

TH  
G 952

THE SOCIAL MESSAGE OF THE PROPHET JEREMIAH

By

WAYNE CLAUDE GUNTER

B.S., Furman University  
M.S., North Carolina State College

A Thesis

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for

THE DEGREE OF BACHELOR OF SACRED THEOLOGY  
in  
The Biblical Seminary in New York

New York, N. Y.  
April, 1935

19028

**BIBLICAL SCHOOL OF  
THEOLOGY LIBRARY**  
HATFIELD, PA.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter	Page
<b>ONE: INTRODUCTION</b>	
I. The Problem.....	1
II. The Significance of the Problem.....	3
III. Method of Procedure and Source of Data.....	6
 <b>TWO: THE GENERAL BACKGROUND</b>	
I. Foreign Nations.....	10
A. Egypt.....	10
B. Assyria.....	13
C. Babylon.....	18
D. Significance of Judah in Relation to Foreign Powers.....	21
II. Judah's Internal Situation.....	23
A. Political and Religious.....	23
1. Historical - Ahaz to Josiah.....	23
2. In Jeremiah's Day.....	26
B. Social - Moral - Economic.....	29
C. Social Classes - The Spirit of the Times.	32
1. The Kings.....	33
2. The Princes.....	35
3. The Priests.....	37
4. The Prophets.....	39
5. The People.....	40
III. Summary.....	42
 <b>THREE: THE PROPHETIC OFFICE AND THE SOCIAL PROCESS</b>	
I. The Prophet and the Social Process.....	46
A. Development of Hebrew Prophecy.....	46
1. Significance of the Name.....	47
2. Origin.....	48
3. Prophecy before Samuel.....	49
4. Work of the Pre-Literary Prophets.....	51
5. The Canonical Prophets.....	53
B. The Prophet's Relation to the Social Process.....	54
1. A Product.....	54
2. A Critic.....	55

20431 Gift of the author

Oct. 28, 1935

II.	Jeremiah, the Man for the Times.....	57
	A. Brief Preview of the Man.....	57
	B. Formative Factors in Jeremiah's Life.....	58
	1. Childhood Training.....	58
	2. Call and Commission.....	59
	3. The Reforms of Josiah.....	61
	C. Jeremiah in Action.....	62
	1. Methods of Work.....	62
	2. His Conflicts and Sufferings.....	64
	3. Glimpses of His Inner Life.....	66
III.	Summary.....	68

#### FOUR: HEBREW SOCIAL INSTITUTIONS

I.	Hebrew Social Institutional Relations.....	71
	A. Domestic.....	71
	1. The Family.....	71
	2. Slavery.....	76
	3. Education.....	79
	B. Economic.....	80
	1. Agriculture.....	80
	2. Industry - Trade - Commerce.....	82
	3. Wealth and Poverty.....	84
	C. Political.....	85
	1. Kingship and Court Nobility.....	85
	2. Administration of Justice.....	87
	D. Religious.....	88
	1. The Sabbath.....	88
	2. Prayer.....	89
	3. Festivals.....	89
II.	Summary.....	92

#### FIVE: JEREMIAH'S SOCIAL MESSAGE

I.	Domestic.....	96
	A. The Family and the Home.....	96
	1. General.....	96
	2. Man.....	97
	3. Woman.....	98
	4. The Child.....	100
	5. Divorce.....	101
	B. Slavery.....	102

II.	Economic and Civic.....	103
	A. Wealth and Poverty.....	103
	B. Work and Wages.....	106
	C. Welfare.....	106
	1. Health.....	106
	2. Pleasure.....	107
	3. The Social Evil.....	108
III.	Political.....	109
	A. Public Leadership.....	109
	B. War.....	112
	C. National Security.....	114
	D. Foreign Nations.....	116
IV.	Religious.....	118
	A. Religion and Social Life.....	118
	B. The Sabbath.....	120
V.	The New Covenant - The Ideal Brotherhood....	121
VI.	Social and Ethical Principles Underlying the Message.....	122
	A. Jeremiah's Conception of God.....	123
	B. The Principles Stated.....	125
VII.	Summary.....	129

SIX:	SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION.....	131
------	-----------------------------	-----

	BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	137
--	-------------------	-----

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

CHAPTER ONE  
INTRODUCTION

I. The Problem

The problem of this study is to determine and to set forth clearly the social message of the prophet Jeremiah.

The term "Social Message" is a much used phrase and no one ever thinks of calling one's attention to its significance. Consequently it is often misunderstood. The Bible contains two important and closely related messages. One is personal; the other is social. The personal message is directed to the individual and instructs him concerning his personal relation to God. It speaks to the individual of God's love, of what he is to believe concerning God, of his condition as a sinner, and of his need of a Saviour. The social message also has the individual in mind but instructs him concerning his relation to others of his fellows or to the group. These messages are not opposed to each other; they are complementary. We are exhorted to love God and also to love our neighbors. And if we should examine the Bible for the duties which God requires of man it would be found that the majority of them are duties to his fellowmen. They are social duties. And the message which the Bible declares concerning one's duties to others or to society may be called its social message.

But this conception of the field of application of the term "Social Message" is somewhat general and too much so for our use in this study. One should keep in mind that society functions essentially through institutions.<sup>1</sup> Every feature of society which comprehends the actions of a group of individuals represents or involves an institution. It is in terms of institutions that we wish to consider Jeremiah's social message.

One might profitably ask, "What is an institution?" Hertzler<sup>2</sup> has given perhaps the most comprehensive definition: "Institutions may be thought of as ways in which people act, for fulfilling socially desirable or necessary ends, taking the form of systems or groupings, made permanent by the authority of the group." We see that basic in the idea underlying an institution is (1) that of need and (2) a system or sanctioned way for meeting the need. Cooley says, "Language, government, the church, laws and customs of property and of the family, systems of industry and education are institutions because they are the working out of permanent needs of human nature."<sup>3</sup> Again there is the idea of some form of order which is felt or recognized to be desirable or necessary. Thus the essence of the institution of law

. . . . .

1. Joyce O. Hertzler, Social Institutions, p. 2
2. Ibid, p. 7
3. C. H. Cooley, Social Organization, p. 313

is a concept of ordered relationships of human beings and things by means of rules and punishments. At the heart of the family is the concept of ordered relations between the sexes. In economic institutions it is the concept of orderly satisfaction of wants and needs by processes of production, distribution and consumption. Institutions then to a large degree reflect the accepted order of things and the ideals of the group or of the society in which they function. They show how the mass of the individuals relate themselves to their fellows. They determine largely an individual's conduct in society.

It would appear then that a profitable approach to Jeremiah's social message may be through the gateway of social institutions. Our problem therefore, more specifically stated, is to determine Jeremiah's social message as it relates to and concerns the important existing institutions of his day, whether domestic, economic, political or religious. What were their problems? What did Jeremiah have to say?

## II. The Significance of the Problem

Whether or not history repeats itself is a question not easily answered, but that history is never antiquated is true because humanity is ever the same. "It is hungry for bread, sweaty with labor, and struggling to wrestle from nature and hostile men enough to feed man. The welfare of the mass is always at odds with the selfish



force of the strong."<sup>1</sup> Whether it is an exodus from Egypt, an uprising of the peasants of Germany or England, or a strike in a Southern cotton mill the same tragic picture is presented. But the Hebrews were the first to face seriously the problem of a social situation, and to recognize the advantage of a well ordered society.<sup>2</sup> In the midst of every situation of any consequence was the prophet delivering his message. True his message often fell on deaf ears, but at other times it was heeded and the sick society recovered its health. Such teachings have universal appeal, and if studied in the light of their historical background, they can be interpreted in universal terms and used as a salvent of present day social problems. These prophets are the beating heart of the Old Testament. Insofar as men have caught the spirit that burned in the hearts of the prophets and have breathed in humanity the Old Testament has been one of the greatest permanent forces making for democracy and social justice.<sup>3</sup>

But why is Jeremiah of particular significance? There are several reasons. He lived during the most critical period of Judah's history. There is no career

. . . . .

1. W. Rauschenbush, Christianity and the Social Crisis, p.1
2. W. B. Bizzell, The Social Teachings of the Prophets, p.1
3. W. Rauschenbush, op. cit., p. 2ff

which is more intimately interwoven with the history of Judah in the closing period of the monarchy than that of Jeremiah. His ministry extended for nearly half a century from early in Josiah's reign until after the fall of Jerusalem in 586 B.C. He lived courageously and prophesied at a time when his nation was crumbling and being destroyed before his very eyes. In the book that bears his name, we feel his very pulse beat. We feel that the book was written in his blood. What Carlyle calls "a prophetic biography" is not a book; it is Jeremiah.<sup>1</sup> Jeremiah had great faith in his God and had a powerful love for his countrymen in his heart, though he stood alone against a nation which had turned its back on God. It is the character of the man and the character of the times which make him the outstanding prophet of the Old Testament.<sup>2</sup>

Besides Jeremiah had a great social vision. His keen insight enabled him to look beneath the surface of things and prescribe accurately for the society of his day which was indeed very sick morally. His own generation refused to listen to him and tragedy resulted. Nations since have not heeded his message or similar ones and have likewise failed. Our own nation is at present

. . . . .

1. H. T. Kuist, Class Lecture, January 31, 1934
2. E. P. Blair, Jeremiah's Philosophy of Life, p. 8

going through a mighty sifting process and most assuredly Jeremiah has a message that we as a nation might well heed. If this study aids, in any way, to bring this message into clear review the effort will not have been in vain.

### III. Method of Procedure and Source of Data

To understand Jeremiah's message it is necessary to have before us the character of the times in broad review. This suggests the method of procedure in the task before us.

In Chapter II we shall discuss the general background of the problem. The political situation of the world will be discussed from several angles - Egypt, Assyria, Babylon and Judah. Following this the moral, social and religious situation in Judah will be presented. And finally the spirit of the times will be discussed as reflected in the behavior of the kings, princes, priests, prophets and people.

In Chapter III we shall discuss the office of the prophet in its relation to the social order. Then Jeremiah, the man, will be considered to show how he was qualified to deliver a message to his day.

In Chapter IV we shall discuss the social institutions existing in Hebrew society of the seventh century B.C. Thereby we shall gain a picture of the social set-up in Hebrew society, how individuals related themselves

to their fellows and how the nation as a whole functioned.

In Chapter V we shall present Jeremiah's social message in regard to the four major types of Hebrew institutions, - the domestic, the economic, the political, and the religious.

Chapter VI is the summary and conclusion to the whole project.

In this study it will be our purpose to use the book of Jeremiah itself (A.R.V.) with supplementary references from other portions of scripture as the primary source of material. Besides this there is quite a bit of secondary material which will be referred to whenever it will add to the discussion.

Let us now proceed to a consideration of the general background of the problem.

CHAPTER TWO

THE GENERAL BACKGROUND

## CHAPTER TWO

### THE GENERAL BACKGROUND

- I. Foreign Nations
  - A. Egypt
  - B. Assyria
  - C. Babylon
  - D. Significance of Judah in Relation to Foreign Powers
  
- II. Judah's Internal Situation
  - A. Political and Religious
  - B. Social - Moral - Economic
  - C. Social Classes - The Spirit of the Times
  
- III. Summary

CHAPTER TWO  
THE GENERAL BACKGROUND

I. Foreign Nations

The history of Judah is inextricably tied up with that of the three great nations surrounding her, - Egypt to the southwest, Assyria and Babylonia to the east. To get a clear picture of the political situation in Judah in the seventh century B.C. we must note the respective activity of these nations in relation to her.

A. Egypt

On the death of Ramses III a long line of kings, all weaklings, succeeded to the throne. Under them the waning power of the Pharaohs declined swiftly to its fall in a few decades.<sup>1</sup> Palestine was comparatively free of Egyptian interference until the tenth century B.C. This gave the Israelites opportunity firmly to establish themselves in the land and to build up a prosperous monarchy under David and Solomon.

However, under Sheshont I the empire regained somewhat of its old vitality. He, having quite firmly established himself at home, adopted an aggressive foreign policy. He commenced to cast longing glances toward the

. . . . .

1. J. H. Breasted, History of Egypt, p. 505ff

east on the lands of Western Asia. In the meantime the kingdom of Israel was divided by rebellion on the death of Solomon. Jeroboam had established himself as king of the northern tribes; Rehoboam was king of Judah. Sheshont invaded Judah in the fifth year of Rehoboam,<sup>1</sup> 970 B.C., entered the house of Jehovah and carried off to Egypt the treasures that Solomon had left. Judah, along with a number of the small surrounding nations, became a vassal of Egypt and paid tribute to Sheshont.

Following Sheshont Egypt was torn asunder political-ly by family feuds. Her influence in Palestine dwindled again. At the same time also began the rapid rise of Assyria who quickly disputed Egypt's claim in western Asia. The Assyrians raided Palestine and the west at various intervals under the leadership of Tiglathpileser III, and Sargon II. All this while Egypt was powerless to offer any determined resistance. In 701 Sennacherib of Assyria began a most determined invasion of Palestine and the border states. He was successful in his march even to the very borders of Egypt, only to have his army hopelessly depleted by the plague recorded in II Kings 19:35. However, the Assyrians came back under Esarhaddon and in 674-670 pushed their way to the Nile and assumed

. . . . .

1. I Kings 14:25



control of lower Egypt, which thus became a vassal of  
Assyria.<sup>1</sup>

Nevertheless the Egyptians in 650-640 or thereabouts, when Assyria was busy at home due to a revolt in Babylon, again set up home rule under the able Psammetikos.<sup>2</sup> For a time it appeared as if she was on the way to former glory. Trade routes were opened up between other countries, and wealth again began to pour in. There was a revival in the arts of the past. But quite true to form she again began to think of establishing her claims in western Asia. This was the dream of Pharaoh-Necho, son of Psammetikos. Rightly perceiving that the Assyrian empire was crumbling he set out on an invasion of Palestine and Syria. Josiah, the young king of Judah, foolishly went out against Pharaoh-Necho and was defeated and slain in the battle of Megiddo 608 B.C.<sup>3</sup> Pharaoh-Necho pressed on as far as the Euphrates and there turned back. He returned to Egypt, carrying with him Jehoahaz, the newly appointed king of Judah, and set up in his stead Jehoiakim as vassal king.

This conquest was of short duration, for in the meantime Assyria had been overthrown by Nabopolassar, king of Babylon, and his army under his son, the mighty

. . . . .

1. Cf. R.W.Rogers, History of Babylonia and Assyria, Vol. II, p. 191ff
2. J. H. Breasted, op. cit., p. 556ff
3. II Kings 23:29-35

Nebuchadrezzar, was marching east. Pharaoh-Necho had also again come up from Egypt. The two armies met at Carchemish 605. The Egyptians were hopelessly defeated and fled in confusion back to their home base, never again to raise any serious resistance in western Asia.<sup>1</sup> She attempted a feeble comeback when Pharaoh-Hophra ascended the throne in 587, but both she and her Judean ally<sup>2</sup> were repulsed. Jerusalem was destroyed in the days of Zedekiah,<sup>3</sup> and Egypt once more felt the sting of humiliation. The Babylonians were now masters of western Asia.

#### B. Assyria

The Assyrian empire was built up under Tiglathpileser I who died about 1090 B.C.<sup>4</sup> Though he boasted of having conquered from east to west the empire rapidly declined under his sons and other successors. There followed a long period of silence in Assyrian history and decay in the empire. As Rogers<sup>4</sup> says it was a period of immense importance in the history of mankind. While the fortunes of Assyria were at a low ebb, people elsewhere had a chance to develop themselves without the fear of Assyrian interference. One such people were the Israelites who

. . . . .

1. II Kings 24:7; Cf. Rogers, op.cit., pp.312-13; J.H. Breasted, op. cit., pp.582-84
2. Jeremiah 37:5
3. Jeremiah 39 and 52
4. Rogers, op. cit., pp. 31-34

moved into Palestine from the deserts and in the course of time established the kingdom of David. It grew in wealth and power under Solomon, only to be rent asunder at his death by rebellion which resulted in two kingdoms, that of Judah and that of Israel.

However, Assyria was not to remain silent forever. Under Tiglathpileser III, 745-727 B.C., she again showed signs of life and under him was to become the dominant power in the world. The policy of Tiglathpileser was two-fold, "To weld western Asia into a single empire, held together by military force and fiscal laws and to secure the trade of the world for Nineveh."<sup>1</sup> These aims he and his successors constantly kept before them. Arpad, the key city to the west, fell in 740 and at the same time the small states round about quickly and peacefully came into line.

Around 737 or 736 a rebellion broke out in Palestine and the Syrian states. Assyria was quick to respond. Tiglathpileser began to march west. The allies, so bold while Assyria was at home, quickly wilted and one after another, including Samaria, meekly submitted to Assyria. Tiglathpileser was master of the west. Judah alone did not appear in the roll of those who paid tribute.<sup>2</sup>

. . . . .

1. A. H. Sayce, International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia, Vol. I, p.294.
2. R. W. Rogers, op. cit., Vol.II, p.121

By 734 Tiglathpileser was again in the west. He went straight to the coast and then turned south ransacking and destroying right to the door of Egypt. He then turned north again and inland with an eye on Samaria and Judah. At this time Pekah, King of Samaria, and Rezin, King of Damascus, saw not the opportunity to combine with Judah against a common foe, but rather siezed this opportunity for revenge upon Judah.<sup>1</sup> Ahaz, King of Judah, appealed to Tiglathpileser for aid and at the same time became a vassal of Assyria, stripping the temple to secure the necessary tribute.<sup>2</sup> Samaria and Damascus quickly withdrew to their own respective cities leaving Tiglathpileser to subdue them singly at his will. Samaria was the first attacked, but before the city itself was ravaged assasins slew Pekah, made Hoshea king and sought mercy of Tiglathpileser by subjugating themselves to him.<sup>3</sup>

Israel and Judah were both now in the cluthces of Assyria and the results of their folly soon became a terrible reality. Shalmanæmer IV succeeded Tiglathpileser to the throne in 727 B.C. In 725 Hoshea rebelled against paying tribute to Assyria. Shalmanæzer, who with his army was in Syria, immediately attacked Samaria. His

. . . . .

1. II Kings 16

2. II Kings 16:7ff

3. II Kings 15; Cf. Rogers, op. cit., pp. 124-30

sudden death, however, left the task of subduing the city to Sargon II. The city fell in 722 B.C. and over 27,000 of the better people of the land were carried off captive. Samaria now was merely an insignificant province. Judah yet remained.

Sargon died in 702 and was succeeded by his son, Sennacherib. Most of his reign is featured by great disturbances close at home and in Babylon particularly. Before his death he completely destroyed and laid havoc to this great city. Only one time did he disturb the western states. In 701 he invaded the west due to a rebellion of the Syrian and Palestinian states. It appears that Hezekiah of Judah was a ringleader in this affair, who himself was placing false hope of assistance in Egypt. Sennacherib invaded the Phoenician cities, nothing stopping his ruthless march, even to the borders of Egypt. Jerusalem was miraculously saved by the plague that destroyed the invading army.<sup>1</sup> Sennacherib withdrew to finish his score with Babylon.

Esarhaddon succeeded Sennacherib in 680 B.C. and under him the empire strode on toward the peak of its power. He restored the Assyrian power in Babylon, bought over the Scythians in the northwest, subjugated Tyre and Sidon and

. . . . .

1. II Kings 18; Isaiah 22

carried his arms into Egypt.<sup>1</sup> Assurbanipal, who succeeded Esarhaddon (C.660) followed in general the course of his father, as anxious for power and as guilty of blood-thirstiness. He completed the capture of Egypt - though not able to maintain his gain - destroyed the Elamites, installed himself as king of Babylon and drove back the Simmerians in Syria. His last days were spent in works of peace, the erection of buildings, the publication of books, etc., but this outward show was only a cloak for personal folly.<sup>2</sup> The empire was beginning to give way. Lofthouse says:

"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>3</sup>

Revolts sprang up on every hand and Assyria was exhausted. On the death of Assurbanipal 626 Assyria was perhaps the chief power of western Asia, but by no means the only power. Egypt was lost, Urartu was independent, Syria and Palestine were almost at liberty and Babylon was quiet but silently waiting for the chance to strike.<sup>4</sup> "The shadows were growing long and deep and the night of Assyria was approaching."<sup>5</sup>

. . . . .

1. W. F. Lofthouse, Jeremiah, p. 25
2. R. W. Rogers, op. cit., Vol. II, p. 275ff
3. W. F. Lofthouse, op. cit., p. 25
4. R. W. Rogers, op. cit., Vol. II, pp. 279-282
5. Ibid, p. 282

### C. Babylon

The death of Assurbanipal left the Assyrian empire in a greatly weakened condition and was the occasion for a new revolt of Babylon. This revolt took place successfully under Nabopolasser, Viceroy of Babylon. He immediately set about to strengthen his claims. Assyria stood in the way. He succeeded in persuading the Indo-Europeans (Scythians) to aid him against Assyria. These people responded heartily - though for no one's benefit but their own. Nabopolasser cunningly stood by while the Scythians did his bloody work. The Assyrians were gradually pushed back and finally took refuge in the capital city, Nineveh. A siege was begun and, though no details are known, it finally fell in 607 or 606.<sup>1</sup>

The people over whom Nabopolasser assumed control were not of native stock. They were Chaldeans who had been penetrating into Babylonia for many years. Thus Nabopolasser had a cunning political game to play in order to keep down the Assyrian feeling and also to keep some crafty Chaldean prince from usurping the throne from him. Besides about this time, as we have seen, Egypt under Pharaoh-Necho had begun again to aspire for world recognition. Necho II, so Rogers thinks, saw clearly the

. . . . .

1. R. W. Rogers, op. cit., Vol. II, pp. 283-295

condition of tottering Assyria and hoped to share in the plunder, and forthwith marched out of Egypt in 609 or 608 towards Syria.<sup>1</sup> As has already been noted, he took Gaza readily, without much trouble defeated Josiah at Megiddo, continued on as far as the Euphrates, and having secured Assyria's western provinces, returned to Egypt with Jehoahaz whom he had removed from the throne of Judah in favor of Jehoiakim.<sup>2</sup> Not being content to let well enough alone Pharaoh-Necho again left Egypt with a great army of Lybians, Ethiopians, etc., determined to make a daring campaign to the north and east of the Euphrates. He reached Carchemich in 605 and there was met by the Chaldeans under Nebuchadrezzar, son of Nabopolassar, and was soundly defeated. Necho retreated in confusion to Egypt. Nebuchadrezzar pursued. He did not pass through Judah, but all Jerusalem was terrorized,<sup>3</sup> lest Nebuchadrezzar's wrath should be spent on them. At the height of this invasion Nebuchadrezzar was suddenly called home due to the death of his father who had been in failing health for some time. He returned to Babylon to make secure his position on the throne. He reached Babylon in time and was received as king without trouble, to begin a long and brilliant reign.

. . . . .

1. R. W. Rogers, op. cit., Vol. II, p. 309ff
2. II Kings 23
3. Jeremiah 35



After the battle of Carchemish Judah passed under the control of Babylon. Jehoiakim paid tribute faithfully for three years,<sup>1</sup> then on the demand of a popular patriotic party omitted it. Jeremiah was the one voice against such folly. Nebuchadrezzar did not invade immediately but encouraged Judah's neighbors, the Syrians, Chaldeans, Moabites and Ammonites to lay waste the land. However, more strenuous measures were necessary. In 597 he sent an army to besiege Jerusalem. In the meantime Jehoiakim died, and was succeeded on the throne by the eighteen year old Jehoiachin.<sup>2</sup> The latter, recognizing the ultimate outcome of the situation, surrendered to Nebuchadrezzar. He, his mother, the entire court and 7000 able men were carried captive to Babylon. Mattaniah (Zedekiah) was made king of Judah,<sup>3</sup> under oath of vassalage to Babylon. Zedekiah remained faithful for a while, then revolted, in response to popular clamor of a nationalistic party, which was relying on Egypt for aid.<sup>4</sup> Egypt was at this time attempting a comeback under Pharaoh-Hophra. Nebuchadrezzar's army appeared before Jerusalem in 587 and laid siege. Shortly afterwards the Egyptians appeared on the scene. The siege was lifted

. . . . .

1. II Kings 24
2. Ibid. cf. Jer. 22:24; 24:1; 27:20
3. Ibid. cf. Jer. 27:1
4. R. W. Rogers, op. cit., p. 320ff

long enough to contact the Egyptians. The army of the Chaldeans met the Egyptian army somewhere south of Jerusalem. Pharaoh-Hophra hastily withdrew and the Chaldeans returned to Jerusalem to renew the siege. Famine, pestilence and rebellion weakened the defense,<sup>1</sup> and the city fell in 586 B.C.<sup>2</sup> Zedekiah fled from the city, but was quickly caught, and brought before Nebuchadrezzar at Riblah. His sons were killed before his eyes, then his own eyes were blinded. The city and temple were plundered and utterly ruined. All the inhabitants except the poor and the weak were carried away captives to Babylon. Babylon was now supreme and her power unchallenged in the west.

#### D. Significance of Judah in Relation to Foreign Powers

Palestine was the "international corridor" of the ancient world.<sup>3</sup> Because of her location geographically this little country saw pass before her doors the commerce and the armies of the world. Desert country lay to the south and to the east, and the sea lay to the west. Whether it was caravans from Egypt, laden with commerce for the shipping ports of Tyre, or whether invading armies from the north or south marching to distant regions, all

. . . . .

1. Jeremiah 38:2

2. II Kings 25:4,5; Jeremiah 39 and 52

3. D. J. Walton, Jeremiah's Significance as a Teacher, p.18

routes led through Palestine.

Being at the crossroads of the world, it was inevitable that she should become intertwined with the political and commercial affairs of the nations. It was a concern of first magnitude to the nations around as to who would control this important gateway. It was no less a problem of Judah to maintain her independence and individuality in the face of encroachment from foreign powers. On the other hand, perhaps it was in the providence of God that the Hebrews settled in this significant spot. They were the promoters of a new religion whose adherents worshipped the one true and universal God. Their mission was to make known the greatness and love of their God to "all nations of the earth." What better location could there have been for such a task when the whole world passed by her very doors?

Judah, by the latter part of the seventh century had become the football of the nations tossed about in a game, the outcome of which was of great significance. Into such a troublous situation came Jeremiah. With the clash of arms about him, which filled the whole known world with the stench of war, with the clamor of ambitious princes and of false prophets ringing in his ears, and with a stubborn people to contend, but with a commission from God as prophet unto the nations, did Jeremiah have a message?

## II. Judah's Internal Situation

### A. Political and Religious

To get a clear understanding of the existing conditions of Jeremiah's day we must go back and trace briefly the reigns of several kings immediately preceding Josiah. We must not forget also that Judah's politics are closely bound up with her religion. Thus anything affecting her politically would have its effect religiously or vice versa.

#### 1. Historical - Ahaz to Josiah

When Ahaz sought aid from Tiglathpileser (before noted) against Samaria and Syria, pledging fidelity to him saying "I am thy servant and thy son,"<sup>1</sup> he did more than make a mere political agreement of vassalage. He, at the same time, had to introduce the worship of Assyrian gods into Judah. It was a strict policy of Assyria to require people subject to her to worship Assyrian gods. Thus we see Ahaz not only offering sacrifices to strange gods, but introducing the worship into the temple itself.

After Ahaz, Hezekiah came to the throne of Judah. He "did that which was right in the sight of Jehovah."<sup>2</sup> He broke down the high places of the land and instituted

. . . . .

1. II Kings 16:7-20
2. II Kings 18:3

a thorough-going religious reform. This necessitated, however, a break with Assyria and when Sennacherib came on his invasion of Judah, Hezekiah was placed in a dilemma. Should he give in to Assyria or remain true to Jehovah? Backed by the comforting words of Isaiah, the prophet, he did not give in and Jerusalem was miraculously delivered.<sup>1</sup>

After this came Manasseh whose reign was noted for the intensity of his wickedness. He went to the opposite extreme of his father, "for he built again the high places which Hezekiah his father had destroyed; and he reared up altars to Baal, and made an Asherah - and worshipped all the hosts of heaven and served them."<sup>2</sup> The temple was debased by the erection there of imaginary gods. Chief among them were Baal, Ashtareth and Moloch. Morality sunk to a low ebb. Corruption prevailed. The Valley of Hinnom became a center of heathenism. He even sacrificed his own son to the heathen god Moloch in that valley.<sup>3</sup> Men who favored this practice gave Jeremiah great trouble in his time.<sup>4</sup> All of this is a clear indication that Manasseh conformed to all the policies of Assyria. Perhaps he and his court saw that it was hopeless to resist Assyria and reluctantly submitted, but it seems

. . . . .

1. II Kings 19:35

2. Ibid, 21:3

3. II Kings 21:1-18; II Chron. 33:1-20

4. Jer. 20:37,38

that at the same time he was overly zealous and went to the extreme. In any case the price was a heavy one.

"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 Jehovah was nothing if He was not supreme, and that the God of Israel demanded an undivided allegiance."<sup>1</sup>

That there were those who opposed Manasseh's policy in religion may be inferred by the statement: "Moreover Manasseh shed innocent blood very much till he had filled Jerusalem from one end to the other; besides the sin wherewith he made Judah to sin."<sup>2</sup> Men were put to death by the state because of their religious beliefs. This has not been the last time that such has happened. However, such a course tends to produce insincerity in worship and, in this case, greatly to reduce the people's feeling of national distinctiveness. Jehovah was just another God; so was their nation.

After the death of Manasseh, his son Amon, continued in the same wicked path. He "sacrificed unto all the graven images which Manasseh his father had made, and served them."<sup>3</sup> After a reign of two years, he was killed by his own servants. The people made his son Josiah king.

Thus when Josiah came to the throne he was faced with a terribly corrupt situation, which had been accumulat-

. . . . .

1. A. C. Welch, Jeremiah, p. 5  
2. II Kings 21:16

3. II Chron. 33:22  
cf. II Kings 21:19-26

ing for some fifty-five years from the time of Hezekiah. It is during the reign of Josiah that Jeremiah comes on the scene, and we are ready to appreciate somewhat the conditions which he faced.

## 2. In Jeremiah's Day

Five kings occupied the throne of Judah during his lifetime, - Josiah, Jehoahaz, Jehoiakim, Jehoiachin and Zedekiah.<sup>1</sup> Only one of these, Josiah, attempted in any way to do that which was right in the sight of Jehovah. Josiah, in the eighth year of his reign began to seek Jehovah,<sup>2</sup> and in his twelfth year he began to purge Jerusalem and Judah of its high places and idols. This reform, from all outward appearances, was complete and sincere. He broke down the altars of Baal. He destroyed the altars of the Asherim, the sun gods and the molten images. The bones of the priests were burned upon their altars. This reform reached to the cities of Manasseh, Ephraim, Simeon and Naphtali. In the eighteenth year of his reign the temple was repaired.<sup>3</sup> It was on this occasion that the book of the law was found by Hilkiyah, the priest. The law was read before the people and the pass-over was kept "like unto which none had been kept since

. . . . .

1. Jer. 1:3

2. II Chron. 34:1-7

3. Ibid, 34:8-33; cf. II Kings 23

the days of Samuel, the prophet."<sup>1</sup> All of this activity was, however, probably not without an ulterior motive. This is indicated by the fact that the reformation was carried beyond the borders of Judah into Samaria and in his ambitious and foolhardy contact with the Egyptians at Megiddo in 608,<sup>2</sup> where he needlessly lost his life.

"He perceived 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."<sup>3</sup>

But Josiah's reign was fairly consistent and righteousness generally was done throughout the nation, and his death was the cause of lamentation on the part of Jeremiah.<sup>4</sup>

Josiah fell in the fateful battle of Megiddo and was succeeded on the throne by his second son Jehoahaz.<sup>5</sup> But after a brief reign of three months he was dethroned, made prisoner by Pharaoh-Necho and carried away to Egypt there to die. Jeremiah and Ezekiel appear to have seen some sign of good in him for they both speak sorrowfully of his untimely fate.<sup>6</sup> In his stead Necho placed Eliakim (Jehoiakim) on the throne of Judah.<sup>7</sup> Judah thereby became

. . . . .

1. II Chron. 35:18
2. Ibid, 35:20-27; cf. II Kings 23
3. E. P. Blair, Jeremiah's Philosophy of Life, p. 31
4. II Chron. 35:25; Jer. 22:10
5. II Chron. 36:1-8; II Kings 23:31-35
6. Jer. 22:10-12; Ezekiel 19:3,4
7. II Chron. 36:1-8; II Kings 23:36-24:7



a vassal of Egypt. This was a great price to pay for the battle of Megiddo.

Jehoiakim was a cruel, selfish, and luxurious ruler.<sup>1</sup> Some time after his ascension to the throne Judah became a vassal of Babylonia, who in the meantime had defeated the Egyptians at Carchemish. Jehoiakim did "evil in the sight of Jehovah." The old paganizing party was again in power and heathen worship became prevalent in Judah. For three years Jehoiakim served Babylon, then rebelled. This was an unfortunate move on his part. Nebuchadrezzar sent bands of Chaldeans, Syrians, Moabites and Ammonites against Judah. Later he himself came at the head of an army. Jehoiakim probably fell in some skirmish with them, after a reign of eleven years. Judah's affairs were in a sad state by this time, and she seems headed for destruction.

Jehoiachin succeeded his father to the throne, but within three months he was compelled to surrender to Nebuchadrezzar. Jehoiachin and 10,000 people of the land were carried away captive to Babylon.<sup>2</sup> Nebuchadrezzar placed Mattaniah, whose name was changed to Zedekiah, on the throne of Judah under promise of faithfulness.

Interestingly enough the name Zedekiah means, "Jehovah's righteousness," as if a constant reminder to

. . . . .

1. Jer. 22:13ff  
2. II Kings 24:10-17

the king of his promises. Notwithstanding this was the one thing the king and his admirers would not do - keep their promises. Zedekiah rebelled against Babylon in the ninth year of his reign, probably relying on help from the ambitious Pharaoh-Hophra of Egypt, and of the surrounding countries of Judah.<sup>1</sup> Jeremiah protested but to no avail. Judah's night had now fully come. Nebuchadrezzar besieged the city, lifting it only long enough to defeat the Egyptians, until it fell in the eleventh year of Zedekiah. The city - its temple and buildings - was utterly destroyed. All the people except the very poorest of the land were carried away captive.

Gedaliah was made governor of the remnant poor. In less than a year he was murdered by jealous enemies. The people, fearing the vengeance of the Chaldeans, migrated to Egypt. Jeremiah opposed this move also, but they "would walk in their own way" and to Egypt they went. There they were scattered to and fro and resumed their old idolatries.<sup>2</sup> Judah's sun had set and another tragic incident in her history had been written.

#### B. Social - Moral - Economic

The worship of the false gods of the Assyrians could

. . . . .

1. II Kings 25; Jer. 27:1ff

2. Jer. 40-44

not but leave its black effect in the lives of the people of Judah. False worship flourished everywhere.

"Yet I have planted thee a noble vine, wholly a right seed; how then art thou turned into the degenerate branches of a foreign vine?"<sup>1</sup> Baal, the sun god of the Canaanites, was considered both beneficent and destructive. Each community had its own individual "lord," "for according to the number of thy cities are thy gods, Oh Judah."<sup>2</sup>

The valley of the son of Hinnom, as well as other places, was the scene of a dreadful procedure where children were passed through the fire to appease the wrath of Baal.<sup>3</sup> Manasseh practiced this, offering his own son.<sup>4</sup> On the flat roofs of houses altars were set up on which incense was burnt to Baal.<sup>5</sup> The people participated in those sensuous orgies connected with Baal worship. This religion, says Skinner, "

"rested on a deification of the sexual instinct....an interpretation of nature by false analogies from the process of physical generation.... Its divinity was conceived as divided into a male and female principle whose marriage was the cause of fertility... It taught its votaries that union with the deity was realized by fleshy intercourse with sacred persons dedicated to this purpose at the sanctuaries."<sup>6</sup>

. . . . .

1. Jer. 2:21; cf. 2:7, 13, 20, 27, 32; 3:1, 8, 21, 29-31; 5:7; 7:1-7
2. Jer. 2:28
3. Jer. 7:31
4. II Chron. 33:6

5. Jer. 32:29
6. John Skinner, Prophecy and Religion pp. 68-69

The worship of false gods led Judah into the vilest forms of heathenism. Sodom and Gomorrah alone could furnish a parallel.<sup>1</sup> The people were very religious and at the same time practicing immorality of the vilest nature.

All of this had its direct effect in the domestic and economic life of the nation. Family relationships were seriously violated. There was an excessive amount of adultery. Jeremiah speaks of the men "assembling themselves at the harlot's houses....as fed horses roaming at large."<sup>2</sup> They have polluted the land with their wickedness.<sup>3</sup> The practice of divorce was accepted by the people as taught by the leaders. The man usually had the right to do as he pleased in the matter.<sup>4</sup> Worst of all the false prophets were deceiving the people and were themselves adulterers and instigators of evil.<sup>5</sup>

Deceit was the accepted principle of the day. "Their tongue is a deadly arrow. It speaketh deceit; one speaketh peaceably to his neighbor with his mouth, but in his heart he layeth wait for him."<sup>6</sup> Truth had perished from their mouth.<sup>7</sup> The poor, the fatherless and the widow

. . . . .

1. Jer. 23:14  
2. Ibid, 5:7,8  
3. Ibid, 3:2  
4. Ibid, 3:1

5. Jer. 23:13ff  
6. Jer. 9:8  
7. Jer. 7:28

were no longer able to receive justice. They were being sold to the oppressor and their lands added to those of the rich and powerful.<sup>1</sup> A man would even hire his neighbor to work then refuse him his wage. The king's, Jehoiakim in particular, chief ambition seemed to be to build spacious chambers and excel in luxury secured by injustice and oppression. The false prophets approved this sort of practice, and as the leaders went so went the people. "A wonderful and horrible thing is come to pass in the land: the prophets prophesy falsely, the priests bear rule by their means; and my people love to have it so: and what will you do in the end thereof?"<sup>2</sup>

Into such a condition came Jeremiah. What will he say; what will he do in the face of such wickedness?

### C. Social Classes - The Spirit of the Times

It would be rather difficult to say just how many classes composed Hebrew society in Jeremiah's time. However, in his book there are portrayed at least five distinct classifications, namely, the kings, the princes, the priests, the prophets and the common people. The last named class would, of course, be divided into many groups according to location and occupation. The spirit

. . . . .

1. Jer. 22:13

2. Jer. 23:16,17; 5:30,31

of the times can best be appreciated if we give particular attention to these five specific classes.

1. The Kings

The king was the most important and powerful person in the nation. In a very real sense he was largely responsible for the nation's welfare. Upon him finally rested the burden of making decisions of national importance, of seeing that justice was executed in the land, and of accepting the responsibility for the nation's folly.

Josiah was a man of high ideals and lofty ambitions. Desperately did he try to stem the tide of wickedness that was begun and revelled in by Manasseh. It is said that "like unto him there was no king before him."<sup>1</sup> His unusual spirit is shown in that in the eighth year of his reign he began to seek after Jehovah, and in the twelfth year began to destroy the high places of Judah.<sup>2</sup> He was generally consistent throughout his whole reign and let not personal greed deflect him from his lofty purpose. Jeremiah said of him: "He judged the cause of the poor and needy,"<sup>3</sup> and holds him up as a good example of what a ruler should be.

. . . . .

1. II Kings 23:35
2. II Chron. 34:3
3. Jer. 22:16

Jehoahaz was dethroned by Pharaoh-Necho after only three months. This is hardly long enough to warrant judgment, but it is said of him "He did that which was evil in the sight of Jehovah, according to all that his father had done."<sup>1</sup> What has been said of Jehoahaz may also be said of Jehoiachin, who also reigned but three months.

Jehoiakim, son of Josiah, was certainly not a "chip from the old block," for it appears that he took a great liking for the ways of his grandfather, Manasseh. He rebelled against Babylon, apparently not on religious grounds, but purely for selfish reasons. He was noted for his unrighteousness and injustice.<sup>2</sup> His spirit was wholly one of selfishness and stubbornness. He refused to take his high position seriously or to listen to God or His prophets. He slew Uriah, a prophet of Jehovah,<sup>3</sup> cut and burned Jeremiah's roll, and sought to destroy Jeremiah himself.<sup>4</sup> He is the type who said, "I will not hear,"<sup>5</sup> a spirit which characterized him from his youth up.

Zedekiah, the last of the kings of Judah, was hardly different from his brother Jehoiakim. He practiced evil in the sight of God and broke his solemn oath with the

. . . . .

1. II Kings 23:32
2. Jer. 22:1-17
3. Jer. 26:30-33
4. Jer. 36:22-26
5. Jer. 22:21

king of Babylon.<sup>1</sup> Zedekiah was a ruler in name but in fact ruled by his court. He secretly conferred with Jeremiah concerning the fate of Jerusalem and the course of action Judah should take, but was afraid to take a stand against the princes of his court,<sup>2</sup> who sought Jeremiah's life. He was totally lacking in moral courage, and consequently allowed Judah with eagle swiftness to hasten to her end.

## 2. The Princes

The princes were men of high rank or authority in any official relation.<sup>3</sup> Jeroboam is spoken of as having been exalted to the position of prince (leader of) over Israel.<sup>4</sup> They are referred to as "heads of the thousands of Israel,"<sup>5</sup> and as the "princes of the provinces".<sup>6</sup> They were in some cases probably local governors or magistrates, the more influential or leading persons in a tribe or community.

The family of Shaphan comes in for considerable attention in the book of Jeremiah and its members showed a commendable spirit. Shaphan was the scribe or secretary

. . . . .

1. II Kings 24:19
2. Jer. 38:5
3. J. D. Davis, *A Dictionary of the Bible*, p. 23
4. I Kings 14:7
5. Numbers 1:16
6. I Kings 20:14



of King Josiah.<sup>1</sup> He was sent by the king to Hilkiah, the priest, to audit the record of money sent in for the repairing of the temple. He received from Hilkiah the book of the law which was found in the temple and read it before Josiah.<sup>1</sup> Shaphan had three sons: Ahikam was sent by Josiah to find out word concerning the book of the law,<sup>2</sup> and was one who foiled the plot to kill Jeremiah;<sup>3</sup> Elasah accompanied by Gemariah was sent by Jeremiah with a letter to those in captivity;<sup>4</sup> Gemariah tried vainly to keep the king from burning the roll.<sup>5</sup> Gedaliah, who was made governor of the poor of Judah by the king of Babylon, was a grandson of Shaphan.<sup>6</sup>

Two other princes of importance were the sons of Neriah: Baruch and Seriah. Baruch was Jeremiah's loyal scribe.<sup>7</sup> Seriah was the Chief Chamberlain of King Zedekiah.<sup>8</sup> He was commissioned to take down the words of Jehovah by Jeremiah against Babylon and to pronounce them against that nation.

Contrary to the spirit of these princes, especially mentioned, was that of the vast majority of them. Evidently Jeremiah had this group in mind when he says, "They

. . . . .

1. II Kings 22:3ff  
2. Ibid, 22:12  
3. Jer. 26:24  
4. Jer. 29:3  
5. Jer. 36:25

6. Jer. 39:14; 40:5,9,11;  
41:2; 43:6  
7. Jer. 32:12,16; 36:4,8,32;  
43:3  
8. Jer. 51:59ff

watch as fowlers lie in wait; ....their houses are full of deceit....waxed rich....overpass in deeds of wickedness...plead not the cause of the fatherless and the needy."<sup>1</sup> They had all "with one accord, broken the yoke and burst the bonds."<sup>2</sup> They who should be leaders of righteousness in their communities had neglected their duty and "the whole land is made desolate because no man layeth it to heart."<sup>3</sup> Though they were recognized as the authority in judicial affairs they were not always consistent. On one occasion it seems they protected Jeremiah from the wrath of the false prophets and the people,<sup>4</sup> while on another they cunningly conspired against him.<sup>5</sup> By the time of Zedekiah it appears that they were in complete control of the affairs of state, and openly were hostile to Jeremiah.<sup>6</sup> They were the leaders of the strong nationalistic party, ambitious for the state because it gave them increasing power. Jeremiah found in them a spirit of "selfishness, chauvinism and meanness."<sup>7</sup>

### 3. The Priests

The priests formed a very distinct and important group.

. . . . .

1. Jer. 5:26-28  
2. Jer. 5:5  
3. Jer. 12:11  
4. Jer. 26

5. Jer. 36  
6. Jer. 37 and 38, esp. 37:15 and 38:5  
7. D.J.Walton, op.cit., p. 36

Their office was hereditary. They were especially set apart to officiate at worship in the offering of sacrifice, to speak to Jehovah for the people, and to instruct the people concerning the law. Upon them lay the chief responsibility of maintaining the faithful worship of Jehovah.

But in Jeremiah's time they used their office for selfish motives and as means of graft.<sup>1</sup> They were guilty of deceit and falsehood.<sup>2</sup> The people were accused of trusting in lying words, offering incense to Baal, etc., and then coming to worship also in the house of Jehovah. The priests had allowed the temple to become "a den of robbers."<sup>3</sup> False prophets were allowed to speak in the temple.<sup>4</sup> Pashur, a chief officer in the temple and son of Immer the priest, threw Jeremiah into the stocks because of his condemnatory message.<sup>5</sup> Jeremiah himself was the son of a priest of Anathoth,<sup>6</sup> a group that was not held in high repute by the priests of Jerusalem. This fact combined with the deceitfulness and arrogance of the priests of Jerusalem combined to make his mission a thankless one indeed.

. . . . .

1. Jer. 5:31

2. Jer. 6:14; 8:10

3. Jer. 7:11

4. Jer. 28:1-5

5. Jer. 20:1

6. Jer. 1:1

#### 4. The Prophets

The prophet supposedly is a messenger of God who speaks to the people concerning Him. But those of Judah in Jeremiah's time seem to have forgotten completely their holy calling. They prophesied lies in the name of Jehovah, crying, peace, peace, when there was no peace,<sup>1</sup> spoke soft messages to the people which tickled their pride and pleased their ears.<sup>2</sup> Some were guilty of adultery like Zedekiah and Ahab.<sup>3</sup> Some prophesied in the name of Baal, openly leading the people into ways that were not right and profitable.<sup>4</sup> The majority of them were men like Hananiah who openly resented and contradicted Jeremiah's message in order to gain popular favor with the people and the leaders.<sup>5</sup> The prophets of Jerusalem especially were guilty of lying words, of adultery, of strengthening the hands of evildoers, of vanity and of speaking from their own heart.<sup>6</sup> They had been instrumental in creating a condition of wickedness in the people of the land, the only parallel of which was Sodom and Gomorrah. Like Jeremiah they often spoke in the name of Jehovah, but while their message pleased the people and made themselves the popular heroes,

. . . . .

1. Jer. 8:11; 14:14  
2. Jer. 5:31  
3. Jer. 29:22

4. Jer. 2:8; 23:13  
5. Jer. 28  
6. Jer. 23

Jeremiah's message cut like a knife and heaped upon himself almost universal disfavor.

### 5. The People

The common people present an equally distressing picture. Allowing themselves to be fooled by the paltry praise of the priests and false prophets, they basked in the sun of "a false sense of security."<sup>1</sup> This spirit is illustrated in their repetitions of such words and phrases: "Peace, Peace", "The Temple of Jehovah" and "as Jehovah liveth."<sup>2</sup> They took great pride in formal worship, but this was a worship of the mouth and not of the heart,<sup>3</sup> and it was not the security which the situation demanded. The spirit of fickleness and false security characterizing the whole nation is shown in the people's action immediately before and during the siege of Jerusalem. Before the siege they foolishly uttered "Who shall come down against us? Who shall enter into our habitation?"<sup>4</sup> When the siege had begun and had grown fierce they suddenly remembered to free their slaves, as if this would win the favor of Jehovah. As soon, however, as the siege was lifted for a spell, they re-enslaved

. . . . .

1. D. J. Walton, op. cit., p. 38
2. Jer. 6:14; 7:4; 16:14
3. Jer. 12:2
4. Jer. 21:13; 34

those who before they had set free. They were trying to play a deceptive game with Jehovah as if He were a fellow neighbor.<sup>1</sup>

Faith in Jehovah had no place in the spirit of the common people. They were dominated by a stubbornness the like of which had never been equaled. They lacked any real sense of wrong-doing. During the experience of the drought they cried to Jehovah to save, honoring Him with many words of praise, but it was a cry from the lips and not from the heart.<sup>2</sup> They cried because they were in danger and not because they were sorry for their sins and had repented. They had brought the desperate situation upon themselves because "they would not hear."<sup>3</sup> Jerusalem would not be made clean. Their repentance was mere empty boasting and self justification. They refused to accept the responsibility for their sin. "The fathers have eaten sour grapes and the children's teeth are set on edge."<sup>4</sup> They practiced perfectly the present day practice of shifting the burden on those who are dead and in the grave. Their spirit may be summed up in their own words: "It is vain for we will walk after our own devices."<sup>5</sup>

. . . . .

1. Jer. 9:8
2. Jer. 11 and 14
3. Jer. 13:11
4. Jer. 31:29
5. Jer. 18:12

Such was the spirit of the times which Jeremiah faced when he was in Jerusalem. He alone saw the inevitable consequence of a disease that was gradually destroying a nation as a cancer might destroy a human body. "A wonderful and horrible thing is come to pass in the land; the prophets prophesy falsely, and the priests bear rule by their means; and my people love to have it so."<sup>1</sup> The whole nation - kings, princes, priests, prophets and people - were "sinning against the habits of nature, of man and of God."<sup>2</sup> It was a spirit manifest of which death for the nation would surely result. Jeremiah saw what was coming and tried to avert it, but Jerusalem would not heed. He like a true soldier stayed with them to the end.

### III. Summary

In this chapter we have considered the general background of our problem. We have seen that the foreign nations, Egypt, Assyria and Babylonia, all were interested in the affairs of Judah, because Judah's geographical position made an important factor in the control of the world of that day. Consequently Judah was constantly placed in a dilemma to know which power to favor that

. . . . .

1. Jer. 5:30,31

2. S. E. Keeble, Social Teachings of the Bible, p. 33

she might be at peace and at the same time maintain reasonable independence.

The constant dallying back and forth, the domination for a while by one power and then by another, the infusion of foreign gods and peoples with their false ideas of God and low standards of morality, soon had its effects in Judah. The people were suffering from a tragic social and economic situation that demanded reform in order for the nation to escape complete destruction.

We found further that the underlying reason for this situation could be found in the spirit of the times as exemplified in the behavior of the kings, princes, priests, prophets and the common people. A self-willed spirit of rebellion and stubbornness, expressed in false religious worship and low personal standards of morality, was a characteristic common to each group. The nation was in its degenerate condition because its people loved to have it so. With such a spirit to contend Jeremiah's task was all the more magnified.



CHAPTER THREE

THE PROPHETIC OFFICE AND THE SOCIAL PROCESS

## CHAPTER THREE

### THE PROPHETIC OFFICE AND THE SOCIAL PROCESS

- I. The Prophet and the Social Process
  - A. Development of Hebrew Prophecy
  - B. The Prophet's Relation to the Social Process
  
- II. Jeremiah, the Man for the Times
  - A. Brief Preview of the Man
  - B. Formative Factors in Jeremiah's Life
  - C. Jeremiah in Action
  
- III. Summary

## CHAPTER THREE

### THE PROPHETIC OFFICE AND THE SOCIAL PROCESS

We have observed, in the preceding chapter, some of the political, social and religious currents which operated to produce an extremely critical situation in the nation of Judah. It is now our task to relate the prophet to the social processes and social situations. The ultimate question we hope to answer is, "How was Jeremiah qualified to speak to his day and age?" We shall approach this question by first considering the development of Hebrew prophecy and the work of outstanding prophets in order to determine the function of the prophet in the social processes. Then, in the light of this, we shall consider Jeremiah, the man, in an attempt to justify the title, "The Man for the Times."

#### I. The Prophet and the Social Process

##### A. Development of Hebrew Prophecy

A very common idea of the Hebrew prophet is that he was one who "foretold the future;" he predicted beforehand events that should come to pass. But such an idea is unfair to a proper conception of the prophetic function and of the significance of the prophets in Hebrew history.<sup>1</sup>

. . . . .

1. W. J. Beecher, Prophet and the Promise, p. 88ff

### 1. The Significance of the Name

The English word "prophet" is the same as the Greek **ΠΡΟΦΗΤΗΣ** which means "one who speaks forth, speaks publicly, speaks out the message he has to speak."<sup>1</sup> The prophet was one who spoke for or on behalf of God. He was a bearer of His message. This was the Hebrew conception of the word as may be observed from Exodus 7:1, where Jehovah says to Moses that he is to be as God to Pharaoh and Aaron, his brother, is to be his prophet. The utterances of the prophets often did concern future events, and no conception of prophecy would be correct that entirely omitted this factor, but the primary element in Hebrew prophecy was not prediction but mediation. Fairbairn says:

"The prophet was one qualified and called to sustain a twofold relation to God and man - on the one side to receive; on the other to give forth the word received - to be in a manner God's mouth for the purpose of declaring the truths, and unfolding the secrets which God might see meet by special revelation to impart to him."<sup>2</sup>

But withal the prophets, though guided by a power not their own, did not lose their individuality. They were men who spoke as compelled by the Spirit of God but who maintained great freedom in methods.<sup>3</sup> We must not forget

. . . . .

1. W. J. Beecher, op. cit., p.21; cf. Thayer, Greek Lexicon of New Testament, p. 553
2. Patrick Fairbairn, Prophecy, p.5; cf. G.A.Smith, Book of the Twelve Prophets, p.11ff
3. H. L. Willett, The Prophets of Israel, p. 13

that the prophets were real flesh and blood men living and working in society.

## 2. Origin

Davidson says that prophecy originated from beliefs or feelings common to men everywhere.<sup>1</sup> Some such beliefs were: that there was a God or Gods on whose will and power the destiny of men depended, that these Gods had communion with men and gave them intimations of their wills, and that these intimations were given only to certain favored men, who communicated them to others. The Gods gave intimations in two ways particularly, by external and by internal signs. As external signs there were such phenomena as the rustling of leaves, the flight of birds, passage of clouds, movements of the stars in the heavens, etc.<sup>2</sup> Besides the external signs there was an internal impression made directly on the mind. The God possessed the man, inspired him and spoke through him. Often the prophet was expected to do some sort of sign, perform a miracle, or testify of a vision or dream to convince the people of his authority. But the important thing was that people trusted in him to speak for God and through him had access to God.

. . . . .

1. A. B. Davidson, Hastings Bible Dictionary, Vol. IV, p. 107
2. Cf. Genesis 12:6; 9:37; II Sam. 5:24; Also G. A. Smith, Book of the Twelve, pp. 14-15

### 3. Prophecy before Samuel

Of the very earliest form and character of Hebrew prophecy we know little. Prophetic gifts are usually attributed to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob,<sup>1</sup> though this idea is not greatly emphasized. In the times of Moses and Joshua the prophetic idea became more prominent. Moses, though usually referred to as a statesman, warrior and law-giver, is nevertheless spoken of as a prophet, "the man of God," etc.<sup>2</sup> There is no doubt of the fact that Moses was in close communion with God. Miriam, the wife of Moses, is referred to as a prophetess.<sup>3</sup> Joshua, though not referred to as a prophet, too, must be thought of as having access to Jehovah to know His will.

During the period of the Judges references to prophets are few. Beyond the reference to Deborah, the prophetess, and a "prophet" who came in the days of the Midianite oppression nothing is said.<sup>4</sup> But we read of the appearing of the angel of Jehovah to Gideon, and to Manoah and his wife.<sup>5</sup> Samson, the son of Manoah, is referred to as being mightily affected by the spirit of Jehovah coming upon him,<sup>6</sup> which moved him to perform his deeds of strength.

. . . . .

1. W. J. Beecher, op.cit., p.41; cf.Gen.20:7; 18:1; 24:2; 31:11
2. Dt. 34:10; 33:1; Josh.14:6; I Chron.23:14
3. Ex. 15:20
4. Judges 4:4; 6:7
5. Judges 6:12; 13:6ff
6. Judges 14:6; 19; 15:14

However, although the records are few, one is not to suppose that the nation was without its prophets during this period. Smith says:

"When we analyze the ethical distinction of early Israel, this indubitable progress which the nation was making while the rest of the world was morally stagnant, we find it due to their impressions of the character of God.... Such a character was partly manifest in great events of their history, and partly communicated itself to their finest personalities... These personalities were the prophets from Moses to Samuel. They inspired the nation to believe in God's purposes; they rallied it to war for the common faith...; they gave justice to it in God's name, and rebuked its sinfulness....Under their God they made Israel."<sup>1</sup>

With Samuel there appears a new temper in the prophetic movement. By this time prophets in Israel are numerous, and organized in bands. Saul met a group of these after his anointing by Samuel.<sup>2</sup> Again Samuel is noted as having been at the head of such a group at Naioth in Ramah.<sup>3</sup> Their activity was usually characterized by a great display of emotional enthusiasm such as singing, dancing, playing musical instruments, tearing of clothes, prostration and other such actions. This sort of thing was new to Israel. It appears to have been a national-religious movement.<sup>4</sup> There was a crisis in Israel, due to invasions by the Philistines which seriously

. . . . .

1. G. A. Smith, Book of the Twelve Prophets, p. 19

2. I Sam. 10

3. I Sam. 19:20ff

4. A.B. Davidson, Hastings Bible Dictionary, Vol. IV, p. 109

threatened the nation. Thus, the reawakening of prophetism was a counter movement that aided greatly in forming a strong national consciousness. These groups continued to exist for generations, and probably degenerated to the extent of being identified as false prophets by the later literary prophets like Isaiah and Jeremiah.<sup>1</sup>

#### 4. Work of the Pre-Literary Prophets

Samuel was the first of a long line of outstanding personalities whom we think of as true prophets who shaped largely Israel's destiny. Samuel was instrumental, as leader and counsellor, in establishing the kingdom, first under Saul and permanently under David. Nathan logically follows Samuel.<sup>2</sup> He appears as David's chief counsel in public affairs, as shown in his advice concerning the building of the temple.<sup>3</sup> But Nathan's more significant role was his work in holding before the king and the people lofty ideals of social justice and personal morality.<sup>4</sup> Gad was another chief advisor of David.<sup>5</sup> These two prophets have been called "the domestic chaplains and spiritual advisors of David."<sup>6</sup>

. . . . .

1. T. G. Soares, Hebrew Social Institutions, p. 200; Cf. G. A. Smith, Book of the Twelve, pp. 21-29
2. W. B. Bizzell, Social Teachings of the Jewish Prophets, p. 36
3. II Sam. 7
4. II Sam. 12
5. I Chron. 21
6. W. B. Bizzell, op. cit., p. 39



The kingdom grew rapidly under Solomon. He constructed the temple, built up a luxurious court and levied heavy taxes upon the people. This was a cause for discontent among the people and we find Ahijah<sup>1</sup> voicing their sentiment in encouraging Jeroboam to lead the northern tribes in a rebellion, which was accomplished soon after Solomon's death. He speaks again concerning Jeroboam, but this time condemning him for forsaking the ways of Jehovah.<sup>2</sup> In the southern kingdom Shemaiah, like Ahijah in the north, warns Rehoboam against attempting to recover the loss of the northern tribes, and also rebukes Rehoboam for forsaking Jehovah, stating this as the cause of imminent invasion.<sup>3</sup> Both Ahijah and Shemaiah influenced the kings of their respective nations and advised them as to policy at critical times. They appear both as statesmen and as moral and religious leaders.

Elijah and Elisha, following the example of those preceding them, did not hesitate to interfere with the affairs of kings and at the same time enter into the life of the common people. Elijah denounced Ahab for murdering Naboth and taking his vineyard.<sup>4</sup> He fearlessly vindicated Jehovah on Mount Carmel,<sup>5</sup> and destroyed Baal worship in

. . . . .

1. I Kings 11
2. I Kings 14
3. I Kings 12:21ff; II Chron. 12:1ff
4. I Kings 21:17-24
5. I Kings 18

Israel, a thing he learned to hate at Zarephath. He courageously denounced Ahaziah for inquiring of other gods concerning the outcome of his accident, which itself was a reprimand for having forsaken Jehovah.<sup>1</sup> Elisha's career was equally as active and colorful as Elijah's. He was concerned with the affairs of state also as he was instrumental in prompting Jehu to overthrow the government of Ahab.<sup>2</sup> His experiences with the Shunammite woman, and Naaman the leper, show him at work with the age-old problems of poverty, disease and death.<sup>3</sup> Also, it shows his interest in the home, the fundamental social institution.

#### 5. The Canonical Prophets

We have seen how prophets like Nathan, Elisha, and Elijah followed the example of Samuel in interfering directly with the government of the state. But henceforth the prophets withdrew from external national and party conflicts while they remain as much statesmen as ever. The work of these prophets is known more by their preaching, their teaching, and their books than by their connection with any particular movement. Chief among these prophets, before the fall of Jerusalem are Amos, Hosea, Isaiah, Micah and Jeremiah. Their respective works in many ways are all similar. They oppose, warn, and advise political leaders according to the expediency of the times.<sup>4</sup> They

1. II Kings 1  
2. II Kings 9  
3. II Kings 4 and 5

4. A.B. Davidson - Hastings  
Bible Dictionary, p.112

condemn injustice, false worship, deceit, and other abuses wherever they are found. We shall not consider further their work, as our study of Jeremiah will be adequate to show their wide range of activity.

#### B. The Prophet's Relation to the Social Process

In the hurried review of prophecy and prophets that we have made, we see how, at great turning points in the history of Israel, these men appear. Moses was concerned with the giving of the Law. Samuel appeared when there was danger threatening from the Philistines, and he succeeded in uniting the tribes into a nation. Ahijah was directly involved in the rebellion of the northern division and in the establishment of the kingdom under Jeroboam. Elijah came forth championing the cause of the people and Jehovah when Israel was being threatened, not from a physical foe from without, but from moral and religious corruption within. Elisha continued the work of Elijah. Then there are Isaiah and Micah who labored during the fall of the Northern kingdom. And finally, Jeremiah proclaimed his unwelcome message just before and after the fall of Jerusalem.

##### 1. A Product

Thus in one sense we may conceive of the prophets as the product of the social situation. They were an integral part of the society of their day, living under the same conditions as the mass and working through existing insti-

tutions. They were of the people, and when they spoke, they were very often only making audible the feelings of the mass. They acted in the capacity of spokesman of the social needs. "The life of the people flowing through the general mass only reached its flood tide in them."<sup>1</sup> Every feeling of fear or hope of the people stamped itself upon their sensitive souls and was reflected in their words and deeds.<sup>2</sup>

## 2. A Critic

On the other hand, the prophets appear as critics of the social institutions and the social process. They were shaped by their environment, yet they rose above it and did their greatest work in shaping it. Great events may have furnished the occasion for their utterances, but they did not set bounds. The true prophets were concerned with living issues and evaluated events differently and more significantly than the general mass. The average person in Israel perhaps saw little harm in the introduction of Baal worship into the land, but it could not be so with

. . . . .

1. A. B. Davidson, Hastings Bible Dictionary, p.112ff; cf. T. G. Soares, op. cit., p. 211
2. The true prophet, however, is not to be confused with the false prophet. The latter spoke words which pleased the ear, but not necessarily words which were a product of careful thought, or words inspired by the spirit of God. The false prophets had their own security only at heart, and thus were always supporters of the party in power.

the prophets. It had to be not Jehovah and Baal, but Jehovah only. The larger number of the people, though feeling the pinch of oppression, of poverty, of injustice at the hands of the powerful, seemed to have remained silent in the face of it. The prophets had the boldness and the ability to condemn the situation and those responsible. They were the great reformers of their times.<sup>1</sup> It is for purposes of reform largely that they engage in public affairs. In the interests of reform we find them rebuking the king, the politicians, the people, the priests or the false prophets.

These men of God stood for the true religion and worship of Jehovah. They insisted on right relations also between man and man. They appear as sensitive instruments whereby the tenor of the times may be determined. When abuses were rampant their voices were heard. Once the evils were corrected then their voices were perhaps less noticeable. But it is not to be understood that they were, in the meantime, silent, for their constant purpose was to watch carefully the bond of relationship between Jehovah and His people. Anything threatening to destroy this relation - strange gods for worship, wickedness in high places, or the spirit of rebellion in the hearts of the mass - was reason enough to call forth the true prophet to action.

. . . . .

1. W. J. Beecher, Prophets and the Promise, p. 98

## II. Jeremiah, the Man for the Times

Having discussed the prophet's relation to the social process, we are now prepared to consider Jeremiah, the man, to discover his qualifications for the office of prophet.

### A. Brief Preview of the Man

It was in the very heart of the turbulent period, and in the face of the corrupt social conditions, discussed in Chapter II that Jeremiah lived and labored. He was born of a priestly family in Anathoth, a small town about three miles northeast of Jerusalem.<sup>1</sup> He was the son of Hilkiah, who was probably a land-owner there, and thus fairly comfortably situated.<sup>2</sup> Jeremiah no doubt received a good priestly home training and had early counsel in intimate communion with Jehovah. His call and commission to the prophetic role came in the thirteenth year of Josiah's reign. He was at first hesitant to become the herald of an unpopular message. But he obeyed his call and began a long ministry of some forty years. He was despised among his own people,<sup>3</sup> accused of being a traitor to his nation,<sup>4</sup> threatened with death in Jerusalem and in the country,<sup>5</sup> and finally saw the complete destruction of the city and nation he loved.<sup>6</sup> But through all these trials Jeremiah

. . . . .

1. Jer. 1:1

2. Jer. 37:12

3. Jer. 12:6; 11:22ff

4. Jer. 37:13

5. Jer. 38:14

6. Jer. 39:52

prophesied, warned, and declared a message in an effort to save the nation from complete destruction.

## B. Formative Factors in Jeremiah's Life

To really understand a great man we should go back to his early youth and young manhood and note the conditions under which he grew up and some of his experiences. Of Jeremiah, the record is rather obscure in this respect and to a certain extent must be a conjecture. However, there are at least three factors definitely contributory to his career, namely, his childhood training and surroundings, his call and commission, and the religious reforms in the eighteenth year of Josiah.

### 1. Childhood Training

Anathoth was the home of the priestly line of Abiathar, who was deposed by Solomon.<sup>1</sup> The Jerusalem priests were of the rival line of Zadok. Jeremiah then was brought up under godly influences and no doubt was thoroughly instructed in the great traditions of his people. From his parents he would learn of the rich knowledge of the past. Anathoth was a town of the territory of Benjamin, the land of Saul and Jonothan. To the east lay the great desert wastes beyond the Jordan. A short distance to the

. . . . .

1. I Kings 2:26

south was Jerusalem, the city of the great temple, the king's houses, and a meeting place for people from all parts of the world. He was in touch with the solitude of the country and with the noisy bustle of a great city. Jeremiah had opportunity to gain firsthand knowledge of the internal conditions in the nation. He could observe the orgies of Baal worship in the country places and the gross wickedness of the priests in Jerusalem.<sup>1</sup>

Again, we must remember that the whole world was in turmoil politically. The Assyrian empire was beginning rapidly to decline. Babylon was slowly rising to power. The Scythians from the north were out for plunder. Little nations everywhere were attempting to establish independence. Judah acted like the others. Josiah, in the twelfth year of his reign instituted a sweeping reform, which it is rather certain was prompted partly by purely political motives, for he extended his power over northern Palestine.<sup>2</sup> All of these factors would leave their impression on the sensitive soul of the young Hebrew. The occasion was indeed right for the emergence of a prophet to proclaim Jehovah's word.

## 2. Call and Commission

The Message of Jehovah came to Jeremiah while he was

. . . . .

1. Jer. 5:1-6  
2. II Chron. 34



still a young man in the thirteenth year of Josiah's reign.<sup>1</sup>  
This was an experience for which the years it seems had  
been preparing him. Jehovah's commission to Jeremiah 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>

Jeremiah hesitated to accept this tremendous task, protest-  
ing that he knew not how to speak, being only a child.<sup>3</sup>

He felt a keen natural sense of unfitness for the task as  
he was of the despised Anathoth priests, and knew of the  
opposition he would meet in Jerusalem. But Jehovah Himself  
put the words into Jeremiah's mouth and gave the timid  
young man complete assurance in the visions of the almond  
tree and of the boiling caldron. Moreover, Jehovah warned  
Jeremiah against his fears and renewed His promise:

"Be not dismayed at them, lest I dismay thee  
before them. For, behold, I have made thee  
this day a fortified city, and an iron pillar,  
and brazen walls, against the whole land, against  
the kings of Judah, against the princes thereof,  
against the priests thereof and against the  
people of the land. And they shall fight against  
thee; but they shall not prevail against thee:  
for I am with thee, saith Jehovah, to deliver  
thee."<sup>4</sup>

Jeremiah accepted his commission, and entered into a career  
of martyrdom, for his life henceforth is full of conflicts

. . . . .

1. Jer. 1:2  
2. Jer. 1:5-10

3. Jer. 1:6  
4. Jer. 1:17b-19

with the groups mentioned in the above verses. It shows again how God "chooses the weak for His instruments, in order that the strength with which He endows them may be seen to be all His own."<sup>1</sup>

### 3. The Reforms of Josiah

There is a third factor which seems to have influenced Jeremiah's ministry. We recall that in the twelfth year of his reign, Josiah instituted a far-reaching reform,<sup>2</sup> tearing down the high places of Judah and extending it into Samaria. What Jeremiah's attitude was towards it is not certain, but surely it gave him food for serious contemplation, and no doubt he heartily approved of it. His call as a prophet came the following year. Five years later the "book of the law" was found in the temple.<sup>3</sup> It is generally believed that this book was the same essentially as our present Deuteronomy. This discovery should have had a deep influence on the sensitive soul of Jeremiah. Here were some sacred commands of Jehovah while Josiah's reforms were just begun and while his call was still fresh in his mind. Would not he naturally feel that Jehovah had revealed His will to the people anew for a spiritual purpose? As the law was read or otherwise made known we

. . . . .

1. A.F.Kirkpatrick, The Doctrine of the Prophets, p. 302
2. II Chron. 34
3. II Kings 22 and 23

can but think of Jeremiah adding his approval to its demands, for it made known once more those principles and ideals which might yet make the Hebrew people a unique nation.

Jeremiah himself received a commission "to proclaim all these words in the cities of Judah."<sup>1</sup> He could do nothing less with a call burning within him and with this new impetus urging him on. His people were violently opposed to his message. The failure of the attempted reform to go beneath the surface only spurred him on to renewed efforts during the reign of successive kings.

### C. Jeremiah in Action

#### 1. Methods of Work

Jeremiah used competent psychological methods in putting across his message. We find him at work, uttering his message in the most public places and on great public occasions. He did not proclaim his message in a corner. The temple courts, the city gates, the house of the king, festival occasions and the cities of Judah were all familiar places to the prophet.<sup>2</sup> He frequented the places where the people were to be found.

Again Jeremiah's message was often incorporated in a symbolic act. He once used events of a long and laborious

. . . . .

1. Jer. 11

2. Jer. 7:2; 17:19; 22:1; 26:2; 35:2

journey as the foundation of his message.<sup>1</sup> A visit to the potter's house and the sight of the potter at his wheel moulding the clay suggested to him Jehovah's relation to Judah.<sup>2</sup> Once he took a company of the elders of the people and of the priests into the valley of Hinnom and there he broke before them a bottle to demonstrate the completeness of the destruction threatening Jerusalem.<sup>3</sup> Again when a company of the Rechabites came up to Jerusalem to worship, he tested their loyalty to their father's command, then used their fidelity to point out the black contrast in Judah's unfaithfulness.<sup>4</sup> Once more when Jerusalem was already under siege Jeremiah demonstrates his certainty in the fulfilment of his prophecies of restoration by purchasing a field in Anathoth, where the Chaldeans were already in possession.<sup>5</sup>

Finally, Jeremiah was more than "a master in the art of persuasive speech," a characterization of all the great prophets according to Beecher.<sup>6</sup> He, with the help of his faithful scribe Baruch, put his utterances into writing that future generations, especially those of the exile, might read and know of God's dealings with and purposes for his people. This is significant due to the utterly hopeless situation that faced the nation. The temptation of the

. . . . .

1. Jer. 13:1-11  
2. Jer. 18:1ff  
3. Jer. 19:1ff  
4. Jer. 35

5. Jer. 32:6ff  
6. W.J.Beecher, Prophets  
and Promise, p. 132

average man would have been to say "What's the use?"  
Jeremiah clearly rose above the temptation and prepared  
for his people's future.

## 2. His Conflicts and Sufferings

The character of the man and his fitness for his  
task are clearly revealed in his numerous conflicts with  
the people of his day. His public ministry was a continuous  
martyrdom. The opposition which he faced might well have  
subdued the strongest spirit, and Jeremiah's steadfast  
courage is nothing short of miraculous. He spoke boldly to  
the kings of Judah,<sup>1</sup> the princes,<sup>2</sup> the false prophets,<sup>3</sup>  
the elders of the priests and people,<sup>4</sup> the mob at the  
temple,<sup>5</sup> and the exiles.<sup>6</sup>

Jeremiah suffered opposition and persecution from  
practically every group. His neighbors at Anathoth sought  
to murder him, no doubt because of his approval of the  
Deuteronomic reforms.<sup>7</sup> Even his brothers and members of  
his father's house dealt treacherously and deceitfully  
with him.<sup>8</sup> The priests and popular prophets were a con-  
stant menace. Pashur, the son of a priest and chief  
officer in the temple, cast Jeremiah in the stocks because  
he had the audacity to proclaim his message in the temple

. . . . .

1. Jer. 21:11ff; 34:6-22;  
37:1-10; 38:14-23, etc.  
2. Jer. 37:14; 38:1-3  
3. Jer. 23:9ff  
4. Jer. 19:1

5. Jer. 26:1-19  
6. Jer. 29  
7. Jer. 11:18ff  
8. Jer. 12:8

courts.<sup>1</sup> Shemiah, a false prophet of Babylon, sent a letter to Zephaniah the priest, commanding him to put Jeremiah in the stocks, because, said he, Jeremiah had prophesied falsely to the exiles.<sup>2</sup> These false prophets were open enemies of Jeremiah, always trying to win popular favor by condemning him.<sup>3</sup> The mental anguish this caused Jeremiah can hardly be imagined, but one can hear the agony of a heart that is breaking when he cries out:

"Astonishment and horror are come to pass in the land: the prophets prophesy falsely and the priests bear rule by their means; and my people love to have it so: and what will you do in the end thereof?"<sup>4</sup>

Jeremiah fared no better at the hands of the kings and princes. His life was sought by Jehoiakim, when he heard read Jeremiah's disturbing message.<sup>5</sup> During the siege Jeremiah was arrested by Irijah, charged with intentions of desertion to the enemy, and was imprisoned.<sup>6</sup> He was thrown into a dungeon by those who sought his life, to be rescued, not by a fellow Hebrew, but by an Ethiopian servant of the king's house.<sup>7</sup> The king, in the face of this, only admitted his inability to control his court. Jeremiah's rejection was complete when the leaders of the remnant, shortly after the fall and captivity, openly slandered him and refused to follow his advice.

. . . . .

1. Jer. 20:1ff  
2. Jer. 29:24-28  
3. Jer. 28:1ff  
4. Jer. 5:30,31  
5. Jer. 36:26

5. Jer. 36:26  
6. Jer. 37:13-21  
7. Jer. 38

### 3. Glimpses of His Inner Life

Jeremiah was an unusual man in many respects. Early in his life he was forbidden to take a wife, "neither shalt thou have sons and daughters in this place."<sup>1</sup> Not only was he a bachelor, denied the intimate associations of family life, but also as we have seen, he was a man who had to endure great suffering and sorrow, a man who usually walked alone. Thus one should not be surprised to find that an intense conflict raged in his soul at various times. This turmoil within is clearly portrayed when he says:

"Woe is me, my mother, that thou hast borne me a man of strife and a man of contention to the whole earth! I have not lent, neither have men lent to me; yet every one of them doth curse me."<sup>2</sup>

This fact is borne out further in the imprecations that he invokes upon his enemies.<sup>3</sup> Only the feeling of complete rejection by his people could cause one to utter:

"Give heed to me, O Jehovah, and hearken to the voice of them that contend with me. Shall evil be recompensed for good? for they have digged a pit for my soul. Remember how I stood before thee to speak good for them, to turn away thy fury from them. Therefore deliver up their children to the famine, and give them over to the power of the sword; and let their wives become childless and widows; and let their men be slain by death...; for they have

. . . . .

1. Jer. 16:1
2. Jer. 15:10; cf. 20:14-18; 23:9-11
3. Cf. Jer. 11:18ff; 15:15ff; 17:18; 20:11; 18:19

digged a pit to slay me...; forgive not their iniquity...; deal thou with them in the time of thy anger."<sup>1</sup>

Such passages as these seem to reveal not Jeremiah's personal vindictiveness, but how "keenly he felt that his cause was God's cause and his enemies God's enemies."<sup>2</sup>

In all his experiences Jeremiah felt that inward compulsion, prompted by an abiding sense of the presence of God with him and with the people.<sup>3</sup> When everyone else failed him and everything seemed uncertain he clung to Jehovah.<sup>4</sup> His faith in the triumph of Jehovah's righteousness did not fail him even to the bitter end. Clearly Jeremiah was a man shaped by his environment, but not mastered by it. He rose above contemporary conditions, and tried to change them by proclaiming righteousness in personal lives, in society, and towards God.<sup>5</sup> Enabled by God, he looked into the hearts of men, and saw what they did not see, that their help lay not in foreign nations and foreign gods, but in Jehovah whom they had wronged and no longer worshipped.<sup>6</sup> Jeremiah was a man capably fitted to be a preacher to his time and to our time.

. . . . .

1. Jer. 18:19-23
2. A.F. Kirkpatrick, Doctrine of the Prophets, p. 308
3. Jer. 18:19; 15:20; 20:11; 46:28
4. Jer. 12:1
5. Jer. 7:1-7; 22:1-19, etc.
6. Jer. 2:13; 3:11-6:29; 17:1-27; 18:1-19:15, etc.



### III. Summary

In this chapter we have considered the office of the prophet in relation to the social process. It involved a discussion of the development of Hebrew prophecy and brief notations of the activity of a number of the outstanding prophets. The prophets, we found, bear a twofold relation to society, that of its product and that of critic.

Then we considered ~~eye~~ Jeremiah, the man. We noted ✓ several factors which bore upon him in early life to shape his role of prophet, and then three things which characterized him in action: his methods of work, his sufferings and conflicts, and his highly spiritual personal life. These factors stand out clearly and justify one calling him, "The Man for the Times."

CHAPTER FOUR

HEBREW SOCIAL INSTITUTIONS

## CHAPTER FOUR

### HEBREW SOCIAL INSTITUTIONS

- I. Hebrew Social Institutional Relations
  - A. Domestic
  - B. Economic
  - C. Political
  - D. Religious
  
- II. Summary

## CHAPTER FOUR

### HEBREW SOCIAL INSTITUTIONS

We have studied Jeremiah, the man, and found that he was well qualified to speak to the people of his day. We are now to consider the more prominent social institutions that existed in Hebrew society in the seventh century B.C. Special attention will be called in each case, where possible, to their regulative principles as reflected in Deuteronomy, which is generally considered to be the "Book of the Law" that was found in the temple during the eighteenth year of Josiah's reign and used by him as the basis of his reforms.<sup>1</sup> Thus we hope to gain a fair picture of what the social set-up of Hebrew society was like. We should perceive how the individuals related themselves to their fellows, and also how the nation as a whole functioned. This should enable us more fully to appreciate Jeremiah's social message which will be presented in the succeeding chapter.

#### I. Hebrew Social Institutional Relations

##### A. Domestic

##### 1. The Family

In the very beginning of Hebrew history it is recorded, "and the Lord said, it is not good that man should be

. . . . .

1. II Kings 23; II Chron. 35

alone; I will make him an help meet for him." Again, "Therefore shall a man cleave unto his wife and they shall be one flesh."<sup>1</sup> It is not certain whether the patriarchal form of family life was the primitive type of family, but the first stories of Hebrew family life given in the Old Testament are those in which the father held the position of supreme authority over the members.<sup>2</sup> This applied not only to his own household, but also to the clan. Such were the families of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, of which they were the respective heads. Soares says:

"No Hebrew institution developed in a more healthy and socially efficient manner than the family. In comparison with other ancient peoples the Jew had a home life that was decidedly significant."<sup>3</sup>

On the establishment of the monarchy the relative importance of the clan rapidly decreased and some of the rights of the father passed over to the elders and the king. However, to a large extent, government was still exercised largely within the family, and the family continued to be the basic unit of society.

Man appears to be the chief figure in the family throughout the Old Testament.<sup>4</sup> The woman is subordinate and frequently she is in a servile state. In early Hebrew society the wife was considered as little more than property

. . . . .

1. Gen. 2:18,24

2. T. G. Soares, op. cit., p. 39

3. Ibid, p. 333

4. E. B. Cross, The Hebrew Family, p. 41ff

of the husband, to be used and put away at will. A good example of this practice is that of Abraham's treatment of Hagar.<sup>1</sup>

By the seventh century B.C., however, we find in the Deuteronomic law considerable legislation to mitigate the evil of divorce and the lot of the woman put away. The customs of the day still allowed the victor in war to marry a woman captive, but the law required that considerable consideration should be shown her.<sup>2</sup> She was to be given a full month to put off the garb of captivity and to lament the parting from her family. She could never be sold into slavery. If the husband grew tired of her he must let her go free. The law also demanded that whoever brought a false charge of infidelity against his wife must make drastic amends with her father and should never be allowed to divorce her.<sup>3</sup> And it was expected that no man should divorce his wife unless some extremely grave thing had happened.<sup>4</sup> The husband must prepare written papers of divorcement and should never be allowed to re-marry her. In any case his contentions must be proved before a public tribunal and this it seems would cause careful thought on the part of the husband before instituting divorce

. . . . .

1. Gen. 21:14
2. Dt. 21:10-14
3. Dt. 22:19
4. Dt. 24:1-4

procedures. Thus we see that, though the wife's fate was in the power of the husband ultimately, there is revealed an attitude toward women of a gentler and more chivalrous nature. "The nation was progressing in ideals and working toward a better relationship between men and women than that which had prevailed in former days."<sup>1</sup>

It should be noted, however, that the most decisive grounds for present day divorce did not enter into the problem. The woman guilty of unfaithfulness was not divorced but was put to death.<sup>2</sup>

"A man guilty of unchastity was regarded as criminal only in so far as he invaded the rights of another man. His conduct could not constitute grounds for the woman to secure divorce, for, in the nature of the case, the woman could not under any circumstance divorce her husband."<sup>3</sup>

One is likely to get an unfair impression of the Hebrew home from the foregoing references to divorce and the like. However, there is nothing to indicate to the contrary and the average home must have been a happy one. Motherhood and the birth of children were held sacred.<sup>4</sup> Male children were more desirable, but the female child was not despised.

The Deuteronomic legislation is very specific regarding duties of parents to children and of children to parents.

. . . . .

1. E. B. Cross, op. cit., p. 52
2. Dt. 22:22
3. T. G. Soares, op. cit., p. 45
4. Ruth Nichol, A Study of Modern Family and Integrating Influence of Religion in the Home, p. 67

One of the important influences in the Hebrew home was religion, and accordingly the parents were held responsible for teaching the children in the ways of Jehovah.

"And these words which I command thee this day, shall be in thy heart, and thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thy house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up ....and thou shalt write them upon the door-posts of thy house, and upon thy gates."1

The law was more specific regarding the attitude of children towards their parents. It insisted that children honor and obey their parents, "for they recognized that this attitude was essential to a stable social order and to the development of efficient social citizens."<sup>2</sup> The children are exhorted to honor the father and mother that their days may be long.<sup>3</sup> This was an appeal to self interest. This appeal was fortified by educated public opinion,<sup>2</sup> as one of the clauses in the curses to be pronounced from Ebal was "...cursed be he that setteth light by his father or his mother."<sup>4</sup> Disobedience and failure to obey his parents made one liable to trial before the elders in the gate, and, if found guilty, stoned to death.<sup>5</sup> But "there is every reason to believe that parental love always prevented ...the execution of this grim law, and that its practical

. . . . .

1. Dt. 6:6,7,9. Cf. 6:20-25
2. C. F. Kent, op. cit., pp.91-92
3. Dt. 5:16
4. Dt. 27:16
5. Dt. 21:18-21



value was to emphasize dramatically a vital principle."<sup>1</sup>

Notwithstanding the conflicting situations and pictures often presented concerning early Hebrew family life, the home was the stabilizer of early Hebrew society. "Only on the supposition that many of these homes were the nurseries of pure sentiments and lofty ambitions, can we account for the fact that the Hebrews did not utterly succumb to the immoral practices and tendencies of the time."<sup>2</sup> There may have been a great deal of evil in high places, but there must have been also many humble homes in which there existed strong bonds of love between husband and wife, and in which the children faithfully were trained in principles of love, honor, purity, honesty and the like.

## 2. Slavery

Slavery has played a prominent part in the development of practically every nation of the world. The practice, no doubt, had its origin deep in the history of mankind when one clan conquered another and, instead of killing their captives, required them to work at whatever tasks might have been assigned. The Hebrews were no exception in this respect, as very early in their history we find slavery already a sanctioned element in society.

There were two distinct types of slavery of the ancient world.<sup>3</sup> One was the heavy toil, required by a king of his

. . . . .

1. C. F. Kent, op. cit. p. 92

2. E. Day, Social Life of the Hebrews, p. 135

3. T. G. Soares, op. cit., p. 49

hordes of captives, in the construction of roads, buildings and other public works. There were no personal relations between the slaves and their masters. The slaves were property of the state to be used according to the will of the king. This type was not favored in Israel though it, no doubt, existed at various times, as under King Solomon.<sup>1</sup> The second and more common type of Hebrew slavery was domestic and agricultural. Slaves of this type acted in the capacity of servants or bondmen<sup>2</sup> in the house of the master. They were generally kindly treated and thought of as members of the household. Thus the lot of a slave depended largely upon the nature of the master.

There were alien and Hebrew slaves, both male and female. The aliens were usually captives of war and they and their children became permanent possessions of their masters. In the case of a fellow Hebrew it was somewhat different. If a poor person was not able to pay his debts he would often sell himself into slavery to his debtor. Thus he became a bonafide servant or slave of his master. According to Exodus 21 such slaves were to be allowed to go free at the end of a six year period; he was to go out as he came in. Thus if he was married when he was bought then both he and his wife were set free. But if he had

. . . . .

1. I Kings 5:13-17; 9:15-23

2. Samuel Krauss, Jewish Encyclopedia, Vol. II, p. 403

married after he became a slave then only he was set free, his wife and children remaining the property of his master. If he did not wish to leave his family, however, he might remain with his master and become his life long servant.<sup>1</sup>

The Deuteronomic legislation, concerning slavery, is more generous than the old. The master is exhorted when, at the end of six years, he releases a Hebrew servant, not to let him go "empty handed," but to furnish him liberally from his flocks, grain and other stores.<sup>2</sup> The woman slave also should be allowed her liberty,<sup>3</sup> and treated in the same generous fashion. The slaves were to be permitted to share equally with other children of the household the sacred privileges of participation in the annual feasts which were celebrated in Jerusalem.<sup>4</sup> Moreover, though the slave was the property of the master and possibly was sometimes mistreated,<sup>5</sup> the new legislation attempts to prevent this practice. The run-away bondman was not to be returned to his former master,<sup>6</sup> the thought no doubt being that the slave would never have run away

. . . . .

1. The female slave was looked upon as permanent property of her master. The master himself might accept her into the household as a subordinate wife; or he might give her to a son or to one of his male slaves as wife. This is not surprising since the customary way of securing regular wifes was by purchase. E.B.Cross, op. cit., p. 146ff
2. Dt. 15:12-14
3. Dt. 15:17
4. Dt. 12:17,18; 16:11
5. Ex. 21:20ff, 26ff
6. Dt. 23:15

had he been rightfully treated by his master.

But while slavery in Israel may have been somewhat mild the existence of such an institution, which remains at best a social crime, should not be defended.<sup>1</sup> The Hebrews themselves regarded slavery in a foreign land as one of the worst things that could happen to them.<sup>2</sup>

### 3. Education

The Hebrews, from the very beginning of their history, regarded the moral and religious training of the people of prime importance, as the whole law "was at an early stage utilized for public instruction."<sup>3</sup> The home was a very significant factor in education. We have already noted that parents were expected faithfully to instruct the children concerning the great festival days, etc.<sup>4</sup> The Deuteronomic law was to be written distinctly on large stones on the highways that all the people might read and know of the things they were commanded, and at fixed times the law should be publicly read.<sup>5</sup> Each king and leader was to keep a copy of the law and persist in its faithful study.<sup>6</sup> The priests and Levites were the keepers of the law and the chief instructors of the people.<sup>7</sup>

. . . . .

1. W. F. Bade, The Old Testament in the Light of Today, p.221
2. Ibid; Dt. 28:32; 15:15; Ex. 21:16
3. Kaufman Kahler, Jewish Encyclopedia, Vol.V., p.42
4. Dt. 6:7ff; 9:19ff
5. Dt. 27:1-8; 31:10-13
6. Dt. 17:18
7. Dt. 31:9; 33:10; Jer. 2:8; 18:8

We know nothing of the Hebrew schools during the centuries of the monarchy. Quite probably they did not have formal institutions of learning, to which boys were sent in pursuit of knowledge, but that this knowledge was imparted to many men, who became instrumental in shaping the life of the nation, there can be no question.<sup>1</sup> Perhaps formal instruction was available for only the princes or the well-to-do. Those who could afford private tutors for their children probably did so. Nevertheless, "character shaped under the influences of the home, reinforced by the best oral literature the day afforded, could hardly have come up to modern standards, but it was at least tolerably fitted for grappling with the sterner things of life."<sup>2</sup> Whatever the system, the prominent men of the day were trained men, for thus only can one account for the rich religious literature of the prophets, or the legislative codes such as Deuteronomy which were produced during the period of the monarchy.

## B. Economic

### 1. Agriculture

We quite naturally think of the modern Jew as a shrewd business man, to be found largely in the merchantile

.....

1. E. Day, op. cit., p. 167ff
2. Ibid

and professional realms. This was not originally the case, however. The fact is that, in the early stages of their history, the Hebrews were predominantly tillers of the soil. Through their desert wanderings we see them looking forward to the time of possession of Canaan, the land rich in grain, vineyards and orchards.<sup>1</sup> The numerous feasts which were to be celebrated, corresponded in the yearly calendar to the spring and fall harvests.<sup>2</sup> The master was generously to supply the departing slave with gifts from the flock, the threshing-floor and the wine-press.<sup>3</sup> There was an injunction in the Deuteronomic law forbidding the removal of a neighbor's landmark,<sup>4</sup> probably indicating that the tenable land was definitely surveyed and owned by individuals. We know little concerning the methods of farming used by the early Hebrews, but there was a provision for the land to lie fallow every seventh year.<sup>5</sup> This seems to indicate that they were well aware of the modern problem of soil erosion. Day, concerning the general period of the monarchy, says:

"Familiar among the sights of rural life was the wine-press. The possession of one was even more a mark of distinction among them than the threshing floor with its oxen and threshing-sledge. Primitive methods of agriculture prevailed. Implements were used but were still of crude construction. The mention of the yoke,

. . . . .

1. Dt. 6:10,11; 8:709
2. Dt. 16:9-19
3. Dt. 15:14
4. Dt. 19:14; 27:17
5. Ex. 23:10ff

the ox goad, the plough, the cart and the wagon, the harness, the harrow, the mattock, the axe, the sickle, the basket, etc., but partially suggests a type of life in which work was done very largely by hand, thus necessitating the employment of all, old and young, at certain seasons, as in the earlier time."<sup>1</sup>

Agriculture was the basic economic institution. On it depended the welfare of the nation. Nothing was so fearfully dreaded as the drought, the insects, or enemies which destroy the fields and the vineyards.<sup>2</sup> Desire for economic security seems to have been a motivation for the worship of foreign gods, especially those whose good favor was thought to bring abundant harvests. It was the complaint of the people to Jeremiah even after they had fled to Egypt, that it had not profited them to serve Jehovah.<sup>3</sup> Their lands had produced plentifully in the days when sacrifices had been offered to other gods.

## 2. Industry - Trade - Commerce

The early Hebrews were not conspicuous for their craftsmanship.<sup>4</sup> David had to call on Phoenician workmen to build his palace and Solomon did the same to construct the temple.<sup>5</sup> However, it is not likely that they were entirely without able craftsmen. The extensive agricultural projects would require numerous implements of various

. . . . .

1. E. Day, op. cit., pp. 145-46
2. Cf. Jer. 8 and 9
3. Jer. 44:15-19
4. T. G. Soares, op. cit. p. 83
5. II Sam. 5; I Kings 5 and 7, etc.

designs, probably fashioned by native craftsmen. Craftsmen and smiths are especially mentioned as being among the captives carried to Babylon in first captivity.<sup>1</sup> There were workers in copper and iron.<sup>2</sup> The art of pottery is very old. Jeremiah graphically uses this industry - the house, the wheel, the clay, the vessel - to teach a great lesson.<sup>3</sup> The tribe of Judah appears to have been specially designated as composed of the craftsmen, potters, weavers of fine linen, etc.<sup>4</sup> This tribe perhaps made the implements of warfare, farming tools and such other articles as were needed by the nation. How extensive was Judah's industrial development, of course, it is difficult to say, but one may safely assume that under ordinary conditions the nation was competently served by native craftsmen.

As to trade and commerce, we have already noted, in Chapter I, that Judah stood at the cross-roads of the world of that day. Through her land passed the caravans of Egypt or Edom bound for the shipping ports of Tyre or other ports. We know that Solomon took particular care to keep these routes open and that the timber for the building of the temple came from Lebanon in exchange for wheat and oil of Israel.<sup>5</sup> Jerusalem appears to have been a natural trading center for caravans from many lands of the East, and there is every reason to believe that such trade continued until near the fall of the monarchy.

. . . . .

1. II Kings 24:14-16  
2. Dt. 8:9  
3. Jer. 18:1-4

4. I Chron. 4:14,21,23  
5. I Kings 5 and 10



### 3. Wealth and Poverty

This is ever a perplexing problem in any land. The process by which the wealth of a new country is soon concentrated in comparatively few hands can hardly be described, but that such is a fact cannot be denied. Greed seems to be a universal characteristic of man and unless he is checked through legislative measures or otherwise there are no ends to which he will not go to increase his power and wealth. The Hebrews very early recognized the fact. The Deuteronomic legislation is particularly rich in this respect.

Some of the legislation aimed at harmony between employer and employee. They were faithfully to keep the Sabbath, thus providing the necessary rest for the whole laboring group.<sup>1</sup> Again employers were required to pay their hired men at the end of each day.<sup>2</sup>

Other legislation aimed specifically to prevent poverty. Unnecessary exploitation of the poor was prohibited. One was not allowed to keep over night the garment of the poor, taken in pledge.<sup>3</sup> Money, on interest, was not to be lent to a fellow countryman,<sup>4</sup> but they were not to refuse to lend to one who was in need. Every seven years all debts, owed by fellow countrymen were to be released.<sup>5</sup> Be-

. . . . .

1. Dt. 5:13-16
2. Dt. 24:14,15
3. Dt. 24:6,10-14
4. Dt. 23:19,20
5. Dt. 15:1-3

sides they<sup>were</sup> urged to give generously to the poor.<sup>1</sup> When the grain was reaped, the poor and the widows should be allowed to take the gleanings.<sup>2</sup> Moreover they should by all means avoid borrowing from foreigners.<sup>3</sup> Finally, every third year the tithes of that year were to be brought in and turned over to the authorities of the respective cities to be distributed to the Levites, the sojourners, the fatherless and the widows, those who had no regular income.<sup>4</sup>

We see that, ideally, these Hebrews in an early day advocated very definite methods in dealing with one of our most modern economic problems, namely, poverty. Many of the grave evils in our present economic system are due to our failure to appreciate the principles laid down by these early investigators and reformers.<sup>5</sup>

## C. Political

### 1. Kingship and Court Nobility

The unified kingdom of Israel came as a result of dissatisfaction of the loosely organized system of government during the period of the Judges. The people had said, "we will have a king over us that .... he may judge us, and go

. . . . .

1. Dt. 15:7-11
2. Dt. 24:19-22
3. Dt. 15:6
4. Dt. 14:28-30
5. G. F. Kent, op. cit., p. 98

out before us and fight our battles."<sup>1</sup> Saul was the first king but failed to bring about the desired results. The kingdom and the institution of the kingship came into full flower under David and Solomon. David captured Jerusalem and made it the capital of the land,<sup>2</sup> and Solomon built there the great temple.<sup>3</sup> On the death of Solomon the kingdom was divided into the northern and southern divisions, Israel and Judah.<sup>4</sup> The fortunes of Judah, we have already traced.

The king was, of course, the highest official in the nation. Upon him rested the responsibility of leading his army in war and of maintaining justice and order in the land. Also, he was responsible for important decisions of state. His office was hereditary. He and his court were supported by a general tax of the people,<sup>5</sup> collected regularly and systematically. Besides, in an emergency, the king might impose a special assessment.<sup>6</sup> The affairs of the government were managed through the court nobility, otherwise referred to as the princes, whose standing and character we have already discussed.

With such a set-up it is not difficult to imagine the

. . . . .

1. I. Sam. 8:19
2. II Sam. 5:6-10
3. I Kings 6:37ff
4. I Kings 12
5. I Sam. 8:15; I Kings 4:22ff
6. II Kings 15:20; 23:35

evils which might result were the king inclined to follow his selfish animal impulses. It is thus not surprising to find in Deuteronomy an exhortation to the one who may be the king, to study faithfully the law and keep its statutes that he may learn to fear Jehovah.<sup>1</sup>

## 2. Administration of Justice

There is always the necessity of having an arbiter of disputes for disagreements are bound to come wherever people dwell together. In Israel the king, theoretically, was the highest arbiter, and accessible to any citizen. Practically, however, the elders or chief men in a city often acted as a court to settle disputes. There was also a smaller group of men in each city to act as rulers and judges.<sup>2</sup> It is not certain just how these judges were appointed, but in all probability they were a part of the royal system and appointed by the king. These men seemed to be of the same rank as the princes, as the judges on at least two occasions are referred to in Jeremiah as the princes.<sup>3</sup>

One in the capacity of judge is particularly tempted to show partiality, to accept a bribe or in some way so use his office to further his own power. Thus the Deuteronomic

. . . . .

1. Dt. 17:18-20

2. Dt. 19:12; 21:2; I Kings 21:8, Cf. T. G. Soares, op. cit., p. 139

3. Jer. 26 and 36

legislation warns the judges of discriminating against the poor, of accepting bribes which only blind the eyes.<sup>1</sup> Bribery was a deadly social crime to be denounced by both priests and people.<sup>2</sup> Likewise the people are also warned against bringing false charges against some one. Two witnesses are required to convict a person of a crime,<sup>3</sup> and if a false charge is brought forth, the false accuser must suffer the same penalty that he sought for the accused.<sup>4</sup> The Hebrews had a keen sense of justice and their courts, if ruled by an honest and upright person, should have been efficient instruments in securing it.

#### D. Religious

##### 1. The Sabbath

The observance of the Sabbath as a day of rest is one of the earliest requirements of the Hebrews.<sup>5</sup> This day, one of every seven, was a day sacred to Jehovah when regular work should cease and rest be given to one's self, his servants and his domestic animals. Deuteronomic legislation reaffirms the earlier code and adds particularly that its observance was instituted because of their release from Egyptian bondage.<sup>6</sup> Thus in the observance of the Sabbath

. . . . .

1. Dt. 1:18; 16:19,20
2. Dt. 27:25
3. Dt. 14:15; 17:6
4. Dt. 19:16-21
5. Ex. 23:12
6. Dt. 5:14,15

they were constantly reminded of Jehovah's goodness to them and of the everlasting gratitude due Him on their part.

## 2. Prayer

From earliest Biblical records we find deep distress and joyous exaltation expressed in prayers. "At least one prayer is attributed to every great Biblical character from Hannah to Hezekiah."<sup>1</sup> Illustrations of such prayers are those of David, Solomon and Hezekiah.<sup>2</sup> All of these are prayers of individuals and free from priestly regulation. It is probable that they were uttered publicly and in a sense participated in by the group. It is quite clear that communal prayers (or Liturgy) was quite early introduced in the temple worship. This was the practice on two regular occasions at least, when the offering of first fruits was brought in and on the giving of tithes.<sup>3</sup> In any case prayer has played a role of untold importance in the life of the Hebrews, both personal and social, as only one who has read and felt the message of the Hebrew psalter can affirm.

## 3. Festivals

Festival days have always played an important part in the life of the Hebrew people. "The social and religious

. . . . .

1. J. D. Eisenstein, Jewish Encyclopaedia, Vol. 10, p.164
2. II Sam. 7:18-29; I Kings 8:22-53; II Kings 19:14-19
3. Dt. 26:5-10; 13-15

significance of festivals as they gradually developed through Hebrew history must have been very marked. They cemented family life. They were times of charitable remembrance of the poor. They turned the thoughts of the nation upon the heroic days of its history. They called the people to the realization of their dependence upon God."<sup>1</sup> The early Hebrew quite probably did not think of the year in terms of the seasons, but rather in terms of the prescribed festivals. The following religious festivals are designated in the Law or referred to in the Old Testament:<sup>2</sup>

(a) The Sabbath we have already referred to.

(b) Day of the New Moon. This day is mentioned originally in connection with the Sabbath, and is marked in the law by special sacrifices. (Numbers 28)

(c) The Passover. This feast was observed in commemoration of Israel's liberation from Egypt. It lasted seven days, from the fifteenth to the twenty-second of Nisan (April). During this period there was general cessation from labor and offering of sacrifices (cf. Numbers 28 and Deuteronomy 16). This feast is sometimes called the "Feast of unleavened bread." It also celebrates the beginning of the ripening of grain, which comes early in the warm climate.

. . . . .

1. T. G. Soares, op. cit., pp. 173-4

2. Emil G. Kirsch, Jewish Encyclopaedia, Vol. 5, p. 374

(d) Festival of Weeks (Pentecost) . As the beginning of the ripening grain is marked by the feast of the Passover, so the end of the harvest was celebrated by Pentecost, otherwise known as the "Feast of the Harvest." It came seven weeks after the Passover. Characteristic of its celebration were free-will offerings and great rejoicing.<sup>1</sup>

(e) Festival of Booths(Tabernacles). This was perhaps the greatest festival of the Hebrew year. It was sometimes called the "Festival of Ingathering." Not only was the grain harvested and threshing completed, but the fruits, especially the grapes and olives were gathered. It lasted for seven days, from the fifteenth to the twenty-second of Tishri(October). The celebration was noted by the erection of booths, in which the people lived for its duration, and thus comes the name Tabernacles. The Deuteronomic code specified that this feast be held in Jerusalem and be observed by the whole household.<sup>2</sup>

(f) "Blowing of the Trumpets." the first day of the seventh month, a holy convocation with cessation of hard labor and prescribed fire offerings. (cf. Lev. 23:24). This was the occasion of a solemn call to repentance.

(g) Day of Atonement. This day came in the seventh month Tishri and the tenth day. It was a day of remembrance of sins and of fasting.<sup>3</sup>

. . . . .

1. Dt. 16:10,11

2. Dt. 16:13-15

3. Cf. Lev. 23:26; Num. 19:7-11



Such were the festival days of the Hebrew year. One can hardly realize the deep impression their celebration must have made upon the growing Hebrew boy or girl, especially since the parents were exhorted to teach them faithfully concerning them.

## II. Summary

In this chapter we have considered several of the important Hebrew social institutions. We have noted of what type they were and their regulative principles as reflected primarily in the book of Deuteronomy. We found that the Hebrews of the seventh century were capably supplied with institutions, and with principles of regulation within them, to meet the needs of a very complex social life. We found further that the Hebrews were more advanced in this respect than the surrounding nations.

We are now prepared to turn to Jeremiah and to consider his message concerning these institutions. We must remember that the situation he faced was not one in which these institutions were functioning according to their ideal principles. Many corrupting features were to be dealt with. That should make his message the more significant.

Let us now present his social message.

CHAPTER FIVE

JEREMIAH'S SOCIAL MESSAGE

## CHAPTER FIVE

### JEREMIAH'S SOCIAL MESSAGE

- I. Domestic
  - A. The Family and the Home
  - B. Slavery
- II. Economic and Civic
  - A. Wealth and Poverty
  - B. Work and Wages
  - C. Welfare
- III. Political
  - A. Public Leadership
  - B. War
  - C. National Security
  - D. Foreign Nations
- IV. Religious
  - A. Religion and Social Life
  - B. The Sabbath
- V. The New Covenant - The Ideal Brotherhood
- VI. Social and Ethical Principles Underlying the Message
- VII. Summary

## CHAPTER FIVE

### JEREMIAH'S SOCIAL MESSAGE

It is our purpose in this chapter to bring into clear review Jeremiah's social message. It is not always easy to arrive at the prophet's message due to the fact that his utterances, in the present form, are not arranged chronologically. Again his message is often expressed in the negative rather than in clear cut positive statements. But when Jeremiah, for instance, condemns Jehoiakim for his injustice and fraud, we may safely assume that a king is obligated to promote, first of all, the interests of his subjects. Thus after all we may arrive at the real message of the prophet.

In this discussion we shall not attempt to follow any sort of chronological arrangement. Rather we shall consider our subject topically. We shall gather from the book as a whole the prophet's message concerning those social institutions which stand out most prominently. So far as possible the material will be presented as it is related to the natural grouping of institutions as domestic, economic, political or religious.

## I. Domestic

### A. The Family and the Home

#### 1. General

According to Jeremiah, the basic unit in society is the family. He presents Israel related to Jehovah as a wife to her husband.<sup>1</sup> But Israel had been unfaithful to her lawful spouse, and had played the harlot with many lovers.<sup>2</sup> This picture of Israel as a nation was only a solemn presentation of what was being done by the individuals of the nation. Sacred family ties had been broken on numberless occasions. He pictures the men of Israel as lustful stallions neighing after their neighbor's wives.<sup>3</sup> The false prophets were also guilty of adultery and made no effort to restrain the people from wickedness.<sup>4</sup> Thus the family as an institution was seriously threatened, as its basic principle, that of mutual fidelity between husband and wife, was being ignored.

On the other hand, Jeremiah gives a thrilling picture of ideal family life. He, in writing to the people in exile, tells them to build houses and plant gardens, to make peace and to dwell in the land, to take wives and rear

. . . . .

1. Jer. 2:2; 3:1,14; 31:32
2. Jer. 2:20; 3:20; 11:15; 13:27
3. Jer. 5:8
4. Jer. 23:10ff; 29:23

children, to multiply and be not diminished.<sup>1</sup> It was by first establishing harmonious family and home situations that they were to hope for peace in the new land while they waited for their restoration. This is a very significant exhortation since Jeremiah himself was not permitted to marry and to establish a home of his own.<sup>2</sup> He fully appreciated and proclaimed the truth that national strength was dependent upon family purity. The moral character of a nation's homes largely determines her destiny in the world. The character of the home may be assized through its individual members. What does Jeremiah say concerning the man, the woman and the child, and their problems?

## 2. Man

The adult male was considered to be the authority in the home, in the state and in religion.<sup>3</sup> When God called Jeremiah to be a prophet he replied, "I am a child," implying that to the full grown man belonged the task of prophecy. But Jeremiah shows also the weakness of man when he cries out: "I know that the way of man is not in himself; it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps."<sup>4</sup> The weakness of authority in Israel is here revealed and his own dependence upon Jehovah is implied. Man is a de-

. . . . .

1. Jer. 29:5,6
2. Jer. 16:2
3. Jer. 2:5; 3:1; 4:3, etc.
4. Jer. 19:23

pendent being, dependent upon a power and a directive force above himself, according to Jeremiah.

Further, man is a free moral agent. He has the capacity to choose and his capacity necessitates his duty to act wisely. This fact is revealed by Jeremiah's constant pleading for repentance in personal and public life.<sup>1</sup> Man is also a responsible agent, responsible to himself, to his fellows and to God. One great requirement of man is the execution of justice toward his fellows and to worship and obey Jehovah.<sup>2</sup> National security was dependent upon righteousness lived out in individual lives.

Again, the highest good attainable in man is for him to "turn from his evil way" and to follow paths of righteousness.<sup>3</sup> The true glory of man is not in riches, honor or wisdom, but in the knowledge and fear of Jehovah who "exerciseth loving kindness, justice and righteousness in the earth."<sup>4</sup> These three characteristics - loving kindness, justice and righteousness - are Jehovah's delight and the ideal man is he who exemplifies each in daily life. Men of this type would compose the prophet's ideal social situation, all knowing Jehovah and serving Him.

### 3. Woman

Women are mentioned by Jeremiah in comparatively few cases, no doubt indicating that her role was considered

1. Jer. 5:3;6:16-21;7:1-7;18, etc.  
2. Jer. 7:1-7;21:12;22:3;  
cf. I Kings 6:12

3. Jer. 4:1;18: 8,11;26:3;  
35:15; 36:3, etc.  
4. Jer. 9:23,24

somewhat inferior to that of the man. Nevertheless there are interesting windows here and there which reveal the prophet's high regard for womanhood.

Many of the women of Jeremiah's day were professional mourners.<sup>1</sup> They are accused, with the men, of promoting false worship, and Jeremiah seems to hold them equally responsible.<sup>2</sup> This is especially true of those who fled to Egypt after the exile. There was a prevalence of adultery and harlotry involving a large number of the women of Judah.<sup>3</sup>

Jeremiah severely denounced this practice, as the source of their ills and likens the people's worship of foreign gods to adultery, which indeed certain forms of worship were.<sup>4</sup> Again it was pointed out to Zedekiah that unless his oath to Babylon was kept, the women of Jerusalem would be humbled and disgraced by the invaders.<sup>5</sup>

Thus we gather, from inference, that there was a high and noble position in society for the woman. The references to the family<sup>6</sup> would indicate that her place properly was the home, and there her virtue and her purity should be jealously guarded for these are her strength and glory. The new covenant appears to exalt the position of

. . . . .

1. Jer. 9:17

2. Jer. 7:18; 44:15-19

3. Jer. 2:7,33; 3:3,8; 4:29,30; 5:7; 7:9; 9:2; 29:23, etc.

4. Cf. II Kings 23:7; John Skinner, Prophecy and Religion, pp. 68-69

5. Jer. 38:20-23

6. Jer. 2:4; 10:25; 31:1-9; 44:9, etc.



woman by the words "all."<sup>1</sup> She too is to know Jehovah and to enjoy this knowledge and freedom. Jeremiah thinks of woman as a righteous and pure member of society, serving especially in the home, who has an important responsibility in the formation and maintenance of a righteous nation. Dr. Morgan is correct when he says: "If the women are openly defying Jehovah, then there is not hope."<sup>2</sup> The woman, in a real sense, is a golden key to the prevention or solution of a dire social problem.

#### 4. The Child

Jeremiah refers to Israel as backsliding children, implying immaturity and dependence upon God.<sup>3</sup> Often the children had to suffer for the sins of their parents.<sup>4</sup> The children of Jeremiah's day were guilty with their parents of idolatry and false worship, and Israel's sin began in her youth.<sup>5</sup> The youth of his day were also guilty of sin and Jeremiah did not attempt to justify their behavior, but he does warn against prevalent abuses against them. To injure and oppress the less fortunate and the fatherless constituted the grossest form of injustice.<sup>6</sup> Children were to be cared for constantly and it was the duty of society to care for the less fortunate and the fatherless. Jeremiah

. . . . .

1. Jer. 31:31-34

2. G. C. Morgan, Studies in Jeremiah, p. 275

3. Jer. 3:14,19,22; 4:22

4. Jer. 31:29

5. Jer. 7:18; 3:24; 22:31; 32:30

6. Jer. 7:6; 5:26-29; 22:3

would say that the children are dependent upon their parents, that their innocence is not to be violated, and those who are guilty of sinning should, by all means, be restrained and guided in paths of righteousness.

### 5. Divorce

Jeremiah does not sanction divorce in the social realm, though he nowhere specifically condemns the practice. When he spoke of Israel's forsaking Jehovah he used the idea of divorce, and in the same passage says that God gave Israel a bill of divorcement because of her infidelity.<sup>1</sup> Thus such practice, in the social realm, must have been common in his day. However, what the prophet does do is to stress fidelity in every conceivable human relationship. Would not this emphasis apply especially to the marriage contract? He stresses the sacredness of vows and obligations when he speaks of the Rechabites.<sup>2</sup> They were classical examples to Judah because of their faithful observance of their father's command and their pledge. Zedekiah was counselled as to results he might expect because his pledge with Babylon had been broken.<sup>3</sup> Again, probably Jeremiah himself was forbidden to marry because his sacred obligations to his home might have interfered with God's plan for him as a prophet.<sup>4</sup> In any case one is safe in con-

. . . . .

1. Jer. 3:1-8; Cf. Dt. 24:1-4  
2. Jer. 35:12-14

3. Jer. 38:17-18  
4. Jer. 16:2ff

cluding that Jeremiah opposed divorce for it is an evidence of unfaithfulness to the most sacred of human vows. Jeremiah always insisted on fidelity in every human relationship.

## B. Slavery

Another social institution that felt the blow of Jeremiah's pointed denunciation was that of slavery. It was, as we have seen in Chapter III, an accepted institution in his day. Full provision had been made in the Deuteronomic legislation for its regulation, such as the law which required one to free his slaves every seventh year, and generously to furnish them from his stores.<sup>1</sup>

But Jeremiah faced one situation, at least, in which the gross injustice of the system, as it actually operated, was brought to the surface. When Nebuchadrezzar and his army were pressing hard upon Jerusalem the leaders of the city liberated their slaves, in accordance with the Deuteronomic law.<sup>2</sup> There was no doubt a mixture of motives in the act. They may have thought of this as a way to regain the favor of Jehovah and His assistance in withstanding the siege; they may have intended the act to improve the morale of those involved and thus improve the city's defense; or it may have been purely an economic measure for quite probably food was scarce at that time. But whatever

. . . . .

1. Dt. 15:12-18  
2. Jer. 34:12-22

the motives that led them to free the slaves, as soon as the siege temporarily was lifted by the Babylonians on the approach of the Egyptians, the (emancipation) covenant was quickly cancelled and the former slaves were again subjected to bondage. This act called forth from Jeremiah a most scathing rebuke. This unscrupulous act was not only a sin against their fellow-men, but also it was a sin against God in that it broke a sacred covenant. Thus, in the name of Jehovah, Jeremiah proclaimed against these men liberty "to the sword, to the pestilence and to the famine."<sup>1</sup> Moreover, Jerusalem would be delivered into the hands of her enemies, burned with fire and her inhabitants tossed to and fro among the nations.

Jeremiah, thus proclaims liberty for all men. He does not condone slavery in any form. It, at its best, is a violation of the rights of personality. Every man should be free in body, mind and spirit. All men are free and responsible agents of Jehovah.

## II. Economic and Civic

### A. Wealth and Poverty

Jeremiah was a mighty champion of the poor and the oppressed. He strongly denounces those who gain their wealth

. . . . .

1. Jer. 34:17

by unfair means, through deceit and oppression. He likens such men to fowlers who lie in wait to catch men. He pictures the land as a cage, but whereas the cage was full of birds, his land was full of deceitful and wicked men, grown rich through oppression of the poor, and the needy.<sup>1</sup> Against such men Jeremiah pronounces the strongest denunciations. Those who gain their wealth by unfair means are not rich but merely fools.<sup>2</sup> They are responsible for the deplorable condition of their nation.

The rich have definite obligations to be fulfilled in behalf of the unfortunate. They are emphatically warned to cease glorying in their riches, and to glory rather in the knowledge of Jehovah.<sup>3</sup> They are not to exploit the poor but to take care of the unfortunate.<sup>4</sup> The shedding of innocent blood must cease and those who are able are to make every effort to raise the standards of living of the lower classes. The fulfilment of this duty is one mark of the true servant of Jehovah. Jeremiah said of the good King Josiah, "He judged the cause of the poor and the needy. Was not that to know me, saith Jehovah?"<sup>5</sup>

A point that we should note here is that Jeremiah did not condemn the rich simply because they were rich and therefore powerful. What he did condemn were the unfair and shady

. . . . .

1. Jer. 5:26ff

2. Jer. 5:20-29; 9:23

3. Jer. 9:23

4. Jer. 7:6; 20:13;

22:3,13,16

5. Jer. 22:16

means whereby the usual person obtained his wealth, deceit, oppression and injustice. He himself appears to have had sufficient funds to redeem his property in Anathoth.<sup>1</sup> Moreover, he fully recognized that the future of Judah lay in the hands of the better classes of the land, those who are most likely to possess most of the wealth. He reveals this fact when he likens the exiles and the remnant that was left in the land to good and bad gifts respectively.<sup>2</sup> The most capable and influential people had been carried away to Babylon and only the poor and the weakest remained.<sup>3</sup> Yet it is in the exiles that the hope of Judah's future lies.

J. M. P. Smith says:

"The backbone of any social or political order is the great company of men and women who make some sort of success in life and have energy left, after caring for themselves and their dependents, to devote to the interests of the community as a whole... This the prophets knew and sought, therefore, to influence these makers of the state to accept and be governed by high moral and spiritual ideals."<sup>4</sup>

Viewed in this light Jeremiah certainly did not advocate the impractical principles of an ambitious dreamer. What he did say was essentially this: that the possession of wealth is legitimate and honorable if it is gained and used in a wise manner, guided by the principle, that, only that society has the right to exist which makes a place for every citizen.

. . . . .

1. Jer. 32  
2. Jer. 24  
3. II Kings 24:14

4. J.M.Powis Smith, The Moral Life of the Hebrews, p. 115

## B. Work and Wages

Jeremiah's attitude on this ever-present problem may be determined from his bold rebuke in Chapter 22 of Jehoiakim, the King, who it seems had used forced labor in the building of his fine houses. The highly indignant mood of the prophet is clearly shown.

"Woe unto him that buildeth his house by un-  
frighteousness, and his chambers by injustice;  
that useth his neighbor's service without wages,  
that giveth him not his hire; that saith, I  
will build me a wide house and spacious cham-  
bers...ceiled with cedar and painted with  
vermilion."<sup>1</sup>

Such a program cannot profit. It will surely result in the complete rejection and death of him in power. James Russell Lowell might well have been referring to men like Jehoiakim when he wrote:

"Have you 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>2</sup>

Thus Jeremiah strongly contended for honest labor, and for just wages to be paid for such service.

## C. Welfare

### 1. Health

Jeremiah refers to the people of Judah as being smitten, and without healing balm.<sup>3</sup> In another place he

. . . . .

1. Jer. 22:13,14

2. James Russell Lowell, A Parable, S.E. Keeble, op.cit., p.16

3. Jer. 14:19

breaks forth in exclamation:

"Is there no balm in Gilead? Is there no physician there? Why then is not the health of the daughter of my people recovered?"<sup>1</sup>

And again as he speaks of Judah's restoration, he says:

"Thy hurt is incurable and thy wound grievous. ....thou hast no healing medicines...For I will restore health unto thee, and I will heal thee of thy wounds saith Jehovah;"<sup>2</sup>

And in that day when God shall redeem those of captivity, He will bring back again those who are lame and blind, the woman with child and she that travaileth with child.<sup>3</sup> Thus Jeremiah, in the main, uses medical terms to express spiritual and moral imperfections and readjustments. However, in the light of his broader message, it appears that he would say that both physical and spiritual diseases are to be prevented. It is the duty of the well and the healthy to care for and protect the sick and the delinquent. This is the minimum duty of any society.

## 2. Pleasure

The prophet's message concerning the place of pleasure in social life is rather obscure. He is forbidden to go into the house of feasting, yet he does not condemn the feasting and merrymaking.<sup>4</sup> On one occasion he cursed the day of his birth and the glad tidings that were brought to

. . . . .

1. Jer. 8:22
2. Jer. 30:12-17
3. Jer. 31:8,9
4. Jer. 16:8



his father.<sup>1</sup> When he speaks for Jehovah concerning the fall of Jerusalem he says:

"Moreover I will take from them the voice of mirth and the voice of gladness, the voice of the bridegroom and the voice of the bride, the sound of the millstones, and the light of the lamp."<sup>2</sup>

And such a picture is surely not the representation of the ideal for when he contemplates the restoration of his people, his tone is decidedly more optimistic. Then the voices of mirth and gladness shall be restored, the people shall sing praises and shout for joy.<sup>3</sup> Jeremiah does not deny that pleasure has a proper place in social life. However, his idea of pleasure is not the popular idea of physical indulgence and unbridled license. The display of pleasure of which he speaks is the resultant expression of the inner joy of a righteous life. It is only right that people make glad on proper occasions, but first of all they should exhibit righteous lives, else there is no occasion for gladness.

### 3. The Social Evil

Jeremiah's opinion of prostitution may be discerned from the terms he employs to portray the religious condition of the nation. He uses such terms as adultery, lewdness, uncleanness, defiled, etc.<sup>4</sup> Even the prophets were called

. . . . .

1. Jer. 20:15

2. Jer. 25:10; 7:34; 16:9

3. Jer. 33:11

4. Jer. 5:7; 11:15; 13:27;  
23:10; 32:34, etc.

adulterers, profane, walking in lies and strengthening the hands of evildoers.<sup>1</sup> The whole nation was corrupt. The prophet's attitude is one of complete denunciation. Only a return to purity and righteousness could save the nation. Fornication must be abolished in society and religion for only through purity and true love may come an ideal state or an ideal religion.

### III. Political

#### A. Public Leadership

The leaders of Judah were, on numerous occasions, condemned by Jeremiah for false and corrupt leadership.<sup>2</sup> The shepherds of the land had failed to achieve the shepherd character and fulfil the shepherd function in public life. Therein lay their sin and the cause of the disastrous condition in the nation. When Jeremiah bursts forth with stinging words against the ruling house of Jehoiakim he might well be voicing a message to all those holding important public office:

"Woe unto him that buildeth his house by injustice; that useth his neighbor's services without wages and giveth him not his hire; that saith I will build me a wide house and spacious chambers..."<sup>3</sup>

. . . . .

1. Jer. 23:9-15
2. Jer. 5:30,31; 21:17; 22:13ff; 23:1-4; 28:1-17, etc.
3. Jer. 22:13,14

Jehoiakim was guilty of the sin of self-interest. He was using his office as an occasion for personal graft instead of as an opportunity for public service. Further on Jeremiah seems to touch the root of the trouble, when he speaks to the nation generally.

"I spake to thee in thy prosperity; but thou saidst, I will not hear. This hath been thy manner from thy youth, that thou obeyest not my voice."<sup>1</sup>

The sin of using one's office for personal graft is the result primarily of a stubborn self-will which refuses to recognize Jehovah as the giver of every boon. Jeremiah clearly indicates that the public leader, to be successful, must accept his office as a sacred trust and as an opportunity to advance the interests of the governed. He had great respect for King Josiah because Josiah faithfully followed these two fundamental principles.

"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>2</sup>

The prophet continually emphasized the absolute necessity of righteousness in high places. The governmental leadership that does not administer justice is an object of God's wrath.

"Oh house of David, thus saith Jehovah, execute justice in the morning and deliver him that is robbed out of the hands of the oppressor,

. . . . .

1. Jer. 22:21
2. Jer. 22:15b-16

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>

Emphasis on this fundamental principle of justice is further shown in the prophet's reference to the ideal kingdom which is coming. Then the shepherds will feed the flocks instead of oppress them.<sup>2</sup> The new king will be a "righteous branch" who will "deal wisely and execute justice and righteousness in the land."<sup>3</sup> The affairs of state will be conducted in the interests of all. The individual will receive his just desert.

Again Jeremiah teaches that the leadership of a nation is directly responsible for conditions existing within the nation. The flocks were scattered because false shepherds had been unfaithful to their trust.<sup>4</sup> The land was full of iniquity because both the prophets and priests were corrupt.<sup>5</sup> The people were only practicing those things in which their leaders were expert teachers. Zedekiah, the last of the kings, dealt falsely with Babylon and as a result Jerusalem must be destroyed,<sup>6</sup> and although Zedekiah complained that he feared the people, Jeremiah admits this as no justification for his course of action.<sup>7</sup> Regardless of popular demands it is the duty of those in authority to lead as God commands. Jeremiah does not admit that the public leader

. . . . .

1. Jer. 21:12

2. Jer. 23:4

3. Jer. 23:5; 33:15,16

4. Jer. 23:1-3

5. Jer. 23:9-13

6. Jer. 21:1-10; 38:20-23

7. Jer. 21:1-10; 38:20-23;

cf. 23:28

is merely the voice of the people. Had the kings of Judah remained true to Jehovah and insisted on justice and righteousness being executed in the land then the national catastrophe perhaps might have been averted. Jeremiah proclaimed clearly that degenerate leadership meant a degenerate nation. Again leadership implies responsibility. Therefore it is imperative that public leadership stand firm in the truth and for Jehovah.

#### B. War

Jeremiah's teaching concerning war is tied up very closely with his attitude on another question, that of individual loyalty to the government. Both may be determined from his attitude and actions during the siege of Jerusalem. Let us review briefly the background.

Josiah's reforms had failed to produce any permanent results. During the reign of successive kings, wickedness in high places and low had increased. The corrupt ideals and practices of the leaders had permeated and totally corrupted the life of the common people also. As a consequence Jeremiah was firmly convinced that the destruction of Jerusalem was imminent and inevitable.<sup>1</sup> Jeremiah saw the rising power, Babylon, as God's instrument in meting out

. . . . .

1. Jer. 17:1-4; 26:5,6, etc.

judgment to Judah and the nations.<sup>1</sup> Nebuchadrezzar is called Jehovah's servant. Therefore, when neighboring states, Edom, Moab, Ammon, Tyre and Sidon, sought Zedekiah's cooperation in plans for a revolt, Jeremiah's one message to Judah and the rest was, "all nations shall serve the king of Babylon."<sup>2</sup> What was the sense in advocating such a policy? Skinner seems rightly to interpret Jeremiah's thought when he 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>3</sup>

When the siege of Jerusalem becomes a reality we see the issues clearly drawn. Jeremiah had continually warned Zedekiah against revolt, and now he counsels the king immediately to surrender to the Chaldeans.<sup>4</sup> By so doing a great loss of life perhaps could be averted.<sup>5</sup> However, Zedekiah refused to follow Jeremiah, admitting that he feared the people, and continued his policy of resistance. Jeremiah nevertheless courageously appeals to the people to go over to the Chaldeans and thus save their lives or remain in the city and meet possible death either by the sword or by famine and pestilence.<sup>6</sup> Jeremiah's advice

. . . . .

1. Jer. 20:4; 25:9-11; 27:6, etc.
2. Jer. 27
3. John Skinner, Prophecy and Religion, p. 261
4. Jer. 21:1-10
5. Jer. 28:17-23
6. Jer. 21:8-10

nevertheless was rejected and the city suffered complete destruction.<sup>1</sup>

Thus we may conclude that Jeremiah does not favor war especially when war is a result of infidelity within the nation. We cannot say, however, that he would not sanction war on any condition. The fact is that in his situation he saw clearly the issues at stake and the inevitable result, so he advised non-resistance and acceptance of merited judgment. Wars come from breaches of faith and Jeremiah would advocate the policy of prevention of war through fidelity to promises on the part of nations. So far as the individual is concerned he above everything else must be loyal to God. Loyalty to government is a subordinate issue.

### C. National Security

Jeremiah's living conviction was that the one and only sure way to preserve the nation was by an unreserved trust in Jehovah. However, this trust had to be expressed, not through magic words, but through thoroughly righteous lives. Jehovah, as the prophet pointed out, had proven Himself worthy of the trust in His past dealings with them, their deliverance from bondage in Egypt, the wilderness experience, His gift of the land of Canaan.<sup>2</sup> But Jehovah's children had

. . . . .

1. Jer. 39 and 52

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

failed Him. They had forsook Jehovah "the fountain of living waters and hewed them out cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water."<sup>1</sup> Their allegiance to Jehovah had been transferred to foreign nations and to foreign gods. As a consequence the nation, as we have seen in Chapter II, was suffering as from the throes of a chronic disease which had accomplished its deadly work in the corruption of the social, moral and religious life of the nation. As a result of this fall the nation had become as refuse silver and must be cast away.<sup>2</sup>

Jeremiah exhorts his people to ask for the old paths and to walk in them.<sup>3</sup> This would, however, involve a thorough repentance and reform on the part of all the people. Not only must they put away other gods, but they must execute justice between each other, be considerate to the sojourner, the fatherless and the widow.<sup>4</sup> Then and only then could they hope for an enduring nation. Judah was not a favored nation of God capable of enjoying His blessings without obeying His commands. She was just as any other nation and could survive only so long as righteousness reigned within. Jeremiah tried to show again that what God desired most of all was a nation of righteous men and women, living according to His ethical laws. The nation only is secure whose God is Jehovah in deed and truth.

. . . . .

1. Jer. 2:13

2. Jer. Chapters 5-7

3. Jer. 6:16

4. Jer. 7:5,6; Cf. 17:19-27



D. Foreign Nations

Judah alone was not the object of Jeremiah's message. Even as he was commissioned "a prophet unto the nations,"<sup>1</sup> so he proved to be.<sup>2</sup> In a day when the clash of arms and noise of strife among many nations, large and small, were heard on every hand, Jeremiah speaks forth that "Jehovah hath a controversy with the nations; he will enter into judgment with all flesh."<sup>3</sup> He saw all nations under the universal and impartial ethical law of God. No one, great or small, could escape Jehovah's judgment.

Egypt, the fair daughter of the south had let the appointed time pass by. She was once a fair heifer, the fear of the nations, but now had become but a noise, and destruction from the north was upon her. The judgment would be complete.<sup>4</sup> Along the coast lands of the Philistines to Gaza and Ashkelon the sword of Jehovah must fall and accomplish its deadly task.<sup>5</sup> Moab, because she had trusted in her works and her treasures, and was guilty of false worship<sup>6</sup> was to be destroyed. Gladness and joy would cease in the land.<sup>7</sup> Lamentation would be on every hand. Moab was to become a derision to all round about.<sup>8</sup> Ammon, the haughty one, the "backsliding daughter that trusted in her riches," was to be driven out of her land and her people

. . . . .

1. Jer. 1:5  
2. Jer. Chapters 45-51  
3. Jer. 25:31  
4. Jer. 46

5. Jer. 47:6  
6. Jer. 48:7,35  
7. Jer. 48:33  
8. Jer. 48:38,39

become fugitives in the earth.<sup>1</sup> Edom, because of her wickedness, deceitfulness and pride, was to become an astonishment to all who should pass by.<sup>2</sup> Damascus, Kedar and Elam were all guilty before Jehovah and were to receive each their due.<sup>3</sup> Even the mighty Babylon, the temporary cause of the imminent judgment, must herself be destroyed. Even as Assyria had devoured Israel, and Babylon had overrun Assyria, so in turn must Babylon be punished.<sup>4</sup> Her false gods, her pride in her strength and power, or her boasted wisdom would all prove to be of no avail.<sup>5</sup> A people from the north and many kings from various parts, cruel and without mercy, must utterly destroy Babylon.<sup>6</sup>

Thus Jeremiah views the nations. They were all subject to Jehovah, the God of righteousness and the God who demands righteousness from all His subjects. No individual can live unto himself, neither can a nation. Jehovah demands the same ethical standards to be observed between nations as between individuals. Further, the only lasting basis of security is righteousness within. Jehovah was not then, nor now, a disinterested spectator of the events taking place on the earth, but He was in the midst, using even the hardness of men's heart and the pride and might of heathen nations to further His purposes in the world.

. . . . .

1. Jer. 49:1-6  
2. Jer. 49:7-22  
3. Jer. 49:23-29

4. Jer. 50:17-20  
5. Jer. 50:2;29-32,35,36  
6. Jer. 50:41-46

#### IV. Religious

##### A. Religion and Social Life

Lovingkindness, justice and righteousness are three essential characteristics of the individual who would claim Jehovah's commendation.<sup>1</sup> An essential function of religion is to enable one to live according to Jehovah's high standards. The religion which does not promote mercy, truth and justice among men is a failure. Religion divorced from these ideals is merely excess baggage that needs to be discarded.<sup>2</sup>

The one great desire of God is for an upright life, not for a temple. Jeremiah strongly emphasized this truth. Temple worship is meant to be an expression of the moral life of the people.<sup>3</sup> Thus worship without character is not worship. True worship must spring from the heart and be expressed in active life. Religious exercises and pious words can never atone for a wicked life. Jeremiah strongly contends that religion and life are inseparable.<sup>4</sup>

"God is hurt not by empty temples, but by homes emptied of life's sustenance, beauty and strength; by the oppression of the poor and the death of the wronged; and that we sin against Him, not when we offend His dignity, but when we insult Him by

. . . . .

1. Jer. 9:23,24
2. Jer. 7:1-7; 31:31-34
3. Jer. 7:1-7
4. Ibid, cf. 5:1-6; 22:8,9; 13-15

a religion that piles high the altar, or packs the prayer meeting, and neglects a brother's due."<sup>1</sup>

Jeremiah strikes at the sacrificial system in another place, asserting that Jehovah had not ordained these sacrifices.<sup>2</sup> The outward form can not be substituted for a heart reformation.

Jeremiah shows further that false religion is the cause of all social wrongs, and of its destruction. Jerusalem was to be destroyed because they had forsaken "the covenant of Jehovah, their God, and worshipped other gods and served them."<sup>3</sup> Their fathers had met defeat at Shiloh because they had trusted in the ark instead of in Jehovah.<sup>4</sup> So the people in Jeremiah's day were to be destroyed. They too were proclaiming magic words concerning the temple, but had long since forsaken Jehovah, the God of the temple.<sup>5</sup> They trusted in the temple for national security and success, but such a formula was poor remedial measures for a morally diseased society. Only a return to Jehovah could save them. Their fate could only be destruction for the gods they worshipped were false gods. Religion determines the character of social life and an ethical religion would result in an ethical society provided the people were true to Jehovah.

. . . . .

1. F. W. Lewis, in Keeble, Social Teaching of the Bible, p.53  
cf. Matt. 5:23,24
2. Jer. 22:9
3. Jer. 22:9
4. Jer. 7:12-15; 26:6
5. Jer. 22:8-15

B. The Sabbath

Jerusalem would have been inviolable, says Jeremiah, had the people kept the Sabbath in spirit and in truth. He exhorts the people to cease violating the Sabbath, "neither carry forth a burden out of your house on the Sabbath day, neither do ye any work, but hallow ye the Sabbath day as I commanded your fathers."<sup>1</sup> If they would keep the Sabbath day the glory of the kingdom might confidently be expected to return. Prosperity would come back to the land. The temple would attract worshippers from all parts. The land would again know rest and peace and Jerusalem would remain forever. But a failure to keep the Sabbath would result in inevitable destruction. "I will kindle a fire in the gates thereof and it shall devour the palaces of Jerusalem, and it shall not be quenched."<sup>2</sup>

Jeremiah places great importance on the Sabbath, the day of rest and worship. The observance of the Sabbath seems to be, in many respects, an excellent test of a person's character. One who sincerely keeps the Sabbath usually possesses a righteous character. Jeremiah by no means was referring to a formal forced observance, but by an observance prompted from within, the natural expression of a righteous life. If the outward acts of righteousness truly conform to the inner spirit then indeed is an individual or

. . . . .

1. Jer. 17:19-27

2. Ibid, vs. 27

a nation inviolable. Righteousness is the only basis for an enduring nation. The nation must be composed of a righteous society which, in turn, must be composed of righteous individuals.

#### V. The New Covenant - The Ideal Brotherhood

There is no more fitting climax to Jeremiah's message than his vision of the New Covenant relation between God and His people. The prophet has a vision of a new day when all men shall be brothers, because of the relationship they sustain to Jehovah, the true and living God.

"Behold, the days come, saith Jehovah, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah: not according to the covenant 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 broke, 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>

One is immediately struck by the nature and the comprehensiveness of this covenant. It is inward and individual.

. . . . .

1. Jer. 31:31-34

The relationship will rest upon a clear understanding of God in the heart of individual souls. Each person will enjoy that joyous feeling which comes from a sense of sins forgiven. The individual may also express his joy directly and personally to God. Furthermore the clear perception of God's will is not the exclusive possession of a few - the kings, or the priests, or the prophets perhaps - but they shall all know Him even from the least to the greatest.

Here is pictured the ideal social situation. The individual is transformed and he, together with his fellows who have had similar experiences, form a new nation. Then there will be no need of restrictive laws for the people of this society will be ruled by love which needs no restriction. It will be a society in which there is no class distinctions for the common knowledge of Jehovah shall make all men brothers. In such a brotherhood shall the purposes of God be worked out. There will be mutual possession of the knowledge of Jehovah which will promote mutual fellowship in social living.

#### VI. Social and Ethical Principles Underlying the Message

No presentation of Jeremiah's message would be complete unless there were brought together some of the social and ethical principles which underlie his message and which guided him in his thinking. Any message, to be effective,

must be based on principles of universal appeal and of eternal value. Jeremiah's social message is richly suggestive of such principles.

#### A. Jeremiah's Conception of God

However, before proceeding to state these principles there is an observation to be made about the prophet's message generally. Jeremiah never left God out of his thought. Underneath all of his teachings and warnings there was a firm conviction that Jehovah is a God of righteousness, justice and love. God "liveth in truth, in justice and in righteousness."<sup>1</sup> He had ever showed His righteousness in all His past dealings with Israel. His activity on Israel's behalf in the deliverance from Egypt and in the conquest of a new land was a clear indication that God had a high and holy purpose for Israel.<sup>2</sup> But Israel had forsaken Jehovah for no reason at all, had gone after other gods and had drifted into the worst of sins - adultery, deceit, covetousness, oppression, stubbornness, and idolatry.<sup>3</sup>

But Jehovah's people were not to get away with their wickedness. If Jehovah is righteous He is also just. He punishes every man according to the fruit of his doing.<sup>4</sup>

. . . . .

1. Jer. 2:5; 4:2; 9:23
2. Jer. 2:7; 13:11
3. Jer. Chapter 5
4. Jer. 21:14



Jeremiah predicted the severest punishment to those who were unjust.<sup>1</sup> Jerusalem was to be destroyed, to become an example unto the nations of what Jehovah does to those who forsake His covenant and follow not righteousness.<sup>2</sup> Besides all nations were alike in God's sight. They must drink the cup of the wine of wrath sent by Jehovah because of the wickedness of their doings.<sup>3</sup>

Nevertheless, along with the ideas of the righteousness and justice of God is that of the love of God. "I am Jehovah who exerciseth lovingkindness, justice, and righteousness in the earth: for in these things I delight, saith Jehovah."<sup>4</sup> His attitude towards His people has always been one of constant love. "Yea, I have loved thee with an everlasting love: therefore with lovingkindness have I drawn thee."<sup>5</sup> His great love endures forever.<sup>6</sup> Jehovah would again gather His people, "Cause them to walk by rivers of waters in a straight way wherein they shall not stumble," "keep them as a shepherd doth his flock," for He continually "yearneth" over His children.<sup>7</sup>

Here then is a point to remember: that Jeremiah's God was one of righteousness, justice and love. His conception of God certainly must have influenced him in the proclamation of his message. Such a God could delight only in a

. . . . .

1. Jer. 9:12-16

2. Jer. 22:8,9; 21:5-7; 24:9;34:17-22

3. Jer. 25:15ff

4. Jer. 9:42

5. Jer.31:3;32:18

6. Jer.33:11

7. Jer.31:9,10,20

people who exercised the same traits of character. Then with this thought in mind let us consider some of the prominent principles of his message.

## B. The Principles Stated

### 1. The Family is the Basic Social Institution

It appears to have been a fundamental conviction of Jeremiah that the security of the nation depended upon family purity and family stability. And, as no group is stronger than its weakest member, the family must be composed of righteous individuals. The husband and the wife must exercise mutual fidelity to the marriage vow. The children must never forget their dependence upon their elders. The real man is respected, not because of his wealth and power, but for his knowledge of Jehovah and because of his deeds of justice, mercy and love. The respectable woman is she who serves faithfully in the home to instill in the children a reverence for Jehovah and to inspire them to lofty purposes. Homes of this sort is a nation's best insurance policy.

### 2. A Sin Against Man is a Sin Against God

Jeremiah viewed all men as free and responsible agents of Jehovah. And further, human personality, regardless of the social status, is of equal value in the sight of God. Men must act according to these principles. When Zedekiah

broke the trust placed in him by Babylon, he did more than merely evade his duty to a fellow man. He thereby sinned against God.<sup>1</sup> When the slave owners of Jerusalem re-enslaved those whom they had formerly set free, they thereby sinned against Jehovah, for they had violated a sacred covenant.<sup>2</sup> A sin against their fellow men was a sin against God.

3. Only That Society Has the Right to Exist Which  
Makes a Place for Every Citizen

The wealthy are not to be condemned nor are the poor to be neglected. It is legitimate and honorable for one to possess wealth, but this wealth must be obtained by fair means and used to wise ends. It is a sin to have great wealth if it has been gained through injustice and deceit.<sup>3</sup> Moreover the favored in society have a direct responsibility for the care of the poor and the helpless. They must go beyond the requirements of the law to improve the status of the unfortunate.

4. The Purpose of All Government Is to Promote the  
Welfare of the Governed

A fundamental requirement is righteous leaders on the one hand, and loyal citizens on the other. True leaders

. . . . .

1. Jer. 29:5  
2. Jer. 34:8-11  
3. Jer. 22:13ff

accept their offices as sacred trusts, which provide an opportunity for them to serve their people by obeying God's commands to execute justice, tempered with mercy. The leadership of a nation is directly responsible for conditions within the nation. A real leader is not a tool of popular clamor. Again, individuals must insist on righteous leaders. They, also, must never place loyalty to government above loyalty to God. In fact, Jeremiah saw that the hope of his nation lay in the unqualified trust in Jehovah of all its citizens.

#### 5. Religious Worship and Ethical Living Are Inseparable

One of the tragedies of Jeremiah's time was that the people substituted formal for true worship. They lived as they pleased, assuring themselves that everything was secure because Jerusalem was the sacred city in which the temple was placed, and because sacrifices were offered there in the temple. Jeremiah was strong in his denunciation of such an attitude. Rather than trust in the fact of the temple the people should mend their ways so that their lives would be in accordance with their worship. True religion and right living go hand in hand.

Moreover, according to Jeremiah, false worship is the cause of all social evils. People have a tendency to become like the gods they worship. The people of Jeremiah's time were guilty of worshipping gods that were not God. The

demands of these gods were so degrading that the people had drifted into all kinds of improper human relationships. Their ideals were shattered because their gods were false. They had no incentive to follow principles of personal morality, honesty, justice and lovingkindness. Their only hope lay in a thorough-going repentance and return to Jehovah.

6. The Ideal Social State Is a "God Centered Brotherhood," In Which Each Individual Member is Equally Important and Responsible

Jeremiah, it seems, constantly thought of society in terms of an individual's relation to it. His message is singular in this respect. He says, "let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, let not the mighty man glory in his might, let not the rich man glory in his riches, but let him that glorieth glory in this, that he hath understanding and knoweth me."<sup>1</sup> The new covenant again emphasizes the individual. The law will be in their inward parts, in the heart. All shall know Jehovah, from the least to the greatest.<sup>2</sup> Jehovah will deal with each according to his iniquity. When the new covenant is established it will be an ideal society because each individual soul shall know Jehovah, and consequently shall look upon each of his fellows as a brother. Mutual fellowship with God will promote mutual fellowship in social living.

1. Jer. 9:23

2. Jer. 31:31-34

## VII. Summary

We have attempted, in this chapter, to set forth clearly Jeremiah's social message. We have seen that his message, though not arranged in chronological manner nor presented often in positive statements, nevertheless was related to the important domestic, economic, political and religious institutions of his day. We were led to conclude that in all Jeremiah's utterances God held a central place. All of the principles underlying his message assume that Jehovah is a God of justice, mercy and love and requires the same of all His people. Only when God's righteousness becomes the righteousness of men can the ideal social state of a "God centered brotherhood" ever be attained.

CHAPTER SIX

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

## CHAPTER SIX

### SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

In our study thus far we have advanced according to the following plan:

I. In the introduction to this study we have stated the problem, discussed its significance, outlined the method of procedure and suggested the sources of data. Our problem, we stated, was to determine and to set forth clearly the social message of the prophet Jeremiah. Our approach was to be through the gateway of social institutions, as society functions essentially through institutions. Such a study, we suggested, is significant because the prophets spoke messages of lasting appeal. Jeremiah's message, interpreted in the light of contemporary conditions, is also a message to our time.

II. A presentation of the general background of the problem was first attempted. We gave particular attention to the activities of three great foreign nations, Egypt, Assyria and Babylonia. All three of them, we observed, were interested in the affairs of Judah, because Judah's geographical position was an important factor in the control of the world of that day. Judah was constantly faced with the problem of how to maintain a degree of independence, and at the same time to remain at peace with foreign powers. This was hardly possible, and Judah was dominated first by



one power and then by another until her fall in 586 B.C. Domination by a foreign nation, especially Assyria, meant also the introduction of foreign gods into the land. The introduction of false gods, and the worship of them, resulted in a tragic social and economic situation that demanded drastic reform in order for the nation to escape annihilation. We found further, that the reason for this tragic situation lay in a self-willed spirit of rebellion in the minds and hearts of the five prominent social classes, the kings, the princes, the priests, the prophets and the common people. The nation was degenerate because its citizens loved to have it so. All of this greatly magnified Jeremiah's task.

III. From the study of the general background we proceeded to consider the office of the prophet in relation to the social process. Through a study of the origin and development of prophecy, and the work of a number of the outstanding Hebrew prophets, we found that the prophet bears a twofold relation to the social process, that of its product and that of its critic. Jeremiah, the man, was considered to determine how he was qualified to fill the office of prophet or preacher to his time. Three things in his early life, namely, his childhood training, his call and commission, and the religious reforms of King Josiah worked to shape his role as prophet. Three things characterized him in action: (1) he used up-to-date psychological

methods in presenting his message; (2) he was in constant conflict with the status quo of his day because of the significant message that he proclaimed; (3) his utterances and his actions were supported by a highly spiritual personal life. Because of these factors we felt justified in calling him "The man for the times."

IV. Next we considered the social institutions operating in Hebrew society in the seventh century B.C. We noted also their regulative principles or laws as reflected in the book of Deuteronomy. We found that the society of that day was capably supplied with institutions - domestic, economic, political and religious - to meet the demands of a very complex social order. The Hebrews were further developed in this respect than the nations round about them.

V. Finally, we attempted to determine and to set forth Jeremiah's social message. We found that Jeremiah did not direct his message specifically to institutions as such. Nevertheless, from his utterances we were able to formulate and relate his message to the various institutions of his day. The family, slavery, capital and labor, governmental leadership, foreign nations, the Sabbath, etc., all come within the scope of his message. We observed that he set forth principles, which, had they been sincerely followed, would have healed the sick society of his day and have averted a national disaster. God held a central place in the prophet's message. Jeremiah's ideal for the nation

was a "God centered brotherhood," in which every member would know Jehovah and because of this knowledge would treat all his fellows as brothers. Righteousness would prevail in this ideal society because each member had accepted the "righteousness of God" as the ideal for his personal life.

In conclusion, it seems that we today, even as the people of Jeremiah's day, need to listen to the voice of this prophet. The family and the home are sadly degenerate. More and more men and women every year are accepting all the privileges of the physical realm at the expense of the spiritual. We are re-enacting the old Esau folly in a slightly different setting. We are selling our spiritual birthright for a mess of pottage. Not only so, but the poor are being exploited. Obligations between neighbors and between nations are being ignored. Faithfulness to a contract is no longer popular. Crime is rampant and criminals are made to appear as national martyrs. Corruption of every sort exists in politics and in the church. The office is used as a means of graft instead of as a channel of service. The quest for pleasure is more attractive than the quest for God, and obedience to conscience. Most distressing of all is the cold indifference to principles of righteousness on the part of the mass.

We have completely set aside the worship of God for the enjoyment of mammon. We have forsaken God. This Jeremiah would say, could his voice be heard today, is our only real problem. Our great problem is not unemployment, or low wages, or war and world peace, but it is sin. This sin is deeply rooted in a stubborn self-will. We would like to have God on our side, but whether He is or is not our course has already been decided upon. Our whole social set-up is suffering from a fatal disease because its spiritual arteries are filled with the deadly poison from false gods of materialism.

We need a revival of religion grounded deep enough to establish a firm bond between God and the individual. This, in turn, would establish a new relation between the individual and his neighbor. In short, we need to listen, in determined obedience, to Jeremiah's admonition, "love worship and obey God. Love, honor and help your fellow men." Jeremiah most assuredly has a message for us today.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

Primary Sources

- American Revised Version: Thomas Nelson & Sons, New York, 1901
- Driver, S. R.: The Book of the Prophet Jeremiah, Chas. Scribner's Sons, New York, 1906
- Moffatt, James: The Holy Bible, containing Old and New Testaments, A New Translation, Doran & Co., New York, 1926

Secondary Sources

- Bade, W. F.: The Old Testament in the Light of Today, Houghton Mifflin Co., New York, 1916
- Beecher, W. J.: Prophets and the Promise, Thomas Y. Crowell & Co., New York, 1905
- Bizzell, W. B.: The Social Teachings of the Jewish Prophets, Sherman, French & Co., Boston, 1916
- Blair, E. P.: Jeremiah's Philosophy of Life, S.T.B. Thesis at the Biblical Seminary in New York, 1934
- Breasted, J. H.: History of Egypt, Chas. Scribner's Sons, New York, 1905
- Calkins, Raymond: Jeremiah the Prophet, The Macmillan Co., New York, 1930
- Cheyene, T. K.: Jeremiah, His Life and Times, Fleming H. Revell & Co., New York, 1888
- Cooley, C. H.: Social Organization, Chas. Scribner's Sons, New York, 1923
- Cross, E. B.: The Hebrew Family, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1927
- Davis, J. D.: A Dictionary of the Bible, The Westminster Press, Philadelphia, 1921
- Day, Edward: The Social Life of the Hebrews, John C. Nimmo, London, 1901

- Elwood, C.A.: Sociology and Modern Social Problems,  
American Book Co., New York, 1913
- Fairbairn, Patrick: Prophecy, T. & T. Clark, Edinburgh, 1865
- Gordon, T.C.: The Rebel Prophet, Harper & Bros., New York,  
1932
- Hastings, James: Dictionary of the Bible, Chas. Scribner's  
Sons, New York, 1901
- Hertzler, J. O.: Social Institutions, McGraw-Hill Co.,  
New York, 1929
- Husslein, Joseph: Bible and Labor, The Macmillan Co.,  
New York, 1924
- Jefferson, Chas. E., Cardinal Ideas of Jeremiah, The  
Macmillan Co., New York, 1928
- Keeble, S. E.: The Social Teachings of the Bible, Eaton &  
Mains, New York, 1909
- Kent, C. F.: The Social Teachings of the Prophets and  
Jesus, Chas. Scribner's Sons, New York, 1917
- Kirkpatrick, A. F.: The Doctrine of the Prophets, The  
Macmillan Co., New York, 1897
- Lange, J. P. (Nagelsbach, C.W.): The Book of the Prophet  
Jeremiah, Chas. Scribner's Sons, New York, 1901
- Lofthouse, W. F.: Jeremiah and the New Covenant, Student  
Christian Movement, London, 1925
- Mitchell, H. G.: The Ethics of the Old Testament, The  
University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1912
- Morgan, G. C.: Studies in the Prophecy of Jeremiah,  
Fleming H. Revell Co., New York, 1931
- Nichol, Ruth: Study of the Modern Family and the Integrating  
Influence of Religion in the Home, M.R.E. Thesis  
at the Biblical Seminary in New York, 1933
- Orelli, H. K.: Prophecies of Jeremiah, T. & T. Clark Co.,  
Edinburgh, 1899
- Peake, A. S.: Jeremiah (The New Century Bible) Henry Frowde,  
New York, 1911

- Peake, A. S.: Brotherhood in the Old Testament, Geo. H. Doran & Co., New York, 1923
- Rauschenbusch, W.: Christianity and the Social Crisis, The Macmillan Co., New York, 1907
- Rogers, R. W.: A History of Babylonia and Assyria, Vol. II, Eaton & Mains Co., New York, 1900
- Rogers, R. W.: Great Characters of the Old Testament, Methodist Book Concern, New York, 1920
- Sayce, A. H.: Article on "Assyria," The International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia, Vol. I, The Howard-Severance Co., Chicago, 1915
- Schenck, F. S.: The Sociology of the Bible, The Board of Publications of the Reformed Church in America, New York, 1909
- Singer, Isidore: The Jewish Encyclopedia, 12 Vol., Funk & Wagnalls Co., New York, 1903
- Skinner, John: Prophecy and Religion, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1926
- Smith, G. A.: Jeremiah, Geo. H. Doran Co., New York, 1923
- Smith, G. A.: The Book of the Twelve Prophets, 2 Vol., A. C. Armstrong & Son, New York, 1901
- Smith, J. M. P.: The Moral Life of the Hebrews, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1923
- Soares, T. G.: The Social Institutions and Ideals of the Bible, Abingdon Press, New York, 1915
- Thayer, J. H.: Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament, American Book Co., New York
- Wallis, Louis: Sociological Study of the Bible, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1912
- Walton, Donald: Jeremiah's Significance as a Teacher, M.R.E. Thesis at the Biblical Seminary in New York, 1932
- Welch, A. C.: Jeremiah, His Times and His Works, Oxford University Press, London, 1928
- Willetts, H. L.: The Prophets of Israel, Christian Publishing Co., St. Louis, 1899