he led; he had no personal interests to advance by magnifying the Deity he represented. His turbulent, grief-filled life was the result of his response to a great imperative. He did not choose his own course. He was conscious that he was losing everything for the proclamation of a great truth that had him in its iron grasp: there is one true God on the throne of the universe who makes moral demands of all men. For this truth Jeremiah was willing to die.

#### C. Jehovah's Relation to the Nations.

The same historical situation that forced the prophets to consider the relation of Jehovah to other gods caused them to consider His relation to the destiny of the nations. As long as Israel was isolated from world movements, the prophets' gaze was intent only upon national affairs. When the Assyrians and Babylonians came on the scene as world powers, the prophets were forced to formulate a philosophy that would accomodate the fact of the new encroachments upon the chosen people and the fact of the supremacy of the God of Israel. The result was that the prophets viewed the victorious powers as the instruments in Jehovah's hands for the chastisement of Israel. The victorious nations owed their victories to Jehovah, not to the gods which they worshipped. Jeremiah saw that Jehovah was moving the nations over the great checkerboard of the world with studied purpose. He knew that it

was useless for any nation to attempt to out-wit Jehovah. Israel had tried it. She thought she could gain her desired end of national security by foreign alliance rather than by the way which Jehovah had planned for her. She chose "to drink the waters of the Sihor" and "the waters of the River".<sup>1</sup> She became a perpetual gad-about, allying herself first with this one and then that of the larger powers.<sup>2</sup> But Jehovah was not to be outdone. He did not prevent her making alliances, but He prevented their success. He repudiated those in whom Israel trusted. What blasting words these are!

"Thou shalt be ashamed of Egypt also, as thou wast ashamed of Assyria. From thence also shalt thou go forth with thy hands upon thy head; for Jehovah hath rejected those in whom thou trusteth, and thou shalt not prosper with them."<sup>3</sup>

Israel's previous experience should have taught her the folly of trying to out-wit Jehovah, but she never seemed to learn. Jeremiah alone was clear sighted enough to be able to foresee the inevitable outcome. Dallying with Egypt was sure to bring a splitting headache.

If Israel could not run her own course as she chose, neither could the surrounding nations. The power of all nations was derivative. Even the powerful Nebuchadnezzar was God's servant.<sup>4</sup> When he failed to recognize this fact he too should go down down at the hands of Him who sits in

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1. 2:18.  
2. 2:36.

3. 2:36,37.  
4. 27:6; 25:9.

perpetual judgment of the nations.<sup>1</sup> Similarly, Egypt, Moab, Ammon, Edom, Damascus, and others were to drink of the wine of the wrath of God because of their various states of moral turpitude. All nations were amenable to the demands of the universal Sovereign.<sup>2</sup>

### III. Summary

We have found an answer to the enigma presented to us in the life of the prophet of Anathoth. Recalling his sufferings, his defeats, his loneliness, his life-long martyrdom, we were brought to ask, Why? Why? We see now that there is but one answer--God. It was God who forced him out into his mission; it was God who urged him on when he fain would have halted from sheer exhaustion. But Jeremiah's was not an unwilling service. He was not God's slave; he was God's beloved, and he, in full reciprocation, was a God-lover. Out of this depth of devotion he cried out to a nation that refused to lift its eyes from the pits of iniquity, Behold your God! He bore down upon the consciousness of the people the fact that they could not sin with impunity. They might sin against God and ignore Him, but they could never be rid of Him. They might worship stocks and stones, but there remained the eternal, all-knowing, holy, and just God, who ultimately would enter into judgment with them and punish them according to their iniquities. They might soil

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1. 50:29.

2. For fuller treatment of this phase of his philosophy see chapter V under Jeremiah's Political Philosophy, p. 117.

their own clothes, but He would not permit them to soil His. They might challenge His ways, but they could not defeat the purpose of the Sovereign of the universe, who was master of all because He was creator of all. But there is more to the character of God as Jeremiah portrays Him than these severe attributes. Were these all Jeremiah might have served Him, but he could not have loved Him. However, God was more: He was the companion of the human heart; He was a tender, unchanging, faithful Lover. His beloved had played the harlot, yet He yearned for her return and promised her reinstatement. His love was more than a passive love; it was a redemptive love. Ultimately he would purge her and restore her to her pristine position. Finally, He would lead her at the head of the nations to completeness of fellowship with Himself. What a God!

Jeremiah's philosophy is centered in his God. In the Divine laboratory the base metals of his sufferings were turned into glittering gold, or to put it another way, the acid that might have eaten out his life was neutralized--yea, more--from the acid and the base there was precipitated an insoluble salt--an invaluable philosophy of life.

CHAPTER FOUR  
JEREMIAH'S PHILOSOPHY OF THE  
RELATION OF MAN TO GOD

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- I. His Philosophy of Nationalism.
- II. His Philosophy of Individualism.
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CHAPTER FOUR  
JEREMIAH'S PHILOSOPHY OF THE  
RELATION OF MAN TO GOD

We have studied the prophet and his God. Our problem now is, What did the prophet conceive man's relation to God to be? It is in answering this question that his philosophy of life begins to take definite shape.

"Philosophy...must bring the course of human history within its survey, and the sequence of events as an evolution in which the purposive action of reason is traceable."<sup>1</sup>

Through the eyes of Jeremiah we now must see man in the course of history, his place in the process of purposive existence.

I. His Philosophy of Nationalism.<sup>2</sup>

In many respects Jeremiah was a child of his age. Not immediately did he throw off much of his background of thought. For centuries Israel had rested in the knowledge that she was a chosen people, the object of Jehovah's special concern. Had not He demonstrated Himself as Israel's God by His mighty works? Were not they the people of the covenant? Were not they heirs of the promise? This sense

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1. A.S. Pringle-Pattison, article on "Philosophy and Philosophical Studies" in the Encyclopaedia Brit., 14th ed., Vol. 17, p. 762.
2. By nationalism here we mean that part of his views that is concerned with the total interest of his own nation; hence, we are using it in a general rather than a particular sense.

of the divine election of Israel was especially acute in the prophets. By Isaiah's time it was the conviction of the people that Zion was indestructible.<sup>1</sup> What mattered if the nations raged and the peoples meditated a vain thing? Jehovah laughed at their vain counsel. He had set His king upon His holy hill of Zion. Who could withstand Him?<sup>2</sup> With this conviction as to the relation of Jehovah to His people, there was developed within Israel a sense of corporate responsibility toward Jehovah. Defection in part was considered to be defection in the whole. Thus, when Achan sinned, the whole nation was held responsible.<sup>3</sup> When the prophets came on the scene, they addressed themselves to the conscience of the nation as a whole. They treated Israel "as a unity, personified as an individual mind, capable in relation to God of all the wealth of personal thought and emotion"<sup>4</sup>

Jeremiah, in the early part of his life, differed in no respect from his prophetic predecessors. He labored with all his might to bring about a national repentance. From boyhood he had been taught the Torah. He had heard over and over the remarkable stories of the history of his people, and always they had been bound inseparably with Israel's God. Through these stories and his own contact with Jehovah, there grew in him the conviction that Israel had a purpose in the

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1. Cf. II Kings 19:32-34; Isa. 31:4,5.
2. Psalm 2.
3. Joshua 7.
4. J. Skinner, op. cit., p. 72.

world. All this Jehovah's care and manifest power in her behalf was not for naught. In metaphor after metaphor he attempts to set forth the intimate relation that existed between Jehovah and Israel. First of all, she is Jehovah's bride.<sup>1</sup> Jehovah is her Lover. He has planned a great future for her. He has brought her out of bondage to a land of freedom.<sup>2</sup> He has lavished bounties upon her.<sup>3</sup> The supreme delight of His soul has been in seeking her well-being.<sup>4</sup> The richness of their love He desires to be realized perpetually in mutual possession: "I will be your God and ye shall be my people".<sup>5</sup> She is to know her Lover intimately, and this knowledge is the supreme value of the universe.<sup>6</sup> He longs to take her by the hand and lead her to Zion, there to instruct her and cultivate in her her potentialities, in a word, to bring her to her highest self-realization.<sup>7</sup> He loves Israel, first of all, for Israel's sake.

But Jeremiah sees that there is another motive in God's choice of Israel. Other figures which he uses to describe the relationship are revealing. Israel from the first was planted a noble vine that she might bear fruit,<sup>8</sup> and as "a green olive tree, fair with goodly fruit";<sup>9</sup> she was originally designed a linen girdle to cling to Jehovah<sup>10</sup> and made a vessel for service.<sup>11</sup> The latter two figures are

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1. 2:2; 3:1,14,20.
2. 2:6.
3. 2:7.
4. 11:5; 32:38-44.
5. 7:23; 30:22; 11:4,5.
6. 9:23, 24.

7. 3:14-16.
8. 2:21.
9. 11:16.
10. 13:1-11.
11. 18:1-12.

particularly enlightening. The linen girdle, being linen such as appointed for priestly wear,<sup>1</sup> is a particularly apt figure to indicate the sacred purpose for which Jehovah intended Israel. As a girdle has a purpose, so has Israel, says Jeremiah. That purpose is expressly stated:

"For as the girdle cleaveth to the loins of a man, so have I caused to cleave unto me the whole house of Judah, saith Jehovah; that they may be unto me for a people, and for a name, and for a praise, and for a glory..<sup>2</sup>

"For a name, and for a praise, and for a glory.."--Israel's purpose goes beyond herself. She is to glorify Jehovah, to make a name for Him, that He may be glorified in her. Now consider the figure of the potter and his vessel. We pause here to note only the fact that the potter was making a vessel, not an ornament, a thing that had a definite use. Israel was the clay out of which the Great Potter was attempting to make something of use. He had a design in mind, which He proposed to transfer to the plastic clay. So Israel was chosen by God and shaped by His hands for a high service. George Adam Smith says, "The predestination of men or nations, which the prophet sees figured in the work of the potter, is to service."<sup>3</sup>

Now to return again to the linen girdle. The point that Jeremiah especially forces on our attention is that God's purpose has been thwarted. In the case of the girdle,

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1. A.W. Streane, op. cit., p. 103.

2. 13:11.

3. Op. cit., p. 186.

the truth is borne home that Israel has been corrupted by foreign influences; her stubbornness of heart and false worship have eaten out her life, according to the figure, marred the girdle; "it was profitable for nothing".<sup>1</sup> The noble vine turned into degenerate branches of a foreign vine,<sup>2</sup> the fair green olive-tree was broken down and burned;<sup>3</sup> the clay over which the potter worked so assiduously had flaws in it which caused the vessel to be marred.<sup>4</sup> Jeremiah, after his years of preaching, which seemingly were of no effect, was driven to the wall, fighting against an unwanted conclusion. He had hoped that Israel would repent of her waywardness, return to Jehovah, and yet fulfil her appointed end.<sup>5</sup> But as his impassioned pleading fell on deaf ears and Israel plunged on in her mad career of iniquity, yea, delighted to do evil,<sup>6</sup> he was forced to the conclusion that Israel's hurt was incurable. She was so inured to her sin that she had lost the power of reformation. There is intensity of pathos in Jeremiah's questioning lament: "Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots? then may ye also do good, that are accustomed to do evil."<sup>7</sup> We are reminded of Aristotle's words, "It is not in man's power to do right when he is so immersed in his own vices so as to have lost the power of free choice".<sup>8</sup> The climax of Jeremiah's pro-

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1. 13:7.

2. 2:21.

3. 11:16.

4. 18:4.

5. 3:1.12-14,22; 4:1, etc.

6. 11:15; 14:10.

7. 13:23.

8. Ethics, Book 7.

nouncement of the inescapability of Judah's punishment came with the dramatic smashing of the potter's bottle before the elders of the people and the elders of the priests.<sup>1</sup> With intensity born of desperation Jeremiah pronounced doom on Jerusalem and destruction to its inhabitants.<sup>2</sup> What else could a righteous God do but meet out justice to a rebellious nation?<sup>3</sup>

Had Jeremiah left us here we might have dubbed him for all time as the pessimist of pessimists. We do not know; perhaps, for a time he was lost in the dark of uncertainty. The nation had to go down; that was certain, but was that all? Was the Sovereign of the universe to be defeated by puny bits of refractoriness? We are certain that he knew the answer in the house of the potter. He watched the deft hands of the potter shape the plastic clay into a vessel, but, lo, "the clay was marred in the hand of the potter".<sup>4</sup> But was the potter defeated? Nay, he was merely thwarted: "he made it again another vessel, as seemed good to the potter to make it".<sup>5</sup> The problem raised by the breaking of the potter's bottle in chapter 19 is answered in the character of the potter as set forth in chapter 18. He is not disheartened by a failure. He crushes the still plastic clay and tries again, this time succeeding in his design. Had Jeremiah seen only the clay and failed to see the resolute

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1. Chapter 19.

2. 19:6-9.

3. Cf. 5:7-9; 15:5-9.

4. 18:4.

5. Ibid.

face of the potter he would have received no answer to his problem. J.S. Mackenzie's words verily are true: "Those who fix their attention on the lives of individuals have always sufficient ground for pessimism."<sup>1</sup> But Jeremiah lifted his eyes from the clay to the potter, from the people to God. Now he saw clearly that his generation, like the marred vessel, would be destroyed, but out of a generation that was fully willing the Great Potter would shape a perfect vessel.

After the battle of Carchemish, Jeremiah saw clearly that the Babylonians were to be the agents in Jehovah's hand for the destruction of Jerusalem. It appears that chapters 19 and 20 should be placed shortly after Carchemish, since it is likely that his unequivocal pronouncements of the doom of Jerusalem at the hands of the Babylonians and the Babylonian captivity<sup>2</sup> were founded on his knowledge of the Babylonian prowess displayed in this battle. It is quite likely, furthermore, that the roll which Jehoiakim burned during the fifth year of his reign (soon after Carchemish), contained oracles of doom based on the results of Carchemish.<sup>3</sup> From then on to the fall of Jerusalem, neither false prophet nor king could persuade Jeremiah otherwise.<sup>4</sup> Babylon would triumph. In his earlier days

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1. Manual of Ethics, p. 440, quoted by T.C. Gordon, The Rebel Prophet, p. 125.
2. 20:4-6.
3. Chapter 36.
4. Cf. Hananiah, ch. 28 and Zedekiah, chpts. 21, 34, 37, 38.

he had considered the Scythians to be the scourge of God.<sup>1</sup> He had been mistaken about this, but there could be no mistake now. However, the Babylonians were not to destroy Judah completely. Throughout his long career he was convinced of the necessity of corrective punishment; but its purpose was corrective: "I will melt them and try them"<sup>2</sup> but "I will not make a full end".<sup>3</sup> The branches were to be taken away, but the tree was not to be cut down.<sup>4</sup> The nation's sin was to be recompensed double, but in the end the survivors were to be fished up out of the Euphrates and hunted up from the hills and clefts of the rock where they had been scattered.<sup>5</sup> The seventy years of captivity, Jeremiah declared, would be turned into a glorious home-coming.

It must be noted here that Jeremiah's conception of the essential unity of the Jewish nation brought him to the conclusion that not only Judah but Israel also would be restored.<sup>6</sup> There is evident in his prophecies an intense personal love for Israel, particularly for Ephraim.<sup>7</sup> He saw all the children of Israel as potential children of Jehovah. Early in his prophetic ministry he held hopes for the repentance of Israel.<sup>8</sup> Now, in the light of the great assured future, it is not strange that he should conceive of a united Israel, the long feud over, and both serving Jehovah in complete

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1. Chapters 1-6.

2. 9:7.

3. 4:27; 5:10,18; 30:11.

4. 5:10.

5. 16:16-18.

6. 31:4-9,17-20,27, etc.

7. 31:6,9,18.

8. 3:11-18.

accord. His earlier hope,

"In those days the house of Judah shall walk with the house of Israel, and they shall come together out of the land of the north to the land that I gave for an inheritance unto your fathers,"<sup>1</sup>

remained unchanged in his later prophecies:

"For there shall be a day that the watchmen upon the hills of Ephraim shall cry, Arise ye, and let us go up to Zion unto Jehovah our God."<sup>2</sup>

The Book of Consolation (Chpts. 30-33) is full of beautiful lyrics describing the delightful conditions of the future restored land. Simmering them down, Jeremiah sees a new and ideal kingdom in which there will be religious establishment,<sup>3</sup> unshadowed communion with Jehovah<sup>4</sup> in which all nations shall participate,<sup>5</sup> economic prosperity,<sup>6</sup> social joy,<sup>7</sup> and political security, built about the person of an ideal ruler,<sup>8</sup> and guaranteed by the protection of Jehovah.<sup>9</sup>

Briefly, then, Jeremiah's philosophy of nationalism is this: Israel is especially chosen of God as a people of His own heart, whom in love He seeks to bring to their highest self-realization in and through fellowship with Himself, and through this fellowship experience to commend Him to the nations, to the end that all ultimately shall participate in the benefits of knowing and serving Him, the one true God. Regardless of the constraint of this high purpose, Israel

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1. 3:18.
2. 31:6.
3. 32:40; 33:8.
4. 31:33,34; 30:9,22; 31:1.
5. 3:17; 16:19,20; 33:9.

6. 32:43,44; 31:5,12.
7. 30:19; 31:4,13.
8. 23:5,6; 30:21; 33:14,15.
9. 30:20.

is thwarting Jehovah's purpose by willful sin and stubbornness. But Jehovah cannot be defeated. The refractory generation will go down, but out of the debris of the destruction Jehovah will raise up a generation who will completely obey and follow Him. In them He will work out His purpose for the world. This generation He will establish in restored Zion, where they will be a blessing to all mankind.

"On, people of God: for, wherever ye roam,  
Your road leads through the world to eternity, home."<sup>1</sup>

## II. His Philosophy of Individualism.

In presenting Jeremiah's philosophy of nationalism we have shown that he believed that Israel ultimately would fulfil her destiny in the world, but we did not show how he believed it would be carried out. It is in his conception of the divine method with man that his greatness lies. To this divine method let us now turn.

### A. Individual Responsibility.

At the outset of Jeremiah's prophetic career, he allied himself wholeheartedly with Josiah's reform movement. We hear in the "Amen, O Jehovah,"<sup>2</sup> the echo of solid approval. He was in for anything that would turn the current of the national life. But it is quite evident that the movement had not gone on long before Jeremiah began to realize that

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1. Stefan Zweig, Jeremiah, p. 331.
2. 11:5.

it had its limitations. He did not find a fundamental transformation of life as he had hoped to find. Instead, he found that the people began to regard the law as a sort of fetish. As long as they possessed it and rendered an external obedience to it, they considered that they were meeting all the demands of Jehovah. They had no regard for the internal disposition of the heart.

"How do ye say, We are wise and the law of Jehovah is with us: But behold, the false pen of the scribes hath wrought falsely. The wise men are put to shame, they are dismayed and taken: lo, they have rejected the word of Jehovah; and what manner of wisdom is in them?"<sup>1</sup>

Josiah had attempted to re-organize religion, and to a great extent he was successful in bringing about outward conformity. However, Jeremiah soon came to see that true religion could not be legislated. The national reformation had failed to eradicate sin from the life of the people. Somehow he came to the conviction that the root of sin could be done away only as individual sin was dealt with.

"When the rotten surface of the national life...broke under the prophet, he fell upon the deeper levels of the individual heart and not only found the native sinfulness of this to be the explanation of the public and social corruption, but discovered also soil for the seed-bed of new truths and new hopes."<sup>2</sup>

Jeremiah did not have to go beyond the bounds of his own heart to be convinced that the root of sin lay there. He was not above the natural frailties and sins of the heart.

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1. 8:8,9.

2. G.A. Smith, op. cit., p. 368.

Skinner's remark is worthy of quotation:

"He who had sat as a gold-refiner, testing the lives of the men around him and finding them to be refuse silver (6:27f.) was himself tested by Jehovah, and he found that all was not pure gold within himself. He was losing victory over himself and without personal victory he could have no victory over the world."<sup>1</sup>

The confession, "The heart is most treacherous of all things, and sick beyond cure: who can know it?"<sup>2</sup> was wrung out of the prophet's own experience. When he laid bare his own heart before Jehovah, through His eyes he saw evil propensities that he did not know existed, and he cried out, "Heal me, Jehovah, and I shall be healed; save me, and I shall be saved indeed".<sup>3</sup> Thus, to his question, "Who can know it?" he answered out of his own experience, "I, Jehovah, am Searcher of hearts, and Tester of thoughts am I, to give each what his doings have earned, to let each reap the fruit of his deeds".<sup>4</sup>

The last part of the verse just quoted suggests directly the fact of individual responsibility. If sin inheres in the individual will<sup>5</sup>, and if it brings down the judgment of Jehovah, it is evident that it is the individual sinner who will

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1. Op. cit., p. 214.
2. 17:9, J.E. McFadyen's translation, op. cit., p. 74.
3. 17:14, Ibid.
4. 17:10, Ibid.
5. More technically, Jeremiah meant that sin inheres in the individual will. H.W. Robinson, op. cit., p. 76 explains Jeremiah's meaning thus: "We must remember that the heart in Hebrew psychology is not primarily the seat of the emotions, as with us, but of the intellectual and especially the volitional side of life, so that the best translation of the Hebrew term 'heart' as here, would be the 'will'". Cf. 5:23; 9:14; 23:17 where stubbornness of heart is mentioned. Here it is evident that the will is intended.

be punished: "to give each what his doings have earned, to let each reap the fruit of his deeds". It will be the sinner himself, and not his posterity with him: "every one shall die for his own iniquity: every man that eateth the sour grapes, his teeth shall be set on edge".<sup>1</sup> In this statement lies a tremendous new concept. For centuries the people had suffered under a system of national religion where the innocent were punished along with the guilty. That day was past forever. Henceforth, the soul of every man should be tried individually in the court of the Almighty. The significance of this concept of personal responsibility lies in the fact that it is the basis for his greater concept of personal religion. Personal religion must have its roots in personal need.

#### B. His Philosophy of Personal Religion.

Just as we found the roots of Jeremiah's philosophy of sin and individual responsibility in the failure of the Deuteronomic reform movement, so also we find the roots of his philosophy of personal religion here. We saw previously that the reform failed to eradicate sin from the people's lives. But the failure of the reforms carried Jeremiah further than the mere knowledge of failure. He saw that there could be no positive heart righteousness effected through mere obedience to the demands of external law. Under the

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1. 31:30; 32:19.

power of this conviction at times he grew impatient with the Deuteronomic ritualism. He rose to such heights of emotion in his temple discourse that he practically condemned the ritualistic system.

"For I spake not unto your fathers, nor commanded them in the day that I brought them out of the land of Egypt, concerning burnt offerings or sacrifices: but this I commanded them, saying, Hearken unto my voice, and I will be your God, and ye shall be my people; and walk ye in all the way that I command you, that it may be well with you. But they hearkened not, nor inclined their ear, but walked in their own counsels and in the stubbornness of their evil heart, and went backward and not forward."<sup>1</sup>

We are not to think that Jeremiah actually condemned the Deuteronomic way as a false approach to God. His major indictment is not that they offered sacrifices, but that they "walked in their own counsels and in the stubbornness of their evil heart..." It is probably safe to say that Jeremiah saw that the Deuteronomic way was inadequate at best.<sup>2</sup> Longacre's observations on the Deuteronomic way are enlight-

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1. 7:22-24.
2. It appears to me that H.G. Mitchell in his article, "The Theology of Jeremiah," Journal of Biblical Literature, Vol. XX, 1901, goes wrong when he contends that Jeremiah didn't recognize the priestly ritual of his time as divinely ordained. As evidence he cites 6:20, "...your burnt-offerings are not acceptable, nor your sacrifices pleasing to me". The context is quite clear that Jeremiah is finding fault not with the system as such but with the people's lives. His point is that the fruits of sacrificial offerings are not accompanied by the fruits of righteous living. Mitchell further contends that Jeremiah held that there was no efficacy to ceremonialism. To support this he cites 4:4; 6:10; 9:24,25f. Is it not safer to conclude here as before that he did not object to circumcision "per se," but he wanted more; he wanted circumcision of the heart?

ening:

"All commands in Deuteronomy could not receive equal obedience. Where they were definite, specific, and objective they were obeyed with enthusiasm, but where they touched matters of the spirit and motive, obedience was not so easy. One could not always say just how they were to be worked out. The result was that the external features of the book were welcomed, while the inner and more spiritual features were neglected."<sup>1</sup>

The people had the law, the book, but were ignorant of the truth<sup>2</sup> and destitute of the power of religion.

But we must go beyond the prophet's observations to his experience to find full explanation of his philosophy of personal religion. Had Jeremiah spun his philosophy out of speculation and sentimental idealism, had he never sharpened his religion by the whetstone of life, we with Milton would say:

"I cannot praise a fugitive and cloistered virtue, unexercized and unbreathed, that never sallies out and sees her adversary, but slinks out of the race, where that immortal garland is to be run for, not without dust and heat."<sup>3</sup>

Jeremiah's religion is of value to us on the very score that it is the result of real life experiences. His sufferings constantly drove him into the heart of God. Fortunately, we have his "confessions", which are "windows through which we are allowed to look into a spiritual temple, and to say, reverently, of what we see, 'Behold, he prayeth!'"<sup>4</sup> When the Anathoth men sought his life, he entered into his spiritual

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1. L.B. Longacre, A Prophet of the Spirit, p. 71.
2. 5:4; 7:28.
3. Quoted from H.W. Robinson, op. cit., p. 47.
4. Ibid, p. 50.

temple to lay bare his soul before Jehovah, and in response to his prayer he received an answer that shamed him for his complaint.<sup>1</sup> When he lamented his birth because he had been cursed of all men<sup>2</sup> and because he had been left to nurse his heart wounds in solitude,<sup>3</sup> he found beside him the Friend of friends, who put about him a strong, supporting arm: "verily I will strengthen thee for good..."<sup>4</sup> and I will make thee unto this people a fortified, brazen wall..."<sup>5</sup> When his back was torn from the lash and strained from the stocks, that strange Presence was with him: "But Jehovah is with me as a mighty one and a terrible".<sup>6</sup> A fire, which could not be extinguished but was rather intensified by the sting of the lash, burned in his bones.<sup>7</sup> Moreover, not even Paul and Silas could sing more lustily than he to Him who "hath delivered the soul of the needy from the hand of evil-doers".<sup>8</sup> When his flesh and heart failed, says Skinner, Jeremiah found in God the strength of his heart and his portion forever.<sup>9</sup> There is profound experience behind his contrast of the flesh-trusting man, who, he sees, is left desolate and forsaken "like the juniper tree in the steppe",<sup>10</sup> with the Jehovah-trusting man, who is "as a tree planted by waters".<sup>11</sup> Experience had taught him where to place his trust.

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1. 12:1-6.
2. 15:10.
3. 15:17.
4. 15:11.
5. 15:20.
6. 20:11.

7. 20:9.
8. 20:13.
9. J. Skinner, op. cit., p.223.
10. S.R. Driver's transl., op. cit., of 17:5,6.
11. 17:7,8.

New experiences and new crises taught Jeremiah new lessons. At successive stages we can see advances in his view of personal religion. When the 10,000 under Jehoiachin were carried into captivity, Jeremiah was face to face with a new issue. What about the religion of the captives? How could they worship their God in a strange land? Here again his solution came out of his conception of God. As we saw in chapter three, there was not a trace of the old henotheism in his conception of God. He knew Jehovah to be the God of the universe, a God who is spiritual and omnipresent. What difference, then, did it make if the captives were in a strange land, away from the temple? The Jehovah who fills heaven and earth<sup>1</sup> was there as truly as He was in Jerusalem. Quite independently of temple, priesthood or ritualism they could commune with Him.<sup>2</sup> The only condition was that they seek Him with their whole heart.<sup>3</sup> In this philosophy of personal, individual religion, independent of temple and ritualism, practicable and workable in any land through direct contact with God lies the seed of universal, personal religion such as that taught by Jesus.

Jeremiah's classic utterance on personal religion, his conception of the New Covenant, probably was the full grown lily that sprang from the muck of his experiences during the siege and fall of Jerusalem, although its roots were in the

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1. 23:24.
2. 29:7.
3. 29:12-14.

deep sub-soil of his total life experience. The ravages of the siege and the ravages of his personal suffering drove him further into the heart of God than he had ever gone before. He was total<sup>1</sup> alone. He could well have said, "I, even I only, am left, and they seek my life to take it away".<sup>1</sup> Skinner points out that in such a position a prophet will do one of two things: "despair of religion", or "find in himself, in his own assent to its truth and his sense of its imperishable worth, the germ and pledge of a new religious relationship, and a proof that there is that in the human heart which will not let the truth of God perish".<sup>2</sup> In other words, Jeremiah's religion had come to be such an important factor in his personal life that he might well have exulted as Paul did:

"Who shall separate us from the love of God...?<sup>3</sup> shall tribulation, or anguish, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?"<sup>4</sup>

In truth, Jeremiah had faced all these things. But he had found that nothing was able to separate him from the love of God. He had come to see that the relationship which he sustained to Jehovah ultimately must become the universal relationship. The Jewish nation had been destroyed, the temple had been razed, the ritualistic way on the basis of the old covenant was no longer possible. Besides, ritualism had failed. All that remained was the human heart and

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1. I Kings 19:10.

2. J. Skinner, op. cit., p. 219.

3. Marginal rendering of Revised Version, Romans 8:35.

4. Romans 8:35-39.

God. If God would have a rendezvous with man, it must be in the lowly stable of the human heart, not in the vaulted chambers of the Jerusalem temple. Jeremiah's answer to the eternal cry of the human heart for God was the New Covenant.

"Behold, the days come, saith Jehovah, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Judah: not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt; which my covenant they brake, although I was a husband unto them, saith Jehovah. But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, saith Jehovah: I will put my law in their inward parts, and in their heart will I write it: and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. And they shall teach no more every man his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, Know Jehovah; for they shall all know me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them, saith Jehovah: for I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin will I remember no more."<sup>1</sup>

There are at least six characteristics of the New Covenant as Jeremiah conceives it.

1. It will be inward: "I will put my law in their inward parts". Fidelity will be based on the will, the heart disposition, rather than on external observances.

2. It will be individual: "in their heart will I write it". Each person will bear a separate, independent relation to Jehovah. He will have direct and personal access to Him. The individual's relationship will not longer be conditioned by the relationship of the nation.

3. It will be transformative: "I will forgive their iniquity and their sin will I remember no more". It will involve a spiritual and moral change, based on forgiveness. It's effectiveness will be assured because it will be backed

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1. 31:31-34.

by the character of God.

4. It will be comprehensive: "for they shall all know me". It thus will be all-inclusive, effecting complete allegiance.

5. It will be eternal: "If these ordinances depart from before me, saith Jehovah, then the seed of Israel also shall cease from being a nation before me forever".<sup>1</sup>

6. It will be consummative: "they shall all know me.." "I will be their God and they shall be my people." Herein will the great purpose of God be completed: mutual fellowship and mutual possession.

The swing from the national to the personal conception of religion was no little swing. Nothing but the most tempestuous winds could have driven Jeremiah off the traditional course. Adversity had driven him into a new channel through which all future religion must pass. We see the individual now standing alone, his sins bearing on himself only; but we see also a God who is waiting to bear the sins of that heart, to enter in and fellowship with him. The individual now is transformed, and he, together with his transformed fellows, form a new nation. Jeremiah's conception of restored and perfected Israel would have been impossible without his philosophy of individualism. The whole cannot be greater than the sum of its parts; if all are to know Him, each one must know Him. Through individualism

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1. 31:35 f.

the religion became national in the true sense of the term.<sup>1</sup>

### III. His Philosophy of Universalism.

We should think it strange indeed should we find no traces of universalism in Jeremiah's philosophy. Throughout the whole of his views, universalism is implicit it not always explicit. He did not live under the noon-day sun of universalism; he lived in the prophetic age in which "the light of universalism was but the light of a star in the night",<sup>2</sup> to which we might add, that the light of universalism in Jeremiah, at least, is the light of a star of the first magnitude.

First of all, universalism is implicit in the character of Jeremiah's God. Our study thus far has shown his God to be the one and only universal God, Sovereign of the universe, a God whose laws are inexorable and whose demands are peremptory. His one universal standard is righteousness, and to this standard all nations are bound to conform, or be justly punished. Before this kind of a God all nations stand on an equal footing. There are no favorites before Him who "exercizeth...justice and righteousness in the earth".<sup>3</sup> The only immunity in this universal court is on the basis of moral rectitude.<sup>4</sup> But justice is not all; He exercizeth

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1. A.S. Peake, op. cit., Vol. I, pp. 45-46, (Intro.).

2. A.B. Bruce, op. cit., p. 188.

3. 9:24.

4. See chapter five, pp. 129-132.

lovingkindness in the earth also.<sup>1</sup> He has a beneficent design for all men. Israel is the chosen agent for the fulfilment of this design. She was meant to be unto Jehovah "for a people, and for a name, and for a praise, and for a glory"<sup>2</sup> "before all the nations of the earth".<sup>3</sup> Early in his ministry Jeremiah saw that if Judah would repent she might still fulfil her destiny, "and the nations shall bless themselves in him, and in him shall they glory".<sup>4</sup> But Israel did not repent. Instead, she brought disgrace upon Jehovah's name. For this Jeremiah declared that she was going to be disgraced that Jehovah's name might be graced.<sup>5</sup> By his keen insight Jeremiah saw that even this humiliation of Zion would ultimately further God's universal cause. In the restoration of Israel, God's redemptive righteousness would be displayed. The restoration "from the land of the North"<sup>6</sup> would be a more powerful manifestation of Jehovah's power than the deliverance from Egypt had been.<sup>7</sup> In the light of this wonder, Jeremiah visions the nations of the earth casting down their false gods, confessing their vanity, and coming from the ends of the earth unto Jehovah.<sup>8</sup>

In his philosophy of personal religion lies the real heart of his universalism. Religion as he defined it was not a relationship between God and the Jews, but between

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1. 9:24.  
2. 13:11.  
3. 33:9.  
4. 4:2.

5. 18:13-17; 19:8; 22:8.  
6. 16:15.  
7. 16:14.  
8. 12:16; 16:19.

God and man. Jehovah was not confined to Zion. All men wherever they were who would seek Him with their whole heart might find Him.<sup>1</sup> The ritual of the temple, the ark of the covenant, the law were no longer needed.<sup>2</sup> Man no longer needed to go to some sanctuary to be instructed in the Sacred Oracles. Jeremiah saw that in the future "men's spiritual life would not be at the mercy of pen, ink, and paper, of scribe and priest".<sup>3</sup> The favored Jew no longer would instruct his neighbor in the law of Jehovah, "for they shall all know me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them, saith Jehovah".<sup>4</sup> Obedience then will spring out of a pure, regenerate heart, and result in constant moral action. With religion conceived of in terms of a personal and individual experience of God, it is possible for all men anywhere and any time. According to Jeremiah, man can come to God anywhere, and God will come to man anywhere.

If we have any fault to find with his philosophy of universalism, it would be that he is hardly consistent in it. It is difficult to harmonize his conception of restored Zion as the dispenser of the knowledge of Jehovah to all nations with his philosophy of personal religion in which each man is his own priest. Why should all nations come to Zion? There is no answer except to say that he did not

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1. 12:16.

2. Chapter 29; 3:16; 31:32-34.

3. C.J. Ball, op. cit., p. 354.

4. 31:34.

swing absolutely clear of the nationalism of his background. We are not to condemn him for not going further, but we are rather to marvel that he went as far as he did. The great thing is that he pointed out the path along which all future religion was to travel.

#### IV. Summary.

To conclude as we began the chapter, to what extent does Jeremiah's philosophy of life "bring the course of human history within its survey, and the sequence of events as an evolution in which the purposive action of reason is traceable"? As far as the course of human history is concerned, there is little which is not included in his scope of interest. He starts, first of all, with God, the Creator and Controller of the universe, in whom all values are centered. The chief end of man he considers to be concerned with God, and toward Him all the ends of the universe bend. The "summum bonum" of the universe is knowledge of and fellowship with God. To this end Jehovah chose the Jews that in them He might work out His beneficent purpose for mankind. He spent Himself lavishly in cultivating them that they might realize their highest possibilities. Through their high type of life He planned that they should commend Him to the nations, that ultimately they might come to know Him and to participate in the rewards of knowing Him. But the Jews as a nation failed Jehovah in His high purpose.

Through national sin they thwarted His plans. Jeremiah then sees that Jehovah as a just God will be forced to punish the nation for her sin. This punishment he declares will be corrective as well as punitive. The nation will go down, but the Almighty will not be defeated. Out of the humbled remnant Jeremiah sees that He will raise up a generation who will follow Him willingly. Their relation to Him will be on a new basis. They will do His will perfectly because within them a moral change has been effected. Their service will then rest on personal affection rather than on compulsion. In and through them Jehovah will consummate His purpose for the universe. The knowledge of Israel's God will fill the earth. All will worship Him and serve Him wholeheartedly because of an inner disposition of heart, and the purpose of God--mutual fellowship and possession, "I will be their God and they shall be my people"--will be achieved.

By such a philosophy of the relation of man to God Jeremiah contemplates the course of human history and the end of purposive existence.

**CHAPTER FIVE**  
**JEREMIAH'S PHILOSOPHY OF THE**  
**RELATION OF MAN TO MAN**

CHAPTER FIVE  
JEREMIAH'S PHILOSOPHY OF THE  
RELATION OF MAN TO MAN

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III. Summary.

CHAPTER FIVE  
JEREMIAH'S PHILOSOPHY OF THE  
RELATION OF MAN TO MAN

In passing from a consideration of Jeremiah's philosophy of the relation of man to God to a consideration of his view of the relation of man to his fellow, we must make it clear that we are not leaving God behind for a new "terminus ad quem". We are merely shifting emphasis. God can no more be ruled out of Jeremiah's conception of human relationships than out of His own universe. Jeremiah would hardly agree with Pope's dictum, "Presume not God to scan; the proper study of mankind is man".<sup>1</sup> He rather would have us keep one eye God-ward, while with the other we look man-ward. To what extent God colored his philosophy of human relationships will appear as we proceed.

I. His Political Philosophy.

It was the lot of the Hebrew prophet to represent Jehovah in all spheres of the national life. The peculiar thing about the worship of Jehovah was that it would not take a place on a parity with other activities of the state; it must dominate the whole. There was no such thing as a separation of national functions; Jehovah would have all or none. The message from Israel's God was thus a message for the whole nation. In the delivery of this message the pro-

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1. Alexander Pope, Essay on Man.

phet was brought into conflict with the whole order. He was set "against the kings of Judah, against the princes thereof, against the priests thereof, and against the people of the land".<sup>1</sup> Not only was he set against his own land, but he was made also a prophet unto the nations,<sup>2</sup> to make known the supreme will of Jehovah for all men.

In order to grasp clearly Jeremiah's political philosophy, we shall need to answer the question, Was Jeremiah a statesman or a politician? What is the fundamental difference between the two? Dr. Gunsaulus somewhere has said: "Statesmanship is the art of finding out in what direction Almighty God is going, and in getting things out of His way". The statesman, then, has a center outside himself for his activities. He seeks to find the eternal purpose of God for mankind and to act in accord with it, regardless of personal interests. He has a world outlook. The politician, on the other hand, is narrow in his interests. His slogan is, "My country, right or wrong". He is not interested in serving God and the world; he wants God and the world to serve him. He is "a barnacle attached to the body politic".<sup>3</sup> Whatever means is convenient he will employ to achieve his end.

"A politician, Proteous-like, doth alter  
His face and habit; and, like water, seem  
Of the same color that the vessel is  
That doth contain it, varying his form,  
With the chameleon, at each object's change."<sup>4</sup>

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1. 1:18.

2. 1:5.

3. A.C. Dixon, Lights and Shadows of American Life, p. 102.

4. Mason, quoted by Ibid, p. 100.

Into which class does Jeremiah fall, and what are his principles of action? We shall view the problem from two angles: his relation to national politics; and his relation to international politics.

#### A. National Politics.

##### 1. Governmental Organization.

The first thing to note is that Jeremiah was not a political revolutionist. Nowhere do we find him advocating a change of governmental form as an aid toward national reconstruction. He was absolutely committed to the monarchical system. A glance at his vision of the future will convince us of this fact. The ideal form of government, he says, will be built around "a righteous Branch", who will "reign as king".<sup>1</sup> He will be a true representative of the people, and he will be enthroned according to their selection.<sup>2</sup> He will live in his restored palace amid social festivity and rejoicing.<sup>3</sup> About him will be his court. Together they will live in splendor, ruling forever.<sup>4</sup> In him will be vested complete authority; upon him will depend the success of the nation.<sup>5</sup> He will rule equitably and righteously. Israel in this golden age will rest in peace and

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1. 23:5.

2. 30:21.

3. 30:18,19.

4. 17:24,25. Though these verses are not properly a part of his prophecies of the future, they nevertheless reveal his ideal.

5. 23:6.

security.<sup>1</sup> But we have not painted the whole picture. Behind the government Jeremiah sees Jehovah, the ultimate Ruler. It is from Him that the king will derive his right to rule and his power.<sup>2</sup> His derived authority and position will be reflected in his very name, "Jehovah our righteousness."<sup>3</sup>

The difference between Jeremiah and the politicians of his day was that he saw beyond the visible king to the Invisible King. The Invisible King nominally had a place in the affairs of the nation, but it was a nominal rather than an actual place. The wheels of the old theocratic-monarchical form of government were still intact, but the monarchical wheels were the only ones that were turning. With the insight of true statesmanship Jeremiah pierced through the national prejudices that blinded the politicians<sup>4</sup> and uncovered the underlying cause of the nation's ills. God had been neglected; the king had been magnified. It was Jeremiah's task to restore God to His place at the head of the nation, and to reduce the king to his proper subordinate position, rather than to attempt to establish a new form of government. This he set about to do, regardless of party or personal interests. He saw that only a government that is God-centered can fulfil its mission.

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1. 23:6; 33:15,16.

2. 30:21; 23:5.

3. 23:6.

4. Cf. Hananiah, chapter 28.

## 2. Governmental Objectives.

Jeremiah had no little amount to say about governmental objectives. He saw clearly that no governmental system has a right to exist unless it seeks to advance the interests of the governed. He had a genuine respect for king Josiah for the very reason that he administered the government in accord with the fundamental purpose of government. His attitude is plainly stated in his words to Jehoiakim:

"Did not thy father eat and drink and do justice and righteousness? then it was well with him. He judged the cause of the poor and needy; then it was well. Was not this to know me? saith Jehovah."<sup>1</sup>

By this statement Jeremiah made plain two fundamental truths: that government exists solely for the administration of justice to the governed; and that the government that does administer justice has Divine sanction. The converse of the latter truth Jeremiah also knew to be true: that the government which does not administer justice is under the Divine wrath. Hence, he turns of Jehoiakim with biting accusations:

"But thine eyes and thy heart are not but for thy covetousness, and for shedding innocent blood, and for oppression, and for violence, to do it. Therefore, ...he shall be buried with the burial of an ass, drawn and cast forth beyond the gates of Jerusalem."<sup>2</sup>

And again,

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1. 22:16.
2. 22:17.

"O house of David, thus saith Jehovah: Execute justice in the morning, and deliver him that is robbed out of the hand of the oppressor, lest my wrath go forth like fire, and burn so that none can quench it, because of the evil of your doings."<sup>1</sup>

With such adamant conviction that government exists for the benefit of the governed, we are not surprised that justice and righteousness are emphasized as they are in reference to the coming ideal kingdom. The new Shepherds will feed the flock, rather than scatter it and tear it to pieces by injustices.<sup>2</sup> The future king will be "a righteous Branch" who will "deal wisely, and shall execute justice and righteousness in the land."<sup>3</sup> It will be an age when the individual will receive his due. Peace and security for all will prevail.<sup>4</sup>

Had the kings of Judah ruled in equity, the state would have been saved, and Jeremiah would have been spared the torments of his long life of strife. But justice had taken to her wings. The prophet saw that unrighteous leadership meant an unrighteous people, that political disease among the authorities meant a pestilence among the people. It was a far cry from the original theocracy, which had "the happiness and well being of the people as the one supreme law of political philosophy",<sup>5</sup> to the degenerate condition of exploitation and abuse of human personality. Such degeneracy

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1. 21:11,12.

2. 23:1-4.

3. 23:5; 33:15.

4. 23:6; 33:16.

5. E.C. Wines, Commentaries on the Laws of the Ancient Hebrews, p. 638.

was a direct reflection on the character of Jehovah, who was supposed to be at the head of the affairs of the nation. Jeremiah knew that Jehovah would not tolerate a government whose objectives were degraded and whose leadership was corrupt. Nothing less than a government for the highest justice to the governed could satisfy the true statesman and the God whom he represented.

### 3. Obligations of Citizenship.

We now approach a difficult problem. It is concerned with Jeremiah's political attitude during the siege of Jerusalem. The problem we shall need to solve is, Was Jeremiah a traitor to his country's interests, or was he a true patriot, and what principle of citizenship does his action reveal? To understand the situation at the time of the siege it will be necessary, first of all, to survey the background.

The failure of Josiah's reforms and the increasing hardness of heart on the part of the people during the reign of Jehoiakim brought Jeremiah to the unalterable conclusion that the destruction of Jerusalem as a just punishment for her sin was inevitable. Not only this, but he also came to see that the temple and all national religious institutions must be destroyed if true religion was to be perpetuated.<sup>1</sup> The reform movement had centered religion in the temple; but a bare externalism and superstitious trust in the temple

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1. 7:12-15; 26:5,6.

were all the fruit that the movement brought. The temple was between Jehovah and the human heart. The barrier had to be done away. After the battle of Carchemish, Jeremiah, with the keen political insight of a statesman, saw in the young and virile Babylonian empire the instrument of Jehovah for the punishment of Israel and the destruction of the temple.<sup>1</sup> He even speaks of Nebuchadnezzar as Jehovah's servant.<sup>2</sup> Consequently, when the neighboring states, Edom, Moab, Ammon, Tyre, and Sidon, sent representatives to Zedekiah to organize revolt measures,<sup>3</sup> Jeremiah was forced to desperate tactics. As a counter to the revolt measures, he appeared publicly wearing bands and bars. His one message was, "Serve Babylon".<sup>4</sup> He even went so far as to send messages to the foreign kings, admonishing them to serve Babylon. We are at once faced with a difficulty. Why, if he knew that Jerusalem ultimately was sure to be destroyed, did he counsel the people to serve Babylon? Would not the frustrated revolt the sooner bring the inevitable end? The only answer is to be found in the great heart of the prophet. True the dissolution ultimately would take place, but why by a revolt precipitate a crisis that would involve a tremendous loss of life and untold suffering? If they would serve Babylon, perhaps the Almighty would humiliate the city with-

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1. 20:4; 25:9-11; 27:6, etc.
2. 27:6.
3. 27:3.
4. Chapter 27.

out undue loss of life. Skinner says, "Jeremiah advocated the policy of voluntary submission to the Babylonian yoke as the only way to mitigate the horrors and agonies of the final dissolution".<sup>1</sup>

The prophet's attitude was unchanged when the revolt was staged a few years later, and when the Babylonians were at the walls of the city. He warned the pusillanimous Zedekiah again and again of the futility of revolt and the certainty of destruction.<sup>2</sup> He urged him to surrender to the Babylonians; by such a course, he would save his own life and the lives of many others.<sup>3</sup> But Zedekiah, unable to decide between the counsel of the false and the true prophets,<sup>4</sup> and strongly influenced by the revolt fanatics, weakly continued his resistance policy. Jeremiah now turned from the king to the people. With courage born of desperation he urged them to go over to the enemy. Surrender would mean life; resistance would result in death.<sup>5</sup> He finally caused such a defection among the soldiers that the irate princes cast him into a dungeon.<sup>6</sup>

Such action as that of Jeremiah's would be condemned today as the highest treason. What kind of a citizen would he be who should undermine his country's interests in a

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1. J. Skinner, op. cit., p. 261.
2. 21:3-7; 34:2-5; 37:6-10; 38:17-23.
3. 38:17-23.
4. Cf. 27:16-23 with chapter 28.
5. 21:8,9.
6. 38:2 f.

time of war? Before we summarily condemn Jeremiah, let us ask the question, Who is the greater patriot and the more valuable citizen, he who battles fiercely for his country's immediate interests, or he who calculates discerningly for his country's ultimate interests? Jeremiah saw that resistance would bring slaughter; surrender would bring clemency. The city would fall in either case. It was the will of God. Who, then, was the true patriot, citizen, and statesman, Jeremiah or his fanatical opponents?

Jeremiah's principle of citizenship is not far to seek. Loyalty to God and loyalty to fact are above loyalty to government. It is the statesman and not the politician who is sensitive to the higher loyalty. His sensitivity is based on profound life principles and experiences to which the masses are total strangers. Gordon has put it well:

"It is the statesman and not the politician who can rise up in the hour of crisis and damn his own people, because he lives by principles greater and more enduring than his people."<sup>1</sup>

He, then, is the true citizen who discerns the course of the Almighty and falls in line, regardless of the direction pursued by the state.

#### 4. Preservation of the State.

Jeremiah shared Isaiah's conviction that the only sure way to preserve the state was by unqualified trust in Jehovah.<sup>2</sup> We pointed out in chapter two the price that subject

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1. T.C. Gordon, op. cit., p. 64.

2. See Isaiah 7:3-9 and II Kings 19:20-34.

nations had to pay for alliance with the Assyrian empire-- acknowledgment of the gods of the empire. Hence, it is not strange that the prophets took a resolute stand against foreign alliance. What was national security in comparison to religious purity? Furthermore, was not Jehovah with His people to fight their battles?<sup>1</sup> Had He not justified their trust in Him as protector?

Jeremiah was certain that Jehovah was sufficient for any emergency. He pointed out to the people Jehovah's dealings in the past, the deliverance from the Egyptian bondage,<sup>2</sup> His provident care in the wilderness,<sup>3</sup> His gift of the fruitful land of Canaan.<sup>4</sup> Was He not sufficient for all their needs?

"And now what hast thou to do in the way to Egypt to drink the waters of the Sihor? or what hast thou to do in the way to Assyria, to drink the waters of the River?...Why gaddest thou about so much to change thy way? thou shalt be ashamed of Egypt also, as thou wast ashamed of Assyria. From thence also shalt thou go forth, with thy hands upon thy head: for Jehovah hath rejected those in whom thou trusteth, and thou shalt not prosper with them."<sup>5</sup>

Jeremiah gives voice to the positive side of his conviction in his vision of the future. He gives us Jehovah's words: "I will cause them to dwell safely",<sup>6</sup> and again, "I will punish all that oppress them".<sup>7</sup> Only by undivided allegiance to Jehovah and unstinted confidence in Him can the great

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1. II Chron. 32:7,8.

2. 2:6; 7:22; 9:4; 16:14, etc.

3. 2:2,6; 31:2.

4. 2:7; 11:5.

5. 2:18, 36, 37.

6. 32:37.

7. 30:20.

goal, "I will be their God, and they shall be my people",<sup>1</sup> be realized. We conclude, then, that it was a fundamental conviction with Jeremiah that the state could be preserved only on the basis of allegiance to Jehovah; foreign alliance he repudiated.

In summary, it is clear that Jeremiah's philosophy, as regards the politics of Judah, sprang from his conception of God. He saw Jehovah as the God who is over all, and whose will must be obeyed in all realms of life. In matters of government He delegates authority to the king. The king in turn is to execute His will among the subjects, for Jehovah's main interest is in the highest personality development of His creatures. The objective of government thus becomes the administration of justice to the governed, and the promotion of their total interests. The obligations of the citizens toward the government is also bound up in the will of Jehovah. When the government no longer discharges its God ordained function, its citizens are no longer bound to render loyalty to it. Their final duty is toward God rather than toward man. Jeremiah was firmly convinced that Jehovah must be the center and circumference of all national life and activity. With Him the center and circumference, according to the people's own choice, he knew that the nation would be invincible.

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1. 31:33; 32:38.

## B. International Politics.

It was in the realm of international politics that Jeremiah showed himself the greatest statesman of the day. It was a day when men's eyes were blinded by national patriotisms and petty self-interests. Jeremiah alone rose high enough above the din of the battle field to view interpretatively the clash of armies on the plains below. In the clash he saw not only armies fighting, but God fighting. He saw clearly that Judah was condemned and awaiting destruction because of her immoral life and unrighteous principles. He saw that the cup of the wine of Jehovah's wrath was to be given first of all to her. If Jehovah punished His own first, who could gainsay His right to punish the other nations of the world who were none better?

"For, lo, I begin to work evil at the city which is called by my name; and should ye be utterly unpunished?"<sup>1</sup>

Jeremiah might well have said to the nations,

"For the time is come for judgment to begin at the house of God; and if it begin first at us, what shall be the end of them that obey not the gospel of God?"<sup>2</sup>

The great truth that Jehovah "hath a controversy with the nations", that "He will enter into judgment with all flesh"<sup>3</sup> staggered his comprehension. Moab, who had trusted in his works and in his treasures,<sup>4</sup> who had magnified himself against

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1. 25:29.
2. I Peter 4:17.
3. 25:31.
4. 48:7.

Jehovah,<sup>1</sup> and who was guilty of false worship,<sup>2</sup> was to be destroyed from being a people.<sup>3</sup> Ammon, whom Jeremiah denounces as a "backsliding daughter that trusteth in her riches",<sup>4</sup> was to be driven out of her land. His cry rings along the coast to Gaza and Askelon; the restless sword of Jehovah will not rest until it has discharged its appointed task.<sup>5</sup> Damascus, Elam, and Kedar, too, were guilty before Jehovah.<sup>6</sup> No empire was too great to receive its due punishment. Egypt was a fair heifer, but a gad-fly was to descend on her from out of the north.<sup>7</sup> She might have repented, but Pharaoh "had let the appointed time pass by";<sup>8</sup> he had failed to reform, to repent, and now judgment was inevitable.<sup>9</sup>

Jeremiah did not relegate all this punishment to a far off future date. The battle of Carchemish jarred him to consciousness of the immediacy of the destruction. He saw Nebuchadnezzar as Jehovah's servant,<sup>10</sup> and Babylon as the

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1. Probably by resisting Reuben when he attempted to occupy the territory that had been assigned to him. From this opposition came hostility that was almost incessant between Israel and Moab. Cf. Numbers 21:24f.; Judges 3:12f.; I Sam. 14:47.
2. 48:35.
3. 48:42.
4. 49:4. Her sin seems to be that she improperly took possession of the Gadite territory after the deportation of the East-Jordanic tribes by Tiglath-Pileser. Cf. II Kings 15:19 and I Chron. 5:6, 26.
5. 47:5-7.
6. Chapter 49.
7. 46:20.
8. 46:17.
9. 43:9-13.
10. 25:9; 27:6.

"golden cup in Jehovah's hand"<sup>1</sup> out of which all nations were to drink the wine of Jehovah's wrath.<sup>2</sup> But Babylon, though a temporary agent, was to be weighed in the same balances of universal justice in which others nations had been weighed. Jeremiah was even then convinced that she was found wanting. Her false gods,<sup>3</sup> her pride against Jehovah through her self-exaltation testified against her.<sup>4</sup> She, too, would go down and remain desolate forever.<sup>5</sup> "For Jehovah is a God of recompenses; he will surely requite."<sup>6</sup>

Though Jehovah would never bend His righteousness so as to embrace the unrighteousness of the nations, Jeremiah saw that there were two ways by which it would be possible for Jehovah to embrace the nations. One way was by voluntary repentance on the part of each individual nation. The word of Jehovah to the prophet in the potter's house was:

"At what instant I shall speak concerning a nation, and concerning a kingdom, to pluck up and to break down and to destroy it; if that nation, concerning which I have spoken, turn from their evil, I will repent of the evil that I thought to do unto them."<sup>7</sup>

Jehovah's pardon could always be had for the sincere asking. The other way was the way of chastisement. This was the way of last resort. The nations had failed to repent; nor was it likely that they would. His only hope was that chastisement for some of these nations would bring about

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1. 51:7.  
2. 25:15f.  
3. 50:2; 51:44,47.  
4. 50:29-32,36.

5. 27:7.  
6. 51:56.  
7. 18:7,8.

the necessary purification, and thus result in their future establishment. Such hope he seems to have had for Moab,<sup>1</sup> Ammon,<sup>2</sup> Elam,<sup>3</sup> and even Judah's old enemy, Egypt.<sup>4</sup> Why he held out hope for these and not for others is a difficult problem. That which concerns us here, however, is that they would have to meet Jehovah's standard, not He theirs.

We find in the prophet, then, two fundamental convictions in regard to the nations of the world. The first is that all governmental authority is a derived authority. He who confers authority has a standard of universal morality by which He measures all governments. Those that measure up to His standard will be continued under Divine favor; those that fail will be punished under Divine wrath. Jehovah's moral demands are absolute. He may temporarily employ a nation to forward His ends, but He never plays favoritism. Even the nation that is thus employed will be punished if it fails to meet the Divine standard. The second is that favor with Jehovah may be incurred through voluntary and sincere national repentance, or through corrective punishment.

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1. 48:47.

2. 49:6.

3. 49:39.

4. 46:26.

### C. Summary of Political Principles.

1. The ideal political state is a Jehovah-centered monarchy.
2. Government exists only for the benefit of the governed.
3. Loyalty to God and to the right are above loyalty to government.
4. The state can be preserved only by unqualified trust in Jehovah, not by trust in foreign alliance.
5. There is a moral God in the universe who demands moral action on the part of all nations. Failure to measure up to this moral standard will bring punishment.
6. National favor with Jehovah may be incurred through voluntary and sincere national repentance, or, failing this, through corrective punishment.

These universal political principles bear abundant testimony to the true statesmanship of Jeremiah.

### II. His Social Philosophy.

It has been said that "the prophets and writers of the Old Testament, in their majestic, unaffected style, give better counsel as to what makes a nation happy and keeps it so, than all the orators or statesmen of Greece or Rome".<sup>1</sup>

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1. St. Loe Strachey, quoted by S.E. Keeble, The Social Teachings of the Bible, p. 46.

Our problem in this section is to determine Jeremiah's social principles, which if followed, he held, would make his nation happy and keep it so.

His utterances have such far-reaching social ramifications that it will be impossible to treat all phases exhaustively. Our purpose is to deal only with those phases which will suggest most directly his basic social principles.

#### A. Domestic Aspects.

##### 1. The Family.

Jeremiah considered the basic unit of society to be the family. Indeed, his entire philosophy is colored by family relationships. His early oracles present Israel's relation to Jehovah as that of a wife to a husband.<sup>1</sup> He portrays the ideal marriage as that in which there is mutual fidelity. But Israel, he knew, had broken her marriage vow, and had played the harlot with many lovers.<sup>2</sup> The horror with which he regards Israel's infidelity indicates to us his high regard for the marriage relation. That which the nation had done by her infidelity to her lawful spouse, Jeremiah proceeds to show, was only the total action of that which was done by the individuals of the nation. The sacred family ties had been broken times without number. For the family he insisted that the standard likewise was chastity and mu-

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1. 2:2; 3:1,14.

2. 3:1,2,6-10; 2:20-25.

tual fidelity. But the men of Israel had broken the yoke of marriage. They were like lustful stallions, neighing after their neighbors' wives.<sup>1</sup> "They committed adultery, and assembled themselves in troops at the harlots' houses."<sup>2</sup> The false prophets were men of immoral life;<sup>3</sup> they made no attempt to restrain the people from licentiousness.<sup>4</sup> Altogether, the very basis of family life was undermined.

Jeremiah, happily, gives us a view of ideal family life. To the exiles he writes:

"Take ye wives, and beget sons and daughters; and take wives for your sons, and give your daughters to husbands, that they may bear sons and daughters; and multiply ye there, and be not diminished."<sup>5</sup>

His exhortation in this verse and in the context is to domestic tranquillity, based primarily on the family relationship. It is by cultivating family life and settling down to wholesome, well-rounded living that they will enjoy peace in their new land, while they await the promised restoration.<sup>6</sup> In his view of the future restoration, we hear the "voice of the bridegroom and the voice of the bride",<sup>7</sup> by which figure he contemplates the chaste, new life of the future. Though Jeremiah himself never knew the joy of a happy home of his own, he fully appreciated its significance in the perpetuation of ethical national life. It was a fundamental conviction with him that purity of national life could be achieved only by

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1. 5:8.

2. 5:7.

3. 23:13,14; 29:23.

4. 23:17.

5. 29:6.

6. 29:5-14.

7. 33:11.

purity of family life, national stability only on family stability.

## 2. Slavery.

Jeremiah, in the strictest sense, was not a social trail-breaker. He propounded no scheme for the social reorganization of the nation. He took social institutions for granted. The basis of his social attitudes was the Deuteronomic law. To its contents he gave hearty assent.<sup>1</sup> Slavery was an institution for which full provision was made by Deuteronomy.<sup>2</sup> It was a restricted servitude, however. The slave had certain definite rights. He was to be treated with liberality and consideration. Six years of servitude was to be rewarded by a seventh of freedom. When the slave was released, his master was to furnish him liberally out of his flock, out of his threshing-floor, and out of his wine-press.<sup>3</sup> "As Jehovah thy God hath blessed thee thou shalt give unto him."<sup>4</sup> Such liberality was to be bestowed from the heart, in remembrance of Jehovah's liberality in redeeming Israel from the bondage of Egypt.<sup>5</sup>

Jeremiah's conception of the sacred duty of master to slave is manifest in his remonstrance to the treatment accorded the slaves during the siege of Jerusalem.<sup>6</sup> Before Jehovah, Zedekiah entered into a covenant with the slave masters

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1. 11:5.

2. Deut. 15:12-18.

3. Deut. 15:14.

4. Ibid.

5. Deut. 15:15.

6. 34:8-11.

to release the slaves according to the Deuteronomic law. We cannot be sure what their motive for the act was. It may have been one of three things: to court the favor of Jehovah in this time of need; to relieve the masters of the responsibility of the care of the slaves during the time of famine; or somehow to use the slaves for purposes of defense. Whatever the motive, the slaves were released. When the Babylonians lifted the siege and withdrew at the approach of the Egyptians, the unscrupulous masters pressed the liberated slaves into bondage again. Such an act in Jeremiah's eyes was a direct insult to Jehovah for two reasons: first, it was a sin against the oppressed slaves by a denial of their sorely needed sabbatic year of relief, and as a sin against them, it was a sin against God; in the second place, it was a trampling under foot of a sacred covenant made before Jehovah. Jehovah would have no such insults. He, too, would proclaim liberty, but it would be a liberty "to the sword, to the pestilence, and to the famine...and to be tossed to and fro among all the kingdoms of the earth".<sup>1</sup> Jeremiah "rose in towering wrath to damn it [the action]"<sup>2</sup> as blasphemy, as the betrayal of both man and God".<sup>3</sup> We cannot fail to notice here Jeremiah's sense of Justice. Though he was not interested in all the ritualism of Deuteronomy,<sup>4</sup> he was interested, and that profoundly, in its weightier matters of justice and consideration for the rights of person-

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1. 34:17.

2. Insertion mine.

3. T.C. Gordon, op. cit.,  
p. 85.

4. 7:22f.

ality. Knowing God and man as he did, he could not help but conclude that a sin against man is a sin against God.

## B. Economic Aspects.

### 1. Poverty and Wealth.

Jeremiah mightily championed the cause of the poor and the oppressed. The two classes naturally go together, and it is natural that it should be so, considering the condition of the times. We noted in chapter two the grinding tribute which the kings exacted from the people for the maintenance of foreign alliance. We noted also the corrupt and lawless character of the times, due to the weak and unscrupulous nature of the kings. Jeremiah protested vigorously against the exploitation of the poor by the rich and by the ruling class. He characterizes the exploiters as "fowlers" who lie in wait, and who set a trap to catch men.<sup>1</sup> Through deceit and deeds of wickedness they accumulate their wealth; "they are waxed fat".<sup>2</sup> On the heads of these foul men Jeremiah unsparingly heaps opprobrium. He holds them responsible for many of the ills of the nation.

"Life scarce can tread majestically  
Foul court and fever-stricken alley;  
It is the rich, must be confessed,  
Are blamefullest."<sup>3</sup>

The important thing to note here is that Jeremiah does

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1. 5:26.

2. 5:28.

3. Thomas Ashe, quoted by S.E. Keeble, op. cit., p. 24.

not condemn the rich because they are rich. His complaint is on the basis of their unfair methods of gaining wealth. That he did not oppose the individual right to hold property is seen in the fact that he possessed sufficient money to redeem his Anathoth inheritance.<sup>1</sup> From this we may conclude that he held that the possession of wealth is legitimate if it is obtained righteously, that is, without the exploitation of others.

## 2. Labor and Wages.

Jeremiah's most stunning rebuke was administered to the kings. We have a sample of such rebuke in chapter 22. Jehoiakim had sunk so low as to employ forced labor. Jeremiah could not be silent in the presence of such an outrage.

"Woe unto him that buildeth his house by unrighteousness and his chambers by injustice; that useth his neighbor's service without wages, and giveth him not his hire."<sup>2</sup>

James Russell Lowell's lines fit into Jeremiah's mood, and might well have been addressed to Jehoiakim:

"Have ye founded your thrones and altars, then,  
On the bodies and souls of living men?  
And think ye that building shall endure,  
Which shelters the noble and crushes the poor?"<sup>3</sup>

To such a policy Jeremiah prophesied a social revulsion that ultimately would result in the dethronement of Jehoiakim and his death.<sup>4</sup> It was a good thing "to excell in cedar",<sup>5</sup> but

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1. Chapter 32.

2. 22:13.

3. See his poem, A Parable.

4. 22:18,19.

5. 22:15.

the prophet considered it a greater thing to excell in justice. He who labors honestly, he says, deserves an honest wage for his efforts.

### 3. Social Obligation.

It is of special credit to Jeremiah that he goes beyond justice to the more positive aspect of social obligation. He enjoins on the favored classes a responsibility for the care of the poor and the helpless. Though put in a negative framework, these words have a positive message: "...they plead not the cause of the fatherless, THAT THEY MAY PROSPER..."<sup>1</sup> They are not only to render exact judgment, but they are to lift the status of the downtrodden. Here is a positive social gospel.

### C. Religious Aspects.

Montesquieu has said, "Christianity is the good man's text; his life is the illustration". So it is with every religion. What a man believes determines how he acts. To understand the life of Jeremiah's age we must take account of the religion of the age, the main-spring of social action. Much of this subject already has been treated. It will be necessary here, however, to view briefly the effect of the religion of Jeremiah's time on the social life, and to consider the principles according to which he acted.

. . . . .

1. 5:28.

# 1. False Worship and Social Life.

We examined in chapter two the religious background of the age, how that political expediency brought about the introduction of foreign gods and the coercion of the people in the worship of them. With the false gods came all the associated heathen practices. When the bars of monotheism were let down, we noted also that there came about, too, a revival of the Canaanitish cults. In his indictment of the people, the prophet laid his finger squarely on the heart of all the social ills.

"For my people have committed two evils: they have forsaken me, the fountain of living waters, and hewed them out cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water."<sup>1</sup>

He traced the germ that had infected the national health to its real source, the contaminated waters of broken cisterns. He tried in vain to wrench the poisonous cup from the people's lips, but they would have their foul water. Out of false worship sprang their abominable child sacrifices,<sup>2</sup> their licentious practices associated with the temple prostitutes,<sup>3</sup> and their loose moral living in general.<sup>4</sup> There was no longer a regard for moral virtues. All men "bend their tongue, as it were their bow, for falsehood", the prophet accuses, "...and they will deceive every one his neighbor, and will not speak the truth".<sup>5</sup> Jeremiah recoils from such falsity; he wonders that Jehovah can endure the sight of it.<sup>6</sup> The people tried

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1. 2:13.

2. 7:31; 19:5; II Kings 21:6.

3. See J. Skinner, op. cit., p.69.

4. 3:2; 5:7-9.

5. 9:4,5.

6. 5:3.

to salve over the loathsome sores of public disease with the externals of worship. They trusted in the temple's presence for national security and success, but the salve only aggravated the sores. Not salve but an operation was needed. Jeremiah knew that the nation could never recover until every last vestige of false worship was rooted out of the national life. Only a correct relation to Jehovah could heal the ills of the nation. What a man thinks about God determines how he acts toward his fellow.

## 2. Social Equality.

There is implicit in Jeremiah's philosophy of individualism the seed of social equality. The prophet sees all men on an equal footing before God. God has no favorites. Each man, regardless of social caste, is personally and individually responsible to God for his sins. God's treatment of all is alike. Jeremiah further sees that each man is to have a personal knowledge of Jehovah, a knowledge that is based on forgiveness,<sup>1</sup> not on privilege. Human social barriers thus are thrown down. All men are lifted into a brotherhood. In the new covenant relation God's purpose for man will be realized. The fellowship relationship will bring men together to the full perfection of their common nature,<sup>2</sup> and to completeness of life. "They shall all know me, from the least

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1. See Chapter Four, p. 108.
2. E.C. Wines considered perfection of nature as the final goal when he wrote: "The true happiness of every being consists in the proper perfection of its nature." (Op. cit., Intro. p. 23.)

of them unto the greatest of them, saith Jehovah."<sup>1</sup> It is impossible for men to know Jehovah without assimilating His character. With His nature in them, and with Him at the head to lead them ever more deeply into the delights of fellowship, Jeremiah sees that the ideal society will be reached. It will be "a God-centered brotherhood".

How was society to reach this ideal state, by the intelligent direction of society's inherent powers? Far otherwise! Jeremiah saw that society was utterly impotent. God alone could effect the transformation. When from a human point of view there was no hope, he had a hope that was as great as the power of his God.

Once again we find lines from Lowell that, from the standpoint of the conviction behind them, might have come from the great prophet of Anathoth.

"Careless seems the great Avenger; history's pages  
but record  
One death-grapple in the darkness 'twixt old systems  
and the Word;  
Truth forever on the scaffold; Wrong forever on the  
throne--  
Yet that scaffold sways the future, and behind the  
dim unknown  
Standeth God within the shadow, keeping watch above  
His own."<sup>2</sup>

#### D. Summary of Social Principles.

After surveying the general field of his social philosophy, we are ready to state his fundamental social principles.

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1. 31:34.

2. James Russell Lowell, quoted by T.C.Gordon, op. cit., p.143.

They are as follows:

1. National purity and stability can be attained only on the basis of family purity and family stability.
2. Human personality is of equal value no matter what the social level.
3. A sin against one's fellow is a sin against God.
4. The possession of wealth is legitimate if the wealth is obtained righteously.
5. The laborer is entitled to a just reward for his expenditure of effort.
6. The favored of society are morally obligated to care for the downtrodden of society.
7. False worship is the direct cause of all the evils of society.
8. The ideal society is "a God-centered brotherhood".

### III. Summary.

After a study of Jeremiah's political and social philosophy, we are brought to reaffirm the great truth, stated at the outset of this chapter, that "the proper study of mankind" is not "man" alone, but God as well. Jeremiah saw that every act of man has a double bearing: man-ward and God-ward. We almost would be right in applying to Jeremiah's philosophy of the relation of man to man the somewhat modern epigram, "To live right in time, one must live for eternity", although we cannot credit Jeremiah with the metaphysical concept involved in the idea of eternity. But the fundamental

idea remains. Only when the righteousness of God becomes the righteousness of men can they, either as individuals or nations, be properly articulated with their fellows and with the universe. God somehow must take hold of individual and national life to make right man's multifarious wrongs and inequities, that the whole of humanity may be brought to participate in that distinctive quality of life which is His.

## CHAPTER SIX

### CONCLUSION

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### CONCLUSION

Our study thus far in this thesis has taken us through the following aspects and yielded the following results:

I. An introduction to the thesis involving a definition of the problem, a statement of the significance of the problem, and a suggestion of the method of treatment and the sources of data. We defined our problem as an attempt to determine Jeremiah's total view of the universe, what he considered the meaning of human experience to be. We stated that it was our conviction that to understand Jeremiah's philosophy would be a big step toward understanding the whole of the Old Testament, the foundations of the religion of Jesus, and the fundamental needs of the world today, together with a message to suit those needs. Because of the limited scope of this thesis, involving only an objective examination of Jeremiah's philosophy of life, the reader of necessity has been left to make his own applications. To one who is at all alert to the problems of history and to the problems of the present, Jeremiah's philosophy of life cannot fail to speak.

II. A survey of the background of the problem. In this chapter it was our purpose to kindle anew the fires of circumstance about the raw materials of the prophet's life in

order that we might have a basis for a complete understanding of the approved residue, his philosophy of life, which was smelted out of these fires. We viewed the rise and fall of the great empires of Western Asia and the changing fortunes of the little country of Judah. We noted the political and religious turmoil and the corresponding degeneration and corruption of national life. We watched the tragic conflict and the life-long martyrdom of the heroic soul of Anathoth, who was born to attempt to head off his doomed civilization. We wondered whether such intense fires could leave a residue, and, if so, what it would be.

III. A study of Jeremiah's philosophy of God. We turned from the depressing earthly scene and lifted our eyes to behold Him whose name was so often on the lips of the prophet. God was left after the fires had done their worst. We saw Him as Sovereign of the universe, Master of all because He was creator of all, rigid in moral demands and in the administration of justice. But we saw Him also as an unchanging, faithful Lover, the Companion of the human heart, tenderly yearning over His people, ever seeking the welfare of His beloved. In Him we found all the values of the universe centered.

IV. A study of Jeremiah's philosophy of the relation of man to God. In this chapter we viewed "the depressing earthly scene" in relation to God. What was the significance of it all? We found that the prophet considered men to have a

potentiality for a far higher life than that which they were living. He considered their chief end to be concerned with God, although they apparently were indifferent to the fact. He saw the Jews as a specially chosen agent of God for the working out of His beneficent purpose for all mankind. He saw Him spending Himself lavishly in cultivating in them a type of life like His. But the refractory ingrates were thwarting His high purpose. In spite of the apparent defeat, Jeremiah came to the conviction that the Almighty could not be defeated. Infinite Justice required that the nation be rejected because of its sins; but God had another way to accomplish His purpose. Out of the humbled remnant He would raise up a generation who would follow Him because of an individual and personal devotion. In them Jeremiah saw that Jehovah in the great future would work out His purpose for all mankind. In that day the goal of purposive existence will be reached--unmarred and intimate fellowship between God and man.

V. A consideration of Jeremiah's philosophy of the relation of man to man. In this chapter we contemplated the practical relationships of men to their fellows in the light of God's high purpose for all mankind. We found that Jeremiah was convinced that only when the righteousness of God becomes the righteousnessness of men, can they, either as individuals or as nations, be properly articulated with their fellows and with the universe. Divine life must be imparted

to men in order for their corrupt, selfish social order to be lifted to the exalted level of "a God-centered brotherhood". In this new order all men will enjoy the blessings of fellowship with one another, and of true fellowship with God.

Jeremiah's philosophy of life may be summarized very briefly as follows:

Man can fulfill his destiny only as he follows and lives by the demands of the Supreme Being of the Universe. By his stubbornness he may thwart the Almighty temporarily, but the Almighty ultimately cannot be defeated. To carry out His design He may be forced to cast a refractory generation aside, but out of their humbled seed, who are ready and willing to obey, He will raise up a generation of faithful followers. In them He will manifest His glory. He will write His laws upon their hearts; they will serve and glorify Him because of a personal heart devotion. In the new brotherhood all men will enjoy a full knowledge of Jehovah and participate in unmarred fellowship with Him. Thus, the supreme value of the universe, the spiritual union of God and man, will be reached. "I will be their God, and they shall be my people".

Jeremiah was an incurable optimist. From all human standpoints he should have been the world's greatest pessimist. His optimism was not a false optimism of the sort that

seeks to avoid ugly facts; he faced the ugliest facts and still had grounds for hope. When his people gloried in a false optimism, he wept copious tears. When they wept in disillusionment, he gloried in a true optimism. He had but one basis for his hope--his faith in God. The measure of his philosophy is the measure of his God.

Stefan Zweig, in his great drama, "Jeremiah", caught a spirit akin to Jeremiah's when he put on the lips of a Chaldean the words: "Who can conquer the Invisible? Men we can slay, but the God who lives in them we cannot."<sup>1</sup>

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1. Stefan Zweig, Jeremiah, p. 336.

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