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THE SUFFERINGS OF THE PROPHET JEREMIAH
AND THEIR RESULTS

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CURRICULUM STUDIORUM

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INTRODUCTION

The existence of suffering in this world is a fact which requires no demonstration. It is within the experience of all, even the young. One does not seek for it, it thrusts itself upon one. Yet, man has a natural craving for happiness implanted in his being by the Creator. Therefore, this universal presence of suffering in our midst calls for an explanation in every system of religious belief. A special aspect of the question is that concerning the suffering of the innocent.

It is not the intent of the writer to give a detailed exposition of the notion of suffering. Rather, in order to attempt to shed some light on this problem, one of the prophets of the Old Testament, the prophet Jeremiah, has been chosen for our study. That Jeremiah suffered is recognized by the majority of exegetes. That his was the suffering of an innocent man is evident because his sufferings were in the course of his labours for his people. The overall purpose of this study will be to determine how he suffered and what were the eventual results of his sufferings.

In a study of any one of the prophets, one must always remember that each of them were very much involved in the times in which they lived and identified closely with the

people with whom they lived. Because Jeremiah also worked out his vocation as a prophet of his time, some attention has been given to the historical and political background of his times in the first chapter. Since his life coincided with one of the most important periods in the history of the Hebrew nation, a short history of that period has been given emphasizing Jeremiah's involvement therein. With this background in mind the actual Book of Jeremiah has been briefly treated and a short discussion on the message he brought to his people has been included.

Our second and central chapter deals specifically with the sufferings of the prophet. By a close study of the numerous texts in Jeremiah that bear on his sufferings, the writer has endeavoured to show what were the causes of his sufferings and in what way he actually did suffer. In the case of Jeremiah, the many autobiographical poems, usually called his 'confessions,' have been used to provide a great deal of the evidence for his suffering.

In the interest of maximum clarity his sufferings have been arranged into three divisions. The first part deals with his sense of loneliness, wherein three factors that contribute to this loneliness are examined: his call, his celibacy, and the exclusion from his family. The second division examines how his great concern for his own people served to intensify his own sorrow. The last section explores

the fact that in view of the previous sufferings just mentioned Jeremiah was torn continuously between the task imposed upon him by Yahweh and his natural aversion to speak out against his people. This in itself caused the greater portion of his anxiety.

The final chapter deals with the results of Jeremiah's sufferings. The first part of the chapter has explored the personal religion of Jeremiah. Since he is often regarded as one of the first to realize that his relationship with Yahweh could exist apart from the nation, a short discussion on how the notion of collective responsibility evolved into that of personal responsibility has been included. With this background an attempt to discover the measure of personal fellowship that Jeremiah achieved with Yahweh has been made.

The second part of the last chapter carries Jeremiah's personal relationship to a greater vision and extends it to the nation. His vision of the ultimate restoration of the nation has been examined in his concept of the New Covenant. Both the characteristics that are like the old covenant at Sinai and those which make it different have been examined and discussed. With this in mind, one can explore how Jeremiah's own personal religion was extended to the people of the future where all men would achieve this measure of personal relationship.

It is hoped that the present study may in some way provide somewhat of a background for understanding the struggles of men through the ages to obtain from their faith the belief that perhaps it is not so much that God's ways are unsearchable as that his love is beyond understanding.

CHAPTER I

BACKGROUND TO THE PROPHET JEREMIAH

Jeremiah of Anathoth, whose life and sayings will be discussed in this thesis, was one of the prophets of Israel. Like the other prophets who went before him he was greatly involved in the history of his time. In order to arrive at a better understanding of the man, this chapter will briefly describe the times in which he lived and the situation to which he addressed himself. With this background in mind, the book of Jeremiah will be briefly discussed and the message he tried to bring to his people will be explored.

1. The Life and Message of Jeremiah

a) Historical and Political Background.- Jeremiah's life coincided with one of the most eventful periods in the history of the Hebrew nation. Called by God as a young man in 626 B.C., he lived through the tragic years preceding and succeeding the ruin of the kingdom of Judah.¹

In 626 B.C., when Jeremiah emerged into public life, the little state of Judah, whose twin kingdom Israel had been devastated by the Assyrian war machine in 721 B.C., continued

¹ J. Bright, A History of Israel, Philadelphia, The Westminster Press, 1952, p. 313.

to be trapped in the power struggles of the great nations of Assyria and Egypt.² Jeremiah witnessed the Deuteronomic reform of cult and morals inaugurated by Josiah, king of Judah, in 621 B.C. The two previous kings, Manasseh and Amon, had been docile vassals of Assyria and for as long as could be remembered Assyrian worship had gone on in Jerusalem. In the year 621 B.C., Josiah's reform, which was based explicitly on the Book of Deuteronomy, purged Jerusalem of Assyrian worship.³

It is likely that Jeremiah supported Josiah's reform in principle but his interest seems to have cooled considerably later on.⁴ Whatever its motivation, the effect of Josiah's great religious reform, with its establishment of a centralized, purified form of worship and a return to the Mosaic

2 A. Welch, Jeremiah, His Time and His Work, Oxford, Basil Blackwell, 1951, p. 14. Towards the end of Manasseh's reign, (687-642), the huge Assyrian Empire began to show signs of breaking up.

3 M. Noth, The History of Israel, London, Adam and Charles Black, 1958, p. 275.

4 H.H. Rowley, "The Prophet Jeremiah and the Book of Deuteronomy," in Studies in Old Testament Prophecy, Edinburgh, T. and T. Clark, 1950, p. 174. Much discussion still prevails as to the relationship between Jeremiah and the Book of Deuteronomy. Rowley favors the view that "Josiah's law-book was Deuteronomy and that Jeremiah had some knowledge of its contents and style, and that at first he advocated the Deuteronomic reform, but later perceived its spiritual failure and therefore condemned its insufficiency."

and Sinai covenant, had been to create a false sense of security. Jeremiah complained that the reform was a matter of appearance rather than fact. Cultic activity had been greatly increased but there had been no real return to the true, ancient path.⁵

Hear, earth!
I am bringing a disaster
on this people:
it is the fruit of their apostasy,
since they have not listened to my words
and, as for my Law, they have rejected that. (6:19)

The decisive year in the northeast was 612 B.C., when the Babylonian leader, Nabopolassar, destroyed the Assyrian capital of Nineveh.⁶ The rise to dominance of Babylon, and the fall of Assyria, were viewed by Egypt with alarm. So, in 609 B.C., Pharaoh Neco II marched northeast to help the Assyrians against the Babylonians in the upper Euphrates valley.⁷ King Josiah, unwilling to see Egypt and Assyria make friends and encircle little Judah, intercepted the Egyptian army as it passed by at Megiddo. However, the Judean force was defeated and Josiah was killed. Thus, Judah

5 J. Bright, Jeremiah, (Anchor Bible), New York, Doubleday, p. xlv. Jeremiah became bitterly disillusioned because "no real repentance had come of it but only an ever more elaborate cultus."

6 Ibid., p. xliii.

7 J. Bright, A History of Israel, p. 303.

came under Egyptian domination.⁸

Neco at once removed Josiah's heir Jehoahaz from the throne, and put there another of Josiah's sons, Jehoiakim, who was to pay a heavy tax as Egypt's vassal. However, Egyptian control did not last long. In 605 B.C., the Babylonians, under their king Nebuchadnezzar, defeated the Egyptians heavily at Carchemish and so Judah became subject to Babylon.⁹

From 605 B.C. onwards, Nebuchadnezzar imposed his will on Judah. Judah, encouraged by the persistent intrigues of Egypt, rebelled and refused to pay taxes. As a result, in 597 B.C., Jerusalem was besieged by Nebuchadnezzar and the upper class of Judean society was deported to Babylon. Nebuchadnezzar installed Zedekiah as king in Jerusalem.¹⁰

Zedekiah was not strong enough to control the Judean movement and a second revolt occurred in 589 B.C. Nebuchadnezzar reacted decisively.¹¹ In 587 B.C., Jerusalem was

8 Ibid., p. 303.

9 Noth, Op. cit., p. 281. From this time on Babylon became the dominant power to overshadow the remainder of Judah's history.

10 Bright, Op. cit., p. 306. "The king, the queen mother, the high officials, and leading citizens, together with an enormous booty, were taken to Babylon."

11 Ibid., p. 308.

captured, its temple burned, and more of its inhabitants deported to Babylon. Zedekiah was caught, blinded and deported. So began the exile proper. Jeremiah lived through-out these catastrophic events, preaching, prophesying disaster and vainly admonishing the Davidic kings one after another.¹²

The ruins of Judah were added to the Babylonian empire and Gedaliah was made governor of the province. Jeremiah remained in Palestine with his friend Gedaliah until Gedaliah was assassinated by a party of Jews. Gedaliah's friends fled to Egypt, taking Jeremiah with them and presumably this is where Jeremiah died.¹³

b) The Book of Jeremiah.- The book of Jeremiah must be read against the turbulent background of the ancient Near East of the seventh and sixth centuries B.C., keeping in

12 J. Muilenburg, "Jeremiah the Prophet," The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible, New York, Abingdon Press, 1962, Vol. 2, p. 827.

13 Ibid., p. 828. "Jeremiah had encouraged the new leaders to remain in Jerusalem, to trust in the Chaldeans, and to give up all plans of going to Egypt. The leaders, however, were enraged, accused Baruch of instigating Jeremiah against them, and set out for Egypt, taking Jeremiah and Baruch with them."

mind the religious and political attitudes of the state of Judah.

Like many of the other prophetic books, the book of Jeremiah is extremely difficult to read because of its apparent lack of arrangement. Sometimes the material is in chronological order (Ch. 37-44), while at other times it is in topical order (Ch. 21-23, 30-31, 46-51). This is probably due to the fact that it is "not the product of one person but rather a product of growth over a long period of time to which many have contributed."¹⁴ The Septuagint version of the book of Jeremiah is of particular interest because it differs in a number of respects from the Hebrew text which we now have. It is approximately one-eighth shorter than the Hebrew and contains a number of omissions, a few minor additions and several variations in the order of the material.¹⁵

Upon further examination we find that there are different types or sources of material in the book of Jeremiah.

¹⁴ J.P. Hyatt, "Jeremiah," The Interpreter's Bible, New York, Abingdon Press, Vol. V, 1956, p. 787. Also see H.T. Kuist, "The Book of Jeremiah," Interpretation, Vol. IV, No. 3, July, 1950, p. 322.

¹⁵ O. Eissfeldt, The Old Testament, Oxford, Basil Blackwell, 1965, p. 349. Also see F.M. Cross, The Ancient Library of Qumran, New York, Doubleday Co., 1961, p. 186-187 and J.G. Janzen, "Double Readings in the Text of Jeremiah," Harvard Theological Review, No. 60, 1967, p. 433 and Muilenburg, Op. cit., p. 831.

In 1914, the Norwegian scholar, Sigmund Mowinckel, designated three types of sources as A, B, and C.¹⁶ Type A is made up of poetic oracles where the prophet publicly proclaims the Word of Yahweh. These are usually introduced by, "Thus says the Lord," and are characterized by the fact that the prophet here speaks as the mouthpiece of Yahweh.¹⁷

The second source, type B, is in the form of biographical prose narratives. We find Jeremiah referred to in the third person. The majority of exegetes consider these passages to be written by Baruch, Jeremiah's secretary, since he is considered by many to be an eyewitness of the events recorded.¹⁸ There are however some who question this position and deny his authorship.¹⁹

Type C, the deuteronomic speeches of the prophet, usually introduced by the formula, "The message that came to

16 G.P. Couturier, "Jeremiah," The Jerome Biblical Commentary, New Jersey, Prentice Hall, 1968, p. 301.

17 Bright, Jeremiah, (Anchor Bible), p. lxiii.

18 Eissfeldt, Op. cit., p. 350. "All this shows that Baruch must have been closely associated with Jeremiah, and that at least in the years 605-587 he must have been his constant companion."

19 Muilenburg, Op. cit., p. 832 and H.G. May, "Towards an Objective Approach to the Book of Jeremiah: the Biographer," Journal of Biblical Literature, Vol. LXI, 1942, p. 130, who says "there is not the slightest evidence that any part of the book was ever written by Baruch."

Jeremiah from the Lord," still constitutes the major critical problem of the book. These passages have the form of the sermon and certainly reflect the style characteristic of Deuteronomy.²⁰

Much controversy regarding the authenticity of this third source is still present among scholars. Mowinckel and various other authors like Duhm, Hölscher, Horst and Rudolph, claim that a Deuteronomist compiled the speeches which it contains with occasional employment of Jeremiah's forms of speech.²¹ Hyatt agrees with this and suggests that the book of Jeremiah as we have it now "has received expansion and redaction at the hands of the 'Deuteronomic' editors."²²

At the same time we have a good number of scholars who feel that the differences between the passages discussed and the deuteronomic literature is sufficient to attribute to the third source a distinctive style of its own. The fact that the diction or style of many of these passages is similar or reminiscent of the Deuteronomic sermon-style is hardly

20 Couturier, Op. cit., p. 302.

21 Eissfeldt, Op. cit., p. 352.

22 J.P. Hyatt, "Jeremiah and Deuteronomy," Journal of Near Eastern Studies, Vol. I, 1942, p. 158.

sufficient ground for denying them to Jeremiah.²³ Thus, "Deuteronomy and the deuteronomic discourses of Jeremiah would be two different examples of this prose."²⁴

This brings us back to the question of Jeremiah's approval or involvement with the Deuteronomic reform carried on under Josiah. If Jeremiah had some knowledge of the contents and style of the Book of Deuteronomy as found in the temple and if he supported the reform of Josiah, it is quite likely that he would adopt some of the style and concepts found therein.²⁵ When we try to answer this question we are again faced with divergent views from scholars. There are those who claim that Jeremiah did not even begin his public career until after Josiah's reforms and therefore could hardly have expressed approval of the Deuteronomic

23 W.L. Holladay, "Prototype and Copies: A New Approach to the Poetry-Prose Problem in the Book of Jeremiah," Journal of Biblical Literature, Vol. LXXIX, 1960, p. 352.

24 Couturier, Op. cit., p. 302.

25 D.J. McCarthy, Kings and Prophets, Milwaukee, Bruce Publishing Company, 1962, p. 139, sees this as the crux of the problem. "Jeremiah's earliest preaching is so close to the ideal of Deuteronomy that it is hardly conceivable that the prophet did not sympathize with the Deuteronomic reform."

reforms or supported them in any way.²⁶ However, the view held by the majority of critical scholars is that Jeremiah began his public career in 626 B.C., five years before the reforms of Josiah.²⁷ Possibly he first approved the measures taken by the king to bring the people back to true worship of Yahweh but then, when he saw that the reformation of the cult brought about a false confidence in the external performance of worship, he changed his attitude. At any rate, the view held by a great many exegetes is that these deuteronomic speeches are authentic.²⁸

When we try to discover how Jeremiah's work was put into the present book form we are also at a loss. To find order in the book is a difficult task. Most critics will begin with Chapter 36 because it is here that Jeremiah dictated all his oracles in 605 B.C. to be re-edited the follow-

26 W.L. Holladay, "The Background of Jeremiah's Self-Understanding: Moses, Samuel, and Psalm 22," Journal of Biblical Literature, Vol. LXXXIII, 1964, p. 161. Also see W.L. Holladay, "Jeremiah and Moses-Further Observations," Journal of Biblical Literature, 1966, p. 352 and J.P. Hyatt, "The Beginning of Jeremiah's Prophecy," Zeitschrift für die Alttestamentliche Wissenschaft, No. 78, 1966, p. 205. Also see C.F. Whitley, "The Date of Jeremiah's Call," Vetus Testamentum, Vol. XIV, No. 64, p. 467.

27 H.H. Rowley, Men of God, New York, Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1963, p. 134. Also see T.W. Overholt, "Some Reflections on the Date of Jeremiah's Call," Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. XXXIII, April, 1971, p. 184.

28 Eissfeldt, Op. cit., p. 352.

ing year with additions. E. Podechard,²⁹ begins with the scroll and regards it as being included for the most part in chapters 1-25. This forms one of the first collections in Podechard's study. It is also in this first section that the book of 'confessions' was inserted at different places.³⁰

Podechard sees the second collection as comprising chapters 26-35. It is believed that this is Baruch's redactional work. The basic theme that runs throughout this collection is the restoration of Israel. This is particularly evident in the Book of Consolation (Ch. 30-31) where the prophet sees a reunion of the divided kingdom.³¹

The last collection according to Podechard is chapters 36-45. This is Baruch's biography of Jeremiah. The man who is mentioned as so closely bound up with the fortunes of Jeremiah and who appears as his secretary in chapter 36, is likely to have had a share in the book as we have it.³² Baruch begins his work with the scroll of 605. Chapters

29 E. Podechard, "Le Livre de Jérémie," Revue Biblique, Vol. XXXVII, 1928, p. 181.

30 Couturier, Op. cit., p. 302.

31 Podechard, Op. cit., p. 183.

32 Ibid., p. 184. Also see Eissfeldt, Op. cit., p. 350, who claims that we can safely surmise that "Baruch was concerned in the formation of the book."

46-51 are a collection of oracles against the nations and chapter 52 is an appendix.

The above explanation of collections form the book of Jeremiah but this does not mean that the basic problem of logical order has been solved or explained. It in no way enables us to summarize the prophet's thoughts or ideas. He was far too personal in his approach to admit of any simple definition. Perhaps one should see the book as John Bright sees it as "an anthology of anthologies, where logical or chronological progression must not be demanded."³³ At any rate, attention will now be given to the message the prophet brought to his people.

c) The Message of Jeremiah.- Jeremiah was born and grew up at Anathoth, a small village northeast of Jerusalem. The town belonged to the tribe of Benjamin, not Judah. It is apparent that he was raised in the tradition of his fathers because he reveals a firm grasp of the election-covenant faith of the Mosaic age and very rarely refers to the Zion tradition.³⁴ This is probably because his priestly family was linked with Shiloh - one of the central sanctuaries where

33 Bright, Op. cit., p. lxxix.

34 G. von Rad, Old Testament Theology, Vol. II, New York, Harper and Row, 1965, p. 192.

the ark of the covenant was kept before Jerusalem was even taken from the Canaanites. This also explains his "close spiritual kinship to northern Israel's great prophet, Hosea."³⁵

As we have seen, the majority of exegetes hold that he was called to be a prophet while still quite young in 626/627 B.C. Of all the prophets Jeremiah seems to have been the most conscious of the compelling character of his call.³⁶ It is true that when it first came to him he pleaded with Yahweh that his youth and inexperience were obstacles but at the same time the Word of God gave him the courage to overcome his fear.

When your words came, I devoured them:
your word was my delight
and the joy of my heart;
for I was called by your name. (15:16)

Two visions follow his call. The first is of an almond tree which signifies God's watching over his word to bring it to fruition. In the second, Jeremiah sees a boiling caldron "with its contents tilting from the North" (1:14). This is symbolic of the imminent coming of the foe from the north.

This foe from the north is the theme of Jeremiah's early preaching. Time and again in vivid language he portrays

35 Bright, (Anchor Bible), Op. cit., p. lxxxviii.

36 H.H. Rowley, "The Nature of Prophecy in the Light of Recent Study," Harvard Theological Review, Vol. 38, 1945, p. 122.

the enemy approaching:

Announce it in Judah,
 proclaim it in Jerusalem!
 Sound the trumpet in the countryside,
 shout the message aloud:
 Mobilise!
 Take to the fortified towns!
 Signpost the way to Zion;
 Run! Do not delay!
 I am bringing you disaster from the North,
 an immense calamity.
 The lion is up from his thicket,
 the destroyer of nations is on his way,
 he has come from his home
 to reduce your land to a desert;
 your towns will be in ruins, deserted.
 So wrap yourselves in sackcloth,
 lament and wail,
 since the burning anger of Yahweh
 has not turned away from us. (4:5-8)

Much controversy still occurs as to who this foe from the north really was. For some scholars these poems have been thought to refer to an invasion of Scythians from the north.³⁷ Some of the more recent commentaries assign them to the Babylonians.³⁸ Later on, it is quite evident that Jeremiah identified them with the Babylonians and felt

³⁷ Rowley, Men of God, p. 151, claims that the Scythians were largely accepted as the foe until the last half century by such scholars as Skinner, Duhm, Cheyne, Peake, Driver and Smith.

³⁸ J.P. Hyatt, "The Peril from the North in Jeremiah," Journal of Biblical Literature, Vol. LIX, 1940, p. 502. Also see C.F. Whitley, "Carchemish and Jeremiah," Zeitschrift für die Alttestamentliche Wissenschaft, No. 80, 1968, p. 48.

that the terrible invasion was Yahweh's judgment against Judah for her worship of other gods.³⁹

Another theme that comes through repeatedly in his early years is that Israel has forsaken the worship of Yahweh and has given herself up to the worship of Baal. In his approach to this problem Jeremiah is different from the earlier prophets whose manner of judgment was often harsh and cold. According to von Rad, "the threat of judgment which earlier prophets had outlined so clearly is very much less prominent."⁴⁰ Jeremiah simply cannot understand how these people could possibly treat Yahweh who had led them through the wilderness into the promised land with such cold indifference. He issues an urgent plea for Judah to turn from her gross infidelity and to return to Yahweh. The influence of Hosea upon the prophet is apparent in these oracles for like Hosea he consistently refers to Judah's relationship with Yahweh in marriage terms. Judah is like an adulteress who has forsaken her husband.⁴¹

39 H. Ringgren, Israelite Religion, Philadelphia, Fortress Press, 1966, p. 278.

40 von Rad, Op. cit., p. 195.

41 B. Vawter, The Conscience of Israel, London, Sheed and Ward, 1961, p. 254. "The people's crime is not simply the disruption of individual family ties, but a shattering of the sacred marriage bond that united people and God."

But like a woman betraying her lover,
the House of Israel has betrayed me -
it is Yahweh who speaks. (3:20)

Even after Yahweh has brought Israel out of Egypt, she forsook Yahweh and Jeremiah sees Israel's apostasy as something that is contrary to common sense and has no precedent in the whole world, for no one has ever heard of a people changing its gods.

Does a nation change its gods?
- and these are not gods at all!
Yet my people have exchanged their Glory
for what has no power in it. (2:11)

Jeremiah cannot understand why Israel has exchanged Yahweh's "fountain of living water" (2:13) for "broken cisterns that hold no water" (2:13). Despite the fact that the people deserve severe punishment, he calls them back to return to Yahweh:

'If you wish to come back, Israel,
- it is Yahweh who speaks -
it is to me you must return.
Do away with your abominations
and you will have no need to avoid me. (4:1)

It is quite probable that this preaching of Jeremiah falls in the period before Josiah's reform in 621 B.C.

During this early time the Book of Consolation (30-31) should also be placed in this phase of preaching.⁴² In

⁴² Ringgren, Op. cit., p. 279.

general one might say that it refers to the time when Josiah sought to extend his territory to the old northern kingdom of Israel. It is quite natural to assume that Jeremiah pursued the idea of Israel's restoration at the beginning of his activity "when Judah was not yet directly drawn into the great world-political events."⁴³ It is in the Book of Consolation that we find Rachel, the ancestress of the northern tribes being comforted:

Yahweh says this:
Stop your weeping,
dry your eyes,
your hardships will be redressed:
they shall come back from the enemy country.
(31:16)

During the years which followed Josiah's reform, very little is heard from Jeremiah but after Josiah's death, during the reign of Jehoiakim, we find him active once more. It is during this time that he utters his famous temple address (7:1-15) because he feels that for a people who have not listened to Yahweh's commands even the temple can be false security. Following this we read that he suffered hostility as a result of the sermon and was only saved from peril by the intervention of certain Judeans (26:10). Later, Jeremiah was forbidden to preach in public and as a result

⁴³ Eissfeldt, Op. cit., p. 361.

he had Baruch prepare a scroll with all his oracles of doom. The king however, heard of this and summoned Baruch before him and had the scroll burned. This did not deter Jeremiah who ordered a new scroll to be prepared and added new material to it.⁴⁴

The last phase of Jeremiah's life probably begins shortly before the exile when the king of Babylon deported a number of the upper class of Judean society to Babylon.⁴⁴ The new king, Zedekiah, acted under pressure from his nobles and rebelled against Babylon. Jeremiah's reaction to this had been very unfavorable and he pleaded with Zedekiah that Judah should surrender to the Babylonians.⁴⁵ As a result, Jeremiah was condemned as a traitor and it was only after the fall of Jerusalem that the Babylonian conqueror released him. After the city had fallen the Babylonians allowed Jeremiah to remain with Gedaliah, the new governor, until Gedaliah was assassinated. When Gedaliah's followers fled to Egypt for safety, they took Jeremiah with them and this is presumably where he died.⁴⁶

⁴⁴ Bright, (Anchor Bible), Op. cit., p. cii.
"Jeremiah subsequently recreated the scroll, with additions."

⁴⁵ Vawter, Op. cit., p. 264.

⁴⁶ Bright, Op. cit., p. cxi.

It would be easy after reading many of Jeremiah's prophecies to cast him as "the prophet of doom." In so doing one would overlook his frequent messages of hope and salvation. Jeremiah's revelation at the potter's workshop is one evidence of this. Yahweh is the potter and man is the clay. Just as a faulty vase can be reshaped into a new one, so Yahweh can reshape Israel into a new people.⁴⁷ Also, his letter to the exiles in Babylon in 587 B.C., encouraging them to "build houses, settle down; plant gardens and eat what they produce," (29:5) is further evidence of his confidence in Yahweh's saving power. For Jeremiah, "the exiles in Babylon were the true line which would carry on the people of God."⁴⁸

I know the plans I have in mind for you,
- it is Yahweh who speaks -
plans for peace, not disaster,
reserving a future full of hope for you. (29:11)

Even more explicit is his hope for the future as expressed when he was ordered to purchase a field during the final siege of Jerusalem. At a time when the city was being demolished and famine was raging within it, Jeremiah's words that "houses and fields and vineyards shall again be bought

47 Couturier, Op. cit., p. 317.

48 McCarthy, Op. cit., p. 146.

in this land," (32:15) were indeed a definite glance towards the future. Presumably Jeremiah had in mind the exiles of 598 and those who still remained in Jerusalem.⁴⁹

The greatest evidence of his vision of the future is however expressed in his concept of the new covenant (31:33ff). Since this topic will be dealt with thoroughly in the last chapter, it is sufficient here to recognize it as the message which formed the heart of his work.

To sum up the prophet's message is an extremely difficult task because his personal religion is far too complex to be explained very easily or in a simple way. Suffice it to say that "no other prophet reached the stature of Jeremiah in his great sensitivity to Yahweh's love for his people and in his profound understanding of this very people's duty toward Yahweh through the covenant ties."⁵⁰

49 von Rad, Op. cit., p. 211.

50 Couturier, Op. cit., p. 301.

CHAPTER II

THE SUFFERINGS OF THE PROPHET JEREMIAH

In the previous chapter it was seen that Jeremiah lived through one of the most trying periods in the history of the Hebrew nation. During his lifetime, because of the nature of his mission, which was to proclaim doom to the people he loved so much, he suffered a great deal. It is these numerous struggles and sufferings which will now be examined and discussed.

To attempt any conjecture about the interior life of any man is always perilous. In the case of a complex character like Jeremiah such an undertaking would indeed be presumptuous. However, in the case of Jeremiah, we are singularly fortunate to be able to discover with some assurance how he suffered because of the number of autobiographical poems, usually called his 'Confessions,' which we find scattered throughout his book. In these confessions Jeremiah records his most intimate thoughts and by means of them we get to know Jeremiah the man, as he struggles with himself and searches honestly and fearlessly for a solution to his spiritual and intellectual problems. In no way do these passages have the same form or content. What is common to all of them is that here we find Jeremiah speaking in his own

name rather than Yahweh's. Most authors recognize the form and style of these confessions as being very closely linked with "the ancient literary category of the individual lament."¹

These passages do not come from any single moment in the prophet's long and varied career, nor can we say that they represent a connected series of events. There are those who feel that the entire series falls in the latter part of the reign of Josiah before Jeremiah had become part of the political scene.² Others think they represent a series of outpourings that took place at various times in his life.³

In his confessions Jeremiah gives way to his anguish and complains to Yahweh of the abuse that his calling has brought to him. He bitterly curses his enemies and cries out for his own vindication. He even accuses Yahweh of having deceived him and failed him. At the same time he continuously brings forth his unvarying reliance upon Yahweh:

1 G. von Rad, Old Testament Theology, Vol. II, New York, Harper and Row, 1965, p. 201. "Jeremiah interpenetrated the conventional usage of the old cultic form with his own concerns as a prophet, and transformed it."

2 H.W. Robinson, The Cross in the Old Testament, London, SCM Press, 1955, p. 155. See also J. Skinner, Prophecy and Religion, London, Cambridge University Press, 1930, p.209.

3 H.H. Rowley, Men of God, New York, Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1963, p. 154.

So, in those years of utter loneliness, originated the confessions - those dialogues in which the prophet pours out his soul to God, his human misgivings, his shrinkings from what he feels to be inevitable, his profound depression verging at times on despair, and on the other hand, voices the reassurance, the positive reasoning, the promise of strength and sustenance,⁴ with which he feels his soul fortified.

While it is true that we find the personal element in many of the other prophets, nowhere else do we find such complete revelations and opening up of the hidden processes of the heart as we do in these confessions. Jeremiah identifies himself with the message he must bring to his countrymen and literally suffers with them because of this. Even though he brings judgment to his people, he does this with a heavy heart and is concerned with them. The earlier prophets could always distinguish between the message they were bringing from Yahweh and their own personal motivation. However, in Jeremiah there was no such distinction and the personal "I" was always breaking through the message.⁵

This brings us to the question of how the confessions of Jeremiah should be treated. Should they be treated as

⁴ M. Battenweiser, The Prophets of Israel, New York, Macmillan Company, 1914, p. 81.

⁵ H. Ringgren, Israelite Religion, Philadelphia, Fortress Press, 1966, p. 281.

mere human expressions of a tortured soul? Or are they to be considered as sufferings which grew out of his specific situation as a prophet? Most scholars regard them as the expression of his humanity because in them Jeremiah speaks about himself and his inner conflicts.⁶ In recent years, this conclusion has been severely questioned, especially by E. Gerstenger⁷ and H. Graf Reventlow.⁸

The former would have it that the confessions are the product of later reflection on the part of the exilic Deuteronomists, while the latter argues that they are liturgical pieces uttered by the prophet in the context of the cult. ⁹

⁶ B.W. Anderson, Understanding the Old Testament, New Jersey, Prentice Hall, 1966, p. 339. "Nothing like this personal diary can be found in the writings of any earlier prophet or, for that matter, in the other religious literature of antiquity." Also see J. Bright, "Jeremiah's Complaints - Liturgy or Expression of Personal Distress," Proclamation and Presence, (OT essays in honor of G. Henton Davies), London, SCM Press, 1970, p. 190.

⁷ E. Gerstenberger, "Jeremiah's Complaints - Observations on Jer. 15:10-21," Journal of Biblical Literature, No. 82, Dec. 1963, p. 393-408.

⁸ H.G. Reventlow, Liturgie und prophetisches Ich bei Jeremia, Gütersloh, Gütersloher Verlaghaus Gerd Mohn, 1963, p. 259.

⁹ Bright, Op. cit., p. 190. "Reventlow sees the prophet as one who discharged an official cultic function, that of mediator between God and people. He interprets Jeremiah's laments and complaints in the light of this understanding of the prophetic office."

G. von Rad feels that Jeremiah's inner struggles arose precisely in connection with his prophetic ministry and this means they should be treated as a vital part of his prophetic witness. They are an intrinsic part of his intellectual and spiritual make-up and therefore cannot be separated from his prophetic function. All his agonizing suffering came to him because of his prophetic office and not in spite of it.¹⁰

For the purposes of this study, one tends to agree with John Bright and the majority of scholars that in the confessions one sees here "a prophetic individual, persecuted because of the word, suffering mental and physical anguish, and lashing out at his persecutors - and God."¹¹ It is therefore not possible to take these confessions and set them aside as simply the subjective expressions of the prophet's emotional temperament. Rather, they show us Jeremiah was not only a witness of Yahweh by his prophetic charisma but also through his personal suffering and broken humanity. It is in this frame of reference that the sufferings of the prophet shall be examined. For the sake of clarity, they shall be arranged into three groups: a) those in which the prophet's sense of loneliness and helplessness is the

10 von Rad, Op. cit., p. 204.

11 Bright, Op. cit., p. 214.

dominating thought, b) those which show us how his suffering was accentuated by intense sympathy with the people against whom he was called to testify, and c) those which show us his divided heart and the divine compulsion.

1. His Sense of Loneliness

a) His Call.— Before proceeding into an analysis of the struggles of Jeremiah, it is necessary to examine the account of Jeremiah's call to the prophetic service, because in it we are given the first glimpse into the working of Jeremiah's mind.

The word of Yahweh was addressed to me, saying,

'Before I formed you in the womb I knew you;
before you came to birth I consecrated you;
I have appointed you as prophet to the nations'

I said, 'Ah, Lord Yahweh; look, I do not know
how to speak: I am a child!'

But Yahweh replied,
'Do not say, "I am a child."
Go now to those to whom I send you
and say whatever I command you.
Do not be afraid of them,
for I am with you to protect you -
it is Yahweh who speaks!'

Then Yahweh put out his hand and touched my
mouth and said to me:

'There! I am putting my words into your mouth.
Look, today I am setting you
over nations and over kingdoms,
to tear up and to knock down,
to destroy and to overthrow,
to build and to plant.' (1:4-10)

Seldom has a man been less naturally inclined to his vocation than Jeremiah. From the very first, Jeremiah is disclosed as a man quiet and sensitive by nature, a man who recoiled from the task to which he felt predestined even before birth. The message he was commissioned to deliver was sure to arouse the hostility of the people. He was to set himself against everyone, because God's judgment was against the whole land of Judah - its kings, priests and people.¹²

Commentators have usually ascribed Jeremiah's reticence in accepting the call of prophetic service to "his modest, shrinking, tenderly sensitive nature."¹³ Perhaps this is so but in addition to this one can readily understand that the task that lay ahead for Jeremiah which was:

to root up and to tear down,
to destroy and to overthrow,
to build and to plant. (1:10)

would loom as a great obstacle for a man of such sensitivity. His inexperience and timid temperament both rebelled against the type of activity into which he felt he had to engage.

12 J.M. Derrett, "Law in the New Testament: the Parable of the Prodigal Son," New Testament Studies, No. 14, Oct. 1967, p. 68. Quite clearly in the Old Testament one comes across the young man being chosen precisely because he has no natural claims.

13 J.P. Hyatt, "Jeremiah," The Interpreter's Bible, New York, Abingdon Press, 1956, Vol. V, p. 802.

He was not the sort of man who relished lashing out against his people, nor did he enjoy the task of bringing judgment upon his own land and the kings that ruled it. Even though he believed that Yahweh would be with him to protect him and give him courage to speak his word, that did not minimize the fact that he was constantly beset on every side with danger. Nor did it change the fact that he suffered continuously from his extremely sensitive nature.¹⁴

One cannot help but compare Jeremiah's vocation with that of other prophets. The story of Moses is rather pertinent here. When God proposed to send Moses to Pharaoh to demand the release of his people, Moses remonstrated. He could not go, because his speech was thick and hesitant.

Moses said to God, 'Who am I to go to Pharaoh and bring the sons of Israel out of Egypt?' (Ex.3:11)

Moses said to Yahweh, 'But my Lord, never in my life have I been a man of eloquence, either before or since you have spoken to your servant. I am a slow speaker and am not able to speak well.' (Ex.4:10)

It was then that God patiently explained: it was God after all who gave man a mouth. So God simply promised to "be with" the mouth of Moses and direct his speech; and Moses went.

¹⁴ B. Vawter, The Conscience of Israel, New York, Sheed and Ward, 1961, p. 241.

'Who gave man his mouth?' Yahweh answered him. 'Who makes him dumb or deaf, gives him sight or leaves him blind? Is it not I, Yahweh? Now go, I shall help you to speak and tell you what to say.' (Ex.4:11,12)

Another close parallel to Jeremiah is the prophet Elijah. In 1 Kings 19, Elijah, fleeing from Jezebel's wrath, falls exhausted under a tree in the desert and prays that he might die; he then goes on to Horeb where, in a cave, he utters a lament. In this lament he protests his own faithfulness, bewails the nation's apostasy and the fate of the prophets, and his own isolation. He utters a personal lament regarding his plight, a plight that he is in because of his faithfulness to his calling.

He was afraid, and fled for his life. He came to Beersheba, a town of Juda, where he left his servant. He himself went on into the wilderness, a day's journey, and sitting under a furge bush wished he were dead. "Yahweh," he said 'I have had enough. Take my life; I am no better than my ancestors.' Then he lay down and went to sleep. (1K 19:3,4)

He replied, 'I am filled with jealous zeal for Yahweh Sabaoth, because the sons of Israel have deserted you, broken down your altars and put your prophets to the sword. I am the only one left, and they want to kill me. (1K 19:10)

Like Moses and Elijah, Jeremiah naturally shrank from his great task, not only because of his youth but also because of his deep sense of personal inadequacy. He was reluctant to accept God's word because his own nature was in

direct opposition to it.¹⁵ From a purely natural point of view, his lack of self-confidence was well grounded in his knowledge of what the prophetic vocation implied. The burden of the prophets' preaching was made up of rebukes and threats of judgment.

From remote times, the prophets who preceded
you and me prophesied war, famine, and plague
for many countries and for great kingdoms.
(28:8)

Jeremiah would have to campaign for the true knowledge of the covenant God of Israel. He would have to attack blasphemous infidelity to Yahweh. He would have to tell his countrymen that Yahweh was not satisfied with their lavish gifts and the pomp of their temple ceremonials but wished to be served in spirit and truth.¹⁶ Jeremiah realized that he would have to strive for the moral and social reformation of his people, because Yahweh was a moral God, demanding ethical righteousness from his people. A naturally repugnant task for a

15 H. Cunliffe-Jones, The Book of Jeremiah, Introduction and Commentary, London, SCM Press, 1960, p. 48.

16 S.H. Blank, Jeremiah, Man and Prophet, Cincinnati, Hebrew Union College Press, 1961, p. 11. In the temple sermon (7:1-15), Jeremiah said that God would destroy the Jerusalem temple as he had destroyed the sanctuary at Shiloh. The prophet's reference was ominous because for the people the temple was the very source and symbol of their security.

sensitive nature would be that of denouncing his people for their injustice and immorality. Cognizant of his all but overwhelming duties, this youth, probably in his late teens, humbly protested: "Ah, Lord Yahweh! I cannot speak: for I am only a youth."¹⁷

But Jeremiah's hesitation was overridden by Yahweh's promise to be with him. Jeremiah is warned that there will be opposition to his message but is also promised sufficient strength and power so that his enemies will not overcome him. His success, is guaranteed by the fact that God will be with him. His strength, after all, did not lie in his natural endowments but in the power of Yahweh who spoke through him and sent him forth.¹⁸

'So now brace yourself for action,
Stand up and tell them
all I command you.
Do not be dismayed at their presence,
or in their presence I will make you dismayed.
I, for my part, today will make you
into a fortified city,
a pillar of iron,
and a wall of bronze
to confront all this land:
the kings of Juda, its princes,
its priests and the country people.
They will fight against you

17 Blank, Op. cit., p. 70.

18 Bittenweiser, Op. cit., p. 80.

but shall not overcome you,
for I am with you to deliver you -
it is Yahweh who speaks.' (1:17-19)

b) His Celibacy.- Another document probably refers to an early period in the life of the prophet, appearing in Chapter 16:1-4.

The word of Yahweh was addressed to me as follows:
'You must not take a wife or have a son or daughter in this place. For Yahweh says this regarding the sons and daughters to be born in this place, about the mothers who give birth to them, and about the fathers who beget them in this land. They will die of deadly diseases, unlamented and unburied; they will be like dung spread on the ground; they will meet their end by sword and famine, and their corpses will be food for the birds of heaven and the beasts of earth.

One observes that the passage refers to the time in Jeremiah's life when he might have been expected to marry and have children. At any rate, Jeremiah connects the fact that he had not married with the fact that he expects a horrible end for his people. Because of this he felt it was immoral to bring children into a world that was about to be crushed.¹⁹

In this he is quite different from the other Hebrew prophets that went before him. Hosea, Isaiah, and Ezechiel mention their wives. Only one prophet was to forego marriage

19 Blank, Op. cit., p. 75.

in the Old Testament and that prophet was Jeremiah. Just as other prophets found in marriage a "re-enforcement of their prophet message (Hos.1:2-9; Is.8:3; Ez.24:15-17)"²⁰ so Jeremiah used the loneliness and hopelessness of his unmarried state as a sign, an enacted prophecy.

Jeremiah here records the fact that he is unmarried by design.²¹ His pain was without doubt greater because he had no family for comfort. He was denied the consolation of a family "that for the Semite crystallized the very purpose of life."²² We do not know whether Yahweh had ordered Jeremiah to be a celibate or whether this state was progressively imposed by the circumstances of his isolation and the persecutions that made him an outcast.²³ In any case, Jeremiah clearly gives his celibacy a symbolic value. The loneliness of his unmarried life foreshadows the desolation of Israel. His forlorn celibacy is an enacted prophecy of the imminent doom and death that is about to sweep the

20 Cunliffe-Jones, Op. cit., p. 128. Also see L. Legrand, The Biblical Doctrine of Virginity, New York, Sheed and Ward, p. 26-36, and J.M. Ford, A Trilogy on Wisdom and Celibacy, Notre Dame, University of Notre Dame Press, 1967, p. 24.

21 J. Bright, Jeremiah, (Anchor Bible), New York, Doubleday Co., 1965, p. 112.

22 Vawter, Op. cit., p. 243.

23 Legrand, Op. cit., p. 26.

country and make matrimony and procreation meaningless.²⁴

With prophetic insight Jeremiah could already see the shadow of death covering the land. It was his bitter task to announce the imminent desolation by his own life. The people of Israel would disappear; there would be no more heirs of the promises and children of the covenant unless Yahweh assembled a new people and repeated the exodus.²⁵

Having already been barred from the Temple (36:5), driven from his village (11:8; 12:6; 11:19) and from the community (20:2; 36:25), Jeremiah learned before the exile what it would mean to live rejected within his own country and away from Yahweh's sanctuary. He experienced what his people would later suffer. His celibacy became a sign or an enacted word with an ominous significance which portrayed what Yahweh was about to do.²⁶

Jeremiah explains in this same composition why he was avoiding people and not joining in their times of grief or pleasure. For so God said:

24 Jones, Op. cit., p. 128.

25 Blank, Op. cit., p. 74.

26 Legrand, Op. cit., p. 29. "Jeremiah's life of solitude announces the reign of death and anticipates the end of the world he lived in. His celibacy is in line with his message of doom."

'Yes, Yahweh says this: Go into no house where there is mourning, do not go to lament or grieve with them; for I have withdrawn my peace from this people - it is Yahweh who speaks - have withdrawn love and pity. High or low, they will die in this land, without burial or lament; there will be no gashing, no shaving of the head for them. No bread will be broken for the mourner to comfort him for the dead; no cup of consolation will be offered him for father or for mother.

'And do not enter a house where there is feasting, to sit with them and eat and drink. For Yahweh Sabaoth, the God of Israel, says this: Now before your eyes, in your own days, I will silence the shouts of rejoicing and mirth, and the voices of bridegroom and bride. (16:5-9)

Jeremiah cannot share in the ordinary mourning of his people because of the greater doom hanging over them. Nor can he share in the ordinary merry-making because of the deep threat that hangs over it all. Throughout his life he was torn between the desire to take part in the life and social gatherings of his friends and the overwhelming task that was his because of his prophetic office. It is true that the words of Yahweh gave him personal happiness, but Jeremiah was first of all a human being who loved people intensely, and who wanted their friendship, their companionship and their approval and who yearned to participate in their festivities. All this, however, the Word of God denied him.²⁷

²⁷ Anderson, Op. cit., p. 340.

c) Exclusion from Family.— Jeremiah's enforced loneliness and exclusion from his family is strikingly shown in the early part of his public life, during Josiah's reign. Having spoken out in favor of the reform of Josiah and the centralization of priestly functions at Jerusalem, in competition with his own priestly family at Anathoth, Jeremiah was attacked by his own relatives, who attempted to take his life. This event set the tone of much of the prophet's later difficulty and affected him deeply.²⁸

Yahweh revealed it to me; I was warned.
Yahweh, that was when you opened my eyes
to their scheming. 'Yes, even your own
brothers and your own family play you false.
Behind your back, they too criticise you
openly. Put no reliance on them when they
seem to be friendly.' I for my part was like
a trustful lamb being led to the slaughter-house,
not knowing the schemes they were plotting
against me, 'Let us destroy the tree in its
strength, let us cut him off from the land of
the living, so that his name may be quickly
forgotten!' (11:18,19)

Yahweh has revealed to Jeremiah that his own family and acquaintances have instigated a plot against his life. This proves to be a great shock to him and causes him to call down Yahweh's punishment and vengeance on these men. He compares himself to an innocent lamb being led to the slaughter since

28 Battenweiser, Op. cit., p. 116.

he was totally unaware of the ill feelings he had provoked.²⁹ Following this Jeremiah, if we may judge from the context, came face to face with the long-debated problem of Israel, the prosperity of the wicked.³⁰

You have right on your side, Yahweh,
when I complain about you.
But I would like to debate a point of justice
with you.
Why is it that the wicked live so prosperously?
Why do scoundrels enjoy peace?
You plant them, they take root,
and flourish, and even bear fruit.
You are always in their lips,
yet so far from their hearts. (12:1,2)

Here Jeremiah is undoubtedly contributing to a question that will be asked many times in his generation but which probably appears for the first time in the Old Testament. It stands as one of the most important themes in the Book of Job.³¹ Its importance for Jeremiah is quite evident because he has given himself completely to the service of Yahweh and as a

29 F. Moriarty, Introducing the Old Testament, Milwaukee, Bruce Publishing Company, 1960, p. 146. Also see G. Couturier, "Jeremiah," The Jerome Biblical Commentary, New Jersey, Prentice Hall, 1968, p. 313. "This figure of complete innocence and simple confidence inspired the author of the songs on the Servant of the Lord." (Is.53:7).

30 Robinson, Op. cit., p. 157.

31 Moriarty, Op. cit., p. 146. Also see G. Couturier, Op. cit., p. 313.

result of this service his life has become filled with danger and solitude.³²

In the light of this question we can better understand the startling violence of the curses heaped upon the heads of his enemies by the prophet:

But you, Yahweh Sabaoth, who pronounce a just sentence,
who probe the loins and heart,
let me see the vengeance you will take on them,
for I have committed my cause to you. (11:20)

You, O Lord, know me, you see me,
you have found that at heart I am with you.
Pick them out like sheep for the slaughter,
set them apart for the day of carnage. (12:3)

It seemed to Jeremiah that the whole cause of Yahweh hung on his inward faithfulness to the truth revealed to him, and also on his outward vindication in the sight of men. This could be the explanation of his passionate desire for the discomfiture of his enemies.³³ For Jeremiah this was not a matter of personal animosity. He knew that he had been called by Yahweh, and that in attacking him these men were rebelling against Yahweh. Their basic sin was hypocrisy: "You are upon their lips, but far from their hearts."³⁴ One

32 G. von Rad, The Message of the Prophets, London, SCM Press, 1965, p. 172.

33 J. Lindblom, Prophecy in Ancient Israel, Oxford, Basil Blackwell, 1962, p. 297.

34 Vawter, Op. cit., p. 242.

must also remember that as a seventh-century Hebrew, Jeremiah had no clear idea of an afterlife, in which injustices could be righted; if justice were to be done and Yahweh vindicated, it would have to be in this life.³⁵

Because of the connection between suffering and sin, there is a tendency in the Old Testament, to explain all suffering, even the suffering of an innocent man, as punishment for the sins of his parents or more distant ancestors.³⁶ The unsatisfactory and one-sided nature of this viewpoint was gradually recognized and Jeremiah was one of the first to apply explicitly the doctrine of retribution to the individual.³⁷

³⁵ Skinner, Op. cit., p. 224. See also M. Dahood, Psalms III, (Anchor Bible), New York, Doubleday Co., 1970, p. xli. The notion of "afterlife" among the Hebrews is continuously being re-examined by exegetes.

³⁶ G.A. Buttrick, (Ed.), "Suffering and Evil," The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible, New York, Abingdon Press, 1951, Vol. 4, p. 451. See also A.S. Peake, The Problem of Suffering in the Old Testament, London, The Epworth Press, 1947, p. 1.

³⁷ H.H. Rowley, Submission in Suffering, Cardiff, University of Wales Press, 1951, p. 10. See also E.F. Sutcliffe, Providence and Suffering in the Old and New Testaments, London, Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1953, p. 96. The individual during his lifetime was to be rewarded or punished for his own behaviour. This doctrine was consistently repeated in Proverbs, some of the Psalms and later in Sirach. But such teaching contradicted everyday experience which showed that the wicked often prospered and the just often suffered. So the just cried vehemently to God protesting the prosperity of the sinners. (Jer.12:1-4)

This question as to why the innocent suffer leads to

In those days, people will no longer say:

'The fathers have eaten unripe grapes;
the children's teeth are set on edge.'

But each is to die for his own sin. Every man who eats unripe grapes is to have his own teeth set on edge. (31:29,30)

Even so, it is not until the Book of Wisdom that divine retribution is largely reserved for life after death.³⁸

Thus, Jeremiah, who did not have this point of view, could hardly be expected to relish the idea of unjust suffering.

One might expect that God would have released Jeremiah from his apparently futile mission, but Yahweh's words only seem to indicate that this was just the beginning and that things would in fact get much worse before he is through.³⁹

another interpretation of suffering, e.g., that in solidarity with his people, the Servant of God has taken vicariously upon himself the punishment of the nation (Is.53:5). However, this did not solve the suffering problem either since there is no general agreement on who the SERVANT is.

The books of Job, Ecclesiastes and some of the Psalms attempted to reconcile the suffering of the just with God's providence and wisdom. The Book of Wisdom tries to prove that the final solution could only come with the revelation of eternal reward and punishment in the life hereafter. At any rate, the problem of suffering was never fully explained and is still with us.

38 Sutcliffe, Op. cit., p. 120.

39 von Rad, Op. cit., p. 203.

If you find it exhausting to race against
men on foot,
how will you compete against horses?
If you are not secure in a peaceful country,
how will you manage in the thickets along
the Jordan? (12:5)

Another poem describes a similar situation at some
stage of the prophet's life when his family sought to con-
coct a plan against him:

'Come on,' they said, 'let us concoct a plot
against Jeremiah; the priest will not run
short of instruction without him, nor the
sage of advice, nor the prophet of the word.
Come on, let us hit at him with his own tongue;
let us listen carefully to every word he says.

Listen to me Yahweh,
hear what my adversaries are saying.
Should evil be returned for good?
(For they are all digging a pit for me.)
Remember how I stood in their presence
to plead on their behalf,
to turn your wrath away from them.

But you, Yahweh,
know all their murderous plots against me.
Do not forgive their crimes,
do not efface their sin from your sight,
Keep their destruction always in mind,
when the time for your anger comes deal with
them. (18:18-20,23)

Thus, Jeremiah was to spend the greater part of his
life divorced from his family, hated by them, and the victim
of plots against him. His only consolation was that Yahweh
would see him through and deal out justice to his enemies.

2. His Concern for His People

The sense of isolation and loneliness which sprang from the prophetic mission of Jeremiah in relation to his times was itself accentuated by a spiritual suffering which was due to his intense sympathy with the people over whom he must proclaim the judgment of God. This is seen from the earliest days, when he discerns the peril from the north:

I am in anguish! I writhe with pain!
Walls of my heart!
My heart is throbbing!
I cannot keep quiet,
for I have heard the trumpet call
and the cry of war.
Ruin on ruin is the news:
the whole land is laid waste,
my tents are suddenly destroyed,
in one moment all that sheltered me is gone.
How long must I see the standard
and hear the trumpet call? (4:19-21)

The message which Jeremiah delivered aroused the anger of his people. He had set himself against everyone because Yahweh's judgment would fall on Judah. Even if he was as "a fortified city, an iron pillar, and bronze walls," (1:18) he was also as sensitive as a mother bereft of her children. The bitter tragedy of Jerusalem and his people was intensified by the very words he felt compelled to speak in the name of Yahweh.⁴⁰

⁴⁰ Skinner, Op. cit., p. 218.

a) Spiritual Insensitivity of His People.— The moral blindness and spiritual insensitivity of his people cut deeply into Jeremiah's own heart prompting him to mix his prophecies of doom with outcries of agony and grief:

Sorrow overtakes me,
 my heart fails me.
 Listen, the cry of the daughter of my people
 sounds throughout the land,
 "Yahweh no longer in Zion?
 Her king no longer in her?"
 (Why have they provoked me with carved images,
 with these Nothings from foreign countries?)
 "The harvest is over, summer at an end,
 and we have not been saved!"
 The wound of the daughter of my people wounds
 me too,
 all looks dark to me, terror grips me.
 Is there not balm in Gilead any more?
 Is there no doctor there?
 Then why does it make no progress,
 this cure of the daughter of my people?
 Who will turn my head into a fountain,
 and my eyes into a spring for tears,
 so that I may weep all day, all night,
 for all the dead out of the daughter of my
 people? (8:18-23)

His feeling for the fundamental order of things and the sacred source from which it comes was intensely acute and, consequently, was violently jarred by the moral and religious disorder of his contemporaries. For Jeremiah, moral disorder was a type of chaos which extended itself into the physical order. Sin was a return to chaos.⁴¹ In one of his finest

⁴¹ Ibid., p. 57.

images, Jeremiah depicted sin as a type or pre-Genesis creation in reverse:

I looked to the earth, to see a formless waste;
to the heavens and their light had gone.
I looked to the mountains, to see them quaking
and all the heights astir.
I looked, to see no man at all,
the very birds of heaven had fled.
I looked to see the wooded country a wilderness,
all its towns in ruins,
at the presence of Yahweh,
at the presence of his burning anger. (4:23-26)

Other prophets certainly experienced the conflict which Jeremiah knew. Amos and Isaiah, Micah and Ezechiel, all loved their people, but none suffered as Jeremiah did because of this.⁴² Unlike Amos and Isaiah, who are on Yahweh's side, and Hosea, who is caught in the middle, Jeremiah is on his people's side. He grieved more for his people than any other prophet. He agonized over their incurable sickness. As Isaiah before him had cried out in agony:

Avert your eyes; let me weep bitterly,
Seek not to console me for the tragedy
of the daughter of my people. (Is.22:4)

so, Jeremiah echoed this same phrase in reference to Rachel's weeping for her children:

⁴² F. James, Personalities of the Old Testament, New York, Charles Scribner, 1939, p. 312.

Hark, Lamentation is heard in Ramah,
Bitter weeping,
Rachel weeping for her children, inconsolable -
For her children, because they are not. (31:15)

The prophets that went before him did indeed suffer because their people were so callous in their love for Yahweh but none of them spoke so openly about this grief, nor did any one leave such a faithful record of his prayers for them. Jeremiah is the only prophet whose prayers are on record in sufficient quantity to invite analysis. They are unique in prophetic literature.⁴³

b) Identification with His People. - At various times in his life, Jeremiah was cautioned and even forbidden by Yahweh to pray for his people because their sins seemed to be unforgiveable:

'You, for your part, must not intercede
for this people, nor raise either plea
or prayer on their behalf; do not plead
with me, for I will not listen to you. (7:16)

Yahweh said to me, 'Do not intercede for
this people or their welfare.' (14:11)

Because Jeremiah was loyal to Yahweh and to his own prophetic office he admonished and scolded a calloused people. However, because he loved his people he prayed for them at the same time. The suffering that lay in store for his people was

⁴³ S. Blank, "The Confessions of Jeremiah and the Meaning of Prayer," Hebrew Union College Annual, Vol. XXI, 1948, p. 331.

for him a source of personal agony. He could not stand aside and regard the fate of his people as something that they deserved and not feel the pain himself. In the thirteenth chapter he shows us how real his identification with his people is when he describes how he himself will suffer if the people refuse Yahweh's love.

Listen, pay attention, away with pride -
Yahweh is speaking!
Give glory to Yahweh our God
before he brings darkness down
and your feet stumble
on the darkened mountains.
You hope for light,
but he will turn it into deep shadow,
change it into gloom.
If you do not listen to this warning,
I will bewail your pride in secret,
tears will flood my eyes,
for Yahweh's flock is led into captivity.
(13:15-17)

In another passage he weeps and laments over the coming disaster that will punish his people. The vivid portrayal of the ruin that is approaching can only be attributed to someone who identifies with the impending disaster.

You there! Call the mourning women! Let
them come!
Send for those who are best at it! Let them come!
Let them lose no time in raising the lament for
us!
Let our eyes rain tears,
our eyelids run with weeping!
Yes, the wail is to be heard from Zion,
'What ruin is ours,
what utter shame!
For we must leave the land,
abandon our homes!' (9:16-19)

Jeremiah's grief seems to have reached a new intensity when he sympathizes deeply with his people in a time of "drought and universal distress" when the plague is dreadful and strikes both people and wild animals.

'Judah is in mourning,
 her towns are disconsolate,
 they sink to the ground;
 a cry goes up from Jerusalem.
 The nobles send the lesser men for water,
 they come to the cisterns,
 and find no water,
 and return with their pitchers empty.
 The ground refuses to yield,
 for the country has had no rain;
 in dismay the ploughmen
 cover their heads.
 Even the doe abandons her new-born fawn in
 the open country,
 for there is no grass;
 the wild donkeys standing on the bare heights
 gasp for air like jackals:
 their eyes grow dim
 for lack of pasture.' (14:2-6)

Jeremiah is not just one who is reporting details of the drought and war. His sensitive nature compels him to picture himself as the noble who finds no water and the distressed farmer who yearns for rain. He certainly does not play the part of a detached spectator but enters into the suffering of his people because he is one with them. He is carried along with them in their grief and the laments that he utters are those of a suffering spirit, agonizing with the ones he loves so much.⁴⁴

⁴⁴ Blank, Jeremiah, Man and Prophet, p. 89.

One final passage displays how Jeremiah could interject some of his own feelings into a lament that he had put into the mouth of Jerusalem. It seems that he cannot control his own grief and thus inserts a line of his own which signifies the fact that he too is borne along in the tragedy.

Alas! I am crushed; grievous the blow!
(Myself, I said: "This is affliction indeed,
and I bear it.")
My tent is down,
All its ropes are torn loose,
My children have left me and are no more;
None is there to stretch my curtains,
To raise again my tent. (10:19,20)

Thus it can be safely seen that Jeremiah himself was caught up in the grief and suffering of the people whose welfare was one of his greatest concerns.

c) Rejection of His Word.- One can imagine how it must have hurt Jeremiah's sensitive nature when his prophetic message was doubted and openly scoffed at by the people he loved so much.

Look, they keep saying to me,
'Where is the word of Yahweh?
Let it come true then! (17:15)

In his abandonment to his enemies, Jeremiah is completely powerless - neither by his words nor by his suffering does he make any impression on them. Even though he had consistently prophesied that Babylon would win a complete victory, no one seemed to believe him and in addition to this he had

to battle with a group of false prophets who continuously brought false messages of hope to the people. "Jeremiah's clashes with his own colleagues were probably among his hardest battles."⁴⁵ This particular problem seems at times to overpower him and we can see him searching for evidence to point out the false prophet. It is surprising to see a prophet so much at sea with a problem. Jeremiah never did arrive at any easy solution and "the very fact that he could not point to any criterion to solve the problem showed him the full difficulty of the problem."⁴⁶

Jeremiah had a naturally friendly disposition and a sensitive spirit. The fact that his faithfulness to his prophetic calling exposed him to the continuous hostility of his people was a bitter thing to him and his only comfort lay in the fact that he had been faithful to Yahweh:

Heal me, Yahweh, and I shall be really healed,
save me, and I shall be saved,
for you alone are my hope.
Look, they keep saying to me,
'Where is the word of Yahweh? Let it come
true then!'
But I, I have never urged you to do evil,
the day of disaster was no desire of mine,

45 von Rad, Op. cit., p. 209.

46 Ibid., p. 209. See also G. Couturier, Op. cit., p. 324. Jeremiah attempts to establish a clear distinction between the true and false prophets. The constant message of the latter is one of peace rather than doom and his second condition is authenticity: a prophecy has to be fulfilled.

this you know;
what came from my lips was not concealed from
you.
Do not be a terror to me,
you, my refuge in the day of disaster.
Let my persecutors be confounded, not I,
let them, not me, be terrified.
On them bring the day of disaster,
destroy them, destroy them twice over! (17:14-18)

Had Jeremiah not recalled God's promise to make him "a fortified city, an iron pillar, and a bronze wall, against the whole land," he might well have given up completely. But he did not give up and things did get worse. The cardinal passage describing the prophet's loneliness is that in which he laments his birth, and reproaches Yahweh for his undeserved sufferings:

Woe is me, my mother, for you have borne me
to be a man of strife and of dissension for
all the land.
I neither lend nor borrow,
yet all of them curse me.
Truthfully, Yahweh, have I not done my best to
serve you,
interceded with you for my enemy
in the time of his disaster, his distress?
You know that I have!

Yahweh, remember me, take care of me,
and avenge me on my persecutors.
Your anger is very slow: do not let me be
snatched away.
Realise that I suffer insult for your sake.
When your words came, I devoured them:
your word was my delight
and the joy of my heart;
for I was called by your name,
Yahweh, God of Sabaoth.

I never took pleasure in sitting in scoffers'
company;
with your hand on me I held myself aloof,
since you had filled me with indignation.
(15:10,11,15-17)

That the prophet's grief is genuine we have no doubt when he asks Yahweh:

Why is my suffering continual,
my wound incurable, refusing to be healed?
Do you mean to be for me a deceptive stream
with inconstant waters? (15:18)

To us this may seem like no more than a colorful figure of speech. But to a man living in a semi-arid country where water is precious and scarce, a "deceptive stream" is a matter of life and death.⁴⁷ Finding no solace and afraid that Yahweh had abandoned him, the prophet could hardly have chosen a more powerful metaphor. Jeremiah implies by this accusation that in time of need, Yahweh has proved himself as unreliable as the idols which he had likened to a broken cistern which can hold no water (2:13).⁴⁸

This outspoken approach to God may be somewhat unnerving to our present way of thinking, where prayer is a tamer thing. But the blunt confrontation of man with God, so clear in the case of Jeremiah, is perhaps a sign that the

⁴⁷ Couturier, Op. cit., p. 315.

⁴⁸ Lindblom, Op. cit., p. 296 and G. Couturier, Op. cit., p. 315.

man is close, rather than far, from God.⁴⁹ His contact with God is not just a matter of convenience and custom but of supreme importance, of life and death. Such an attitude is characteristically biblical and appears frequently in the Psalmists, many of whom were no doubt influenced by the experience of Jeremiah.⁵⁰

However, even Jeremiah realizes he may have gone too far and that he has spoken rashly, for in the following lines Yahweh has him recognize his danger of becoming like one of the rebellious people against whom he had been set.

To which Yahweh replied,
'If you come back,
I will take you back into my service;
and if you utter noble, not despicable, thoughts,
you shall be as my own mouth. (15:19)

The reply which Yahweh gave to this blasphemous charge shows that it is quite probable that Jeremiah had thought seriously about giving up his prophetic ministry. Yahweh proclaims that only by returning willingly to it, and by bringing forth the precious in place of the worthless, could he again become Yahweh's mouth and enjoy Yahweh's protection.⁵¹ According to Skinner, this illumination, which comes to Jeremiah as an

49 Blank, The Confessions of Jeremiah and the Meaning of Prayer, p. 349.

50 Skinner, Op. cit., p. 222.

51 Anderson, Op. cit., p. 341.

answer to prayer, marks a turning point in his life.⁵² It can be rightly regarded as a renewal of the call of Jeremiah. Jeremiah himself recognizes that he who has been accusing others of impure and ignoble motives had best look into his own heart and sift out the noble from the base. Only as he cleanses himself from these lower impulses of nature can he hope to appear before Yahweh and be as Yahweh's mouth.⁵³

One tends to agree with J. Muilenburg,⁵⁴ who feels that Jeremiah's "capacity for empathy, both social and cosmic, his profound sympathy with his own people, despite their waywardness and infidelity, his ability to identify himself interiorly with their afflictions," are unparalleled in the Old Testament. But, Jeremiah discovered that throughout his life the very people for whom he prayed and to whom he gave his love unreservedly were the ones who caused him the anguish and suffering that encompassed his own life. It was Yahweh who gave him the strength and courage to continue in his mission despite the lack of support he experienced from his countrymen.

52 Skinner, Op. cit., p. 214.

53 Ringgren, Op. cit., p. 281.

54 J. Muilenburg, "The Terminology of Adversity on Jeremiah," Translating and Understanding the Old Testament, (Essays in honor of H.G. May), New York, Abingdon Press, 1970, p. 60.

3. The Divine Compulsion

a) His Divided Heart.— From this point of view, one can the better understand the prophet's divided heart. One can see the long-drawn-out conflict between the natural shrinking of his temperament and the consciousness that he was divinely commissioned to proclaim the spectacle of sin that called for punishment, in Yahweh's name. As Skinner points out:

The central interest of the "confessions" is the struggle in Jeremiah's mind between fidelity to his prophetic commission and the natural feelings and impulses of his heart. 55

When one considers the fact that Jeremiah was a man who naturally speaking had a very sympathetic and sensitive temperament, it follows quite normally that he drew away from the task that was his. His sympathetic nature compelled him to enter into the suffering of his people with an acuteness that was more than evident in his struggles.⁵⁶

In the sixth century B.C., Jeremiah had a difficult task to carry out because his message was one of severe condemnation for his people. It is quite understandable how this must have been hard for someone like Jeremiah who had

55 Skinner, Op. cit., p. 210.

56 Robinson, Op. cit., p. 162.

a "warm and emotional temperament."⁵⁷ Two powerful desires are struggling for the possession of Jeremiah's soul: desire for the approval of men and obedience towards Yahweh. What this obedience cost Jeremiah in his life and how he, at the same time, felt compelled to preach the word of Yahweh is strikingly shown in one of the most powerful outbursts that are recorded:

You have seduced me Yahweh, and I have let
myself be seduced;
you have overpowered me: you were the stronger.
I am a daily laughing-stock,
everybody's butt.
Each time I speak the word, I have to howl
and proclaim: 'Violence and ruin!'
The word of Yahweh has meant for me
insult, derision, all day long.
I used to say, 'I will not think about him,
I will not speak in his name anymore.
Then there seemed to be a fire burning in
my heart,
imprisoned in my bones.
The effort to restrain it wearied me,
I could not bear it. (20:7-9)

God has overpowered him and compelled him to prophesy. He has then made him a laughing-stock by the non-fulfilment of his word until Jeremiah vowed that he would never prophesy again, only to feel a fire burning in his bones and a desire to speak which he could not resist.⁵⁸

57 Moriarty, Op. cit., p. 147.

58 J. Sanders, "Suffering as Divine Discipline in the Old Testament and Post-Biblical Judaism," Colgate Rochester Divinity School Bulletin, Vol. XXVIII, 1955, p. 73.

In the above passage, "one is haunted by the impression that the darkness keeps growing, and eats ever more deeply into the prophet's soul."⁵⁹ Jeremiah has reached a stage in his life when his thoughts are on the verge of despair. While it is true that many of the forms of the lamentations were vivid and daring expressions often uttered with audacity, here, Jeremiah went far beyond anything like this. Overcome with his emotional fury, he charges Yahweh with a premeditated deceit.⁶⁰

This accusation contains all the bitterness of a deceived man. The term which he used in describing how he was duped is an expression which is used in Ex.22:15 as a term for seducing a virgin who is left to shame and ridicule. In the same manner, says Jeremiah, Yahweh has acted with him, an inexperienced boy. He enticed him with promises to be with him and overwhelmed him with his might, and then left him to the mockery and shame of his fellowmen. As often as he opened his mouth to speak God's word he was forced to speak of doom. This same word made him an object of ridicule and laughter. He admits that he attempted to escape from the intolerable burden but the WORD with which he was

59 von Rad, Op. cit., p. 203.

60 Ibid., p. 203.

inspired was like a fire in his breast (heart).⁶¹ He even dallied with the thought of casting off the burden of responsibility and living the natural life of men:

'Who will find me a wayfarer's shelter
in the desert,
for me to quit my people,
and leave them far behind? (9:1,2)

But that was only to aggravate his suffering. The word of the Lord which had been an outward reproach now became an inward torture:

'If I say, "I will not think about him,
I will not speak in his name anymore."
Then there seems to be a fire burning in my
heart,
imprisoned in my bones. (20:9)

Thus Jeremiah finds himself in a terrible dilemma. As a human being he craves for the approval of his fellow-men but as a spokesman for Yahweh, he realizes he must speak the word else he will be burned out inwardly. The last expression, "The effort to restrain it wearied me, I could not bear it," is one of the most moving and powerful expressions

⁶¹ Robinson, Op. cit., p. 156. "It must be remembered that the body, not the soul, is the essential personality for Hebrew psychology; man is an animated body, not an incarnated soul as with the Greeks." The Hebrew language does not distinguish within man a seat of intellectual operations; these are located in the heart - in Hebrew the heart is the organ of thought rather than of feeling. Also see J. Muilenburg, "Jeremiah the Prophet," The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible, New York, Abingdon Press, 1962, Vol. 2, p. 829. "In Jeremiah the theology of the Word reaches its culmination."

that the Old Testament has in describing the compulsion that can come upon a man from God. Here God's relationship to man is placed at that deepest level of human experience where the question is no longer about a free choice or intellectual agreement, but is simply the question of a total submission to a power greater than man.⁶²

b) Personal Anguish and Despair.— Yahweh has brought Jeremiah into a situation from which he can neither exit nor retreat. In the midst of his suffering he calls out in confidence to Yahweh:

But Yahweh is at my side a mighty hero;
my opponents will stumble, mastered,
confounded by their failure;
everlasting, unforgettable disgrace will be
theirs.
But you, Yahweh Sabaoth, you who probe with
justice,
who scrutinize the loins and heart,
let me see the vengeance you will take on them,
for I have committed my cause to you.
Sing to Yahweh,
praise Yahweh,
for he has delivered the soul of the needy
from the hands of evil men. (20:11-13)

On the one hand, his confidence in Yahweh compels him to continue with his mission and speak his word. On the other hand, what is to become of him as a result of this? His days

62 Lindblom, Op. cit., p. 295.

are to end in complete shame (20:18) and so finally - and this is the supreme consequence - Jeremiah curses the complete abandonment of his life. It is here that we find the expression of the prophet's personal anguish and despair.⁶³

A curse on the day when I was born,
no blessing on the day my mother bore me!
A curse on the man who brought my father
the news,
'A son, a boy has been born to you!'
making him overjoyed.
May this man be like the towns
that Yahweh overthrew without mercy;
May he hear alarms in the morning,
the war cry in broad daylight,
since he did not kill me in the womb;
my mother would have been my tomb
while her womb was swollen with me.
Why ever did I come out of the womb
To live in toil and sorrow
and to end my days in shame! (20:14-18)

Here we see the prophet in an hour when he feels completely overcome by his grief and the burden he has to bear seems to be more than he can take. In contrast to the other confessions, we see no ray of hope or assurance to relieve the depression that envelops him. No comforting thoughts surround him. It is simply an isolated expression of despondency with no relief in sight. Nothing resembles this passage in the Bible except Job 3.⁶⁴

63 G. Couturier, Op. cit., p. 319. See also Buttenweiser, Op. cit., p. 127.

64 Bright, Jeremiah's Complaints, p. 213.

This is probably the lowest point in Jeremiah's spiritual struggle where the prophet, having reached the limit of his mental and spiritual endurance, curses both the day of his birth and the innocent messenger who brought the glad news of Jeremiah's birth to his father. He wished that he had never been born or at least that he had died at birth. The whole passage reveals the depth of despair into which Jeremiah had fallen.

c) The Divine Compulsion.- Jeremiah's uniqueness lies in the consciousness of his own human existence and value. It is this that leads him again and again into a controversy with Yahweh. There is within Jeremiah a continual tension between Jeremiah the man and Jeremiah the prophet, and this tension, which had its inception with his call, continued throughout his entire life. Despite the fact that at different times he was assured by Yahweh that Yahweh was with him and would support him he never seems to reach the point where he can accept his office with pleasure and certainty. Until the very end of his life he approaches his task with a certain amount of distaste and reluctance. At the same time, he is overwhelmed by the urgency of Yahweh's word and proclaims it faithfully. Despite his initial hesitance and fear, he knows that he has been called to bring the burning

word to his people.⁶⁵

Jeremiah, however, was no fanatic, not a doctrinaire, a man moved by no overriding conviction of any kind. He was what he was not for any belief in himself, but for lack of it. He is a patron neither of the positive thinker, nor of the 'man of principle,' nor of the conformist. He was only a weak, rather conventionally minded Israelite caught up by the grace of God and, by his faith, given the strength and the imperative to do what his every natural fibre prompted him not to do. Thus did prophecy reveal itself in a life. 66

In conclusion, one can see that like the prophets before and after him, Jeremiah is under the compulsion of the divine imperative to speak all that is commanded him. Most of his fellow prophets were persecuted and denied the support of their countrymen. Isaiah was one of the prophets who had to face the fact that his preaching would fall on deaf ears and that he would again and again meet nothing but rebellion and resistance. Nevertheless, he was forced to continuously bring the divine judgment against his own people. Ezekiel is another prophet who must bring sentence to a callous and indifferent audience and in the call that he received from Yahweh we find a scroll inscribed on both sides and on it was written "lamentations, wailings,

65 M.M. Bourke, "Jeremiah and Job," Jubilee, August, 1965, p. 42.

66 Vawter, Op. cit., p. 244.

moanings." (Ez.2:10) But no prophet suffered with the intensity and acuteness that Jeremiah displayed. From his earliest youth, bereft of family and friends he recoiled from the task given to him. The very people for whom he would undergo untold anguish were to turn bitterly against him and throughout it all he found himself torn between the compulsion to speak and the natural impulses of his heart. In the long run, it is only the "ultimate power and sovereignty of God that stands over against Jeremiah's inability and frailty."⁶⁷

Naturally, one wonders what happened to Jeremiah as a result of these sufferings and tribulations. Did he despair of religion and find that the word of God could not really build or plant or renew? Or, was the word of God the source of a new and intimate religious relationship with his God? That will be the subject of our next chapter.

⁶⁷ Muilenburg, Op. cit., p. 63.

CHAPTER III

THE RESULTS OF HIS SUFFERINGS

In the case of Jeremiah, all the sufferings that he had experienced purified his soul of everything that was unworthy and opened it up to Yahweh. Before expressing this in his prophecy of the New Covenant, Jeremiah practised a deep, inward religion. For him, religion constituted a personal fellowship with Yahweh and this aspect of his life will make up the first part of this inquiry. Eventually, his teaching reached its climax in his vision of the New Covenant and that will be the second part of our discussion.

1. Personal Fellowship with Yahweh

Before discussing Jeremiah's personal relationship with Yahweh, it is necessary to review briefly the predominant teaching that existed in early Israel concerning the relationship of the people with Yahweh. Jeremiah was influenced by this and his personal religion led him to rethink traditional teaching.

a) Collective Responsibility.— If we go back to the early days of Israel, it is quite clear that the sentiment of family and national solidarity was very strong among the

Israelites. Stress was always laid on the solidarity of the group and the relationship of the people to Yahweh was through the tribe, clan or nation. This meant that the individual person saw his relationship with Yahweh through the group.¹ Many examples of this are present in the Old Testament. Achan is put to death, not because he is to be revenged personally, but because he breaks the taboo on the spoil of Jericho and involves the whole of Israel in defeat and, on discovery, the whole of his family in destruction.

Then Joshua took Achan son of Zerah, with the silver and the robe and the ingot of gold and led him up to the Vale of Achor--and with him his sons and daughters, his oxen and donkeys and sheep, his tent and everything that belonged to him. All Israel went with him. Joshua said, 'Why did you bring evil on us? May Yahweh bring evil on you today!' And all Israel went with him. (Josh.7:24,25)

Another example to illustrate this point is when seven of Saul's descendants are executed to atone for the Gibeonite blood shed by Saul.

In the time of David there was a famine lasting for three whole years. David consulted Yahweh, and Yahweh said, 'There is blood on Saul and his family because he put the Gibeonites to death.' (2Sam 21:1)

¹ T.H. Robinson, Prophecy and the Prophets, London, Gerald Duckworth and Co., 1953, p. 138.

Throughout all the history of Israel men are treated from the point of view of their relation to the community, in religious matters as in civil.²

Along such lines, then, the collective sense of the family, the clan and the nation was conceived realistically as a unity, a unity which made possible the all-important doctrine of election, and gave unity to the history itself.³ The national unity became a most important fact for the history of Israel. It is characteristic of the genius and eventual contribution of Israel that this national unity was from the outset based on religion. The Israelites were welded into a unity sufficient to force their way into parts of Canaan. This they could do because they had such faith in Yahweh. He was the God who had led them out of Egypt into the promised land and he had freely chosen this people for himself. Israel was the chosen people linked to Yahweh

2 G. Couturier, "Jeremiah," The Jerome Biblical Commentary, New Jersey, Prentice Hall, 1968, p. 327.

3 G.E. Mendenhall, "Election," The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible, New York, Abingdon Press, 1962, Vol. II, p. 76-82. Also see J. Dillenberger, "Revelational Discernment and the Problem of the Two Testaments," The Old Testament and Christian Faith, (B.W. Anderson, Ed.), New York, Harper and Row, 1963, p. 164 and E. Maly, Prophets of Salvation, New York, Herder and Herder, 1967, p. 116. Election refers to God's action in forming a people for himself and in involving himself in the life of this people in order to accomplish his possibilities for them and for the world.

by a moral act. It was this relation which underlay the covenant of Yahweh with his people. "The covenant is with the nation, not with the individual Israelites except as members or representatives of the nation."⁴ Throughout the whole period of the Old Testament, this covenant with the collective personality of Israel remains the all-inclusive fact and factor, whatever the increase in the consciousness of individuality.⁵

For you are a people consecrated to Yahweh your God; it is you that Yahweh has chosen to be his very own people out of all the peoples on the earth. (Deut.7:6-8)

b) Individual Responsibility.— Even though, in general, the unit of religion in Israel was the group and not the individual, it would be incorrect to suppose that in the early period of Israel's history, there was little or no consciousness of the individual. Perhaps it would be more accurate to say that the individual was more conscious of being one of the group. In addition to this, there was much more fluidity in the ancient conception of both the

⁴ E. Sutcliffe, Providence and Suffering in the Old and New Testaments, New York, Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1953, p. 87.

⁵ C. Lattey, "Vicarious Solidarity in the Old Testament," Vetus Testamentum, Vol. I, 1951, p. 270.

group and the individual, so that one could merge into the other more easily than our modern world would allow. Thus the society could find realistic identification with an individual who represented it, such as the king or priest, and the individual instinctively enlarged his own consciousness so as to speak confidently in the name of the whole group, as does the prophet.⁶

It is with the prophets that the fuller sense of individuality was brought to the fore because they believed that they stood in an individual relation both to Yahweh and the nation. They were the eyes of the people toward Yahweh and the mouth of Yahweh toward the people. Their own personal relation to Yahweh was reinforced by the very demands they made of Israel in the name of Yahweh.

'Take your wrong-doing out of my sight,
Cease to do evil,
Learn to do good,
search for justice,
help the oppressed,
be just to the orphan,
plead for the widow. (Is.1:16-17)

Their message was to the nation, but they asked justice and mercy from the individual Israelite toward his neighbour as the true and essential fulfilment of Yahweh's desires. This

⁶ G. von Rad, Old Testament Theology, Vol. II, New York, Harper and Row, 1965, p. 232.

demand became increasingly a demand for something more than the external reformation of conduct. Hosea saw that what was wrong with Israel was its inner spirit of infidelity (4:12). This new emphasis on motive went far to individualize the relation of the Israelite to Yahweh.⁷

We see therefore, that there really was nothing drastically new in the notion of individual responsibility put forth by Jeremiah and Ezekiel (Ez.18). Jeremiah calls to mind the proverb which visits the fathers' sins upon the sons and takes the opportunity to reject it.

In those days people will no longer say:

'The Fathers have eaten unripe grapes;
the children's teeth are set on edge.

But each is to die for his own sin. Every
man who eats unripe grapes is to have his
own teeth set on edge. (31:29,30)

However, Jeremiah uses this proverb to bring forth a new truth, i.e., personal accountability. He does not give a new conception of Yahweh and his justice but puts a new emphasis on personal responsibility.⁸

7 J.L. McKenzie, "Divine Sonship and Individual Religion," Catholic Biblical Quarterly, No. 7, 1945, p. 37. Also see A.R. Johnson, The Vitality of the Individual in the Thought of Ancient Israel, Cardiff, University of Wales Press, 1964, p. 64.

8 Couturier, Op. cit., p. 327.

Even though Jeremiah follows along with his predecessors in their desire to build a new consciousness of individual personality and their insistence on inward faithfulness to the will of Yahweh, at the same time, it must be recognized that with Jeremiah we enter into an entirely different conception of the relations between Yahweh and man. If T.H. Robinson is correct, as far as we know, it was Jeremiah, "taught by his own bitter experience, who first of all Israelites realized that he held an immediate personal relation to Yahweh, which was independent of the nation to which he belonged."⁹

Jeremiah was not original in his doctrine of Yahweh, nor did he even reveal anything that could compare with the idea of Amos about righteousness, or Hosea concerning Yahweh's love, or even that of Isaiah concerning his holiness. We may even go further and say that he was not caught up in any majestic visions like Isaiah and Ezekiel. What Jeremiah did was take the ideas of his predecessors and put them to new uses.

In particular, his experience of an intimate and familiar fellowship with Yahweh threw new light on man's ways and Yahweh's ways.

9 T.H. Robinson, Op. cit., p. 139.

He looked into his own heart in the light of that fellowship and discovered what the sin about him really meant and what were its essential roots. He looked to Yahweh as the giver of the best in his own experience, the God who promised that if his servant uttered the best he knew, he would be as Yahweh's mouth and by this very experience would learn more about Yahweh's ways. 10

'If you come back,
I will take you back into my service;
and if you utter noble, not despicable, thoughts,
you shall be as my own mouth. (16:19)

As we read through Jeremiah, we are struck by the fact that again and again he stresses the need for his people to be true in their relationship to Yahweh and not act like unfaithful and corrupt spouses. This points to the fact that for him the gravest sins were those which affected the personal relations of men with their God and with each other. Jeremiah does not simply look at the outward, external acts of men but recognizes that it is within man's own heart that real motives are born.¹¹

'The heart is more devious than any other thing,
perverse too: who can pierce its secrets?
I, Yahweh, search the heart,

10 H.W. Robinson, The Cross in the Old Testament, London, SCM Press, 1955, p. 176.

11 J. Skinner, Prophecy and Religion, London, Cambridge University Press, 1930, p. 148. "Religion has its seat in the heart, which in Hebrew includes the reason and the moral sense."

I probe the loins,
to give each man what his conduct
and his actions deserve. (17:9,10)

Because he recognizes this inwardness of true religion, he also realizes that it is Yahweh himself who knows the depths of the human heart and sees what man is thinking and planning.

You know me, Yahweh, you see me,
you probe my heart, it is in your hands. (12:3)

Yahweh, who had made Jeremiah the tester or trier of Israel (6:27), was himself the supreme tester of their inner life:

'Am I a God when near - it is Yahweh who speaks -
and not one when far away?
Can anyone hide in a dark corner
without my seeing him? - it is Yahweh who
speaks -
Do I not fill
heaven and earth? - it is Yahweh who speaks.
(23:23,24)

His trust in the unfailing righteousness of Yahweh led him to recognize that the ultimate aim to achieve was not power, or knowledge, or influence but rather a deep relationship with Yahweh that was characterized by the spirit of the covenant and justice.¹² He portrays this most vividly when he pictures a man who enjoys this fellowship with Yahweh as:

12 H.W. Robinson, Op. cit., p. 180.

a tree by the waterside
 that thrusts its roots to the stream:
 when the heat comes it feels no alarm,
 its foliage stays green;
 it has no worries in a year of drought,
 and never ceases to bear fruit. (17:8)

In contrast to this, we see that the man who relies on his fellow man alone and is not seeking the will of Yahweh is:

like dry scrub in the wastelands:
 if good comes he has no eyes for it,
 he settles in the parched places of
 the wilderness,
 a salt land, uninhabited. (17:6)

We have seen that as a result of Jeremiah's own personal fellowship with Yahweh, he was able to appreciate the fact that sin is the refusal of man to correspond to the loving ways of Yahweh. This also taught him more of the divine nature and what sin means in relation to that nature. It is here that we see how very closely Jeremiah resembles Hosea in his theology. Hosea too is not satisfied with any outward sign but shows that the sin of the people towards Yahweh comes from the inner spirit.¹³

¹³ J. Muilenburg, "Jeremiah the Prophet," The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible, New York, Abingdon Press, 1962, Vol. 2, p. 825. "The influence of Hosea upon the young prophet is apparent in these oracles. The central theme of harlotry is the same in both, as is the emphasis upon the father-son relation, the bridal days in the wilderness, the lure of Egypt and Assyria, but more especially Yahweh's covenant with his people, the bond sealed in steadfast or covenantal love."

Their deeds do not allow them to return
to their God, since a prostituting spirit
possesses them; they do not know Yahweh.
(Hos.5:4)

Hosea is deeply impressed by the wrong that this disloyalty
does to Yahweh, the forsaken husband of his people.

Jeremiah also uses the covenant-love symbol to
describe Yahweh's reproach of faithlessness to the faithful
one:

"Yahweh says this:
I remember the affection of your youth,
the love of your bridal days:
you followed me through the wilderness,
through a land unsown.
Israel was sated to Yahweh,
the first fruits of the harvest;
anyone who ate of this had to pay for it,
misfortune came to them -
it is Yahweh who speaks." (2:1-3)

Because Yahweh carries forth this covenant-love to the end,
he himself suffers from the punishment he must deliver to
his people.

'I have abandoned my house,
left my heritage,
I have delivered what I dearly loved
into the hands of its enemies.
For me my heritage has become
a lion in the forest,
it roars at me ferociously:
so I now hate it.
Or is my heritage a speckled bird
for the birds to flock on her from all
directions?
Come on, all you wild beasts, gather round,
fall on the quarry!

Many shepherds have laid my vineyard waste,
 have trampled down my inheritance,
 reducing my pleasant inheritance
 to a deserted wilderness.
 They have made it a mournful, desolate place,
 desolate before me.
 The whole land has been devastated
 and no one takes it to heart. (12:7-11)

Because Jeremiah himself had found the security of Yahweh's
 friendship, he could imagine the future of the covenant-love
 for Israel:

Yahweh says this:
 They have found pardon in the wilderness,
 those who have survived the sword.
 Israel is marching to his rest.
 Yahweh has appeared to him from afar:
 I have loved you with an everlasting love,
 so I am constant in my affection for you.
 I build you once more; you shall be rebuilt,
 virgin of Israel.
 Adorned once more, and with your tambourines,
 you will go out dancing gaily.
 You will plant vineyards once more
 on the mountains of Samaria
 (the planters have done their planting:
 will gather the fruit).
 Yes, a day will come when the watchmen shout
 on the mountains of Ephraim,
 'Up! Let us go to Zion,
 to Yahweh our God!' (31:2-6)

Although the history of Israel was one of continuous rebel-
 lion against Yahweh, all she has to say is that she is sorry
 and Yahweh comes forth to meet her with an everlasting love:

I have loved you with an everlasting love,
 so I am constant in my affection for you.
 (31:3b)

It has been seen that the result of Jeremiah's life of suffering enabled him to find in Yahweh the centre of his life. Rather than become estranged and drift far away as a result of his trials, he used these very tribulations to establish a personal discourse with his God,

which expanded into a life of prayer and communion, in which all that concerned him, his temptations, his perplexities, and the burden of his work, formed the object of intimate dialogue between Yahweh and himself.¹⁴

Thus it seems that Yahweh, by separating Jeremiah from all human solaces and surrounding him with enemies, had thrown Jeremiah completely upon himself and the prophet literally had nothing left but Yahweh. Perhaps it was only through personal suffering that Jeremiah could grow to the stature that he reached as a prophet. While other prophets certainly communed personally with Yahweh, no other prophet left us with such evidence of the depth of his personal association with him.¹⁵ Jeremiah used the very trials of loneliness and exclusion from everyone as a means to arrive

¹⁴ Skinner, Op. cit., p. 222.

¹⁵ M. Battenweiser, The Prophets of Israel, New York, Macmillan Company, 1914, p. 80. "It was as if the measure of personal suffering was necessary to bring his religious endowment to its full development. It led him to a closer and more personal relation with Yahweh than we have evidence of in the case of any of his predecessor prophets."

at a greater trust in Yahweh and it also gave him a significant appreciation of the message he was to bring in his name.

In the words of Skinner:

Disowned by men and driven in upon himself, he found in the truth of his rejected prophecy an indissoluble link of communion between his own soul and God. In this individual response to the voice of Yahweh he discovered an earnest of that instinctive and universal sense of the divine in which he recognized the permanent essence of religion. 16

It would be a mistake to conclude, from Jeremiah's emphasis on personal relation to Yahweh, that he was concerned exclusively with the individual or that he should be called "the father of individualism."¹⁷ Jeremiah's emphasis on the individual does not detract at all from the common group. He was quite aware that the individual was not simply a separate person responsible for his own life but was rather

16 Skinner, Op. cit., p. 219.

17 J. Lindblom, Prophecy in Ancient Israel, Oxford, Basil Blackwell, 1962, p. 298. "Accordingly, it is not correct to say that Jeremiah was the first representative of individual religion in ancient Israel. It is true that we have a more intimate knowledge of Jeremiah than we have of other prophets, but this fact does not prove that he was quite unique. His individual disposition may have contributed to his frankness in recording his personal conflicts and victories. In addition, Jeremiah was a man of poetic gifts. Such personalities have always a propensity for giving literal expression to their feelings and other personal experiences."

part of the social whole. The emphasis on the individual was not a denial of the doctrine of corporate responsibility.¹⁸

It is sometimes supposed that Jeremiah and Ezekiel discovered the individual... It is not true that hitherto man had been regarded solely as a member of the community. Nor did these two prophets regard him solely as an individual. With them there came a new emphasis on the individual, rather than a discovery of the individual. 19

Above all, one should not forget that Jeremiah set his vision of the future in the context of a community, the New Israel. Individualism and collectivism were nicely balanced in the thought of Jeremiah, and one should not be stressed to the exclusion of the other. The personal, individual elements were certainly there, notably in the promised "knowledge of Yahweh." They were present as well in the promised "forgiveness of sins," but in the age of the New Covenant men were still to remember that they were members of a community and that it was through community life that they were to be saved.²⁰ It is this New Covenant to which we shall now turn our attention.

¹⁸ B. Vawter, The Conscience of Israel, New York, Sheed and Ward, 1961, p. 275.

¹⁹ H.H. Rowley, The Re-Discovery of the Old Testament, London, James Clarke and Co., 1946, p. 148.

²⁰ J. Harvey, "Collectivisme et individualisme, Ez.18, 1-32 et Jer 31,29," Sciences Ecclésiastiques, Vol. X, 1958, p. 174.

2. The New Covenant

Jeremiah was not simply satisfied to hope that he himself had achieved a certain depth of personal relationship with Yahweh but as a result of his own relationship he desired earnestly to extend this to the people of the future. His intimate, personal union with Yahweh gave him an insight into the nature of Israel's God Who, though bound to purify his people of their faults, would still, through his great goodness, offer salvation to all in a New Covenant. Thus Jeremiah lifted his eyes to the future and spoke of a New Community. For him this did not simply mean the present community of Judah but in the new age the tragic separation of the "house of Israel" and the "house of Judah" would be overcome and the people would become one in the loyalty which they would give to Yahweh.²¹

See, the days are coming - it is Yahweh who speaks - when I am going to sow the seeds of men and cattle on the House of Israel and on the House of Judah. And as I once watched them to tear up, to knock down, to overthrow, destroy and bring disaster, so now I watch over them to build and to plant. It is Yahweh who speaks. (31:27-30)

²¹ H. Cunliffe-Jones, The Book of Jeremiah, London, SCM Press, 1960, p. 202.

a) His Message of Hope.— As a result of this concern, it is quite natural that Jeremiah addresses some of the oracles found in the "Book of Consolation" to Ephraim, the "house of Israel" that had fallen into defeat in an earlier period. It is to them that he gives the following promise:

Yahweh says this:
 They have found pardon in the wilderness,
 those who have survived the sword.
 Israel is marching to the rest,
 Yahweh has appeared to him from afar:
 I have loved you with an everlasting love,
 so I am constant in my affection for you.
 I build you once more; you shall be rebuilt,
 virgin of Israel. (31:2-4)

Rachel, the ancestress of Northern Israel, is heard weeping bitterly for her children and is asked to stop crying, for "there is hope for your descendants." (31:17)

Is Ephraim, then, so dear a son to me,
 a child so favored,
 that after each threat of mine
 I must still remember him,
 still be deeply moved for him,
 and let my tenderness yearn over him?
 It is Yahweh who speaks. (31:20)

It is here again that we notice the close relationship that existed between Jeremiah and Hosea. Hosea too, continuously stresses the fact that Yahweh is a God of loving tenderness (hesed) who would not let his people go.

Ephraim, how could I part with you?
 Israel, how could I give you up?
 How could I treat you like Admah,
 or deal with you like Zeboiim?
 My heart recoils from it,
 my whole being trembles at the thought. (Hos.11:8)

Hosea had lived at a time when the Northern Kingdom was about to end. Jeremiah was the prophet who stood on the brink of the downfall of the Southern Kingdom of Judah and like Hosea he sought to give new courage and hope for the future of a united kingdom where Yahweh's love would unite all. In the very midst of deep distress he brought a message of salvation.²²

This is indeed a great day,
 no other like it:
 a time of distress for Jacob;
 but he will be freed from it. (30:7)

Jeremiah's greatest contribution to the message of hope, however, is his concept of the New Covenant where the vision of the ultimate restoration is profoundly expressed. This passage (31:31-34) has been acclaimed by many authors as "the most important single teaching of Jeremiah where his religious thought reaches its climax."²³ It is also

²² J.P. Hyatt, "The Book of Jeremiah," The Interpreter's Bible, (G.A. Buttrick, Ed.), New York, Abingdon Press, Vol. V, 1956, p. 1036.

²³ Ibid., p. 1037.

thought to be the message which formed the heart of his work and it is here that we find the "high point of his theology."²⁴

We have here an expansion of an oracle that Jeremiah in his early period directed to the Northern Kingdom:

The word addressed to Jeremiah by Yahweh: Yahweh, the God of Israel says this: Write all the words I have spoken to you in a book. For see, the days are coming - it is Yahweh who speaks - when I will restore the fortunes of my people Israel (and Judah), Yahweh says, and bring them back to possess the land I gave to their ancestors. (30:1-3)

Toward the end of his life he supplemented and revised this:

See, the days are coming - it is Yahweh who speaks - when I will make a new covenant with the House of Israel (and the House of Judah), but not a covenant like the one I made with their ancestors on the day I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt. They broke that covenant of mine, so I had to show them who was master. It is Yahweh who speaks. No, this is the covenant I will make with the House of Israel when those days arrive - it is Yahweh who speaks. Deep within them I will implant my Law, writing it on their hearts. Then I will be their God and they shall be my people. There will be no further need for neighbour to try to teach neighbour, or brother to say to brother, 'Learn to know Yahweh!' No, they will all know me, the least no less than the greatest - it is Yahweh who speaks - since I will forgive their iniquity and never call their sin to mind. (31:31-34)

²⁴ J. Bright, Jeremiah, (Anchor Bible), New York, Doubleday Co., 1965, p. 287.

Jeremiah proclaims that Yahweh will make a new covenant with his people. Here he takes up one of the "weightiest ideas of Old Testament theology - the idea of covenant."²⁵ At all decisive turning-points in the history of Yahweh's relation to Israel, the Old Testament speaks of covenant.²⁶ Many exegetes feel that Jeremiah spoke this oracle at a later time in his life, after he had witnessed and experienced the failure of the early Deuteronomic reform of Josiah and after the exile was already in process.²⁷

Although some authors have challenged Jeremiah's

²⁵ R. Rendtorff, Men of the Old Testament, London, SCM Press, 1968, p. 98.

²⁶ The notion of covenant cannot be dealt with extensively in this study. Some of the important works on the subject are as follows:
 K. Baltzer, Das Bundesformular, Neukirche, Neukirchen Verlag, 1964, 183 p., D.R. Hillers, Covenant, The History of a Biblical Idea, Baltimore, John Hopkins Press, 1969, 188 p., P. van Imschoot, Théologie de l'Ancien Testament, Paris, 1954, Vol. 1, p. 237-259, J. L'Hour, La Morale de l'Alliance, Paris, 1966, 95 p., G. Mendenhall, "Covenant Forms in Israelite Tradition," The Biblical Archaeologist, Vol. XVII, No. 3, Sept. 1954, p. 50-76, D.J. McCarthy, "Covenant in the Old Testament," Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. XXVII, No. 3, July, 1965, p. 217-240, Treaty and Covenant, Rome, Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1963, 230 p.

²⁷ B.W. Anderson, "The New Covenant and the Old," The Old Testament and Christian Faith, New York, Harper and Row, 1963, p. 229.

authorship of the passage,²⁸ the consensus of scholarship is in favour of accepting the authenticity of the passage.²⁹

Most will agree with Skinner who thinks that:

we may read into the words a view of religion so profoundly spiritual and personal that it is hardly conceivable that anyone else than Jeremiah could have written them. 30

b) Features of the New Covenant.— Before we attempt to give any significant information regarding the nature of the New Covenant, it is necessary to point out two features of it that give us important background material necessary for a proper understanding of its unique character. First, the oracle stands in the northern Mosaic covenant tradition, not in the southern tradition of royal covenant theology.³¹

28 B. Duhm, Israels Propheten, Tübingen, Verlag von J.C.B. Mohr, 1922, p. 456, and S. Blank, Jeremiah, Man and Prophet, Cincinnati, Hebrew Union College Press, 1961, p. 213 who feels that "the divine determinism in the new covenant passage is so little like Jeremiah's pattern that it casts strong doubt on his presumed authorship of the paragraph."

29 H.H. Rowley, The Growth of the Old Testament, London, Hutchinson's University Library, 1950, p. 102. See also A. Condamin, Le Livre de Jérémie, Paris, Librairie Lecoffre, 1936, p. 237, H. Cunliffe-Jones, Op. cit., p. 197, J. Bright, Op. cit., p. 287.

30 Skinner, Op. cit., p. 320.

31 von Rad, Op. cit., p. 217. "So far as we have found Jeremiah's prophecy to have roots in tradition the case is clear - Jeremiah stands and acts upon the Exodus-Sinai tradition, and this gives his preaching a very broad foundation."

It is true that Jeremiah does make references to the messianic prophecies.

'See, the days are coming - it is Yahweh who speaks - when I will raise a virtuous Branch for David, who will reign as true king and be wise, practising honesty and integrity in the land. In his days Judah will be saved and Israel dwell in confidence. And this is the name he will be called: Yahweh-our-integrity. (23:5-6)

Again in the Book of Consolation we find the promise of a ruler who will be in intimate connection with Yahweh.

Their prince will be one of their own, their ruler come from their own people. I will let him come freely into my presence and he can come close to me; who else, indeed, would risk his life by coming close to me? - it is Yahweh who speaks. (30:21)

However, it is quite clear that in the view of Jeremiah the concept of the New Covenant is based explicitly on that of the Sinai covenant. This is quite evident when he uses the ancient covenant words, "I will be their God and they shall be my people."³² Israel had definitely broken the covenant and deserved the rebuke:³³

³² H. Ringgren, Israelite Religion, Philadelphia, Fortress Press, 1966, p. 283.

³³ D.R. Hillers, Treaty-Curses and the Old Testament Prophets, Rome, Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1964, p. 88. Probably in many cases prophets used these treaty-curses as the source of their oracles.

And these men who have infringed my covenant, who have not observed the terms of the covenant made in my presence, I will treat these men like the calf they cut in two to pass between the parts of it. (34:18)

In addition to this, it would be true to say that Jeremiah had been gravely disappointed by the descendants of David and had seen many of the kings in his time misuse the people and turn them away from true worship to Yahweh. On the one hand, he had faith in the promise which Yahweh had made to David through Nathan and recognized it as important.

It is he who shall build a house for my name, and I will make his royal throne secure forever. (2Sam 7:14)

On the other hand, even though Jeremiah saw the New Covenant as an "everlasting covenant" (32:40), this would be brought about through Yahweh's gracious initiative for it was Yahweh's wish that they return to him with all their heart. This was something quite different from a covenant that would remain and endure despite what the people did.³⁴

Another important feature is that it is eschatological, as indicated by the opening phrase, "the days are coming," that is, "at an unspecified time in the future."³⁵

³⁴ J. Bright, "An Exercise in Hermeneutics, Jer. 31:31-34," Interpretation, Vol. XX, No. 2, April, 1966, p. 196. "The Davidic monarchy, likewise, he placed under the divine judgment."

³⁵ Ibid., p. 194. Also see Hyatt, Op. cit., p. 1038.

Clearly, the breach of covenant was on the people's side and it was only through the great intervention of Yahweh that a new relationship could ever be established. Like Hosea, Jeremiah sees that Israel had repeatedly, all through history, fallen away from true Yahwistic worship and had again and again put her hopes and confidence in false gods. For this very reason, he foresees that the only way the original covenant can be brought to its true intention is for Yahweh to make a new historical beginning for his people. As John Bright says, "It represents God's definitive act in behalf of his people."³⁶ Probably, Bultmann is also thinking along these same lines when he says that Jeremiah's prophecy moves into an eschatological dimension.³⁷ The New Covenant or the New Age cannot be dated exactly but rather "represents the future for which men hope, knowing that the time of its coming is measured by Yahweh's activity and purpose."³⁸

36 J. Bright, Ibid., p. 194.

37 R. Bultmann, "Prophecy and Fulfilment," Essays on Old Testament Interpretation, (C. Westermann, Ed.), London, SCM Press, 1963, p. 61.

38 B.W. Anderson, Understanding the Old Testament, New Jersey, Prentice Hall, 1966, p. 354.

c) Nature of the New Covenant.- What is the exact nature of this covenant and what relation, if any, does it have with the one that was made on Mount Sinai? It is important to notice that Jeremiah does not speak of a renewal of covenant but one which will be radically new and therefore quite different from the one made with Moses. This is a radical innovation from the original one because Jeremiah refers to the covenant which Yahweh concluded with his people when "I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt." The verb is used in the futuristic sense and as Claus Westermann writes, "The real significance of the new covenant lies in the fact that here the covenant is included in the promise."³⁹ This oracle is something new because it tells Jeremiah that Yahweh is about to do something that he has never done before in the history of Israel. Yahweh promises this and "brings to an end the previous history of God with his people."⁴⁰ This is why Jeremiah stresses the fact that this is a New Covenant "not like" the one that was made with the Israelites when they journeyed out of Egypt into the promised land.

³⁹ C. Westermann, "The Way of the Promise through the Old Testament," The Old Testament and Christian Faith, New York, Harper and Row, 1963, p. 219.

⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 219.

The majority of exegetes feel that even though the New Covenant is "not like" the original one on Mount Sinai, still, they see no complete rupture between the two and in many ways regard them as fundamentally the same.⁴¹ However, in order to better appreciate the true nature of the New Covenant we shall study both sides of the question.

What are the essentially new features of the New Covenant emphasized by the language "not like" (v32) and "no further need" (v34)?

The new religious relationship, first of all, consists in the fact that this will be a radically inward relationship with Yahweh.⁴²

Deep within them I will plant my Law,
writing it on their hearts. Then I will
be their God and they shall be my people. (31:33)

The important thing to recognize here is that Yahweh will make his will known to men in a very different way. Under the New Covenant he will speak directly to his people. No longer will his law have to be written on tablets of stone but rather he will "put his will straight into Israel's heart."⁴³

⁴¹ Couturier, Op. cit., p. 327.

⁴² H.W. Robinson, Op. cit., p. 171 and Skinner, Op. cit., p. 329. "The central truth, therefore, on which the emphasis of the prophecy lies, is the inwardness of true religion."

⁴³ von Rad, Op. cit., p. 213.

Yahweh will speak to each individual Israelite so that he will know what is right and be prepared to do it. In all probability this is the "most personal and individualistic view of the relationship between God and his people which the Old Testament presents."⁴⁴ It is new in the sense that it will confer a new, inward motivation and power for fulfilling the law already known. The content of the Sinai covenant was the revelation of the fact that Israel had been elected and that Yahweh's will was expressed in the law.⁴⁵ Most scholars feel that in the New Covenant Jeremiah introduces an entirely new concept of the covenant relationship between Yahweh and his people which would ultimately prevail. This new concept would in reality "nullify the necessity of all Torah in any external sense."⁴⁶ A.S. Peake's expression

⁴⁴ D.J. McCarthy, Kings and Prophets, Milwaukee, Bruce Publishing Company, 1968, p. 146.

⁴⁵ von Rad, Op. cit., p. 213.

⁴⁶ W.D. Davies, "Torah in the Messianic Age and/or the Age to Come," Journal of Biblical Literature, Monograph Series, Vol. VII, 1952, p. 17. Also see H.H. Rowley, Studies in Old Testament Prophecy, Edinburgh, T. and T. Clark, 1950, p. 157. "It was his poignant experience of the failure of the Deuteronomic reform movement that led Jeremiah to question the efficacy of the outward forms of religion and their necessity, and so created in him a distrust of written Torah in all its forms."

of this is typical:

The new covenant is new not in the sense that it introduces a new moral and religious code, but that it confers a new and inward power of fulfilling the code already given. The law ceases to be a standard external to the individual, it has become an integral part of his personality. 47

It is true that the Mosaic tradition had been rooted in the recollection that Yahweh had graciously favored his people and had brought them into Egypt and sustained them through the years.

And taking the Book of the Covenant, he read it to the listening people, and they said, 'We will observe all that Yahweh has decreed; we will obey.' (Ex.24:7)

However, the history of the people had shown that this covenant had been broken. Even the attempt of the Deuteronomic Reform to restore the Mosaic covenant had been a failure. It was with this background in mind that Jeremiah foresaw a New Covenant whose Torah would be inscribed on the heart. In contrast to the outward, external obedience the people had given to former covenant, their obedience would now come from the inner springs of faith.⁴⁸ According to von Rad,⁴⁹

47 A.S. Peake, "Jeremiah," The Century Bible, London, Thomas Nelson, Vol. II, p. 103.

48 J. Coppens, "La Nouvelle Alliance en Jér.31:31-34," Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. XXV, 1963, p. 17.

49 von Rad, Op. cit., p. 213.

In the new covenant the doubtful element of human obedience as it had been known up to date drops out completely... Men are to have the will of God in their heart, and are only to will God's will.

Perhaps the aspect of the New Covenant that is most radically different from the old is the fact that the previous history of Yahweh with his people is ended. Tradition and all the covenant renewal ceremonies which would have the effect of reactualizing the past are finished. There would be no need for religious instruction as in the past.⁵⁰ In Deut.6:20-25, we find that when an Israelite son inquires, "What is the meaning of the decrees and laws and customs that Yahweh our God has laid down for you?" he is to be told how Yahweh led his people out of Egypt by his mighty hand and worked great signs and miracles. This was to initiate him into the tradition of Israel.⁵¹ In the New Covenant this will no longer be necessary.

There will be no further need for neighbour to try to teach neighbour, or brother to say to brother, 'Learn to know Yahweh!' No, they will all know me, and the least no less than the greatest. (31:34)

50 Westermann, Op. cit., p. 219. "With the inclusion of the covenant in the promise the nature of the covenant was radically changed; it now means the end of the previous history of God with his people."

51 Anderson, The Old Testament and the Christian Faith, Op. cit., p. 234. Also see J. Bright, Op. cit., p.196.

Under the old covenant apparently it was the duty of the priests to instruct the people. The people needed cult and the teachers to force them to live up to the covenant stipulations. In the new time, Jeremiah claims that the people will not have to be forced into obedience to the covenant, nor will they need the prophets to continuously rebuke them and teach them Yahweh's will.⁵² The old covenant had failed, as Jeremiah saw it, because it had been an external thing, written down in a book and imposed on men by royal or ecclesiastical authority. In the New Covenant people will not need to be taught by human teachers because all who participate in the new law will "know" Yahweh.⁵³

Another distinguishing characteristic is that the New Covenant will be based on divine forgiveness. Again we must recognize that the old covenant illustrated the fact

52 Vawter, Op. cit., p. 275.

53 Couturier, Op. cit., p. 327. "In reference to the word "know," such a knowledge is the practical recognition of God in every action and situation - a life attitude." Also see H. Cunliffe-Jones, Op. cit., p. 197, D.R. Millers, Covenant, The History of a Biblical Idea, Baltimore, John Hopkins Press, 1969, p. 168 and P. Moriarty, Introducing the Old Testament, Milwaukee, Bruce Publishing Company, 1960, p. 154. "This 'knowledge' which appears frequently in the Old Testament, is a dynamic thing which combines intellectual apprehension of the truth with the fulfilment of God's commands. It embraces much more than what we are accustomed to associate with the term. To know God, is, above all, to do His will."

that Yahweh was a God who was "merciful and gracious."

This is evident when Moses calls upon him.

He called on the name of Yahweh. Yahweh passed before him and proclaimed, 'Yahweh, Yahweh, a God of tenderness and compassion, slow to anger, rich in kindness and faithfulness; for thousands he maintains his kindness, forgives faults, transgressions, sin. (Ex.6-7)

Yet in the very same passage we find that Yahweh is also a just judge who brings terrible judgment to his people.

yet he lets nothing go unchecked, punishing the father's fault in the sons and in the grandsons to the third and fourth generation. (Ex.7)

What is so astonishing in the New Covenant, according to Jeremiah, is that these very same people who by right should have been destroyed for their unfaithfulness and idolatry will have their sins forgiven and will be given a chance to begin anew. Israel will begin anew as the forgiven people.⁵⁴

since I will forgive their iniquity and never call their sin to mind. (31:34b)

The people will share in the knowledge of Yahweh because the barrier to this knowledge, sin, has been forgiven by Yahweh. Will the people thereafter sin no more? According to John Bright:

⁵⁴ B.W. Anderson, Understanding the Old Testament, Op. cit., p. 352. "When men stand humbly before God, shamed by their sordid history and contrite about their betrayal of their Lord, then all things will be made new."

That is a question that lies beyond Jeremiah's field of vision. The new covenant is God's final, gracious provision for his people; the question of its continuing endurance does not enter his mind. 55

Even though it has been important to emphasize the ways in which the New Covenant differs from the old, it is equally imperative to point out that as far as the form or content of the New Covenant is concerned, Jeremiah is not suggesting that the revelation given at Sinai is nullified nor does he in any way propose any alteration or expansion of the content. It is not his intent to draw a deep rupture between the two.⁵⁶ It was that same Exodus which, if only by contrast, supplied him with the very categories with which to describe the new redemption that he desired. The New Covenant would be in practice what the old one was in theory. In both cases it was concluded on the initiative and authority of Yahweh. The covenant relation is not ruptured but brought to a higher level of perfection.⁵⁷

55 J. Bright, Op. cit., p. 195.

56 H. Cunliffe-Jones, Op. cit., p. 198.

57 Anderson, Op. cit., p. 352. Also see Skinner, Op.cit., p. 329 and H. Cunliffe-Jones, Op. cit., p. 198.

To further illustrate some of the likenesses between the two we must recognize the fact that both include the Torah as an integral part of the covenant. In Ex. 24:3-8, we find that Moses "put all the commands of Yahweh into writing." So in the New Covenant, Yahweh says "Deep within them I will implant my Law, writing it on their hearts" (31:33). True, the new Torah is to be inscribed on the heart but this does not mean that it is reduced to a general sense of moral obligation arising out of man's relation to his neighbour. What is new is "that obedience to the law will not, so to speak, be imposed from without, but will be effected by a new creation in the heart of men."⁵⁸ This is a thought that occurs frequently in Jeremiah's theology because he firmly believed that man was incapable of determining his own ways or of making himself clean in the sight of Yahweh through his own efforts.⁵⁹

Can the Ethiopian change his skin,
or the leopard his spots?
And you, can you do what is right,
you so accustomed to wrong? (13:23)

⁵⁸ Ringgren, Op. cit., p. 283.

⁵⁹ von Rad, Op. cit., p. 216. "His thoughts constantly revolve round the tremendous bondage in which man is the prisoner of his own opposition to God. It is simply not in his power to determine his way; to no one is it granted to direct his own steps."

Well you know, Yahweh,
the course of man is not in his control,
nor is it in man's power as he goes his way
to guide his steps. (10:23)

The collapse of the state and the worship of Israel had left a spiritual vacuum which the individual Israelite was unable to fill. Jeremiah taught that Yahweh would fill it.⁶⁰

Jeremiah never speaks of a new Torah but always stresses the fact that the New Covenant will promote a new relationship that will develop from the inner springs of the heart.

Perhaps the key to the whole question of Torah is how it is viewed by Jeremiah. For him, the true Torah is the "revelation of the essential will of Yahweh. Berîth and Tôrâ are related to each other as form and content."⁶¹ The Torah was not, therefore, merely a set of external rules to be consulted but rather something to be learned and acted upon personally.

Another striking similarity is the fact that in both cases the reason for establishing each covenant was to bring about a relationship between Yahweh and his people. The

60 J. Bright, (Anchor Bible), Op. cit., p. cxviii.

61 Skinner, Op. cit., p. 332. Also see von Rad, Op. cit., p. 213 and Davies, Op. cit., p. 18.

characteristic formula of each covenant is:

I will be their God and
they shall be my people. (31:33b)

It is important to recall here that the original covenant established at Sinai was not initiated by the people but rather by Yahweh. Not only did they not initiate it, but they were in no position to restore it after they had broken it. It was Yahweh who chose this people Israel and entered into their history as their God. This is why the words, "I will be their God" signify the fact that he has committed himself to lead them into the future as a God of trust and dependability. This he has done because he willed to do so freely and has willingly committed himself to be their God. If we carefully study the New Covenant, we see that Jeremiah is bringing this truth back to mind as a foreshadow of what the future will be like when Yahweh will still bind himself to Israel as "my people" and they in faith will call him "their God." The old covenant created a people of God: so does the new.⁶²

Finally, the New Covenant, was addressed to the whole people of Israel. It is true that Jeremiah lived at a time when only "the house of Judah" was in existence, since

⁶² W.G. Most, "A Biblical Theology of Redemption in a Covenant Framework," Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. XXIX, 1967, p. 9.

the Northern Kingdom had fallen in 721 B.C., but the saving event of which he speaks was certainly to be shared by the whole of Israel, "in particular by the exiles of 721 and 598."⁶³ It was the "people of God" as a whole who remembered the fact that Yahweh had led them out of Egypt and that they as a nation had been elected to share in the making of the Sinai covenant. In the original covenant there was no thought of division of kingdoms or subsequent rulers. The covenant was made with the nation as a whole. This brings us back to the basic point that as in the old covenant, Jeremiah stresses the important factor that the individual has access to Yahweh within the community of which he is a member.⁶⁴ As Skinner says:

On the one hand he is clinging to the national idea as the only form in which the religious community was conceivable to him; and on the other hand the conception of religion as direct contact between the individual soul and God. Both are represented in the New Covenant; it is a national covenant, made with the house of Israel; and at the same time it is individual, resting on the possession by each member of the community of personal knowledge of God. 65

63 von Rad, Op. cit., p. 212.

64 Vawter, Op. cit., p. 275.

65 Skinner, Op. cit., p. 333.

Our discussion has pointed out that in Jeremiah's prophecy of the New Covenant, he did not seek to point out in any way that the Sinai covenant and its contents had become obsolete. He still believed that Yahweh's original offer to Israel, which was that she should be his people and obey his commandments, was still valid. The newness of the New Covenant lies in the human sphere, in a change in the hearts of men.

What is here outlined is the picture of a new man, a man who is able to obey perfectly because of a miraculous change of his nature. 66

In conclusion, we can see that the sufferings of the prophet Jeremiah led him to a deep and lasting relationship with Yahweh which was probably due to the fact that these very sufferings made him place his trust and reliance on Yahweh. Despite the fact that he endured many persecutions for the sake of his people, these same trials deepened within him the intense love he had for his people. This very love was expressed in his vision of the New Covenant which was to be for them a sign of hope and encouragement. His earnest desire was that religion should be to all men what it was to him - the response of the heart of the voice

66 von Rad, Op. cit., p. 213.

of God within. In projecting his own personal experience into the future as the form which true religion must assume universally, he threw a bright beam of light across the ages by the words of his New Covenant which has since become:

one of the most momentous testimonies
to the hope of a lasting and undisturbed
relationship between God and mankind. 67

67 Rendtorff, Op. cit., p. 99.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Jeremiah, who lived through one of the most turbulent periods of the Hebrew nation, was one of the prophets of Israel. During his lifetime, he continuously spoke to his people of Yahweh's love for them and urged them incessantly to turn towards Yahweh and fulfil the demands of the covenant. Because of his message, which was to proclaim doom to his countrymen, he suffered in numerous ways and experienced the anguish of loneliness.

His very youth and inexperience were the cause of continuous outcries against his call. He was always a man who recoiled from the task to which he felt that he had been predestined even before birth. In addition to this, because he felt that a horrible end would come to his people, he did not marry and thus was denied the security of a family in his struggles. Finally, his own family were among his bitterest enemies. His relatives continuously attacked him and attempted to take his life on various occasions.

To add to this, Jeremiah's sufferings were greatly intensified by the fact that he identified himself with his people. More than any other prophet he suffered and anguished because he loved his people. Their lack of response to Yahweh's call and their callous indifference to Yahweh's

wishes were the source of inner stress and anxiety for Jeremiah. In spite of his love for them, these very people were the ones who doubted his word, openly scoffed at him and caused him to cry out in anguish.

As a result of this, it can be seen that throughout Jeremiah's life he continuously had to struggle because of the conflict that was in his being. He was a prophet with a divided heart, torn between the desire to proclaim eagerly Yahweh's word and the temptation to retire from this because of his natural love for solitude and peace.

The results of all this were important for Jeremiah and the people whom he served. For Jeremiah, his sufferings led him to a deep fellowship with Yahweh and his sense of isolation and rejection made him rely ' all the more on Yahweh. In turn, he desired that all his people would adopt a deeper relationship with Yahweh and this he proclaims in his vision of the New Covenant. In the New Covenant, Yahweh will speak directly to his people and write his law on the heart of the individual. All men will live in the personal knowledge that Yahweh is their God.

In conclusion, the sufferings of the prophet Jeremiah were the means of a new and greater union with his God. Though he was an innocent man suffering for his people, he

underwent countless struggles which in the long run proved to be the source of a deeper relationship. That would seem to be at least one aspect of the importance of Jeremiah in the history of Israelite religion until its culmination in the New Testament.

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