SUBMISSION AND RECEIPT OF CLASS OF 2007

COMPLETED RABBINIC THESIS

I, Jocelyn Hudson, hereby submit two (2) copies of my/our
(Please print)
completed thesis in final form, entitled

Toward a Prophetic Theology

Jocelyn Hudson 2/28/07
Student Signature / Date:

Additional Students, if applicable (please print, sign, and date)

"The author has my permission to submit this thesis in partial fulfillment for requirement for ordination."

Name of Advisor: Rachel Adler

Signature of Advisor: Rachel Adler

RECEIPT BY REGISTRAR

The above named thesis was received by the Registrar's Office

RECEIVED FEB 2 8 2007

Date

Carol Soffer
Registrar

by

Toward a Prophetic Theology

By Jocee Hudson

In partial fulfillment for requirement for ordination.

Rabbinic Thesis
Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion
Los Angeles, California
Advisor: Dr. Rachel Adler
March 1, 2007

Table of Contents

Chapter One
Toward a Prophetic Theology

Introduction

In some ways, the aim of this chapter—to compare the role prophetic theology plays in the work of liberation theologians and Reform Jews—is an unfair premise. Liberation theology was born amongst the poor of Latin America. The Reform social justice movement emerged gradually amongst clergy and filtered down into the consciousness of the laity. Liberation theology surfaced out of an already established religious tradition; its aim was to change the way people acted, thought, and believed, not the way they prayed or experienced ritual. Reform Judaism was initially intended to serve as a vehicle for making reforms to Jewish ritual, theology, and observance; it was only half a century into the movement's American inception that the movement adopted a social justice focus. Despite these differences, I believe comparing these two modern prophetic movements is a critical exercise for Reform Jews living today. Reform Jews have an enormous amount to learn from Liberation theologians. The lessons of Liberation theology may hold the keys we need to unleash, once again, a prophetic voice within our movement.

There is a deep disconnect between the ways in which Reform Jews and Liberation theologians speak about social justice. Reform Jews, historically, spoke about justice work as being separate from or a replacement of ritual and observance. Liberation theologians speak of the two as being one and the same. Reform Jews traditionally called themselves a "prophetic movement," but neither their internal documents nor their

printed speeches/memoirs provide evidence of a widespread prophetic heritage—they talk *about* the prophets and text (sometimes!), but they don't talk *through* the prophets. Liberation theologians link every premise—every assertion—they make to biblical texts. Their way of seeing justice is not only rooted in—but blooming and budding with—Bible.

In order to understand *what* Reform Judaism and Liberation theology are and *who* the leaders of these movements are, the bulk of this chapter is dedicated to analytical histories of Reform Judaism and Liberation theology. These histories are intended to introduce readers to both the historical contexts of the movements and to the individuals who helped define the shape of these movements. Most importantly, these histories will include the major trends of thinking central to the two groups. The history of Reform Judaism, because of the nature of the movement's development, is focused more on historical trends, while the history of Liberation theology, because of the nature of the movement's development, is focused more on theological assertions. While these two sections are clearly not parallel, they have a similar purpose—to prepare the reader fully to engage with the final portion of the chapter: *Toward a Reform Prophetic Theology: What Reform Jews Can Learn from Liberation Theology.*

It has long been assumed that the Reform movement <u>was once</u> a Prophetic movement and that, along the way, something happened and we lost our focus. In this chapter, I will show that the Reform movement was <u>never</u> a true Prophetic movement. However, by learning from the trends of our history and considering the rich lessons we can glean

from Liberation theology, we may still yet be able to claim our long hoped for dream—to be a movement of Justice, a true Prophetic Judaism.

Reform Judaism

First Steps Toward Reform

In order to understand the Reform movement's relationship to social justice issues in general and Prophetic Judaism in particular, one must look to the Reform movement's first steps in North America. In his book *Response to Modernity: A History of the Reform Movement in Judaism* Michael Meyer reports that Jews first arrived in North America in 1654 and lived without efforts toward institutional reform until 1824 (Meyer 228). The first Reform congregation, Reformed Society of Israelites, was founded in 1825 by a small group of people who were disgruntled by their inability to bring moderate ritual reforms to Kaal Kodesh Beth Elohim in Charleston, South Carolina (Meyer 228). The intellectual leaders of the Reformed Society of Israelites, in particular Isaac Harby (1788-1828) rejected the laws and rulings of the rabbis and spoke of a return to biblical Judaism (Meyer 230-231). Of course, Harby did not really intend to return "biblical Judaism," as there were plenty of aspects of biblical Judaism he had no interest in adopting; rather, he wanted to create to a new Judaism born out of his understanding of biblical Judaism. For Harby, the rabbis of the Talmud and Middle Ages were in diametric opposition to the enlightened, modern, rational world of America. Harby wanted his Jewish community to reflect the trends of his contemporary society. While the Society never reached full fruition, its creation marked a change in Charleston. By 1836, Beth Elohim showed initial signs of reform, as well, and, by 1841 the congregation was primarily serving the city's Reformers (Meyer 234). Meyer reports that by 1855 there were congregations that had adopted varying degrees of reforms in Charleston, Baltimore, New York, Albany, and Cincinnati (Meyer 235). The "reforms" that these

congregations addressed were particular in nature. These communities were concerned with changing internal practice and praxis; their "reforms" involved no notions of changing the world surrounding them.

Isaac Mayer Wise

It was in this climate of reform that Isaac Mayer Wise (1819-1900) emerged as the Reformers' first leader (Meyer 238). Sefton Temkin, author of *Isaac Mayer Wise 1819-1875*, states that Mayer Wise[1] was a schoolmaster from Bohemia. The details of his formal education are unknown and it is unclear if Mayer Wise ever received rabbinic ordination, although it is known that he attended a famous yeshivah outside of Prague and took some university courses (Temkin 21). It was not until Mayer Wise immigrated to the United States in 1846, that his professional career blossomed. Mayer Wise came to the United States looking for freedom (Meyer 239). He was a complicated man who suffered from "recurrent severe depressions, hypochondria, and the wish for death," but he was also imbued with a hefty sense of self-confidence, an ability to speak clearly and persuasively about popular topics of his day, and, most importantly in the still new United States of America, he was blessed with an unwavering belief that he "'was a child of destiny'" (Meyer 238). Mayer Wise was a generalist. He could write, speak, and lecture on a wide breadth of topics and had enough depth in these areas to hold his own among intellectuals of his time. He had a firm handle on the realities of Jewish life in America and abroad and he had innate leadership abilities (Meyer 238-239).

[1] I use the name "Mayer Wise" to distinguish Isaac Mayer Wise from Stephen S. Wise, who I refer to as "Wise."

To understand Mayer Wise, one must understand this: Isaac Mayer Wise loved America. He celebrated the English language. He believed that America and the Law of Moses were closely linked (Meyer 239-240). Mayer Wise described America in almost messianic terms; for Mayer Wise, America was the land of freedom and opportunity. It is, therefore, not surprising that Mayer Wise's primary goal, throughout his career, was to unify American Judaism. Mayer Wise did not prize consistency of message or unwavering belief; rather, he sought to create a single Judaism for America and he was willing to compromise and bend his own beliefs to achieve his dream (Meyer 240). Mayer Wise operated publicly as a moderator between extremes. Indeed, in 1855, Mayer Wise engaged in his most ambitious proposal, a call "for deliberation on union, a regular synod, a common liturgy referred to as *Minhag America*, and a plan for Jewish education" (Meyer 243). Mayer Wise rallied nine rabbis, both from Orthodox and Reform circles to sign his proposal. He followed the proposal with a conference in Cleveland. At this conference, he was elected president and he soon realized that if he wanted to create a unified message he would need to engage in extreme compromise. His willingness to do so—to the point of "proposing that the conference agree on the divinity of the Bible and the obligatory authority of the Talmud," surprised even the Orthodox rabbis in attendance (Meyer 243). At the conclusion of the conference, Mayer Wise declared the venture wholly successful and saw its conclusion as evidence that his own dream of a defined American Judaism had been realized. The backlash to the event, however, was stunning. Rabbi Isaac Leeser, the best known Orthodox rabbi in attendance, was immediately hammered by his supporters for his perceived concessions

to the Reform camp and, even more strongly, Mayer Wise was virulently attacked by Rabbi David Einhorn (1809-1879), a radical Reformer (Meyer 244-245). It is clear that Mayer Wise was a visionary who did not shy away from conflict, but who met it with a deep desire for compromise and unification.

David Einhorn

Einhorn came to America in 1855 at the age of forty-six. Einhorn was very different from Mayer Wise; he was a German intellectual who was universally respected, if not liked (Meyer 245). And, indeed, it was Einhorn's radicalism that, by the end of the nineteenth century, came to define American Reform Judaism (Meyer 245). Einhorn was critical of Mayer Wise throughout his rabbinate, but Mayer Wise's popular American speeches and publications were, in their time, more widely received than Einhorn's intellectual German style (Meyer 249). Unlike Mayer Wise, who seemed to love America unconditionally and was loath to enter into politics, Einhorn was critical of America's policies and spoke out extensively about the Civil War and adamantly decried the immorality of slavery (Meyer 247-248). Einhorn called America's slavery '"the cancer of the Union'" and asserted that even though the bible tolerated slavery, its tenet that all people are created in the image of God overrode its permission for certain types of slaves (Meyer 247). Einhorn dared to assert: "'Is not the question of slavery above all a purely religious issue?'" (Meyer 248). For Einhorn, the moral fabric of his society was absolutely of concern to him, a religious person. In 1851, Einhorn was forced to flee Baltimore because of his staunch opposition to slavery (Meyer 248) and he remained

deeply ambivalent about the United States throughout his life. While Einhorn did see America as the land of freedom that would allow Reform Judaism to grow and flourish, he was unwilling to put patriotism above his religious ideals (Meyer 248). Einhorn was, in the deepest sense, a social critic; he opposed slavery, pretentiousness, and injustice (Meyer 248). Einhorn believed deeply in freedom, not only political freedom, but religious freedom, which is why he so strongly butted heads with Mayer Wise, who remained resolute in creating a unified American Judaism, even if it meant compromising on basic values and beliefs (Meyer 249). Mayer Wise is often credited as being the founder of American Reform Judaism, and yet, his relationship to "Prophetic Judaism"—as Reform Judaism would come to be called—is tenuous at best. Mayer Wise exhibited none of the characteristics of the fiery "Prophetic" rabbis—least of all Einhorn.

The Civil War

In 1855, Mayer Wise founded the *Israelite* magazine. He used this magazine as a platform for voicing his own beliefs and ideologies, but never once wrote definitively on the issue of slavery. Mayer Wise wrote passionately about Jewish rights within the broader community; in fact, at two different times in 1855 he dedicated first a page and a half and then two pages to responding, respectively, to a slight against Jewish clergy in New York and anti-Semitic remarks made by the Speaker of the California Legislature (Temkin 162). Clearly, Mayer Wise was willing to speak out on political issues. And yet, in an article published in February 1, 1861, edition of the *Israelite*, Mayer Wise writes, "Politics in this country means money, material interest, and no more. The

leaders of all parties are office-seeker or office-holders. ... Politics is a business, and in many instances a mean business, which requires more cheat and falsehood than a vulgar scoundrel would practice" (Temkin 176). Temkin, Isaac Mayer Wise's biographer, offers sharp criticism of Mayer Wise's pronouncement, stating unequivocally:

> In the context in which they were written—the issues before the American people just before the Civil War broke out, and the particular incident of the day of national prayer[2]—such words give the impression that for the most part they were not issues worth fighting for. Freedom or servitude for the Negro, Free Soil or the extension of slavery to the territories, the right of secession or the indissolubility of the Union, seem to have been placed by Wise on the same level as controversies over the spoils of office or the granting of land to a railway (Temkin 176).

Wise simply did not see slavery as a critical issue of his day. What is shocking about Mayer Wise's words and Temkin's indictment is that Mayer Wise *clearly* spoke in a prophetic voice when it came to issues of the Jewish community. He rallied the American Jewish community to work toward unity and he helped to create the Union of American Hebrew Congregations (UAHC), the Hebrew Union College (HUC), and the Central Conference of American Rabbis (CCAR), (see below). Mayer Wise preached for the acceptance of *Minhag America*, the *siddur* he authored, and he traveled up and down the country, dedicating new synagogues. And yet, at this pivotal moment in history, Mayer Wise remained silent. The modern day prophets, like their biblical predecessors, were not perfect. Interestingly enough, years into the war, early in 1863, Mayer Wise was nominated to be a state senator by the Democratic County Convention in Carthage, Ohio (Temkin 183). In the end, both the congregation for which Mayer Wise served as rabbi

---

[2] President Buchanan called for a day of national prayer, a day in which Mayer Wise refused to participate.

and the school for which he served as superintendent asked him to decline the nomination (Temkin 183-187). This nomination, which both pulled Mayer Wise in and out of the political arena, suggests that Mayer Wise had the conviction and charisma to be active politically. He simply chose not to be when it came to certain issues.

The Institutionalization of Reform Judaism

The years following the Civil War brought growth and prosperity both to the United States and American Jewry. The number of American Reform Synagogues grew exponentially. At the time, a "Reform Synagogue" was defined as an institution that had an organ, mixed seating, did not observe second day holidays, and had a shortened Torah reading. The moderate Reform synagogues used Mayer Wise's *Minhag America siddur*, while more radical congregations used Einhorn's *Olat Tamid*. Reform synagogues, to varying degrees, used the vernacular in liturgy and did not require men to wear *kippot* or *tallitot* (Meyer 251). Absent from these discernments are any unified visions of social justice that might have branded early Reform synagogues. Indeed, it seems just the opposite—the reforms that characterized early Reform Judaism were denunciations of classic Jewish symbols and ritual. The Reform revolution was ritual, not moral.

In 1869, Einhorn organized a conference in Philadelphia. At this conference, thirteen rabbis, mostly radical Reformers (although Wise also attended), passed seven principles of Reform Judaism. These principles were meant to outline a clear definition of Reform Judaism (Meyer 256-257). None of these principles included any mention of ethical

obligations or views on social justice (*See Appendix*). In subsequent years and under Mayer Wise's leadership, follow-up conferences to this initial meeting were held in New York and Cincinnati. These conferences, as well, remained mute on issues of justice. Despite this, the work of these conferences should not be understated. Even though Mayer Wise's peers attacked his broader theological efforts, this group of Reform leaders called for the creation of the "Union of Israelite Congregations of America" and a Reform rabbinical curriculum—a seminary (Meyer 259). But, it was only because of Mayer Wise's broad popular support that the lay leadership of his own congregation—without his direct involvement—came to create the Union of American Hebrew Congregations and the Hebrew Union College in 1873 (Meyer 260-261). While neither of these two institutions was founded as an exclusively Reform institution, they soon came to be identified as such.

Emil Hirsch

During these years, two new leaders of American Reform Judaism emerged—Kaufmann Kohler (1843-1926) and Emil G. Hirsch (1851-1923), (Meyer 265). Hirsch and Kohler were brothers-in-law, both married to daughters of David Einhorn (Meyer 270). In 1885, Kohler called for a meeting of Reform rabbis from across the United States. The conference elected Isaac Mayer Wise as president and the rabbis in attendance declared that this meeting would be a continuation of the 1869 Philadelphia Conference. This conference similarly sought to define Reform Judaism and resulted in the adoption of a unifying platform. In contrast to the 1869 platform, these principles were meant to

convey a more affirmative definition of Reform Judaism and not simply serve as a rejection of Orthodoxy. When one reads the Pittsburgh Platform, one cannot help but notice the final seventh principle, which departs from the Reform movement's previous taciturn institutional stance on issues of social justice:

> In full accordance with the spirit of the Mosaic legislation, which strives to regulate the relations between rich and poor, we deem it our duty to participate in the great task of modern times, to solve, on the basis of justice and righteousness, the problems presented by the contrasts and evils of the present organization of society.

While this principle certainly foreshadows the commitment to justice that would later characterize the Reform rabbis and does seem to be a natural continuation of Einhorn's earlier political stands, one cannot correctly identify this as evidence of systemic change within the movement, but rather, evidence of the "personal morality" of Emil Hirsch. In fact, Hirsch rallied considerably for its inclusion and it was added only after much pressure from him (Meyer 269, 287). These principles, save for Hirsch's addition of the final seventh principle, are wholly optimistic; they were born out of the social consciousness of the time—a time of widespread hope in the promise of the future (Meyer 269). Meyer explains, "One looks in vain for social criticism in Jewish sermons delivered during the twenty years after American Civil War. It was then the common belief, of rabbis no less than Christian clergymen, that an unbridled capitalism would eventually bring prosperity to all" (Meyer 287). I would add that it is significant that, until this point, the major leaders of the Reform movement were immigrants, having come to the United States from Europe. These rabbis, schooled in foreign lands, looked at their society through outsiders' eyes. It may have been this dichotomy, between the

oppressions of Europe and the freedoms of America, which allowed them to see the country, despite her flaws, through a lens of such defined hope.

Classical Reform Judaism

As the nineteenth century drew to a close and the twentieth century began, Reform radicalism took strong root in America. This new era is called Classical Reform. It was during this period that Reform rabbis and congregations dug deep and differentiated roots in America. While congregations took steps to distinguish themselves from Orthodox Jews on the one hand and Christians on the other, they took steps to build deeper infrastructure. The Central Conference of American Rabbis (CCAR) was founded in 1889 and joined the UAHC and HUC (Meyer 264). It was also during this time period that Reform rabbis began consciously looking outward.

> Rabbis sought to instruct their members not on Judaism alone, but on Darwinism, biblical criticism, and the latest findings of natural science. Increasingly, social justice became one of the movement's major concerns, serving as a practical application of the moral principles which at this time greatly overshadowed ritual as the basis of Reform religious expression (Meyer 264).

Note here two important points: 1) The push for a social justice focus came from the top-down, from the rabbis to the laity. 2) Social justice was seen as separate from Jewish ritual life. Indeed, for Emil Hirsch—one of the first Reform rabbis to speak out against issues of economic injustice (e.g. against laissez-faire capitalism, strikes, riots, and worker's rights) and the author of the justice-focused seventh Principle of the Pittsburgh Platform—liturgy and ritual were markedly less important than caring for the poor (*See*

Appendix), (Meyer 275). For these early Reformers social justice work did not *rise out of* prayer and ritual, but stood in *contrast* to it.

During the Classical Reform period, the rabbi's sermon came to be viewed as the primary portion of worship services, shifting the primary focus of the service away from from prayer. Meyer explains, "In their congregations classical reform rabbis were first and foremost preachers. ... More often than not, sermons were topical and unrelated to a scriptural text. ... A successful sermon educated listeners on the questions they had read about in the newspapers and presented an answer that was linked some way to Jewish values" (Meyer 280-281). This "rabbi as preacher" model laid the groundwork for rabbis to direct their congregations on worldly matters. In fact, rabbis in this period were more likely to discuss contemporary issues than they were to address matters of ritual or textual interpretation. This movement, away from Jewish study and toward social consciousness, created a unique platform for justice issues to find place in the congregation. This power of the preacher was coupled with a change in the American mindset—from hope in the ultimate saving power of capitalism and progress to despair at widespread poverty and the depravity of workers' conditions. So, while in the 1890's "rabbis preached personal morality rather than public action, social service rather than social justice," by the turn of the century, the message was shifting (Meyer 287). It was, beginning in the early twentieth century, the Reform movement's rabbis who brought messages of social justice into the synagogue and it was Reform rabbis who led the charge toward a self-described "Prophetic Judaism."

Meyer attributes the shift from rabbinic calls for personal morality to messages of systemic change to two American movements—one secular and one religious: The American Progressive Movement and the Christian Social Gospel (Meyer 287). The Progressive movement, heralded by Theodore Roosevelt, held notions of progress as its banner and simultaneously sought to make changes—moral changes—in American life (Meyer 287). The Social Gospel movement was essentially a religious brand of Progressivism brought into the liberal church; this movement placed prophetic theology at its center. Jonathan Sarna, in his book *Judaism: A History*, explains that while the Social Gospel movement named Jesus as the supreme example of morality, its followers were also champions of Micah, Amos, and Isaiah (Sarna 2004, 195, Meyer 288). For their part, Reform rabbis of the time both related to the Social Gospel and claimed it as their own (Meyer 288). Sarna explains, "Prophetic Judaism, as this emphasis on universalism and social justice came to be called, stimulated a wide range of political and communal activities on the part of Classical Reform rabbis" (Sarna 2004, 195). Seen in this broader context, one can see the Reform movement's emerging commitment to a prophetic message in a different light. The rabbis of the time came to reexamine the roots of their own tradition through the eyes of their surrounding society. Indeed, the influence of the Christian Social Gospel movement on the Reform movement helps to explain why the seventh principle of the Pittsburgh Platform—the Reform movement's first concrete mention of a social justice commitment—contains no mention of a prophetic theology. The Reform movement's commitment to justice was first articulated as a general moral stance and only later explicitly identified with a prophetic message. In

either case, neither in its isolated inception nor in its growing widespread application did "Prophetic Judaism" include a language of ritual.

Stephen S. Wise

One rabbi who held great power and influence in the final years of the Classical Reform period and well into subsequent years was Stephen Samuel Wise (1874-1949). Wise is considered one of the last of the Classical Reform rabbis, although many of his actions set him apart from his contemporaries (Meyer 302). Wise, unlike many of his Reform colleagues, received private *smichah* and did not attend HUC. He was a universalist at heart—preaching to crowds of Jews and Christians in Carnegie Hall on Sunday mornings. He was an ardent Zionist—a fact that put him at odds with many of his predecessors and colleagues—and, more to the point, a champion of social justice. Meyer asserts, "Wise took second place to no Reform rabbi in his active advocacy of social justice, especially taking the side of workers against their exploitative employers" (Meyer 302). Because of his commitment to workers' rights and his deep commitment to justice, Wise is often called a "prophetic figure." Without a doubt, the issues that Wise championed are similar to the issues on which the biblical prophets spoke, but the language Wise used to articulate these messages was far from prophetic.

In Stephen S. Wise's autobiography, *Challenging Years*, Wise devotes an entire chapter, "Pulpit and Politics," to describing why he chooses to engage in political activity. He explains, "I felt very early in my ministry the necessity and advantages of the minister

going into politics. To me neither religion nor politics was remote or sequestered from life. Religion is a vision or ideal of life. Politics is a method, or *modus vivendi*. To say that the minister should not go into politics is to imply that ideal and reality are twain and alien. Politics is what it is because religion keeps out of it" (Wise 1949, 109). For Wise, religion and politics were inextricably intertwined. He did not choose one over the other; rather, engagement in one necessitated engagement in the other. Wise states unequivocally, on the second page of the chapter, "For me the supreme declaration of our Hebrew Bible was and remains: 'Justice, Justice shalt thou pursue'—whether it be easy or hard, whether it be justice to white or black, Jew or Christian" (Wise 1949, 110). And yet, at no other point in this chapter does Wise mention Jewish text, tradition, God, or the Bible. Wise, like so many of the other Reform rabbis of the time, felt it sufficient to say that his commitment was "Jewish" and born out of the "Bible."

It is not surprising that Wise, given his commitment to social justice, greatly admired Emil G. Hirsch. Like Hirsch, Wise often stood at odds with his fellow rabbis (Meyer 303). Indeed, even though Wise was one of the most vocal figures on social justice issues during his time, his name does not appear on the significant social justice platforms published by the CCAR during his tenure nor did he have a central role in the movement's social justice agenda. Wise was not interested in affecting change amongst his rabbinic colleagues.

To extend his platform, Wise founded the Free Synagogue in New York, a place in which he had the freedom to speak from the pulpit on any topic he chose (Meyer 303). Wise,

similar to Mayer Wise, was a visionary and, displeased with the scope and focus of Hebrew Union College's rabbinic education, in 1922 founded the Jewish Institute of Religion in Manhattan, a rival seminary to HUC (Meyer 303). Melvin Urofsky writes in *A Voice that Spoke for Justice,* for Wise, "a free pulpit, an enlightened rabbinate, and a socially responsive religion went hand in hand with civic reform, wage and hours legislation, and fair treatment of minorities" (Urofsky vii).

In much the way Einhorn and Hirsch stood out in their generations, Wise stood out in his as a social activist. Wise has a documented record of speaking out against specific injustices for decades before the CCAR followed suit. For instance, Wise sided with labor in 1895 after a streetcar strike during which laborers were killed (Wise 1949, 56). At one point, during a sermon that Wise preached on behalf of steel workers, he called out a certain judge, saying that "Judge Gary had Cossackized the steel industry" (Wise 1949, 72). By his own estimation, Wise was never attacked more strongly for any other stance he took than he was for this one. Interestingly, one will note that he uses the term "Cossack" as an insult—playing on the historical enemies of Russian Jews. Wise does not, notably, employ biblical language or prophetic images to make his point.

As a foreshadowing of the tension that would emerge between rabbis of the CCAR and members of the UAHC, Wise reports on how certain members of his community rebuffed some of the stances he took on particular issues, such as the Gary case, in which he named particular individuals and spoke his mind on specific cases (Wise 1949, 73). Critics would have preferred that Wise, as well as rabbis in the years to come, use general language and refer to broad, sweeping issues. In order to explain and justify his practice

of speaking out on particular issues, Wise cites a biblical figure—Nathan. Nathan, he explains, walked into David's chamber and pointed out David's particular wrongdoing against Bat Sheba and declared "Thou art the man," thereby speaking particularized truth to power. Wise goes as far as to explain why he chose this particular passage as a means for justifying his politicized stance: "The implication of much of the criticism leveled against me at that time was that public speaking against the wrongdoer, as well as for the wronged, was not in keeping with biblical tradition" (Wise 1949, 73). By citing Nathan as an example of one who spoke truth to power, Wise illustrated that his actions were well within the biblical tradition. And yet, when Wise spoke out on social justice issues, only seldom did he employ the language of biblical or prophetic traditions.

Social Justice Sweeps the CCAR

During the 1908 CCAR convention, the CCAR broke new ground by granting official support to a campaign against child labor. Many of the movement's leaders put themselves directly into the middle of labor disputes and many rabbis, in particular those of a younger generation, pushed for the CCAR to support a host of social measures. According to Meyer, CCAR spent the following ten years articulating a clear definition of this campaign. Meyer writes, "While earlier conventions had focused on liturgy and religious practice, the rabbis now discussed white slavery, venereal disease, working conditions, and juvenile delinquency" (Meyer 288). In 1918, the CCAR published its first social justice platform. By way of contextualization, the Protestant Church published a similar platform in 1912 and the Catholic Bishops followed suit in 1919

(Meyer 288, Sarna 2004, 195). And yet, by this time, the Reform Platform was in many ways broader than these other platforms and was seen, both at the time and today, as being singularly significant (Meyer 288). These social justice stances were coupled with rabbinic calls for democratization within the movement. The rabbis of the CCAR called for an unrestricted minimum in dues, open seating, and open ballots, but these reforms were only adopted by a small minority of synagogues (Meyer 289). By 1918, it was clear that the CCAR's previous focus on ritual and liturgy had been *replaced* by a new primary agenda of social justice.

While this trend toward a dichotomy of social justice and ritual was certainly widespread, it was not universal. Edward Israel, the head of the CCAR Commission on Social Justice, was concerned with both religious and social justice issues. Under his leadership, the Commission was publicly recognized for rabbinic resolutions on social justice issues, played an active role in labor disputes, and worked closely with socially minded Protestant and Catholic organizations (Meyer 309).

In 1928, the CCAR Commission on Social Justice, under the leadership of Edward Israel, produced a new report on social justice. While the 1918 report was titled narrowly, "1918 Report of Committee on Synagogue and Industrial Relations" (*See Appendix*), the 1928 report expanded its scope and was boldly titled "1928 Report of Commission on Social Justice" (*See Appendix*). The 1918 Report consisted of fourteen points, each of which focused on a different labor issue. The points were focused outward, aimed at changing labor policy and business practice. The 1928 Report was expanded, no longer

solely focusing on outside policy and practice, but calling on members of the Reform community to change their own outlook and behavior. The first of these social principles is "The Duty of Social Mindedness," which announces, "it is part of the great social message of the prophets of our faith that salvation can be achieved only through the salvation of society as a whole" (1928 Report of Commission on Social Justice). This document explicitly addresses itself not only to employers, but to investors, as well, "Too often are investors content to accept profits from industries administered out of harmony with principles of social justice. The investor has the moral duty to know the ethic of the business from which he derives his dividends and to take a definite stand regarding its moral administration" (1928 Report of Commission on Social Justice). Beyond the expanded principles regarding labor, the 1928 Commission addressed social issues, as well: prisons, lynching, civil liberties, and international relations. While the 1928 Commission is explicit in connecting its principles to the prophetic tradition—the document opens, "Deriving our inspiration for social justice from the great teachings of the prophets of Israel and the other great traditions of our faith" (1928 Report of Commission on Social Justice)—the document neither cites explicit prophetic passages or comments on what one might understand a prophetic message to be. The mere mention of a prophetic message seems to be an adequate rooting in text for the authors. This, of course, begs the questions: What does it mean to be a prophetic movement? What does it mean to dedicate oneself to Prophetic Judaism?

One of the 1928 Commission members and a faculty member at the Hebrew Union College, Abraham Cronbach, attempted to articulate such a vision (1882-1965).

Cronbach not only taught rabbinical students the Prophets, he gave them tools to apply the teachings to social justice issues current to their day. Cronbach's powerful message resonated with generations of students (Meyer 302).

Abraham Cronbach

In 1941, Abraham Cronbach authored a book entitled *The Bible and our Social Outlook*. The book, according to the editor's note, is meant for adult learners and is intended to help introduce those interested either in bible or in social action to a Jewish study of them both. This book, notably not written by a rabbi but an academic, sets out to contextualize justice issues and root them in biblical texts. Cronbach begins this book by describing a *change* in the way that religion must be considered. He writes:

> Within the recollection of most of us, there was a time when religion was believed to be entirely detached from such matters as the wages paid to labor, hours of labor, factory conditions, trade unions, housing, vocational training, public recreation, old age pensions, international relations, or any of the bewildering problems which we designate by the term 'social.' Our religion was supposed to consist of the rituals—many of them a little strange in our American surroundings—and some precepts of personal morality received from our ancestors. But changes have now occurred. We are beginning to realize that our religion on the one hand and, on the other hand, the vital economic and social questions of the hour are closely interrelated. Religion has come to require a social interpretation. That is why we are undertaking this study (Cronbach 3).

What is most notable about this introduction is the way in which it creates a divide: here is how religion *was* looked at and here is how it *now* must be looked at. Cronbach explains that people use biblical messages for their own purposes. He shows how

Christians and Jews alike interpret certain passages to support their religious claims and further shows how different social movements—from those who supported the rights of the elderly to those who supported Prohibition—can find support for their causes in the biblical text (Cronbach 5-8). While laying out the tendency of many different groups to use biblical texts to support their social causes, Cronbach firmly states, "Our study ... should reveal that religion is not on the side of the strong and the privileged but on the side of the poor and the oppressed" (Cronbach 9). In his book, Cronbach is trying to outline a prophetic message.

Cronbach explains that people tend to either look at poverty as a personal problem or a social problem, explaining that some people blame the poor themselves for being poor and others blame society for the condition of poverty. In a style very different from the bombastic Stephen S. Wise, Cronbach modestly lays out a biblical opinion on a contemporary subject. He writes, "although most of the passages which we have quoted from the Book of Proverbs attribute poverty to personal shortcomings, the general spirit of partiality toward the poor, pervading the Bible, ranges that literature more extensively on the side of those who emphasize the factors that are social" (Cronbach 32). What is clearly different about Cronbach, when comparing him to Wise or other Reform rabbis writing on social justice issues, is the concrete connection he builds between the text and his viewpoint, as well as his willingness to deal with the internal conflicts and contradictions within the biblical text. Rather than using a single lens to view a single biblical message, he teases out the differences between, for example, Proverbs and the Prophets.

When it comes to the process of change, Cronbach suggests his own recipe: "Social betterment usually proceeds by three distinct steps. First there is agitation, then legislation, then education" (Cronbach 66). Cronbach suggests the bible's order of presenting issues of social justice loosely follows this pattern, as well. He asserts that the books of the Prophets were the first biblical materials to have been produced concerning social justice. These materials, Cronbach suggests, were followed by the law codes and, finally, Proverbs and Psalms, or the educational supporters of the law. While Cronbach does point out that this ordering is not always consistent, he suggests that it holds a general truth (Cronbach 67). What is unique about Cronbach's assertion is that he fits the role of the prophet—the agitator—into a larger biblical system of social change, one that he lays out clearly. Cronbach suggests that the prophetic voice is *one* voice in a biblical process of change, not *the* voice of change.

One point of interest in Cronbach's work is the way he organizes book's chapters. For example, chapter eight of his book is entitled "The Rights of Labor in the Bible." In this chapter, Cronbach outlines different ways in which the Bible looks at laborers and issues of laborers' rights. In this chapter, Cronbach looks at biblical discussions on labor through a purely academic lens. He points out the places in which the Bible champions the rights of laborers and presents those times the text holds the opposite conclusion. As he does this, Cronbach gently pushes the reader to understand these moral codes through his own contemporary ethical lens. He presents opposing textual sources and points out instances in which the biblical text diverges from what he considers correct morals. Chapter nine of the book is entitled "The Plight of Labor Today" and discusses labor

issues contemporary to Cronbach's time, such as workers achieving a living wage, the income of women, the plight of child laborers, and hours of work. This chapter is not, in any way, linked to the previous chapter that discussed biblical views on labor. For Cronbach, these two notions remain separate. Finally, in chapter ten, entitled "The Hopes of Labor Today," Cronbach discusses some of the positive moves toward social change that were taking place in his time. Among these, Cronbach cites the work of religious groups working for change. He describes the cooperation between the CCAR, the Federal Council of Churches, and the National Catholic Welfare Council (Cronbach 164). Finally, in the last two pages of this chapter, Cronbach explores why religious groups feel closely aligned with issues of labor. He writes, "The one point at which the Bible survives in modern life resides in the religious scruples regarding the rights of labor both then and now. Considerateness of the worker's plight was, in biblical days, regarded as a divine injunction. It is still felt to be a divine injunction. Now, no less than in those far-off ages, are men impressed by the sacredness of their duty to espouse the cause of those who work with their hands" (Cronbach 166). While these chapters certainly raise issues of labor rights in the bible and twentieth century labor rights in America, one is hard pressed to identify Cronbach as the trumpeting prophetic voice of his generation. And yet, through his remarkable work, one gets a glimpse at the education many of the Reform movement's rabbis received when it came to social justice. All contemporary Reform Jews setting out to define a Prophetic theology should study Cronbach's works.

The Divide Between Clergy and Laity

Meyer reports that as social conditions in the United States worsened with rising unemployment and the Depression era brought new lows to American life, the CCAR moved even farther left. In 1932 the CCAR Commission on Social Justice published the following position on capitalism: "'Any system which can be so characterized is neither economically sound nor can it be sanctioned morally. We therefore advocate immediate legislative action in the direction of changes whereby social control will place the instruments of the production and distribution as well as the system of profits increasingly within the powers of society as a whole'" (1932 Conference Report, Meyer 310). This statement is clearly bold and fiery in temperament, but can it be called prophetic? When one compares this statement to the carefully outlined biblical conclusions Cronbach outlines, one senses that there is a disconnect in the CCAR's publications: While the prophets certainly engaged in political action, they did so with an outlined theology. While this statement clearly suggests a moral lens through which one should view society, it does not suggest a prophetic, religious, or even "Jewish" vision.

While many of the rabbis in the early twentieth century were themselves involved in issues of social justice, they did not necessarily see their congregations as partners or even supporters of their work. Albert Vorspan and Eugene Lipman write in *Justice and Judaism: The Work of Social Action*, "The rabbis who devoted themselves to social idealism did not expect their congregations to support them at all times, and sometimes the laymen did not. Not infrequently was there vocal opposition expressed both to the views and actions of the rabbis" (Vorspan and Lipman 16). In fact, the 1932 CCAR

Commission statement ignited Ludwig Vogelstein, the UAHC chairman, to declare, "'The recent manifesto shows immaturity'" (Meyer 311). During this time, the leaders of the UAHC supported a loose notion of a "Prophetic Judaism" and believed in the individual rabbi's right to speak out, but stopped short of supporting a movement-wide issue-specific agenda of the CCAR (Meyer 311).

At the February, 1929 UAHC Biennial, Mr. Roscoe Nelson lamented the fact that social justice had, to that point, been left in the sole control of rabbis and the CCAR. He declared the need for the laity to illustrate the centrality of social justice not only through words, but also through action.

> ...the truth is that this Union has never conceded that any subject is more vitally Jewish than that of Social Justice...*Our privilege and our duty in this behalf is not discharged by the most gracious of permits to the Central Conference of American Rabbis to adopt a program of Social Justice. It would be a strange voice in Israel which suggested that gropings for Social Justice must be vicariously conducted through a Hierarchy of Rabbis or a House of Bishops. I have grossly misinterpreted the history, philosophy, and tradition of our people, if passivity and impersonality in connection with the most profound interests of humanity suffices for spiritual identification with the sources of Jewish inspiration* (Vorspan and Lipman 20).

Vorspan and Lipman assert that Nelson's speech and the subsequent discussion over the issues he raised "can be called the beginning of the *synagogue* social action movement in twentieth century America" (Vorspan and Lipman 20). And yet, it took years for any concrete movement to emerge out of Nelson's declaration; it was not until 1948, after a "strong call for action" by Rabbi Maurice Eisendrath at the 1946 biennial, that a Joint

Commission on Social Action, with the CCAR and UAHC as partners, was organized (Vorspan and Lipman 20).

One reason this partnership took so long was because the rabbis of the CCAR did not want their more radical messages to be hampered by the more moderate UAHC. In a statement that echoed Wise's experiences, the UAHC declared that it did not want the CCAR making specific claims or referring explicitly to issues or "controversies."

Attempts to Define "Prophetic Judaism"

In 1935, the UAHC reported that it was "disassociating itself from 'any declaration on controversial, economic, financial, or political questions that do not involve basic ethical or religious principles'" (Meyer 312). Such a statement suggests that the laity was uncomfortable with its leaders taking political stands without a concrete connection to Jewish tradition or ideology. Indeed, the preamble to the Revised Charter of the Joint Commission for Social Action of the UAHC and CCAR is much more explicit in its biblical roots than either the 1918 or the 1928 CCAR principles. It states:

> We are the heirs of the great Jewish tradition which conceives of its ultimate goal as the establishment of the kingdom of Heaven on earth. The God whom we serve is a God of righteousness who would have us be holy as He is holy. The Torah which we cherish is a guide for spiritual living concerned with every aspect of human experience. The prophets of Israel, dedicated to God and the welfare of fellow men, bid us pursue justice, seek peace, and attain brotherhood with everyone of God's creatures, whatever their race, creed, or class (Revised Charter of the Joint Commission for Social Action of the UAHC and CCAR).

With this Joint Commission created, the UAHC began creating a stronger and better-organized movement of social justice. They hired staff members for the Commission and began aggressively agitating to bring social action initiatives into individual congregations. It was during the years immediately following World War II that synagogues began forming social action committees and the *people* of Reform Judaism began studying issues of social justice and participating in local actions and politics (Meyer 364). This time also marked a shift in issues of focus. The movement, as a whole, "paid relatively less attention to economic issues and focused more on civil liberties, on civil rights, and on international peace" (Meyer 364). And so, while the CCAR focused almost exclusively on economic and labor issues throughout the 1920s-1930s, the Reform movement focused on social concerns throughout the 1940s-1960s. In particular, the movement joined in the struggle for African-American Civil Rights (Meyer 365).

And so, despite the setbacks of general religious apathy and early resistance to the rabbinic message of social justice, the Reform rabbis' commitment to social justice came to function as a road back to Judaism for the movement's laity. Sarna writes:

> Most important of all, Reform Judaism in this period offered those disaffected with synagogue life a new alternative means of actively expressing their faith. Following Emil G. Hirsch's lead, it called on Jews to help resolve the great social problems plaguing American life. This social justice motif—the Jewish equivalent of the Protestant Social Gospel—became, as we shall see, ever more influential within Reform circles over the ensuing decades, and provided an alternative road back to Judaism for those whose interests focused less on faith than on religiously inspired work (Sarna 2004, 151).

The laity of the Reform movement saw the relationship between ritual and social justice similarly to the clergy—social justice was seen *in contrast to* ritual life. For those individuals who were uninspired by Jewish religious life, a life of Jewish social justice was waiting. Note the distinction here: Social justice was not seen as an extension of religious life, but an alternative to it.

Rabbi Maurice Eisendrath in a speech at the 43rd Biennial in February, 1955 began to outline what a Prophetic Judaism could be:

> A guide for Reform Judaism do we desire? Indeed we do. But not for ritual and rites alone—but for righteous conduct and decent behavior between man and man; not merely for the forms of services but for the service of God in the affairs of men; not merely a minimum code for liturgical worship but a minimal code of moral conduct incumbent upon anyone who calls himself a Reform Jew presuming to be the heir of Hebrew prophet and sage. Even the prophet prefaced his command to 'walk humbly' with the demand 'to do justly and love mercy.' The resemblance between the noble name we bear and our bearing toward our neighbor must be more than coincidental. It must be fundamental. It must translate our preachment into practice, our dogmas and doctrines into deed, our creed into conduct, our prayers into programs of moral righteousness and social justice, our invoking of God's name—too frequently in vain—into the establishment of His kingdom on earth (Vorspan and Lipman 21).

Eisendrath's words loosely echo the message of the prophets (and Cronbach's work), who state that ritual action is not enough, that God desires justice. Eisendrath called on his community not only to consider ritual life, but a life of justice, as well. And yet, even as Eisendrath's message certainly *echoes* the prophetic message, it does so by slightly altering the crux of the prophetic message. Eisendrath furthers the dominant message of

the time: Reform Jews should stop concerning themselves with ritual and start concerning themselves with justice. Eisendrath talks about a "transformation" from a focus on ritual to a focus on justice. The real prophetic statement, however, was never a message of "transformation," but of "integration." In Isaiah 58:5, when God asks, "Is this the fast I desire?" the message is not that ritualized fasting is unimportant, but that ritual fasting must be coupled with just behavior.

Eisendrath's message, though, struck a chord in the hearts of the people: Reform Jews took up the prophets' call to protect the powerless of their society. During these years, Reform Jews joined together with the National Council of Churches and the National Conference of Christians and Jews and jumped into the thick of the Civil Rights movement (Sarna 2004, 309). In 1962, the Reform movement officially sealed its relationship with politics, opening the Religious Action Center in Washington D.C. This center declared itself to be "Dedicated to the pursuit of 'social justice and religious liberty,'" (Sarna 2004, 308). The Religious Action Center was to function as the Reform voice on Capital Hill.

Post-1967

Like much of Jewish life, the Reform relationship to social justice changed post-1967. In these years, the Reform movement's focus on the American community and politics shifted from a universalistic approach to a particularistic agenda. Sarna writes, "Domestic causes like civil rights and interfaith cooperation lost ground, particularly as

concerns mounted over anti-Semitism and militancy in the black community, as well as anti-Israel sentiments among liberal Christians. In their place, Jews took up causes like Soviet Jewry and Israel, where the objects of assistance were fellow Jews" (Sarna 2004, 318). As Jewish life began to focus inward, the community's relationship to change began to focus inward as well.

Liberation Theology

Gustavo Gutiérrez

The history of Liberation theology begins with the story of a single man, Gustavo Gutiérrez, who came to serve as the voice of the poor in Latin America. James B. Nickoloff explains in the introduction to Gutiérrez's book *Essential Writings* that Gutiérrez was born in Lima, Peru, in 1928, and lived in similar conditions to many in Latin America: He experienced the harshness of poverty and illness, as well as the sweetness of a loving family (Nickoloff, writing in Gutiérrez 1996, 2). Gutiérrez began his formal studies at the University of San Marcos in Lima, but after three years, he changed his course of study and enrolled in a Catholic seminary to study toward ordination. In subsequent years, 1951-1959, Gutiérrez, like many of the Liberation theologians, studied abroad in Europe, earning masters' degrees in philosophy and psychology, and theology. Gutiérrez returned to Peru and began teaching in the Pontifical Catholic University of Peru (Nickoloff, writing in Gutiérrez 1996, 2). This divide in Gutiérrez's experiences and interests is central to understanding who Gutiérrez is: A brilliant scholar who loves ideas and a man of the people who loves the community that raised him.

Gutiérrez, like Mayer Wise, has interest in and speaks and writes on an impressive breadth of subjects. Nickoloff points out that even in his most academic theological publications, Gutiérrez is likely to quote the Peruvian writers César Vallejo and José María Arguedas, as well as to cite Church theological teachings extensively (Nickoloff, writing in Gutiérrez 1996, 8, 15). According to Nickoloff, Gutiérrez has long served as a

pastor in his home community in Rimac, a slum area in Lima, Peru (Nickoloff, writing in Gutiérrez 1996, 1). Gutiérrez is considered by many to be the founder of Liberation theology, as he coined the phrase "theology of liberation" in a talk he gave in July 1968. However, according to Robert McAffee Brown, writing in *The Power of the Poor in History: Selected Writings,* Gutiérrez asserts he did not create Liberation theology alone; rather, it was a way of thinking formed by the people and their experiences:

> This is not a theology created by the intelligentsia, the affluent, the powerful, those on top; it is a theology from the bottom, the 'underside,' created by the victims, the poor, the oppressed. It is not theology spun out in a series of principles or axioms of timeless truth that are then 'applied' to the contemporary scene, but a theology springing up out of poverty, the oppression, the heartrending conditions under which the great majority of Latin Americans live" (Brown, writing in Gutiérrez 1983, vii).

Liberation theology is rooted in the experiences of the people.

There are some loose parallels that one can make between Gutiérrez and Mayer Wise, the not-quite-founders of their respective movements. Both respond to the religious/social currents of their times and, through the persuasive power of their personalities, rallied others around their mission. Both are visionaries. And yet, there are some fundamental differences between them. Mayer Wise loved America and was willing to choose American unity over the suffering in his midst; he did not get involved in the "politics" of slavery or the Civil War. Mayer Wise believed—or at least wrote—that politics and religion should remain separate. Gutiérrez loves his people, especially the poor, of Latin American, particularly the people of his native Peru. He is deeply critical of the

governments of Latin America and industrialized foreign nations and believes that it is these forces that have oppressed the poor of Latin America, causing widespread suffering and disempowerment. Gutiérrez demands the religious must become involved in politics and champion the causes of the people.

A History of Oppression

Liberation theology was not just born out of a social reality; it was born out of a particular lens through which reality is understood. All history is subjective and it is a particular subjective understanding of history that gave rise to Liberation theology. Therefore, the only history that can be told which will explain the emergence of a theology of liberation is the history of Latin America as seen through the eyes of the oppressed.

The stage for a theology of liberation was set in the days of Latin American colonization, in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. According to Gutiérrez, as European colonizers discovered the New World, Western Christians came into contact with the "other," the "Indian." Gutiérrez explains in *The Power of the Poor in History* that newcomers to the land exploited the indigenous peoples and created societies based on a concept of "other" and a mistreatment of the poor (Gutiérrez 1983, 185-186). In the nineteenth century, as countries around the world began the first steps toward industrialization, Gutiérrez asserts, a new era of exploitation—the exploitation of the Latin American poor by the social elite—was ushered into Latin America (Gutiérrez 1983, 187). In this way,

Gutiérrez identifies a continual oppression of the Latin American poor throughout history; the poor are oppressed by foreign nations and social elites/ruling parties.

Gutiérrez explains that, in the eighteenth century, Latin America was finally freed from Spain's colonization, only to become dependent on large capitalist countries, to which Latin American nations traded raw materials and received finished products in return. The newly freed countries of Latin America created constitutions that afforded dominant groups new liberties, but Gutiérrez explains, these freedoms were granted only to the powerful of society, while Indians, blacks, and *mestizos*, the poorest and least empowered members of society, were left behind. The dominant groups in society, according to Gutiérrez, were the liberals and the conservatives, groups that roughly paralleled similar parties in Europe and the United States (Gutiérrez 1983, 187). But, Gutiérrez writes, "What had been a movement for modern freedoms, democracy, and rational, universal thought in Europe and the United States, in Latin America only meant new oppression, and even more ruthless forms of spoliation of the populous classes" (Gutiérrez 1983, 188). For Gutiérrez and other Liberation theologians, a history of oppression and disenfranchisement is what led to the eventual need for a theology of Liberation.

With the world economy crumbling in the 1930s, many Latin American countries, in particular those countries that had more stable economies, began the process of industrializing, breaking their dependence on foreign nations for finished goods. This time period also marked changes in the Catholic Church in Europe—in particular, the Christian social movement was born. The Christian social movement sought to rethink

Christendom and reexamine Christianity in light of the modern world (Gutiérrez 1983, 188). This way of thinking led Christians to begin reexamining the relationship between Latin America and the larger world, as well as the plight of the poor in Latin America. People began to realize that poverty was not simply a necessary condition of life for the Latin America populace, but that their condition had root causes (and thus it was not preordained, but rather conditional). This realization gave way to socio-Christian political parties in Latin America, which sought to create "a more just and more Christian society...integrating the marginalized and attending to the most flagrant injustices" (Gutiérrez 1983, 188). Gutiérrez explains these parties were both liberal and conservative and found mixed results in their political attempts. Gutiérrez asserts that Latin America, with this new way of thinking, could no longer only be defined as "developing," but needed to be redefined as "dominated" and "oppressed." For Gutiérrez, the imbalance of economies and empowerment among nations was not just a reality of contemporary society, but a widespread social ill—a moral issue to which the Church had an ethical obligation to react. Indeed, Gutiérrez writes in *A Theology of Liberation: History, Politics, and Salvation*, "To characterize Latin America as a dominated and oppressed continent naturally leads one to speak of liberation and above all to participate in the process" (Gutiérrez 1973, 88).

During the 1930s-1960s, trends of socialism swept through Latin America, taking different forms in different countries. These attempts at change had varied results. But, by the 1960s, with 1965 as a zenith year of armed struggles in Latin America, the political unrest and plight of the poor was fully incorporated into Latin America's

Christian consciousness. In 1983 Gutiérrez wrote, "this commitment, this involvement, constitutes the greatest single factor in the life of the Latin American Christian community today" (Gutiérrez 1983, 190). He elaborated, "This participation by Christians—of various confessions—in the liberation process exhibits varying degrees of radicality. It has different nuances in each Latin American country. It is expressed in experimental languages, which grope along by trial and error" (Gutiérrez 1983, 190).

Liberation theology did not begin in a vacuum. The seeds for the Church's involvement in socially progressive politics (with the participation of Christians from a broad range of backgrounds) had been laid early in the twentieth century. Because so many in Latin America saw their religion as an integrated part of their lives, it was natural for the general Christian populace to seek a response to their socio-economic conditions within the realm of religious values and teachings. Liberation theologians, like Gutiérrez, saw it as their role both to respond to widespread need and articulate a demanded response.

Defining "Liberation Theology"

There is no single definition of what Liberation theology is or a means through which it has been or can be applied. But, in its loosest definition, at the center of Liberation theology is both a belief in and a commitment to three different liberations. First, there is the liberation of "oppressed peoples and social classes" (Gutiérrez 1973, 36). Second, there is an historical liberation—the ongoing process by which human beings try to make, or better, themselves throughout time (Gutiérrez 1973, 36). Third, there is biblical liberation—Christians believe that Jesus liberated them from their sin and allowed all

human beings "to live in communion with him" (Gutiérrez 1973, 37). For Liberation theologians, socio-economic liberation is inextricably linked to historical liberations and religious liberation. One should consider this definition in comparison to the rhetoric of Wise, who worked tirelessly on behalf of the worker, but who often spoke a language of politics/economics that was disconnected from the language of tradition. One of the reasons Liberation theologians are able to speak through the bible is because the majority of the people in Latin America share a common religious vocabulary. For the poor of Latin America, religious metaphors are touchstones; they think of suffering and hopefulness in religious terms. Wise's community, on the other hand, never had this same shared vocabulary. One of the reasons neither nineteenth or twentieth century Reform rabbis nor laity spoke a true prophetic language is because they lacked common metaphors that would have allowed them to do so. Liberation theologians can use the language they do because the stable element they depend on is their community's Christianity. But, for Reform rabbis there has always been a lacuna there; they could not take people's Judaism for granted.

Gutiérrez explains that modern human beings seek two sorts of liberation. The first is exterior: A person seeks to be liberated from those "*external* pressures which prevent his fulfillment as a member of certain social class, country, or society" (Gutiérrez 1973, 30). The second liberation is internal or psychological (Gutiérrez 1973, 30). The goal of liberation theology is to link these two types of liberation—the macro level of the masses and the micro level of the individual. David Cooper, a notable member of the anti-psychiatry movement, suggests that one of the "cardinal failures" of past revolutionary

movements was "the disassociation of liberation on the mass social level, i.e. liberation of a whole classes in economic and political terms, and liberation on the level of the individual and concrete groups in which he is directly engaged" (Gutiérrez 1973, 31). Gutiérrez was primed to think of liberation on a collective level because of his Marxist assumptions. Even though Gutiérrez and the other Liberation theologians are adamant that Liberation theology is not a Marxist movement, its followers shared a familiarity with Socialism. The nineteenth and twentieth century Reform rabbis, on the other hand, were wholly enmeshed in individualism. According to Cooper, what makes Liberation theology unique is the movement's conscious attempts to link collective liberation to one's own personal liberation. This link was never fully fostered in the Reform movement. Reform rabbis of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries conceptualized social justice as being so disconnected from religious identity, they did not see fostering a religious identity as a crucial piece of growing a social justice movement. Furthermore, these rabbis never engaged in any sort of activity that suggested they, themselves, needed liberating. The liberation of the Reform movement was always pointed outward, never inward at the individual. For Liberation theologians, the liberation of the self was articulated through the language of religion and inextricably linked to the liberation of the community.

Liberation theology is a movement that seeks to liberate both the internal world of the individual and the external world of the populace. This liberation is rooted in a certain brand of Christian exegesis that identifies a message of liberation at the center of the Biblical text. Gutiérrez asserts that Christian theology has, for too long, ignored "the

conflictual character of human history, the confrontations among men, social classes, and countries" (Gutiérrez 1973, 35). Gutiérrez suggests that "St. Paul continuously reminds us, however, of the paschal core of Christian existence and all of human life: the passage from the old man to the new, from sin to grace, from slavery to freedom" (Gutiérrez 1973, 35). Gutiérrez understands Paul to be addressing a fluid society, a society that is perpetually evolving, rather than a static society whose elements never change. Gutiérrez cites the twentieth century Protestant theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer in order to define the "freedom" to which Paul refers; Bonhoeffer writes "'In the language of the Bible ... freedom is not something man has for himself but something he had for others. ... Being free means 'being free for the other,' because the other has bound me to him. Only in relationship with the other am I free'" (Gutiérrez 1973, 36). According to this definition, then, liberation theology can never only be about liberating the self, but partnering with the other in order to work towards her liberation. It is only when the other is liberated that the self can be liberated.

While the Reform movement, at its inception, was defined by an organized attempt to reform Jewish life, Liberation theology, at its inception, was defined by an attempt to reform all of life: "The poor, the wretched of the earth, are not, in the first instance, questioning the religious world or its philosophical presuppositions. They are calling into question first of all the economic, social, and political order that oppresses and marginalizes them, and of course the ideology that is brought in to justify that domination" (Gutiérrez 1983, 191). In this sense, Liberation theology truly was a people's movement. The theology grew out of people looking at their lives and agitating

for change. Many of the disenfranchised people of Latin America who began agitating were, themselves, Christians. As such, they looked to their tradition for answers as to how they could change the unjust political, economic, and social systems that oppressed them. For these people, and for the Church scholars who began to articulate various theologies of liberation, action needed to be at the forefront of the movement. For Liberation theologians, action came first and theory came second.

Second Vatican Council and Medellín

In addition to the political upheaval of 1965 that helped to move Christian thinking about the plight of Latin America's poor, the unexpected paradigm shift of the Second Vatican Council, which developed from 1962 to 1965, came to deeply influence the as yet undefined Liberation theology movement. The Second Vatican Council influenced Gutiérrez in two significant ways. First, he was struck by the disconnect between the depraved situation in which the poor of Latin America found themselves and the hope and optimism that so defined the Council (Nickoloff, writing in Gutiérrez 1996, 3). And second, he was influenced by the trend, which emerged during and after the Second Vatican Council, for the Church to find its theological center rooted in its actions in the world. Gutiérrez writes in that "Vatican Council II has strongly reaffirmed the idea of a Church of service and not of power....All of these trends provide a new focus for seeing the presence and activity of the Church in the world as a starting point for theological reflection" (Gutiérrez 1973, 8).

The Second Vatican Council gave rise to the Second Latin American Bishops' Conference in Medellín. The Bishops who met at Medellín were tasked with defining, in light of the Second Vatican Council, what the role of the Church should be within Latin America (Gutiérrez 1983, 199). Medellín, by all accounts, was a watershed event in the history of the Church within Latin America. One month before the Conference in Medellín, in July 1968, Gutiérrez delivered a proposal for a "theology of liberation." According to Nickoloff, this was the first time the term "Theology of Liberation" was used (Nickoloff, writing in Gutiérrez 1996, 3). One can see Gutiérrez's influence in the final document produced at the Medellín Conference and, when looking to Gutiérrez's 1969 *Liberation of Theology*, one can see the influence of Medellín. The Medellín document not only addresses matters of theology, but matters of society. In number 16 of the document, one reads, "Faced with the need for a total change in Latin American structures, we believe that change has political reform as its prerequisite" (Medellín), (see appendix). The Medellín document speaks of two types of colonialism facing Latin America, "tensions between classes and internal colonialism" and "international tensions and external neocolonialism." In this way, the participants in the Medellín Conference recognize that the poor of Latin American have been affected by two separate but connected forces of oppression—an internal imbalance of power and an external unbalanced relationship of influence and economics.

Distinction of Planes

The Second Vatican Council's attempts to blur the lines between "Church" and "Society" had a deep impact on Liberation theology. Vatican II asserted that society could work for the good of the Church and the Church could work for the good of society (Gutiérrez 1973, 71). This notion of a Church-World relationship runs contrary to classical notions of Christendom, which were based on the assumption that only the Church is worthy of salvation and, therefore, only the Church should be the recipient of Christian acts (Gutiérrez 1973, 53-54). This way of thinking, which historically had centrality within the Church system and whose legacies are still felt today, began to decline in the sixteenth century. At that time, the French Revolution ushered in a novel theology called New Christendom.

New Christendom asserts that there are two powers in the world, the Church and the Society, and that these two powers act upon one another. Indeed, by this definition, Christians are meant to act upon their society in ways that reflect Christian values; specifically, they are to seek justice in the broader world. And yet, despite the seemingly radical efforts of its supporters, New Christendom brought about little change (Gutiérrez 1973, 56). Gutiérrez suggests that the absence of on-the-ground change may have been rooted in the thesis of New Christendom itself, which purported a "distinction of planes." This "distinction of planes" was defined in two ways—a distinction between "the Church" and "the World" and a distinction between "the Clergy" and "the Laity." In the distinction between the Church and the World, one can imagine an image in which the overarching kingdom of Heaven stands at the top, with both the Church and the World

descending from it. The kingdom unifies the Church and the World and the latter two, through their own distinct actions, work for the betterment of the kingdom. In the distinction between the Clergy and Laity, New Christendom asserts that the priest should work for the Church, while the laity work for the betterment of both the Church and the World. In this system, the clergy of the Catholic Church are cut off from the larger society, leaving broad Christian works to the laity (Gutiérrez 1973, 57). This organizational structure is reflected in many of the writings from the Second Vatican Council (Gutiérrez 1973, 58) and is a mirrored opposite of what we find in the early Reform social justice movement. In the case of the Reformers, the laity wanted to work for the synagogue, while the rabbis wanted to work for the world.

Gutiérrez asserts that the "distinction of planes" led to friction within the Church's pastoral work and theological framework (Gutiérrez 1973, 63). On the pastoral level, people felt the Church's narrowly defined role in the world (i.e. evangelizing and inspiring) and the strict divide between the role of the priest and the layperson was too restricting (Gutiérrez 1973, 63). Christians looked around the world and saw issues of significant weight and felt called to act. This calling necessitated action outside of the clearly defined roles of evangelism and inspiration—Christians wanted to make change! On the theological plane, as the world became increasingly secular, the Church needed to form a new vocabulary and culture that allowed it to access the secular world and forge a connection with it. The old model, which assumed a religious society that viewed the Church as relevant and essential, was no longer binding (Gutiérrez 1973, 67). By blurring these planes, Vatican II sought to realign the Church with the world. In the

Reform movement, Jewish issues and larger socials issues have had a long history of blurring, even if the community shifted its focus inward post-1967. And, as society becomes increasingly informal and more egalitarian, a blurring of roles between the clergy and the laity is growing in the movement. However, there remains in many congregations a Rabbi-Focused social justice agenda. The next step in a blurring of Reform planes should be in both educating and training an active laity to work on significant issues of social justice.

Juan Luis Segundo

Another Liberation theologian, Juan Luis Segundo, has been equally vocal about the critical relationship between the Church and Society. Segundo was born in 1925 in Montevideo, Uruguay. Similar to Gutiérrez, Segundo has lived much of his life in his birthplace of Montevideo, working as a chaplain, leading lay groups on matters of theology, and working in the social sciences. In 1941, Segundo entered a religious order, the Jesuits, and studied in the Jesuit Seminary of San Miguel in Argentina. Similar to Gutiérrez's course of study, Segundo studied theology and philosophy in Europe from 1951-1959. From 1965-1971, Segundo served as founder and director of the Peter Faber Theological and Social Center in Montevideo and editor of the Center's periodical. In 1971, the Uruguayan government shut down both institutions, presumably in reaction to Segundo's criticism of Uruguayan politics. Since that time, Alfred T. Hennelly reports in

Signs of the Times, Segundo has been focused on producing theological works for lay and scholarly communities (Hennelly, writing in Segundo 1993, 1-2).

Religion and Politics

Segundo discusses in different language what Gutiérrez and Stephen S. Wise make explicit in their writing: There is an assumption among certain religious figures, both within and outside Latin America, that there should be a divide between religion and politics. Segundo suggests that such thinking is not only misguided, it is naïve. According to Segundo, religion is and always has been linked to politics. He suggests in *Liberation of Theology* that Christians today should translate Jesus' teachings about the primary need for acts of love in this world into a new vocabulary: Today's vehicle for love is politics (Segundo 1976, 69-71). He writes, "to suggest that almsgiving should continue to be the Christian response to the whole problem of wealth and its relationship to love is also to seriously distort the gospel message" (Segundo 1976, 71). According to Segundo, the only way to affect real change is to change the very system that allows love to exist in this world. To make isolated donations to a system that forbids love to exist is parallel to placing a Band-Aid on a gaping wound. Furthermore, Segundo asserts an apolitical Church is an impossibility. The Church, not to mention those individuals within the Church advocating for an apolitical stance, are far from apolitical themselves; their work implicitly supports the status quo power and political structures within the Church and within the world (Segundo 1976, 74-75).

This, of course, leads to the question: How should the Church go about making political decisions. Should the Church limit itself to "political principles" and avoid "political decisions"? If bishops, for example, were to become involved in politics, making explicit political decisions and advocating for their followers to follow their lead, they expose themselves to a host of problems. For example, in the case of Latin America, where much of the populace has been faced with the question of whether to support a capitalist government or a socialist government, should local bishops voice their opinions and ask their parishioners to follow them? What happens if history proves them wrong? Segundo suggests that it is, indeed, the place of the Church to make political decisions. These decisions should be rooted in the realities of one's social context and should attempt to respond to those contexts through moral action and through theological understandings. To shy away from this sort of political action does not equal being apolitical, Segundo asserts, but rather, merely perpetuates the status quo. Segundo writes, "Not choosing something because it is human is just as human a choice as the one that is supposedly being avoided" (Segundo 1976, 74-75). Mayer Wise and Einhorn debated this very issue—what did it mean not to speak out against the war—in the nineteenth century. In the twentieth century, Reform rabbis and lay leaders heatedly debated whether or not it was the place of the rabbi to speak on "political principles" or political decisions." The question of the degree to which clergy can enter political debates, ranging from purely philosophical to explicitly guiding, will surely be an ongoing discussion.

Praxis and Theology

Rachel Adler explains that any theology must have within it a defined praxis. And this is one of the central critiques that Catholic Liberation theologians have leveled at existing Church doctrine. Gutiérrez asserts that the Church, from its earliest days, was focused primarily on orthodox belief, but failed to create an orthopraxis, an orthodoxy of action in the world. "Orthopraxis," writes Gutiérrez, was largely left "in the hands of nonmembers and nonbelievers" (Gutiérrez 1973, 10). This oversight left one of the central aspects of Catholic theology to "outsiders." Theology, according to Gutiérrez, is not only an exercise in understanding the Divine, but also the act of human beings reflecting critically on their own lives and actions. This critical reflection, Gutiérrez asserts, must be rooted in praxis—with theologians assuming "a clear and critical attitude regarding economic and socio-cultural issues in the life and reflection of the Christian community" (Gutiérrez 1973, 11). For Gutiérrez, theological reflection means critically examining both the Church and the broader society and understanding both to be expressions of the "Word of God" (Gutiérrez 1973, 11).

Segundo has been equally vocal about the essential relationship between theory and praxis. Liberation theology, explains Segundo, conceptualizes theology within the context of reality. He explains that each human being first and foremost knows his own reality and then acts within that reality. Therefore, a functioning theology cannot be separate from one's social context or supercede one's social context. Liberation theology teaches that first one must make a decision to act and then consider the voice of theology

(and/or divine revelation) and use that voice as a way of supporting or further informing one's decision (Segundo 1976, 76).

Segundo, like Gutiérrez, asserts Church theologians have reversed the natural order of theology—becoming entrenched in ideas that are divorced from experience and action. Segundo, however, suggests this way of theologizing runs contrary to the earliest Christian traditions. In an exegetical interpretation that is telling, although it accepts the polemical anti-Pharisaic bias of the Gospels, Segundo looks to the roots of Christian theology by examining Jesus' own actions as described in the Christian Bible. He cites the following passage from Mark 3:1-5:

> On another occasion when he [Jesus] went to a synagogue, there was a man in the congregation who had a withered arm; and they were watching to see whether Jesus would cure him on the Sabbath, so they could bring a charge against him. He said to the man with the withered arm, 'Come and stand out here.' Then he turned to them: 'Is it permitted to do good or to do evil on the Sabbath, to save life or to kill?' They had nothing to say; and, looking round at them with anger and sorrow at their obstinate stupidity, he said to the man, 'Stretch out your arm.'

Segundo explains that Jesus' question fell outside of the Pharisees' known categories. The Pharisees, he explained, were ready for any question about what was or was not permitted on the Sabbath—these questions, according to Segundo, were questions of theology and disconnected from the realities of everyday life. Jesus' question, on the other hand, challenged the normative definition and asked a philosophical question, beyond the scope of the law (Segundo 1976, 77-78). This story, Segundo explains, illustrates how Jesus was willing to look to the needs of his people—they needed to be

healed—and was willing to first act and then consider the theology (so that even though healing was forbidden on the Sabbath, Jesus was willing to heal for the sake of the people and not get lost in the theological categories), (Segundo 1976, 78-79). In this case, Segundo parallels theology with love, explaining that Jesus first acted out of love for the people and then used his theology to support that action. The Pharisees, on the other hand, acted first from a place of theology and then looked to the people. Segundo asserts that the Pharisees valued "theological certitudes" over the "upright human heart" and, when they could not find those certitudes in their lives, they stopped short of granting love to others (Segundo 1976, 80). I would suggest that Segundo's thinking on this issue reveals a number of assumptions about Liberation theology. Liberation theology is asserted *in contrast* to perceived normative, dominant traditions. Segundo refers to the misguided views of the Church in his time and the Pharisees in Biblical times, two institutions that, in his view, divorced themselves from the people and entered into the world of ideas. Both Segundo and Gutiérrez are theologians who live amongst the people and theologize as a way of responding to their community's needs.

Jon Sobrino

Another Liberation theologian, Jon Sobrino, comments on this critical relationship between theology and praxis; similar to Segundo and Gutiérrez, his experiences do not come from the realm of ideas but from the realm of experience. Sobrino, like Segundo, is a Jesuit priest. He was born in Barcelona during the Spanish Civil War and is from a Basque family. Sobrino wrote the book *The True Church and the Poor* in El Salvador,

during the turbulent years of 1977-1980. During these years, Bishop Oscar Romero and Fathers Rutilio Grande and Octavio Ortiz were killed. Sobrino writes soberly in *The True Church and the Poor*, "Doing theology in this situation requires that the theology not only follow a specific method but that it also have a specific character. Theology in this situation becomes *responsible*. Theologians do not arbitrarily decide to study this or that theme; the theme is forced on them by reality" (Sobrino 1984, 4). Sobrino had no choice but to write about liberation in a time of widespread violence, cruel oppression, and, rampant injustice. What is critical to understand about Gutiérrez, Segundo, and Sobrino is that they *lived* the hardships of poverty, oppression, and injustice as they wrote. This connection, raw and deep, affected the ways in which they saw God and the world. Theology, for them, became deeply political and politics became wholly religious.

Understanding Spiritual Poverty and the Poor of Latin America

After the Second Vatican Council, Gutiérrez began wrestling with how the Christian world, until that time, had defined "poverty." On the one hand, Christians had understood poverty as a degrading condition needing to be overcome (even if the Church had not always sought to understand its root causes). On the other hand, Christians had traditionally thought of poverty as a religious or spiritual ideal. Gutiérrez suggests these definitions are no longer sufficient; in the modern world, "poverty" has stretched beyond a material definition. He asserts, "Not having access to certain cultural, social, and political values, for example, is today part of the poverty that people hope to abolish.

Would material poverty as an 'ideal' of Christian life also include lacking these things?" (Gutiérrez 1973, 289). Clearly, the answer is no. Gutiérrez explains the Bible[3] defines poverty as "a scandalous condition inimical to human dignity and therefore contrary to the will of God" (Gutiérrez 1973, 291). Once classified in this way, it is natural that Amos and Job would "rigorously" reject poverty and protest against its existence. Moreover, the Bible's stance that perpetrators of poverty are unjust oppressors becomes a critical piece of this theology (Gutiérrez 1973, 291-292). Gutiérrez explains the prophets point to specific instances of "fraudulent commerce and exploitation," "the hoarding of lands," "the violence of the ruling classes," "unjust taxes," and "unjust functionaries." In these ways, the prophets take a theoretical theology and root it in reality. Gutiérrez continues: "But it is not simply a matter of denouncing poverty. The Bible speaks of positive and concrete measures to prevent poverty from becoming established among the People of God" (Gutiérrez 1973, 293). For Gutiérrez, reactions to poverty are no longer sufficient, the religious person must work to prevent poverty—to seek out its root causes and dismantle them.

Gutiérrez's conclusions are similar to those of Wise: It is the job of the religious person to dismantle systems that lock people into poverty, to speak directly and truthfully, to condemn exploitation, to act purposefully on behalf of the poor, and to point out oppressors and condemn their actions. The *difference* between Wise and Gutiérrez is that Gutiérrez supports his conclusion with page after page of biblical citation. His condemnation of poverty is simultaneously an economic stance and an assertion of a new

[3] Here referring to both the Hebrew and Christian Bibles.

theology; he reframes God's relationship to the poor and, by extension, the relationship of the religious with the poor. For Gutiérrez, a prophetic theology is not something that must be named, but rather it functions as the life source of his political conclusions. Gutiérrez wrestles with text, tradition, and theology as part of his process of liberation. Wise, in contrast, champions the plight of the poor, but fails to connect his actions with tradition. Wise was an activist, not a theologian.

Sobrino, influenced by Gutiérrez, further comments on God's relationship with the poor, particularly the poor of Latin America. He explains there is a difference between the past revelation and the current manifestation of God. In order to understand God's current manifestation, one must reconsider how the Church and individual Christians act in their societies. Sobrino writes, "In my opinion, God's manifestation, at least in Latin America, is his scandalous and partisan love for the poor and his intention that these poor should receive life and thus inaugurate his kingdom. Correspondingly, the proper way of being conformed to God is to be concerned actively with the justice of the kingdom of God and with making the poor the basis of this concern" (Sobrino 1984, 2). For Sobrino, God is found amongst the poor and, therefore, it is amongst the poor that one must work in order to find God. Inherent in God's scandalous love of the poor is the promise that they will bring about God's manifestation on earth. And yet, Sobrino does not suggest the just due of the poor will come in "the next world;" rather, it is the responsibility of the world to ensure they receive begin receiving rewards in this world. The Liberation theologians express something critical here: In order for a religious community to act politically, that community must articulate God's role in the process.

Liberation theologians reflect on the Divine through a multi-faceted lens. In their work, they first examine the world and the actions of a religious person in the world. Next, they begin to imagine God's role in the process. This understanding of theology is based on rational thinking and faith. Faith, obviously, has always been a key part of theologians conceptualizing the Divine. But, in the Christian world, Gutiérrez's articulation of using "rational thinking" as a part of this process is unique. He explains that in order to understand God in today's history, one must take into account broad notions of philosophy, science, psychology, biology, and social sciences (the latter, most notably, in Latin America), (Gutiérrez 1973, 5-7). Because of the complex nature of poverty, as outlined above, one cannot only rely on traditional religious notions of poverty, but also must look to the socio-economic and geo-political realities that affect the lives of the poor. Liberation theologians suggest the religious person must stretch theology beyond the realm of belief and into the realm of practical reality.

A Community of Activism

There are a number of groups within Latin America that are working for liberation. Certain lay people, priests, and bishops have all attempted to use their power as Christians to affect change in their societies. For these different groups, involvement in liberation has often meant allying themselves with Christians of other denominations (in particular among the laity) and revolutionary political groups. Among bishops, there has also been a move not only to affect change in government and political policies, but also

within the Church structure as well. The actions of all three groups (i.e. lay people, priests, and bishops) have not been without consequence. Many Christians are now marked as "subversives" and have had to move their political activity underground (Gutiérrez 1973, 102-107). There is one unifying characteristic among all these change-agents: These Christians see their acts as being "in solidarity" with Latin America (Gutiérrez 1973, 108). Liberation theologians do not believe the Latin American Church is above the on-the-ground realities of Latin America; rather, "...[the Latin Ameican Church] attempts to assume its responsibility for the injustice which it has supported both by its link with the established order as well as by its silence regarding the evils this order implies" (Gutiérrez 1973, 108). One way that the Latin American Liberation movement has insured not only a language of partnership and solidarity, but also a reality of such, has been because of "the active participation of the oppressed" (Gutiérrez 1973, 113). Gutiérrez explains that this involvement signals the fact that these individuals recognize the injustice of their situation and have taken steps to actively pursue radical change (Gutiérrez 1973, 113). There is a clear difference between the active participation of the poor in Liberation theology and the clear non-participation of the oppressed in Reform Judaism. Historically, Reform Jews have acted *on behalf* of the oppressed; they have not seen themselves as part of the oppressed. Reform Jews have never worked for their own liberation; they have worked for the liberation of the others. It is not until Reform Jews come to understand how they, themselves, are oppressed and work for their own liberation, that they will fully embrace their own prophetic aspirations.

Toward a Reform Prophetic Theology:

What Reform Jews Can Learn from Liberation Theologians

Prophetic Categories

Both Gutiérrez and Segundo describe the importance of using the social sciences along with religious tradition as lenses through which they look at their lives and the lives of their people. While this notion may not seem that radical, when compared both to traditional Church or Jewish methodologies for articulating theology, it is, indeed, quite revolutionary. Traditional Jewish theologies are organized around the categories of God, Torah, and Israel. While these categories are certainly useful tools for examination, I do believe that they have the power to distance us from the realities of our lives. By beginning to articulate a Prophetic theology through the lenses of "God, Torah, and Israel" we have the potential to perpetuate our own blindness to the real-life experiences of our people. A Prophetic theology must rise up from amongst the people. We must study our people's lives (Israel) and attempt to rearticulate how text (Torah) and theology (God) play a role in creating a Community of Justice.

The Relationship between Politics and Religion

Isaac Mayer Wise chose religion over politics. Stephen S. Wise chose politics over ritual. Eisendrath called for a transformation from a concern for ritual to a concern for justice. And yet, amongst these various calls to action, never once was there an organized, movement-wide assertion that a life of justice was *part of* a life of ritual.

Gutiérrez, in his analysis of Christianity's theological history, pays close attention to the Distinction of Planes, a central tenet of New Christendom. New Christendom was a movement that failed because it defined the secular world and the Church as separate—distinct from one another. This distinction failed to ignite people toward action. This distinction was coupled with a separation between clergy and laity. And yet, the Liberation theologians benefited greatly from the teachings of New Christendom. Might we today, within the Reform movement, have similar lessons to learn from the initial attempts of Reform Jews to create a social justice movement? This movement was *defined* by a distinction of planes—focusing on politics *instead of* ritual and, at least in its early years, by a split between clergy and laity. The Reform movement's widespread focus on social justice waned after 1967, when the Jewish community turned inward toward a more particularistic agenda. Because justice work was separate from religious life, when social trends shifted, the Reform movement shifted away from a commitment to justice.

What we learn from Liberation theology is this: A true Prophetic Judaism must be holistic. It must link justice and ritual—politics and religion, so that neither is fully articulated without the other. A true Prophetic Judaism must be co-imagined and co-realized through a partnership of clergy and laity, working together to carry out a joint vision. In the first half of the twentieth century, many disenchanted Jews were attracted to Reform Judaism because of its political message. For these Jews, a political Judaism served as a replacement for an unrealized spiritual Judaism. It was decades later, in the 1980s and 1990s , when Jews began decrying the lack of a spiritual center in Jewish life,

that the Reform movement focused on its own spiritual revival. Must we wait again for the pendulum to swing? The prophets and the Liberation theologians who later re-envisioned their words assert unequivocally that religion and politics must go hand and hand. And, it is only through a lay-clergy partnership that the community can begin to understand how this may be possible.

Language: Fostering a Common Fluency

Each of the biblical prophets articulates his own vision of justice and theology using the language of text and couching his assertions in the language of tradition. Each of the prophets articulates a Divine message—a message of justice. Each of the prophets, however, articulates a unique vision of justice and a unique understanding of the Divine. There is no single "Prophetic Judaism" that we can point to and claim as our own. For generations, Reform rabbis called the Reform movement a "Prophetic movement," but we have never set out to systemically define what "Prophetic" means to the movement. The only way this definition can be articulated is if communities come together in serious study of text (in particular studying Prophetic texts) and in an open sharing of their own experiences. We must create a shared language of experience and a shared language of justice if we hope to become a Prophetic movement.

Liberation theologians explain no theology can be articulated without a defined praxis. The theologies they articulate are not separate from everyday life, but defined by life. Liberation theology bubbled up from the beliefs of the people. It was born out a

searching—a desire amongst the poor of Latin America—to create a culture of radical change. The theologians did not articulate theology secluded from the people, but rather wrote amongst the people; they served as the mouthpieces of their community. The people of Latin America shared a religious language—one of biblical metaphors, holy texts, and tradition. Many Reform Jews today do not speak these languages, nor have Reform Jews—as a whole—ever been fluent in them. Many Reform Jews today do not know of the prophetic tradition, nor are they aware of the foundational texts that breathe a life-source of justice into our People. In this way, to even begin articulating a shared Prophetic Judaism is, in and of itself, a challenge. How can we articulate a Prophetic theology when our people know neither the prophets nor theology? This textual gap, which creates de facto camps of folk and elite, prevents a true lay-clergy partnership because it makes an articulation of a common textual language impossible. The history of social justice within the Reform movement shows us that rabbis initially had to cajole lay leaders to join in their cause of justice—a feat that took decades to achieve and which only lasted about twenty years. In our attempts to create a true prophetic Judaism, we must start where the Liberation theologians began—with the people. We must raise up a language and culture of prophetic texts and traditions amongst the laity of our movement. We must expose our laity to texts so that they might expose us to their deepest held beliefs. At the same time, we must listen to the stories of our people and begin fostering a culture in which we all articulate the injustices we face daily. We must learn and listen together—winding text and experience, if we hope to begin articulating a shared, communal prophetic theology.

From "Them" to "We": Liberating the Self and the Other

Latin American Liberation theologians do not articulate a language of liberation from a place of freedom. Rather, they understand themselves and their people as being oppressed and they articulate a theology with a defined praxis of liberation from within that context of oppression. In the past, Reform rabbis, and later the Reform laity, wrote about other people's oppressions and then worked to free them. While this work is noble, it is not prophetic. Gutiérrez asserts the modern definition of poverty is not only material, but also "not having access to certain cultural, social, and political values (Gutiérrez 1973, 289). We must ask ourselves, what impoverishes us? What access do we lack? What is our oppression?

A Prophetic Judaism cannot only be centered on helping or liberating "the other," it must also center on bringing justice to ourselves. It is only by learning our own stories of injustice that we can begin to understand the injustices carried out by the whole of humanity. It is only when we see that the work of redemption means laboring on behalf of ourselves in relationship to the other that we can affect real change. Community organizer Ernesto Cortés writes in *Better Together: Restoring the American Community*, "What I mean by organizing is getting you to recognize what's in your best interest. Getting you to recognize that you have a child, that you have a career and a life to lead, and that there are some things that are obstacles to the quality of your life. I need to get you to see how you can affect those things through relationships with other people" (Cortés, cited in Putnam and Feldstein 16). Part of affecting change means understanding

that we ourselves need changing. Liberation theologians understand that it is not only the other that needs liberating, but the self. Community organizers explain effective liberation only happens when everyone sees himself or herself as in need of change and as a part of a process of making change. One of the reasons 1967 ushered in the end of the Reform movement's focus on issues of justice is because, in that watershed year, Reform Jews' focus shifted from the other to the self. It is only when other and self are linked together that a focus on justice can withstand the waves of history. If the salvation of self is linked to the salvation of other, then the context of liberation can shift, but the common goal remains fixed.

In Jeremiah 14:19-22, Jeremiah cries out to God in the third person plural. Using the language of "we" and "our," Jeremiah weaves himself into the fabric of his community. He says to the Divine, "We acknowledge, O Adonai, our wickedness, the iniquity of our fathers, for we have sinned against You" (Jeremiah 14:20). In this statement, Jeremiah states unequivocally that even though he sees it as his role to chastise members of his community, he understands their sins are also his sins and that their history is his history. Jeremiah cannot remove himself from the community he hopes to save. He recognizes that he himself is a part of the process of change. Jeremiah is inextricably linked to his neighbor and, therefore, their hopes for redemption are joined. When we, as a community, are able to articulate how we are inextricably linked to our neighbors, we will be ready to articulate a vision of justice.

Relationship: Recognizing the Power in Partnership

Rachel Adler writes in *Engendering Judaism* that the praxis for a feminist Jewish theology can only be articulated when groups of Jews meet and, together, define Jewish life and their experiences (Adler XXV). Adler writes, "As I understand it, theology's task is to allow the texts of the tradition and the lived experiences of religious communities to keep revealing themselves to one another so the sacred meanings of both text and experience can be renewed. In the course of this process, God becomes present in our midst" (Adler XXV). In the same vein, a Prophetic theology must be born out of the experiences of diverse members of the Reform Jewish community and it must be articulated through a language of text.

Our movement's Prophetic theology must grow out of our congregations. We must meet together—as communities—to discuss and learn and articulate. A social justice message cannot be articulated at CCAR Conventions or URJ Biennials and brought home to congregations; it must originate amongst the people—evolving from a primal cry for change into a defined praxis born out of a common theology. The first step in defining this praxis is fostering a common language of text and tradition. The second step is understanding that a Prophetic Judaism calls upon us not only to bring justice to the other, but also to bring justice to ourselves. The third step in this process is recognizing that it is only through relationship that we can bring about change.

Liberation theology community organizer Ernesto Cortés writes in *Gathering Power* "Organizing means looking for leaders. Organizing means understanding the iron rule

'Never do for someone else what he or she can do for themselves.' Organizing means understanding that power comes in two forms: unilateral, top-down, expert-driven power from organized money. ... But power also comes from organized people with their institutions. Power can also be not just unilateral but also relational" (Cortés, cited in Osterman 3-4). Understanding that liberation of the self and the liberation of the other are linked not only fuels a desire for change, it fuels the possibility for change. The model of community organizing teaches us that we are able to leverage power when we do it in partnership with others. When we advocate for another's liberation and they advocate for ours, we both increase justice in the world and elevate each other's voices. If individual communities come to articulate prophetic theologies that are born out of text and experience, these communities can join together to see their visions of a better world realized. We must realize that working in relationship elevates the voice of the text, the self, and the other.

Chapter Two
The Prophets

Introduction

In this chapter, I will introduce readers to a select group of prophets: Micah, Amos, First Isaiah, Deutero-Isaiah, Habakkuk, and Jeremiah. As I have worked on my thesis, I have come to care for each of these characters. Each of these prophets has his own unique voice. Each of them looks at the world differently. Each of them expresses his opinions and his beliefs with passion—with conviction. I have come to know these prophets as individuals and this, in a very basic sense, has fueled my writing of this chapter. Too often, our tradition and those of who teach it refer to "The Prophets" as a monolithic group. Our references, in this regard, take many forms. Reform Jews have long talked about a "prophetic tradition," a "prophetic Judaism," and a "prophetic message." What I have come to learn is that such references are misleading. This terminology seems to suggest "the prophets" present a singular idea of how the world should be. It suggests "the prophets" have similar goals, similar aims, and similar roles in society. This could not be farther from the truth. Each of the prophets has his own goal, his own means of communicating, and his own messages he is burning to express. Each of the prophets is called to prophesy in a unique way and both communicates with and understands God through a personal frame of reference.

When we read the Torah during our yearly Torah cycle, we read it as a whole. Week after week, we read *parashah* after *parashah*, winding our way through our fundamental narrative until we come to its end and begin again. When we read the five *megilot*, we

read them in their totality. On Sukkot we hear line after fragile line of Ecclesiastes. Not a single detail of the Song of Songs is left out during Pesach. All of Esther is up for booing and cheering. The prophets are different. Ages ago the rabbis chopped the prophets up—sliced them into razor thin servings and doled them out, each to its own week. The *haftarot* are presented in no particular order. They are selected not for their own message, but as an accompaniment, a side dish to go along with the main serving of Torah. A bit of Isaiah here, some Jeremiah there, Judges thrown in with Kings and Ezekiel. The rabbis assumed their fellow Jews had internalized the prophets in their totality and would recognize these reassigned well-known passages. But we today are not the rabbis' fellow Jews. Is it any wonder we have lost our prophets?

Jeremiah must be read from beginning to end; to read it in sections is almost a waste. Jeremiah's relationship with the Divine is intense. Jeremiah's life is filled with ups and downs, successes and victories. In one chapter Jeremiah is imprisoned, in the next he is free. In one moment he comforts and in the next he chastises. Isaiah must be read from beginning to end. Likewise, to pull strands of Isaiah out of context is to misrepresent the book's intent. If it is read out of order, readers will never realize the book, consciously, ignores the destruction of Jerusalem and the events leading up to the exile. These details are critical to understanding how the prophets thought and behaved, what they believed and how they expressed those beliefs. In this chapter, I attempt both to analyze each of the prophets holistically and to offer detailed comparisons among them.

In Chapter One of this thesis, I explore two modern religious movements that call themselves "prophetic": Reform Jews and Liberation theologians. I assert that while Reform Jews historically called themselves "prophetic," they did not employ many of the techniques the prophets employed and, while they certainly focused on some of the issues that drove the prophets (i.e. concern for the powerless), they consciously ignored others (i.e. concern for ritual). At the end of Chapter One, I suggested Reform Jews must come together in study—to learn about the prophets, to wrestle with texts on a deep level, and to reimagine what it means to be prophetic.

Chapter Two of this thesis is divided into a number of sections. First, in "Prophetic Voices," I provide a brief overview of the prophets I will analyze. I show how these prophets are fundamentally different from one another and touch on a number of themes on which I will expand later in the chapter. Next, I give a brief overview of the "Social, Historical, and Theological Context" within which the prophets operate, analyzing how the prophets are called to prophecy, where they are from, the time period in which they live, and the areas in which they prophesy. Then, in "The Prophets: Voices of Justice" I look at the central message of each of the prophetic books—the prophets' statements about issues of justice. I show that even though many of the prophets lived during the same time periods and witnessed similar social, cultural, political, and religious realities, they interpreted, judged, and responded to these realties in vastly different ways. In the next section "The Prophets: Issues Beyond Justice," I explore a few of the common social issues to which the prophets respond. I show that even though these topics are outside the generally perceived realm of prophetic discourse, they are closely linked to the

prophets' notions of justice and, furthermore, seek to enhance their core messages. In the final section, "Prophetic Methodologies" I look at how various prophets deliver their messages.

Throughout this chapter I have aimed to balance two competing concepts: 1) The prophets should be read as whole books, in order to understand their full complexity and 2) In order to fully understand the wide variety of prophetic messages, one must consider selections of prophetic texts in comparison to one another.

Prophetic Voices

First Isaiah presents a fully contextualized prophetic message. The book opens with a detailed superscription that includes Isaiah's birthplace, his intended audience, and his temporal setting. Isaiah refers to specific topics—including the unjust actions of Judah's kings and priests, the people's sins, and specific directions on how the nation should proceed in her international relations. Isaiah draws concrete conclusions about the future (e.g. Judah will be destroyed and Jerusalem spared) and gives explicit instructions to Judah's kings (e.g. not to make alliances with foreign nations or fight back if attacked). The book of Isaiah includes third person narration and descriptions of the prophet's activities. The book gives detailed descriptions of Isaiah's relationships with different kings and his family. Isaiah includes ornate descriptions of the Divine and concrete eschatological visions. Isaiah is called upon by God to speak truth to power and to provide concrete direction as to how his society should be governed. He criticizes the people about their religious and social infractions. Isaiah describes a tangible future, a distinct image of God, and offers visions of both hope and destruction.

Benjamin D Sommer explains in *The Jewish Study Bible* that the book of Isaiah is "perhaps the best-loved of the prophetic books. It is cited more than any other prophetic text in rabbinic literature, and more haftarot are taken from Isaiah than from any other prophetic book" (Sommer 780). For this reason, I believe, the specifics of Isaiah's model of prophecy—the definition of "prophet" according to the book of Isaiah—comes to represent, in the popular imagination, the global definition of "prophet." In my

estimation, such associations rob us of powerful prophetic models and vastly oversimplify the complex role of "the prophet" in Israel's history.

For example, Micah acts almost exclusively as a mouthpiece for the Divine. He reveals close to nothing about his own background to his audience. The book's superscription lets us know Micah is from Moreshet, but we have no idea what his life was like before he was called to prophecy. We do not know if Micah was a willing prophet or a reluctant advocate. When Micah speaks, he almost exclusively *quotes* God. In fact, Micah never *speaks directly* to God. The book of Micah includes no third person narration, no descriptions of the prophet's activities, and no concrete images of Micah's audience. As far as the reader is concerned, Micah, as an individual, hardly exists. Without the inclusion of the superscription, readers would have no concept of a "Micah" at all; without Micah 1:1, this book could easily be read as one long Divine condemnation of the people. In fact, the name "Micah" is not written a single time in the book, except for in the superscription.

The book of Micah is vastly different from the book of Isaiah and the prophet Micah is quite different from the prophet Isaiah. The book of Micah is about a prophetic message, not about a prophetic figure. The condemnations included in this book—against religious transgressions, greed, oppression, and unjust leadership—are certainly "prophetic." The Divine punishments outlined in the book—the destruction of Judah and Samaria, as well as the people's exile—can clearly be categorized as "prophetic" warnings. Micah's hopeful visions of a "latter day," in which the world knows peace and Israel is redeemed

by a remnant of Jacob, are "prophetic" messages of comforting order in a time of unjust chaos. And yet, Micah never speaks to royalty, he never speaks to God, and he never reveals anything about himself. Micah, throughout the book, remains an anonymous first person narrator who quotes the word of God, in the form of poetry, leaving his own voice out of his message. Micah offers commentary on social ills and outlines visions for the future, but he remains distant from all that he sees.

The book of Habakkuk is unlike either the books of Isaiah or Micah. Habakkuk does not begin with a prophetic proclamation to the people, as Micah and Isaiah do, but instead begins by crying out in protest at God. The book includes no prophetic speeches to the people whatsoever. Habakkuk is comprised entirely of a conversation between the prophet and God. When compared to one another in these ways, it is hard to believe Habakkuk, Isaiah, and Micah are considered to be within the same genre of biblical literature. And yet, surprisingly and excitingly, all of these books are prophetic.

Habakkuk instigates his own prophetic career. Indeed, the unique superscription, "The oracle which Habakkuk the prophet saw" (Habakkuk 1:1), does not attribute the prophet's initial vision to God. Similarly, this book does not begin with Habakkuk quoting God's speech, but Habakkuk speaking his own words. It is Habakkuk, himself—not God—who outlines the iniquity, trouble, destruction, and violence endemic to his world (Habakkuk 1:3). It is only after Habakkuk accuses God of showing him injustice and doing nothing to stop it that God responds to Habakkuk's pleas.

We know nothing of Habakkuk's background—where he comes from, the time in which he lives, or from where he prophesies. Even more so than Micah, Habakkuk, as an historical figure, is a complete mystery. In fact, the only clue into the setting of Habakkuk's prophecy is the reference to God raising up the Chaldeans (the biblical term for the Babylonians) in Habakkuk 1:6; this reference sets the date of the book after 612 BCE, when the Babylonians came to power.

The book of Habakkuk makes no effort to show Habakkuk was called by God to be a prophet and provides no social context or audience for his prophecies. Habakkuk sees injustice and cries out to God, demanding a reply; he is not called by God, but by his own conscience. Throughout the book, Habakkuk speaks directly and solely to God. Indeed, this is the only prophetic book to include a psalm—a lament psalm (Habakkuk 3)—as a form of prophetic speech.

In direct contrast to Habakkuk's fierce desire to challenge God, Jeremiah is a reluctant prophet. While the societal roles of "priest" and "prophet" are often presented as diametric opposites, we learn from Jeremiah's superscription that Jeremiah is a prophet who comes from a priestly line. Similar to the book of Isaiah, the book of Jeremiah provides us with concrete historical data to contextualize Jeremiah's prophecies within history. Jeremiah, like Isaiah, is called upon to speak to ruling officials, but he is also called upon to address the people. Jeremiah is not only a social critic, but also a comforting presence during a time of tragedy. Jeremiah's role is not only to enact change, but also to provide solace. Like Isaiah, Jeremiah provides concrete warnings

about Judah's future and impending destruction. Jeremiah, however, is overwhelmingly concerned with religious infractions, in particular with idolatry. (Might this be why he, an individual from a priestly family, is called upon to deliver these messages?)

The book of Jeremiah is clearly *about* the prophet Jeremiah (and in this way it is markedly different than the book of Micah). Jeremiah begins with God speaking directly to the prophet and includes particular details, including many chapters of third person narration, describing the prophet's activities. In contrast to Habakkuk, who cries out his demands to God, or to Isaiah, who encounters God through grand royal visions, Jeremiah has a close, almost gentle, relationship with the Divine. And, in line with this closeness, God calls upon Jeremiah to make concrete sacrifices in his life, including his direction for Jeremiah never to marry or father children. Jeremiah is asked on numerous occasions to act out Divine messages through symbolic actions or embodied metaphors (e.g. wearing a yoke). Jeremiah suffers because of his role as prophet: he is mocked, imprisoned, threatened, and punished. He is presented as a tragic figure—an individual beaten down by his relationship with God and his responsibility to his people.

Jeremiah is a tortured soul—a person who is asked to endure pain and suffering in order to make God's messages heard. He seems to have no allies in this world—except for the Divine, with whom he shares a particularly close relationship. Jeremiah is a priest, a pious individual, concerned with religious infractions and deeply committed to the people's belief in and worship of Adonai. Finally, Jeremiah is a social chameleon—

offering words of criticism in times when change is possible and words of solace when times are desperate.

From the prophet Amos, we learn a prophet need not be from the upper echelons of society. Amos is a sheepherder. He speaks the language of the people, using an abundance of agricultural imagery. For Amos, both destruction and redemption are centered on the health of the land. Amos is deeply concerned with how people treat one another—his prophecies on justice are unwavering. When Amos is called a "prophet" by a priest, he demurs, explaining, "I am not a prophet and I am not a prophet's son, I am herdsman and a gatherer of sycamore fruit" (Amos 7:14). Amos prophesies Israel's future destruction and the people's exile, but he isn't concerned with the specifics of how this will happen.

Amos is one of the people, a commoner, called upon by God to criticize society and provide concrete visions of what injustice between one individual and another will bring to the world. Amos is not interested in Israel's foreign policy, but he does demonstrate himself to be a champion of justice. Amos is resolute in his belief that Israel must only worship Adonai.

Finally, we look to Deutero-Isaiah. Deutero-Isaiah stands shoulder-to-shoulder with the exiled people and says to them: Do not worry, God is on high. Do not worry, God is here—present, in this place with you. Do not worry, God has brought a foreign ruler to redeem you. Do not worry, God forgives you. Do not worry, God will deliver you. And,

similar to Jeremiah, when the people are once again ready, Deutero-Isaiah offers his messages of social criticism: You must act justly toward one another and you must only worship Adonai.

Deutero-Isaiah helps his community to re-imagine the Divine after their entire context for conceptualizing God has been destroyed. Deutero-Isaiah gives others the language and imagery they need in order to help them feel God's presence and know God is with them, even when it seems impossible.

Social, Historical, and Theological Context

Historical Context

Before studying a given prophet, it is critical to understand the time period in which the prophet lives and the social context within which he operates. The prophets were influenced by four major events that shook the bedrock of ancient Israel—the destruction of the Northern kingdom, the destruction of the Southern kingdom, the exile, and the return from exile. It is almost impossible to describe the degree to which these events influenced the lenses through which the prophets saw society and the lenses through which the society saw itself.

In addition to external pressures, the prophets responded to internal strife. Frank Frick explains in *A Journey Through the Hebrew Scriptures* that even during the period of Jeroboam II, which is called a time of "peace" for Israel, "probably no more than five percent of the population enjoyed this 'prosperity' and 'peace'" (Frick 357). Frick, citing Bernhard Lang, asserts that Israel's economic stratification was rooted in rent capitalism. In this system, urban elites who owned huge amounts of property levied high taxes and demanded steep rents in the form of agricultural produce from peasant farmers. When crops failed, the peasant farmers were forced to take out loans from members of Israel's elite. Instead of offering low- or no-interest loans to their fellows, elite landowners exacted high interest rates. When peasants could not pay of these debts, their land was seized by the elites, creating a further rich-poor divide. This cycle ensured an ever-expanding landless peasant class (Frick 359). This stratification directly contradicts the

intent of Torah law, such as that laid out in Leviticus 25. The aim of Leviticus 25 is to prevent the emersion of this very sort of landless class that came to dominate the economic landscape of the eighth century. Each of the prophets, in his own way, responded to the geo-political and economic conditions surrounding him. What is remarkable about the prophets, though, is just how differently they spoke about and experienced the same local and global events. What is notable about their messages during these times is how different they all are.

The superscription to the book of Micah informs readers that the prophet Micah was a Morashite, meaning he was from the Judean town of Morashet. Many of the prophetic books open with a list of kings during whose reigns a given prophet prophesied. These kings provide an historical context for the prophet's message. Micah is said to have prophesied during the reigns of "Kings Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah of Judah," meaning the text presents Micah as prophesying from around 740 to 700 BCE (Micah 1:1, Suggs et. al. 963). While, the *Oxford Study Bible* asserts some of the material may have been written as late as the sixth century, emerging during the Babylonian Exile, what is critical for our understanding of the book is that Micah prophesied during the very time the Northern kingdom of Israel was destroyed (722 BCE), (Suggs et. al. 963). Micah prophesied before the destruction of the Northern kingdom, as well as after the calamity had struck. Like many other prophets, Micah had to endure the pain of seeing his prophecies come tragically true and continue speaking regardless.

Micah's intended audience is not fully disclosed. The superscription of the book informs readers that Micah "saw words about Samaria and Jerusalem," but this description does not indicate to whom these messages were delivered (Micah 1:1). Ehud Ben Zvi suggests in *The Jewish Study Bible* that Micah spoke to the people of Jerusalem (Ben Zvi 1205), but the prophet seems to have a larger audience in mind. Micah begins his prophecy with lofty goals of listenership, exclaiming, "Hear all you peoples and listen O earth and all its fullness..." (Micah 1:2). At the end of Micah 6 and the beginning of Micah 7, one finds a concentration of agricultural imagery, but it is unclear whether this language is indicative of Micah's upbringing or whether it is representative of the imagery most familiar to Micah's audience. Even though Micah's identity and his audience remain concealed throughout the book, his messages of both inevitable destruction and redemption continue to resonate loudly.

While the particulars of Micah's background are somewhat nebulous, Amos' origins are laid out clearly. Amos prophesied during the reigns of Kings Uzziah of Judah (around 783-742 BCE) and Jeroboam son of Joash of Israel (around 781-746 BCE), suggesting he lived in the generation before Amos (Suggs et. al 948). Despite the fact that Amos was a sheepherder from Tekoa in Southern Israel, the text explains he will prophesy about Israel to the community of the Northern kingdom of Israel. The superscription explains that during the middle of the eighth century, two years before a great earthquake, Amos "saw words about Israel" (Amos 1:1). This sight propelled Amos out of the southern farmland that was his birthplace and brought him northward to preach to a people who were not directly his own. The community to which Amos moved was fated for disaster.

He spent his prophetic years warning the people of impending doom. His words were so unwelcome to his transplant community that Amos is deported from the North (7:10-14). Amos, despite his humble beginnings, was able to see the writing on the wall and his prophecies, couched in the agricultural language of his youth, rang simple and true.

Biblical scholars assert that, held within the single book entitled "Isaiah," there are the writings of at least three different "Isaiahs" or Isaiah schools that spanned at least three different generations (Peterson 48). According to David L. Peterson in *The Prophetic Literature*, some scholars, in theories that have been largely disproved, suggest that the three Isaiahs fit neatly into three sections that together comprise the book of Isaiah: First Isaiah, writing in Jerusalem in the latter half of the 8th century (chapters 1-39), Second Isaiah, writing in the latter half of the 7th century (chapters 40-55), and Third Isaiah, writing in the sixth century during the Second Temple period (chapters 56-66) (Peterson 48). Contemporary biblical scholars, however, suggest that the texts are much more integrated than this. For the purpose of this paper and by way of comparison, I will first discuss elements of the so called "First Isaiah" text, or that of Isaiah son of Amoz, who the text tells us prophesied during the reigns of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, or from about 742-710 BCE (Suggs et. al. 700)[4]. In a different section, I will discuss the so-called "Deutero Isaiah," who writes just before the exile and in the post-exilic periods. In this way, First Isaiah is a contemporary of Micah's and Deutero-Isaiah is a contemporary of Jeremiah's.

[4] I am not claiming that all of Isaiah 1-39 describes First Isaiah, but I do recognize that the bulk of the material in these chapters describes this time period.

Micah, Amos, and First Isaiah all began their prophecies in a time of naïveté. The people amongst whom they prophesied did not yet know deep destruction or tragedy. This was a time of hubris, a time in which the people could still believe they were invincible, could still hold onto the false hope they could avoid devastation. Micah, Amos, and Isaiah each warned the people of their impending doom and simultaneously offered words of new hope. With invasion imminent, the prophets both attempted to alter the people's behavior, and when that failed, offered the people a vision of a future time in which they could create a new society based on justice and peace.

The superscription to the book of Habakkuk does not offer a list of kings or an explicit mention of historical context. Suggs et. al. propose the prophet Habakkuk prophesied some time between 612 to 597 BCE (Suggs et. al. 975). This dating scheme suggests Habakkuk began prophesying soon after the Babylonians defeated Assyria in 612 BCE, making him a contemporary of Jeremiah and Deutero-Isaiah, although his career as a prophet was quite contained and nowhere near as expansive as his fellows (Suggs et. al. 975). This time period was one of deep confusion within Judah. The people assumed the defeat of the Assyrians would mean a respite for Judah. With her enemy destroyed, there was hope she would be left in peace. But, this was not to be. The destruction of Assyria was only one stop on Babylon's warpath. Just as Assyria and Egypt had tried to rule the Ancient Near East, so did Babylon come to attempt domination. Habakkuk's message emerges out of this place of deep concern. It is unclear, however, whether or not the Judeans of Habakkuk's time shared his fears or his observations.

The book of Jeremiah describes the story of Jeremiah son of Hilkiah, who, the superscription to the book informs us, was from a priestly family and was born in Anatot, from the territory of Benjamin, a town that was about three miles north of Jerusalem (Suggs et. al. 778). The text tells us: "The word of Adonai came to him in the days of Josiah son of Amon, king of Judah, in the thirteenth year of his reign, and during the days Jehoiakim son of Josiah, king of Judah, and until the end of the eleventh year of Zedekiah son of Josiah, king of Judah, until the exile of Jerusalem in the fifth month" (Jeremiah 1:2-3). These dates correspond to the years 627-587 BCE; however, certain passages of the book, in particular chapters 40-44, suggest Jeremiah's prophecies continued to a date later than the superscription states (Peterson 97-98).

Jeremiah and Deutero-Isaiah wrote in times during which we might have presumed the people would have had a deeper awareness of both internal and external threats. These were communities that knew the limits of their power, for they were fully aware of the destruction of the Northern kingdom and the strategic desirability of Judah. And yet, everything we read suggests the people did not translate the fate of the Northern kingdom into a warning to Judah. Jeremiah and Deutero-Isaiah attempted to convince both the ruling classes and the people that their belief in their own immortality was faulty. Both prophets drew direct links between the fate of the North, the displeasure of the Divine, the actions of the South, and the future of Judah. But the people would not listen and the Southern kingdom, along with Jerusalem its capital, were destroyed. In the wake of this calamity, both Deutero-Isaiah and Jeremiah followed the people into exile. The prophets became involved in the exiles' experiences and preached explicitly to the exiled

communities. In this way, Deutero-Isaiah and Jeremiah, who, for chapters presented themselves as harsh social critics, metamorphosised into sources of consolation.

Calls to Prophecy

Each of the prophetic books begins by establishing a link between the prophet and the Divine. The assumption in these books is the prophets are both "normal" and "elevated." On the one hand, the prophets are human, and on the other hand, they are human beings who have answered a particular call or responded to a vision or made a conscious decision to act in the face of injustice. This careful balance between "normal" and "elevated" is made transparent in the opening verses of each prophet book, in which the text outlines how the prophets became prophets. These concise but revealing descriptions give readers clues as to the nature of the prophetic-Divine relationship and offer words to describe Divine communication with human beings.

The books of Micah and Amos begin with superscriptions, in which they describe their prophetic careers as beginning with "seeing" (חזה) the "words" or "the word" of Adonai (דבר), (Micah 1:1, Amos 1:1). In contrast, the book of Isaiah opens with Isaiah "seeing" (חזה) a "vision" (חזון). Later, in Chapter 6, Isaiah makes specific reference to the vision (חזון) that comes to him: "In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw Adonai sitting on a throne, high and lifted up, and his robe-skirt filled the temple" (Isaiah 6:1). Neither the book of Micah nor the book of Amos includes any visions of the Deity that can compare to Isaiah's. Micah and Amos communicate with the Divine by "seeing the word," but

Isaiah, like Ezekiel, sees a vision crowded with visual images of God's presence and the divine court filled with holy creatures. Isaiah describes God through images and uses images when quoting God's description of the future.

While Micah and Amos prophecy primarily to the people or to unidentified audiences, Isaiah speaks directly to kings, high officers, and other members of the upper echelons of society. Similarly, while Micah and Amos tend to use accessible or common metaphors and speak in relatively simple prose and poetry, Isaiah's language is ornate, the metaphors tend to be sophisticated, and the prose and poetry are complex. These differences in language suggest the prophets not only have diverse relationships with God, but also target their words to affect different listening audiences.

The book of Habakkuk reinforces this assertion of diversity. The book of Habakkuk opens with a short and not particularly informative superscription; it reads, "The oracle which Habakkuk the prophet saw" (Habakkuk 1:1). Note here that while Habakkuk "saw" (חזה) his "oracle," the verb form echoing that seen in Micah, Amos, and Isaiah, the book does not open with Divine speech. Rather, Habakkuk begins his prophecy by railing against the Divine and citing his own critical observations of the society around him. This superscription suggests Habakkuk is not called to prophecy by God, but by the evils of his society; he can no longer tolerate the status quo.

Notice, as well, that Jeremiah does not see (חזה) the word of Adonai, the word simply comes to him. Or, if one reads the Hebrew literally, the word of Adonai "was to him"

("אֲשֶׁר הָיָה דְבַר־יְהוָה אֵלָיו"), (Jeremiah 1:2). Jeremiah goes on to explain the particulars of how he received the Divine word—through touch: "Adonai put out His hand and touched my mouth and Adonai said to me, 'Behold, I put my words in your mouth'" (Jeremiah 1:9). This description, whether Jeremiah intends it metaphorically or literally, is striking in its familiarity. Jeremiah sees himself as being gently touched by God at a young age. The book describes another such encounter in Jeremiah 1:11-12; Jeremiah explains, "And it came to pass that the word of Adonai was upon me, saying 'What do you see, Jeremiah?' And I said 'A rod of an almond tree (שָׁקֵד), I see.' And Adonai said to me, 'You have seen well, for I am watchful (שֹׁקֵד) of my word to perform it.'" In the Hebrew, the same root word is used for "almond tree" and "watchful," suggesting that just like the early blooming almond tree, God will soon bring his prophecies to realization (Suggs. et. al. 779). While we do see this particular prophetic testing described in other texts, both this formulation of direct speech between God and a prophet[5] and the Divine request for the prophet to describe what he sees[6] are rare.

The "normalcy" and "elevation" of the various prophets, as shown in this section, are encapsulated in their calls to prophecy. However, it is only in the unfolding chapters of these books that readers can come to understand who the prophets are, what messages are central to them, and why they feel compelled to express their impressions.

---

[5] The phrase וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֵלַי is repeated only 17 times in the Tanakh. God speaks directly to Moses ten times, he addresses Jeremiah three times, Ezekial once, and Amos and Zechariah twice.

[6] See Amos 7:8, 8:2; Zechariah 4:2

The Prophets: Voices of Justice

In this section, I will give a brief overview of the prophetic books and outline some of the prophets' most explicit statements about justice and injustice. At the center of each prophetic book is an eternal truth, angling to be revealed: God intended this to be a just world, but humanity has perverted Divine justice. God is troubled—angered—by this perversion and will respond to humanity's sins. The word "humanity" is used purposefully here; the prophets do not only criticize Israel and Judah, but also speak out against the rest of the world. Each of the prophets has a particular vision of what justice should be and lays out the steps needed to reach it. This diversity of opinion speaks to the complexities inherent in the prophetic messages, as well as the common central core running through each of them.

Micah

The book of Micah reveals very little about the prophet Micah or his social context. The book's vagueness is furthered by Micah's presentation of contradictory images of the future and the inclusion of only a few direct statements about the present. The book offers a wide breadth of metaphoric language—moving quickly from one image to the other, but offers limited depth—focusing in on only a select set of images and metaphors. The book of Micah is something of a Prophetic Digest—a glimpse into general prophetic messages, images, and techniques (see Micah 6:8).

The book of Micah begins with a foreboding message, "For, behold, Adonai will come out from His Place and descend and tread on the heights of the earth" (Micah 1:3).

Micah continues by answering the unasked question, "Why?" Why would Adonai descend from the Place of the Divine to melt mountains and cleave valleys (Micah 1:4)? The answer is simple: Because of the transgressions of Judah and Samaria (Micah 1:5). As punishment for the people's transgressions, Samaria (Micah 1:6) and Judah (Micah 3:12) will be destroyed. Abraham Joshua Heschel suggests in *The Prophets* that Micah is the first of the prophets to prophesy the destruction of Jerusalem (Heschel 124).

The only time we learn anything of Micah as an individual is when he rails against the false prophets of his time—prophets who lavished their material supporters with positive messages. Some scholars suggest that Isaiah might have been one of the false prophets to whom Micah is referring. Micah suggests that they will be engulfed by darkness, shamed, and will soon hear nothing from the Divine. Micah, in this instant (a moment of transparency?), gives us a glimpse into his own psyche: "But I am filled with the strength of the Spirit-of-Adonai and of law and of power to declare to Jacob his crimes and to Israel his sins" (Micah 3:8).

Micah is intent on speaking truth to power, and yet, the truth Micah speaks is not his truth, but God's truth. Micah is much quicker to quote the Divine than to engage the people. We never know how Micah's prophecies are received and we have no idea who actually hears them.

Micah outlines a series of "transgressions" for which the people will be punished. He begins by addressing the sins of idol worship and harlotry (Micah 1:7) and continues to

address the social evils of greed and oppression. In Micah 2:1-2, the text reads, "Woe to those who devise iniquity and make evil on their beds. In the light of morning they do it, for it is within the power of their hand. And they covet fields and steal them; and houses and take them away. And they oppress a gentleman and his house and a man and his property." For Micah, oppression and greed are tied up with immoral sexual acts. The same people who steal houses and fields also "make evil on their beds." Micah, in this way, focuses on the breakdown of both public and private morality.

Micah continues in Chapter 3 by exploring the extent to which Samaria's leadership is unjust. He accuses Israel's leaders of literally devouring the people they are meant to protect; he says of them, "Haters of good and lovers of evil. You steal their skin from off of them and flesh from their bones, and eat the flesh of my people, and strip the flesh off of them, and break their bones, and chop them up as into a pot or like meat in a caldron" (Micah 3:2-3). He supports this graphic image with concrete condemnations, leveling his tongue at all people in power: "Her rulers judge for bribes and her priests teach for a price. And her prophets divine for silver. But they lean on Adonai, saying "'Behold, Adonai is in our midst, evil will not come upon us'" (Micah 3:11). Once again, Micah attempts to illustrate a complete breakdown in society—those who claim to speak the words of God tell lies for their own gain and those who are meant to conduct right worship and right government are interested only in themselves. Both Jeremiah and Ezekiel refer to the trope of a pot, as well (Jeremiah 1:13, Ezekiel 11:7). What makes Micah's version powerful is that it takes the metaphor to new depths—casting Samaria's leaders as cannibals.

Micah does not focus in depth on any one issue, nor does he offer a direct call to action for the people. Micah tells the people to act righteously (Micah 6:8), but he does not offer rallying cries of social change or condemnations supported by action-messages. In Micah we find descriptions of a God who loves justice and bitterly rages against corruption. And yet, in Micah's eyes, the fate of Samaria has already been sealed.

Amos

Amos begins his prophetic career by citing a metaphor rooted in his own experience—the land: "Adonai from Zion will roar, And from Jerusalem give His voice, And the shepherd's pastures will languish, And the head of Carmel will dry up" (Amos 1:2). From here, Amos' prophecy condemns one nation of the Ancient Near East after another—prophesying that God will destroy the nations surrounding Israel as punishment for their sins. *The Oxford Study Bible* points out that Amos winds these condemnations around the map until he focuses in on Israel (Suggs et. al. 948). With each new place, Amos repeats the same refrain, "For three crimes of [*the nation*], and for four I will not turn away." These nations have been forgiven time and again, but they have now passed over God's threshold of forgiveness. God forgave them three times, but for the fourth transgression God cannot forgive. This rotating prophecy gives readers/listeners the sense that the world is on the brink of collapse—each nation has pushed its limit of sin and now will be brought to its knees.

Each one of these nations, in Israel's eyes, is an enemy. Each one, in their eyes, deserves punishment. One can imagine the Northern Israelites' response as they heard these prophecies one after another. Each one tells of an enemy's destruction. Each one cites God's power and willingness to do battle on Israel's behalf; that is, until Amos 2:6, when Amos takes aim at Israel: "For three crimes of Israel, and for four I will not turn away." What begins as a favorable prophecy, evidence of God working on behalf of the Israelites, quickly turns into a bitter pronouncement.

The Northern Israelites would not have seen this condemnation coming. With these words, the people would know: Amos was not there to praise them, but to rail against them. Amos lays out the people's sins clearly: "They sold the righteous for silver and the needy for sandals. They trample the head of the poor into the dust of the earth and stretch out the path of the humble. And a man and his father lie with the same young woman, thereby profaning my holy name. And they stretch out on clothes taken as a pledge in the place of My slaughter-site. And they drink wine from fines in the House of their God" (Amos 2:6-8). Each one of these accusations describes an abuse of power—the powerful acting unjustly toward the powerless: Upper classes abusing the lower classes, men abusing women, lenders abusing borrowers, and tax collectors abusing the fined. These abusive acts of the powerful operate in two realms: The "marketplace" (that is to say, abuses that take place amongst Israelites during everyday life) and in the "temples" (that is to say, abuses that take place in sites the people think of as "holy"). Amos' condemnation gives us an insight into his understanding of God's will: For Amos' God, justice between one person and another is just as important as the people's right actions

toward the Divine. For Amos, holiness—and by extension the ability to profane that which is holy—exists not only at holy sites, but exists within the covenanted relationship amongst human beings.

Amos' punishments for Israel match their purported crimes—crimes against God and crimes against one another: "For on that day I will visit the crimes of Israel on them and I will visit the slaughter-sites at Beth El and the horns from the slaughter-site will be hewn and they will fall to the ground. And I will smite the winter house with the summer house and the ivory houses will be destroyed and the great houses will be swept away, declares Adonai" (Amos 3:14). As punishment for sinful actions—injustice and profane behavior—against God and one another, both the people's places of worship and their places of luxurious living will be destroyed.

Unlike Micah's unfocused use of language, Amos' use of metaphor centers closely around agricultural imagery. In fact, his elaborate description of punishment against Israel centers around God's promise that Israel's agricultural center will be crippled: Amos begins by reminding the people that God has brought drought, blight, and mildew—thereby destroying Israel's economy—in the past (Amos 4:6-10). And Amos explains he has seen two potential futures: a field being destroyed by a swarm of locusts (Amos 7:1) and a field being engulfed by a mighty fire (Amos 7:4). But, with each of these images, God promises Amos that, because of Amos' prayers, these visions will not come to fruition. This hopeful prophecy, though, will not endure. The people's sins are too great. God finally declares He has placed a plumb line in the midst of the people, and

He will not pardon the people again (Amos 7:7-9). This description—of forgiven treachery after forgiven treachery followed by certain punishment—parallels the opening verses of the book. Adonai is a forgiving God, Amos tells us, but the Divine can only be pushed so far. Amos too is a forgiving prophet, but he can only be pushed so far. Both God and Amos were able to forgive the people on two accounts, but, for the third, there was no mercy left.

First Isaiah

In general, Isaiah's prophecies are much wider reaching than either Micah or Amos'. Isaiah prophesies about the sins and subsequent punishments of nations other than Israel, advises kings on international policy, describes the kingdom of God, and comments on the future role of women and warriors.

Isaiah 1:10-17 seeks to undo the people's sinful practices, letting them know God will no longer accept their religious offerings if they do not begin pairing them with holy behavior. Isaiah asserts ritual obligations can only be fulfilled if they are coupled with moral action:

> Hear the word of Adonai, rulers of Sodom. Give ear to the Torah of our God, people of Gomorrah: 'Why do I need your many sacrifices?' said Adonai. 'I am satisfied with ascension offerings of rams, and suet of fatlings, and the blood of bulls or sheep or he-goats does not delight me. When you come to see My face, who asked that of you? Trample my courts no more, bringing meal-offerings is futile, incense-offerings are an abomination to me. New moon and Sabbath, the calling of verses, I cannot stand; it is a sin, even the assembly. Your new moons and festivals I hate; they are a burden to me. I cannot endure them. And when you

> spread out your hands, I will hide my eyes from you, and when you make many prayers, I will not listen, your hands are filled with blood. Wash, clean yourself, turn away from your evil deeds before my eyes, cease to do evil. Learn good and seek after judgment; relieve the oppressed, judge the orphan and plead for the widow.

Note here Isaiah is speaking both to the leaders and people of Judah and associating them with residents of Sodom and Gomorra—the Torah's quintessential sinners. Such an address invites the question: What did the people do to deserve this title? According to Isaiah, the people continually offered up sacrifices and regularly observed Sabbaths and festivals, but like the residents of Sodom and Gomorrah, they committed serious moral infractions. They did not judge one another fairly and oppressed one another. The orphan and the widow, representatives of the powerless in society, were not protected by the powerful. According to Isaiah, these ethical infractions were not irreversible—if the people changed their behaviors, God would accept their worship once again.

Like those of Amos, Isaiah's prophecies focus on the ethical issues of his day. Isaiah's prophecies focus on the powerful: "Woe to the decreers of unfair decrees and the writers of unrighteous writings, who turn aside the judgment of the needy and steal judgment from the poor of my people, so that widows may be their spoil and orphans their plunder" (Isaiah 10:1-2). Unlike Micah and Amos, God calls upon Isaiah to prophesy directly to Judah's kings. The direct nature of this call suggests something unique about Isaiah's status as a prophet. Micah is certainly critical of Samaria's leaders, but we never once learn of him approaching them outright. Isaiah, by contrast, describes how he is called on directly by God to take his son and approach King Ahaz in his palace. Once there, Isaiah is to speak to King Ahaz directly, "Be guarded and quiet. Do not be afraid and do not

soften your heart over the two tails of these smoking firebrands, or over the fierce anger of Rezin and Aram and the son of Remaliah" (Isaiah 7:4).

Besides warnings of injustice, Isaiah takes up prophecies against idolatry. In language reminiscent of Jeremiah's prophecies (see below), he rails against the people for their acts of "harlotry," committed by worshipping other gods (Isaiah 57:8). In sexualized detail, Isaiah describes Israel as an adulterous woman, lying down with other men, "And behind the door and the doorpost you put your remembrance, for you revealed yourself to one other than me, and you went up and made your bed wide. And you cut a covenant with them, you loved their bed and chose lust" (Isaiah 57:8). Warnings against idolatry would have been particularly important during and post-exile, for, as the people experienced tragedy and came into contact with other deities, the temptation for them to turn to other gods would have intensified.

Isaiah, like his contemporaries Micah and Amos, concerns himself with Assyria's advances. But, unlike Micah, whose prophecies focus solely on Israel, Isaiah, similar to Amos, has a more global agenda in mind. During Isaiah's prophetic years, Assyria destroyed the Northern kingdom (721 BCE) and continued its advances toward Egypt. Isaiah saw this advance as the will of God. Unlike Amos, who focuses his prophecies inward and says little about Israel's international politics, or Micah, who tells the people to fight back if Assyria invades again in the future, Isaiah preaches submission. Isaiah introduces the people to his God—the Divine One who acts through the nations of the world. According to Isaiah's theology, if Assyria invades Judah it will be evidence that

God is punishing Israel for her sins (Isaiah 10:5-6). After Assyria's conquest, Isaiah prophesies, Jerusalem will rise again, led by a holy remnant—a descendant from David who will lead in concert with Isaiah's philosophy (Isaiah 9:6-7, 11:1-5).

Isaiah describes Judah's relationship with other nations in moral terms. Isaiah sees Judah's plans to make alliances with other nations as sinful and he puts the schemes on par with ethical violations. Isaiah exclaims, "'Woe to rebellious children,' declares Adonai, 'Taking counsel, but not from me; and covering with a covering, but not of my spirit, adding sin upon sin. Who go down into Egypt without asking from my mouth, for strength from the strength of Pharaoh and seeking shelter in the shadow of Egypt'" (Isaiah 30:1-2). According to Isaiah, Judah's sins, against one another and God, will lead to Judah's capture.

The final prophecies of First Isaiah focus on Assyria's invasion of Judah, which comes to pass in 701 BCE under the leadership on King Sennacherib. Isaiah casts these geopolitical events as God's punishment of Judah for her sins. What is most notable about this account is the lens through which Isaiah relates it. Isaiah 36:1 declares, "In the fourteenth year of King Hezekiah, Sennacherib king of Assyria came up against the fortified cities of Judah and seized them." One may have assumed this tragedy would have grieved the prophet Isaiah, but, in fact, Isaiah understands this assault, in which much of Judah is taken but Jerusalem is spared, as fulfillment of his prophecy. Isaiah relishes telling of this story! Suggs et. al. point out in 2 Kings 18:13-27 that the text describes King Hezekiah both submitting to the Assyrians and offering them tribute

(Suggs et. al. 741). However, in the Isaiah 36, a third person narrator leaves out these critical details. The book of Isaiah makes it clear that King Hezekiah decided to follow Isaiah's prophecy and not make an alliance with Assyria, even as they invaded the country. In this account, emissaries of the king of Assyria come to Jerusalem and deliver a very public message to King Hezekiah, shouting it out in Hebrew so all of Jerusalem will understand: "Thus said the king, 'Do not let Hezekiah deceive you, for he will not be able to save you! And, do not let Hezekiah make you trust in Adonai, saying 'Adonai will surely save you, this city will not be given into the hands of the king of Assyria!'" (Isaiah 36:14-15). Isaiah reports the Jerusalemites follow King Hezekiah's commands and do not respond to this verbal onslaught, "But they were silent and did not answer a word, for the king's commandment was 'Do not answer him!'" (Isaiah 36:21). Throughout the siege, King Hezekiah is in direct contact with Isaiah, asking for his counsel and advice (Isaiah 37). In fact, this text provides a telling juxtaposition when compared to Isaiah's interactions with King Ahaz. While Isaiah was forced to surprise King Ahaz at the water place in order to get his attention, King Hezekiah approaches Isaiah on his own accord, asking for guidance. While we have no idea if King Ahaz ever even heard Isaiah's prophecies, King Hezekiah seeks out Isaiah's advice (Isaiah 37:1).

In the end, Isaiah heralds King Sennacherib's invasion as a failure: The Assyrians invaded and destroyed much of Judea, but, because of God's intrusion, did not destroy Jerusalem. Isaiah promised the people, "Therefore, thus said Adonai about the king of Assyria, 'He will not come to this city, and he will not shoot an arrow there, and he will not advance upon it with shields, and he will not pile up a mound against it. By the way

that he came, he shall return. And to this city he will not come,' declared Adonai" (Isaiah 37:33-34). And so, even as the Assyrians advanced toward Jerusalem, Isaiah held firm that Jerusalem would not be taken.

This story helps to further solidify the relationship between king, prophet, and God. In 37:16-20, King Hezekiah approaches God at the House of Adonai. He spreads out a letter from the King of Assyria, a letter that promises Israel's destruction. Isaiah prays directly to God, asking for God's strength and salvation. In response, King Hezekiah is sent a message from God in return—from Isaiah. Isaiah, in this way, asserts himself as a new type of prophet, one who serves as an intermediary between God and human (in this case God and king). God's response to Hezekiah comes in the form of poetry and essentially reiterates Isaiah's central message: God will destroy Judah, but Jerusalem will not be touched and out of Judah's wreckage a remnant will shoot up to save the people (Isaiah 37:29-35).

When the Assyrian army does finally retreat, without invading Jerusalem, Isaiah gives meaning and context to the events that have unfolded. He explains the events to the people, "Then the Angel of Adonai went forth and smote within the Assyrian Camp one hundred and eighty five thousand. And when they awoke in the morning, behold, they were all dead corpses. So Sennacherib king of Assyria went away and traveled on and he returned to Nineveh" (Isaiah 37:36-37). One should note this account of Sennacherib's invasion is also described in Assyrian documents, in which it is said the Assyrians destroyed forty-six Israelite cities but did not destroy Jerusalem (Sommer 853). Such

events would have done well to bolster Isaiah's reputation. With Assyria having fled without taking Jerusalem, many within the country would have let out sighs of relief—the impending punishment from God was over. Judah was crippled, but Jerusalem was still beating strong. In fact, when one reads Isaiah, one has the sense the people are still resting comfortably in this worldview. Assyria came and went and Jerusalem survived!

Deutero-Isaiah

The book of Isaiah, unlike the book of Jeremiah (see below), offers neither description nor detail of the events of the Babylonian invasion or the people's exile. In fact, the first 38 chapters of Isaiah lead up to Isaiah's conclusion that the foreign threat against Judah has passed: Assyria attempted to invade Jerusalem, failed, and retreated. But, in Isaiah 39, in what feels like a break from the previous narrative, readers are offered a prophetic hint at the destruction that is yet to come. In this chapter, an envoy from Babylon enters into King Hezekiah's palace and King Hezekiah shows them everything inside his armory and storehouses (Isaiah 39:2). When Isaiah hears about this, he becomes immediately alarmed. The text reports, "Then Isaiah said to Hezekiah, 'Listen to the word of Adonai of Hosts. Behold! Days are coming when all that is in your house, which your ancestors stored for you until this day, will be carried off to Babylon. Not a thing will be left behind,' said Adonai. 'And your sons, who will issue out from you, whom you begot, will be taken away and they will become eunuchs in the palace of the king of Babylon'" (Isaiah 39:5-7). This reversal in prophecy is alarming and seems to break form with Isaiah's previously consistent view that Jerusalem would not be

destroyed. In fact, the only other time Babylon is mentioned in the first 39 chapters of Isaiah is in the oracles against the nations. Until this moment, which Suggs et. al. dates around 705-703 BCE (Suggs et. al. 745), Babylon had hardly been a threat. This chapter speaks of the changing power structure of the ancient Middle East and foreshadows the destruction to come.

Isaiah 39 ends with Isaiah's menacing prophecy that the Babylonians will invade Jerusalem and take the people into captivity and then jumps to Isaiah's messages of consolation, promises of a future redemption, descriptions of God's lasting presence, and testimony's of God's forgiveness, which he offers to the exiled population in Babylon.

Deutero-Isaiah is markedly different from First Isaiah. This Isaiah knows tragedy and longs for redemption. It is not surprising, therefore, that he takes issue with the Divine—pleading on behalf of the people. He challenges God, "For the sake of Zion I will not be silent and for the sake of Jerusalem I will not keep quiet, until the righteous go forth from her like brightness and her deliverance is like a burning torch" (Isaiah 62:1). This challenge is, in some ways, surprising, especially when read against the earlier chapters of Isaiah, which call for Israel's leaders to trust in God and in God's plan. But, it is far from unique. In Isaiah 63, we see evidence of a lament psalm, in which the prophet not only praises God, but also complains about God's lack of involvement in the people's lives and asks for God's response to their plight (Sommer 909). "Look down from heaven and see from your holy, glorious abode on high! Where is your zeal and your might? The sound of your yearning and your mercy are being withheld from us!" (Isaiah

63:15). For Isaiah, criticism against other people comes easier than criticism against the Divine. In fact, much of Isaiah's criticism against other people centers on their failure to trust in God. And yet, we see, even Isaiah has limits, even Isaiah has hopes his world will be changed sooner rather than later.

Even as the people suffer in exile and Isaiah longs for a divine intercession on their behalf, Deutero-Isaiah offers criticisms against humanity. In Chapters 56-66, Isaiah's fiery prophecies are reignited and the people are once again called upon to change. Isaiah prods the people, "Thus said Adonai, 'Keep the law and do what is just, for my salvation is close and my righteousness is to be revealed. Happy is the man who does this and the person who holds fast to it, who keeps Shabbat and does not profane it and who keeps his hand from doing any evil'" (Isaiah 56:1-2). Here, Isaiah suggests redemption is close at hand, but reminds the people their lot in life is conditional; they must work to create a relationship of justice between themselves and God, as well as a relationship of justice between one another.

Lest the people begin to fear their covenant with the Divine is broken or God would no longer hear their prayers, Isaiah explains to the people that the breakdown of their covenanted system was their own fault and their requests for forgiveness ring hollow. Isaiah quotes God as saying, "Is this the fast that I have chosen: A day for a person to afflict his body? Is it bowing one's head like a bulrush and lying in sackcloth and ashes? You call this a fast, a day acceptable to Adonai? Is this not the fast that I have chosen: to loose the bonds of evil, and to release the cords of the yoke, and to let the oppressed go

free, and to break off every yoke. Is it not to divide your bread amongst the hungry? And to bring the homeless poor into your home? When you see the naked, to cover him and not to ignore your own flesh" (Isaiah 58:5-7). Isaiah wants the people to understand that in order for them to receive God's favor, they must act rightly toward one another.

Isaiah seeks to spell out the people's sins so they understand their infractions: "No one calls for justice and no one pleads for truth. They trust in emptiness and speak falsehood. They conceive trouble and beget iniquity" (Isaiah 59:4). Amazingly, hearing this charge, the people lament and take responsibility. "For our transgressions are many before You and our sins testify against us. For our transgressions are with us, and our iniquities, we know" (Isaiah 59:12). Isaiah is no longer an ostracized figure, pushed outside of the people's consciousness; rather, he is a comforting presence, a voice to which they listen.

Habakkuk

Habakkuk begins with a prophetic indictment of the Divine, "How long, O Adonai, shall I cry out and You not listen? I cry out to You 'Violence!' and You do not deliver. Why do You show me iniquity and cause me to look upon trouble? For, destruction and violence are before me. Dispute carries on and strife continues. Therefore, Torah grows numb and justice does not go out, for wickedness surrounds justice and justice comes out twisted" (Habakkuk 1:2-4). Habakkuk's prophecy is unique in that he denounces violence and injustice in his own name and not in God's.

God, surprisingly, responds to this complaint with a terrifying promise, "'Look among the nations and see and be surely astounded, for a work is being worked in your days that you will not believe even if you are told. For, behold, I am raising up the Chaldeans, that bitter nation, who hastily march across the wide spaces of the earth to possess dwelling places that are not theirs'" (Habakkuk 1:5-6). Suggs et. al. explain "Chaldeans" is another term for the Babylonians (Suggs et. al. 975). Habakkuk has called out to God begging for justice and God has promised the deliverance of an evil nation!

Habakkuk is not comforted by this message and complains again to the Divine, "You whose eyes are too pure to see evil or to look upon trouble, why do you look upon those who act treacherously and remain silent while a wicked one swallows up the one more righteous than he" (Habakkuk 1:13). Habakkuk continues, goading the Divine, "I will stand on my watch and I will take up station on the tower and watch to see what He will speak to me and what I will answer when I am reproved" (Habakkuk 2:1). Notice the

marked difference between Habakkuk and the other prophets we have explored. Habakkuk is certainly not the unwilling recipient of a divine message, like Jeremiah, or an unsuspecting recipient of the Divine word, like Amos! No, Habakkuk has positioned himself on the top of a tower watching—watching for the Divine to speak His reply to Habakkuk's demand for speech.

And the Divine does reply! Adonai replies with the promise of a future time when the righteous will be rewarded and the wicked punished (Habakkuk 2:2-5). Habakkuk then cites five "Woe" statements, each one encompassing another group that will be punished, and each one beginning with the formula "Woe to him." These "Woe" statements are: "Woe to him who increases that which is not his" (Habakkuk 2:6a), "Woe to him who unjustly gains unjust, evil gains on his house" (Habakkuk 2:9a), "Woe to him that builds a city with blood" (Habakkuk 2:12a), "Woe to him who makes his neighbor drink" (Habakkuk 2:15a), and "Woe to him who says to wood, awake!" (Habakkuk 2:19a). For each of these sins, the guilty parties will be punished in kind. Habakkuk's theology is pointedly Deuteronomic—the righteous will ultimately be rewarded and the wicked will ultimately be punished. Similar to the other prophets we have considered, Habakkuk's central woes are targeted at those who treat others unjustly and who practice idolatry.

The third and final chapter of Habakkuk is a Psalm. Habakkuk, unlike many of the other prophets, does not seem satisfied with impending punishment coming from God. Even though he is fearful of the divine message, he begs the Divine for mercy and asks that God's promised rewards come soon; "Adonai, I have heard your speech and I am afraid.

Adonai, revive Your works in these near years, make them known in these near years. In wrath, remember mercy" (Habakkuk 3:2). The opening images in this psalm, which describe God coming from Teman and the Sea of Paran echo images from Deuteronomy 33:2 and from Micah 1:3-4 (Habakkuk 3:3). After this plea, Habakkuk relays terrible images of God, describing how God will march across the land like a mighty warrior, ready to deliver His people (Habakkuk 3:3-15). In these images God is anthropomorphized into a giant, "When he stands and measures the earth, he sees and makes the nations tremble. The timeless mountains are shattered, and the eternal hills bow. His routes are eternal" (Habakkuk 3:6). In Habakkuk 3:8, the text makes allusion to a holy war—one Adonai will wage against the Canaanites gods of Neharim and Yam, personified here by chaos and destruction, "Are you angry at Neharim, Adonai? Is your wrath at Neharim? Or against Yam is Your rage? That you are riding your horses and your chariots of deliverance?" These allusions to wars amongst divine beings point back to ancient creation myths; their presence in this book suggest Habakkuk imagines the world being cursed with turmoil in realms beyond the human[7]. Habakkuk explains God will trample across the created world, wreaking havoc, until he comes to Judah, ready to redeem her. These images, evidently, are meant to bring relief to the people of Judah and bring fear to her enemies. Habakkuk displays his trust in God, stating, "I heard and my belly quaked, my lips quivered at the voice, rot entered into my bones, and I trembled inside myself. Yet I wait for a day of trouble, for a people to attack us" (Habakkuk 3:16). In this statement, Habakkuk proves that he has no fear—he knows that no matter what will happen, God will eventually redeem Judah.

---

[7] See Psalm 89:10-11 and Isaiah 59:9-10

The book of Habakkuk ends with a final future promise, this time using agricultural imagery: "Though the fig tree does not blossom and no produce is on the vine, the labor of the olive fails and the fields make no food, the flock is cut off from the fold and there are no cattle in stalls, Yet I will exult and rejoice in Adonai who delivers me. Adonai God is my strength and He makes my feet like a deer's and makes me tread upon the heights" (Habakkuk 3:17-19). This message of future triumph points to a time of peace, when the prophet's prayer will be answered, but the prophecy also describes an immediately foreseeable future that is quite bleak. Habakkuk's comfort is a lot less comfortable than Deutero-Isaiah's.

Jeremiah

Jeremiah prophesied in Jerusalem both before and immediately after the First Temple's destruction and, then, after the Babylonian exile, he moved with a portion of the exiled community to Egypt and continued his work with the people there. In this way, Jeremiah is the epitome of a tragic character—he was the prophet charged to lead a reverse-exodus—delivering the people from the Promised Land back to Egypt.

Unlike the eighth century prophets, Jeremiah not only warns against impending destruction, he lives through it. He is a "Trauma Prophet," a leader who stays with his people through destruction and moves with them into exile. With Jerusalem destroyed, Jeremiah is called upon by God to reorient the people—helping them to redefine their

lives—to make sense of a life without the Temple or Jerusalem. Not only is Jeremiah a social criticizer, but a caregiver in a time of loss.

Jeremiah's prophecy begins differently than the prophetic texts we have explored previously. Jeremiah's message does not begin with God's words to the people, but with God's words to Jeremiah. Jeremiah quotes the Divine saying to him, "Before you were formed in the stomach, I knew you. And before you came forth from the womb, I sanctified you. A prophet of the nations, I appointed you" (Jeremiah 1:5). Jeremiah immediately rebuffs God's appointment, "And I said, 'Ah, Adonai God, behold, I do not know how to speak, for I am still a boy' (Jeremiah 1:6). God is unwilling to hear this rebuff and speaks again, directly to Jeremiah, "And Adonai said to me, 'Do not say, 'I am still a boy,' for everywhere that I will send you—you will go, and all that I command you—you will speak. Do not fear their faces, for I am with you to deliver you,' said Adonai" (Jeremiah 1:7-8). This exchange begs the question: Why would the book of Jeremiah open in such a different manner than the books of the other prophets we have explored? One possibility has to do with the markedly different focus of Jeremiah's prophetic role. The people need to know Jeremiah, for he will not only be the one who warns them of future destruction, but he will be the one who stays with them through the devastation. Jeremiah's character as an individual and his relationship with God will be more important to this generation of Judeans than previous prophets had been to previous generations. Furthermore, Jeremiah's character is tested again and again in this book—he is called upon to live out Divine messages through radical actions, he is hated by the leaders of his people, he does battle with false prophets, and he is punished by priests and

kings. This opening prophecy lets the readers know all of this was part of Jeremiah's lot in life—as he explains, where God sends him he will go and what God tells him he will speak. Finally, this account of Jeremiah's calling introduces the intimate relationship Jeremiah has with the Divine. Notice Jeremiah calls the Divine by name in this section, saying plainly, "Ah, Adonai God." Jeremiah uses this same phrase three other times in the book—making a total of four proclamations. The only other individual in the Tanakh to use this construct is Ezekiel, who invokes it four times.

The book of Jeremiah, though, is far from self-centered. Jeremiah moves his prophecy from individual to communal with quick urgency, focusing his prophecy on Jerusalem's impending destruction. To this end, Jeremiah describes an "evil" coming from "the North" no less than twenty times in the book. This evil is poised to attack Jerusalem and exile her inhabitants (Jeremiah 1:14). Some scholars assume this northern evil is Babylon, but Babylon is not named explicitly until Jeremiah 20:4 (Suggs et. al. 779). Taking a different view, Peterson points out that an oracle against Babylon, presented later in the book (Jeremiah 50:3, 41), refers to an enemy from the North destroying Babylon (Peterson 107); he, therefore, takes the stance that this northern enemy is not meant to represent a particular nation, but to be a symbol for an unnamed looming destruction (Peterson 107).

The terror felt by this repeated prophecy builds as the book continues—with each new pronouncement, the threat from the north feels increasingly imminent. Again and again, Jeremiah is called upon to describe the forthcoming destruction of Jerusalem and then,

dizzily, a few verses later, is called upon to deliver a message of hope (e.g. Jeremiah 4:1-2, 4:6-9). In fact, this invasion feels so pressing to Jeremiah he has trouble believing God can actually avert the disaster, "And I said, Ah, Adonai God! Surely you are deceiving this people and Jerusalem saying 'Peace will be upon you,' when the sword already touches their life" (Jeremiah 4:10). The people, however, do not readily accept Jeremiah's word nor do they believe his dire predictions. For Jeremiah, the sense of future doom is overpowering, and yet other prophets continue to prophesy that all will remain calm and that the threat of destruction is over.

Unlike other prophets, who focus on social ills and matters of deep injustice within society, Jeremiah, like Ezekiel, uses priestly language and themes and tend to focus on the people's engagement in idolatry. This sin is articulated through the metaphor of marriage and adultery: The people are married to God, but continue to commit adultery by worshipping other gods. In response to these sins, Jeremiah outlines God's plans to punish both Jerusalem and the people with destruction. This central theme is supported by a number of other sub-themes, which do, at some points, shift from the people's sins against God to their sins against one another. In a couple instances, Jeremiah treads familiar prophetic ground, describing how the powerful members of society oppress the powerless. Jeremiah cries, "'They have become fat and they pass over the deeds of the wicked. Judgment—they do not judge the case of the orphan, and they prosper. And the case of the needy, they will not judge. For these things, shall I not visit?' says Adonai. 'Shall my soul not be avenged by a nation such as this?'" (Jeremiah 5:28). Notice here how God understands the people's transgressions against one another as further injury to

God's self. In a similar vein, Jeremiah explores the ways in which the people have come to deceive one another: "Man against his friend, beware! And brother to brother, do not trust! For, every brother is crooked like Jacob and every friend walks in slander" (Jeremiah 9:3). In each of these instances, the text is quick to point out that God will bring punishment against the people for their transgressions.

In another instance, Jeremiah attempts to dispel the rumor that the Temple will protect the people from harm and expulsion:

> Thus said Adonai of Hosts, God of Israel, 'Mend your ways and your deeds and I will let you dwell in this place. Don't trust in lying words, saying, 'The Temple of Adonai, the Temple of Adonai, the Temple of Adonai are these.' For if you surely mend your ways and your deeds, and surely make justice between one person and his neighbor, and if you do not oppress the stranger and the orphan and widow, and if you do not shed innocent blood in this place, and if you do not walk after other gods, to your own hurt, then I will let you dwell in this land that I gave to your fathers for ever and ever" (Jeremiah 7:3-7).

In this passage, Jeremiah lets the people know their tenure in the land is, indeed, conditional. However, this message, which echoes the blessings and curses from Deuteronomy, leaves room for the people to change their ways and remain in the land. Notice the issues that Jeremiah highlights from Deuteronomy: enacting justice between people, not oppressing the powerless in society, and not worshipping other gods. For Jeremiah, these are the aspects of the covenant that need to be upheld—this is the "stuff" of everyday holy living, which will determine Israel's future in the land. Interestingly enough, this re-appropriation of Deuteronomical text mirrors the very way Deuteronomy, itself, uses earlier biblical traditions. Deuteronomy presents a retelling of earlier

traditions through a new lens and with a new focus. Here, Jeremiah presents Deuteronomy through a new lens and with a new focus.

Jeremiah describes God's immediate responses to the people's sins—the land's infertility. He explains, "They have sown wheat, but will reap thorns. They have been pained, but will not profit. And they will be ashamed by your harvest, because of the burning anger of Adonai" (Jeremiah 12:13). Jeremiah paints the picture of a land plagued by drought, "And their nobles sent their little ones for water, they came to the pits, but did not find water. They returned, their vessels empty. They were ashamed and confounded and they covered their heads. Because of the earth—dismay, because there is no rain on the earth, the farmers are ashamed and cover their heads" (Jeremiah 14:3-4. For the God of Jeremiah, the Land of Israel represents the home He shares with His consort Israel. Through this lens, the image of a parched infertile land is even more painful—for God to destroy this land is for God to destroy God's home.

Similar to Micah, Jeremiah quotes God speaking out a number of times against false prophets. For example, in Jeremiah 14:14, he exclaims, "Adonai said to me, 'Lies! The prophets prophesy in my name. I did not send them and I did not command them and I did not speak through them. A lying-vision and divination and idols and deceit from their own minds, they prophesy to you!'" (Jeremiah 14:14). Marvin Sweeney asserts in *The Jewish Study Bible* that Jeremiah is referring here to prophets such as Isaiah, who prophesied specifically about Assyria. While the threat of Assyria was neutralized by Jeremiah's time, Sweeney suggests many of Jeremiah's contemporaries might have

thought the threat of destruction was over. Therefore, even as Jeremiah pointed repeatedly to a new threat from the north, others prophesied peace. This disconnect may help explain why Jeremiah was so unpopular in his time (Sweeney 955). Indeed, Jeremiah responds to other prophets' claims of future security directly in Jeremiah 27:9-10, "And you, do not listen to your prophets, or to your diviners, or to your dreamers, or to your practitioners-of-witchcraft, or to your sorcerers who speak to you, saying 'You will not serve the king of Babylon.' For it is a lie that they prophesy to you, with a result that you will be moved far from your land. And I will drive you out and you will perish.'" Jeremiah spends a great deal of time answering claims such as this and trying to convince the people and the leadership that he is speaking God's truth, but he is not believed until it is too late.

And yet, even after his prophecies come true and his terrible visions are realized, Jeremiah is not released from Divine service. Jeremiah continues prophesying even in the face of destruction. As the context around him shifts, Jeremiah's messages transition quickly from desperate warnings to messages of coping and hope. For example, even as the armies of Nebuchadnezzar lay waste to all of Judah, Jeremiah (inaccurately[8]) prophesies to King Zedekiah about the king's own peaceful death (Jeremiah 34:4-7).

[8] See 2 Kings 25:1-7 for an account of King Zedekiah's painful demise

The Prophets: Issues Beyond Justice

It is a common misconception that the prophets were only concerned with issues of justice. In fact, for the prophets, concepts of justice were closely tied in with issues such as God's role in the world, their visions of the future, and their responses to the exile. One reason it is critical to examine these broader prophetic messages is because they illustrate the wide scope of the prophetic voice. The prophet was far from serving solely as a radical political/religious character or an extreme voice in the people's affairs; rather, the prophets were integrated members of their societies and commented on a vast range of issues. For the prophets, there was no divorcing ritual from justice or deliverance from worship.

Role of God in the World

The prophets do not possess a uniform theology. In fact, each of the prophets has a unique concept of how God acts and should act in the world. Theology stands at the center of every prophetic message. A prophet's relationship with God shapes the ways in which he believes humans should act toward one another and toward the Divine. When the prophets look to the world, they see a reality infused with the spirit of God; the language they use to define this spirit is what asserts their uniqueness. In this sense, implicit in any prophecy is a theology.

Micah provides readers with a clear concept of what God's role in Israel's life should be. According to Micah, God should be removed from Israel's life—"in His place." But, because of Israel's sins, God was forced to descend from on high and effect change in the

world (Micah 1:2-4). According to Micah, the Divine could no longer tolerate Israel's leaders, who simultaneously ruled deceitfully and asserted they were safe because God was in their midst, and so God descended into reality (Micah 4:11). For Micah, an imminent Divine presence is not a source of comfort, but an indication of looming punishment. Therefore, when unjust leaders proclaim "Behold, Adonai is in our midst, evil will not come upon us" (Micah 3:11). Micah rages, "Therefore, because of you, Zion will be a plowed field and Jerusalem a ruin, and the Temple Mount a forest shrine" (Micah 3:12). According to Micah, God's presence is a promise that Samaria and Jerusalem will be destroyed.

In his prophecy, Micah counters a belief that appears to have been widespread in the ancient world: A close relationship or encounter with the Divine acted as a sort of talisman. As long as the people were close to God, they claimed, harm could not fall upon them (See Jeremiah 7:1-11). The prophets, from Micah to Jeremiah to Isaiah, labored to deconstruct this myth. Being in covenant with the Divine was not enough to save the people; only right action could bring the people protection.

The prophets uniformly agree that destruction is an indicator of divine punishment. However, the prophets disagree amongst themselves as to whether or not humans can attempt to fight against a foreign nation that brings this destruction. Possibly the most vocal speaker on this issue is Isaiah. Isaiah suggests it is blasphemous for Judah to try to prevent attack or defend herself against conquerors. To do so would be to fight the will of God. In particular, Isaiah cautions Judah's leaders against making alliances with

Egypt, the other "super power" of that time (Isaiah 31:1). For Judah's leaders, who controlled a tiny, but strategically crucial, patch of land in between mighty Assyria and powerful Egypt, the most obvious chance for survival was to align themselves with one of the larger nations and hope for protection. Judah possessed the only passageway between the superpowers of the North and the South and, not surprisingly, these larger countries had a vested interest in possessing that road. Isaiah was adamant that Judah not leverage her power though, and prophesied against such political alliances, telling Judah's leaders, "Woe to those who go down to Egypt for help, and rely on horses, and put their trust in chariots, for they are many and on horsemen, for they are very strong, but to You, Adonai, they do not seek" (Isaiah 31:1). Isaiah believes the only alliance one should make is with the Divine; chariots and horses only offer people an illusion of protection. If the people behave correctly and uphold their end of the covenant, Isaiah asserts, God will protect them.

Isaiah prophesies to the people, informing them that God is using Assyria as a rod to inflict punishment on them, but, he further promises that the Divine will punish Assyria's king for the sin of thinking his victories are due to his own power and not God's. Isaiah quotes God as proclaiming to the Israelites, "Woe! For Assyria is the rod of my anger! And the staff in their hands is my indignation!" (Isaiah 10:5). And yet, even as they are warned, the people are comforted with a message of future retribution against the mighty nation, "And it will be, when Adonai has carried out all His deeds against Mount Zion and Jerusalem, that I will punish the fruit of the puffed-up heart of the king of Assyria and the heights of glory in his eyes. For he says, 'by the strength of my hand, I did this,

and by my wisdom, and my understanding. And I have removed the borders of peoples, and I have plundered their treasures, and I have put down the inhabitants like a mighty man'" (Isaiah 10:12-13)[9]. Isaiah's double message allows the people to hold two simultaneous realities: Assyria will punish them because of their sins, but it will not really be Assyria punishing them—it will be God. And, after Assyria is used to punish them, God will punish Assyria for its haughtiness.

Deutero-Isaiah echoes First Isaiah's theological assertion that international events are evidence of the will of God and that human beings should not interfere in their unfolding. However, instead of preaching destruction at the hands of another people, as First Isaiah does, Deutero-Isaiah prophesies salvation. In Isaiah 41:2, Isaiah announces God has brought Cyrus king of Persia to assert a new order in the world (Sommer 864). As Cyrus's victories throughout the Ancient Near East mount, Isaiah looks hopefully to Cyrus as an instrument of the Divine sent to restore Israel. In fact, it seems as if Cyrus, a foreign ruler, comes to take the place of the promised Davidic leader who serves as the promised savior in the first part of the book. Isaiah now asks, "Who raised up from the east a righteous man, called him to His foot, delivered before him nations and subdued kings? He put them as dust to his sword, like wind-blown straw he drove his bow" (Isaiah 41:2). The language here is clear; Cyrus is not only a rod in the hand of God (as Isaiah described Assyria to be in the first half of the book), but a "righteous man." Isaiah quotes the Divine as declaring, "I am the one who says of Cyrus, 'He is My shepherd and he shall fulfill My delight, even saying to Jerusalem, 'You shall be rebuilt' and to the

[9] See also Isaiah 24-25

Temple, 'You shall be re-founded' (Isaiah 44:28). Isaiah not only assigns Cyrus the task of redeeming the people, but also with rebuilding the Temple. By considering the relationship between First Isaiah and Deutero-Isaiah, one sees how a prophet's theological core can remain intact, even as the particulars surrounding the center shift. In this way, even though the particulars of First Isaiah's future-focused prophecies do not come true, Deutero-Isaiah is able to reinterpret their essential messages for his own time.

Amos' understanding of God's role in the world can be viewed as a middle ground between Micah and Isaiah's theologies. Amos refers a number of times to Israel being punished by a future exile (Amos 5:27, 8:12, 9:9), but the force he describes behind the exile shifts. On the one hand, Amos decries in 5:27, in a prophecy reminiscent of Micah's, that the Divine will exile the people: "'And I will cause you to go into exile beyond Damascus,' says Adonai, his name is God of Hosts." While, on the other hand, in 6:14 Amos asserts another nation will exile the people, "'For behold I will raise a nation up against you, House of Israel,' uttered Adonai, God of Hosts, 'And they will oppress you from Lebo-Hamat until the Wadi Arava.'" While Amos 6:14 may appear to be similar to Isaiah's assertion that God uses other nations to exact punishment against Israel, there are some significant differences in their messages. First, Amos' prophesied punishment does not describe a particular nation that will enact the Divine punishment, as Isaiah does. Second, Amos does not couple his prophecy with the strong assertion that Israel must stop acting in international politics, as Isaiah does. For Amos, the crimes of Israel are against God and other Israelites; they are not rooted in Israel's international political philosophy.

Jeremiah's relationship with God is unique among the prophets. Jeremiah is a reflective prophet, letting us know the process by which he receives divine revelation. His disclosures suggest a special, although not always pleasant, intimacy between the Divine and himself. Jeremiah experiences God familiarly. He describes how God talks to him and touches him. The prophet's relationship with the Divine is particularly striking when one compares it to Isaiah's relationship with the Deity. While Isaiah sees God on a throne and describes him as a crowned King on High (Isaiah 6:1), Jeremiah experiences God as being close to him and deeply involved in his life. The book of Jeremiah discloses God's words of warning to the prophet; Adonai says, "So, you will gird up your loins and rise up and speak to them all that I have commanded you. Do not be confounded by their faces, lest I confound you before them" (Jeremiah 1:17). Unlike Micah, who interprets God's presence as a sign of trouble, Jeremiah defines himself by God's nearness.

As in any close relationship, however, Jeremiah experiences God as being both a source of strength and of pain. In Jeremiah 20:7, Jeremiah talks to God as if He were Jeremiah's lover. He seethes at the Divine, "You have seduced me, Adonai, and I was seduced. You overpowered me, and You prevailed. I am a laughingstock all day. Everyone mocks me. For every time I speak, I cry out. Violence and destruction, I call. For the word of Adonai causes me reproach and derision all day." Jeremiah admits to God that he believed his relationship with Him would have realized itself differently. God seduced Jeremiah and Jeremiah now suffers because of their relationship. He talks as if he has an

abusive lover who causes him pain and humiliation. The prophet, here, reveals the pain he experiences because of his intimacy with and service of God.

Jeremiah uses a variety of metaphors—including intimate images—to describe God's relationship with Israel. While Jeremiah quotes God as calling Himself the father of Israel (Jeremiah 31:9), he focuses most of his metaphoric language on the notion of a marriage between God and the people. Jeremiah explains that God looks back fondly on the early days of their courtship, "Go and call out in the ears of Jerusalem, saying, 'Thus says Adonai, 'I remember you, the mercy of your youth, your love as a bride, you followed after me in the wilderness, in a land not sown'" (Jeremiah 2:2). The God of Jeremiah remembers His history with the people. Lovingly, Jeremiah quotes God's memories of freeing the people from Egypt, of wandering with them in the desert, and of entering with them into the Promised Land (Jeremiah 2:4-8). These sweet images, though, are fleeting, for the people have been disloyal to the Divine.

The sting of the people's infidelity is particularly painful to God, the Groom, because of His deep love for the people, His bride. Jeremiah describes the people's transgressions: "And I will speak my judgment against them for all their wickedness. They have forsaken me and made smoke-sacrifices to other gods and they have bowed down to the works of their hands" (Jeremiah 1:16). God is deeply pained by the people, not only did they commit adultery, but they did it in the Divine-Human Marriage Home, "And I brought you to the Land of the Carmel to eat her fruit and her produce, but you came and defiled my land, and my heritage you made into an abomination" (Jeremiah 2:7). Again,

notice the intimate telling of this history and the deep injury that Jeremiah describes God as feeling. This language is far from Amos' fiery denunciations; Jeremiah's God is a grieving Husband—wounded by the adulterous behavior of his bride. Jeremiah rails, "How well you plan your way to love! Why, even evil women learn from your ways" (Jeremiah 2:33). For Jeremiah's God, Israel's worship of other gods and engagement with Assyria and Egypt is equal to a complete rejection of the sacred wedding vows He made with the people. God, in anger, challenges the people to seek protection from the other gods and nations to whom the people cling, for, God explains, He will now seek revenge (Jeremiah 2:33-37).

Jeremiah's God hurls out crude language and (to use an anachronism) misogynistic accusations, "They say, if a man sends out his wife and she goes from him and becomes another man's, will he return to her again? Surely that land will be polluted! But you whore now with many lovers and return to me,' says Adonai" (Jeremiah 3:1). The poetic pain of these statements is biting. The God of Jeremiah, who knew both prophet and people with tender intimacy, has been burned and shocked by the people's flagrant disregard of His feelings—His love and His tender care. And yet, despite His proclamation and the legal precedent ruling that He can never take back His bride, Jeremiah quotes God as pleading, "Return, faithless children, I will heal your faithlessness'" (Jeremiah 3:22a). Jeremiah's God exhibits all the emotional twists and turns of an aggrieved spouse—simultaneously irrational and cruel, tender and forgiving. Heartbreakingly, we are given a glimpse into God's secret yearnings; even as He foretells his bride's destruction, he imagines her return: He dreams that one day the people will

turn to Him and say, "'Behold, we come, You are Adonai, our God'" (Jeremiah 3:22b). Jeremiah speaks with a tenderness not found in other prophets' accounts of Judah and Samaria acting as the adulterous brides of God, perhaps because he, himself, has experienced God's seduction[10].

The prophets' clear differences of opinion on God's role in the world reflect the fact that the Hebrew Bible does not present one single theology. Rather, the Hebrew Bible allows for a multiplicity of theological alternatives. Because each of the prophets has his own understanding of the Divine, each has his own understanding of the world. The reason the prophets argued amongst themselves is because they have significant differences of opinion. The fact that these differences are so critical to the books of the prophets suggests that debate, not only consensus, is a prophetic value.

Future Visions

The prophets often had hard news to share about the immediate future. Indeed, one of the hallmarks of the prophets was their unflinching ability to describe events unfolding around them. These descriptions, though, are not meant to be objective—each prophet has his own agenda and his own lens for seeing the future. Whether it is Isaiah prophesying Judah's destruction alongside Jerusalem's promised salvation, or Jeremiah declaring that Jerusalem will be destroyed with a remnant saved, each prophet lays out his own opinion about upcoming future events. As the prophets looked ahead to

[10] See Hosea 2:1-7 and Ezekiel 23:1-4.

uncertain futures, they each understood God to be the just conductor of those futures. Each prophet operated under the assumption that their God was a just God and that the people would deserve any punishment or reward coming to them. Indeed, the prophets interpreted everything—from external hostilities to environmental anomalies—as coming directly from God in direct response to human action.

The book of Isaiah belies the commonly held belief that the main function of a prophet is to tell the future. Throughout the first thirty-eight chapters of the book, First Isaiah remains resolute in his opinion that Jerusalem would not—could not—be destroyed. The admission of Isaiah into the canon, despite this glaring error in his future telling capabilities, suggests the prophets were not seen, at least in biblical times, as primarily functioning as future-seers.

Isaiah declares his definitive belief in Jerusalem's promised safety in his opening prophecy. Quoting the Divine, he describes what will come of Judah: "Your country is desolate, your cities are burned by fire; your land—before you, enemies devour it; and, desolate, as overthrown by strangers. And remaining is the Daughter of Zion like a booth in a vineyard, like a lodge in a cucumber field, like a city besieged. Had Adonai of Hosts not left us a tiny remnant, like Sodom, we should have been, like Gomorrah were we intended" (Isaiah 1:7-9). In this prophecy, the "Daughter of Zion" refers to Jerusalem. According to Isaiah, Judah will be destroyed—purged, but Jerusalem will remain, ready to be renewed by a small band of survivors.

Isaiah saw Assyria's growing strength and continual advances toward Israel not as a cause for alarm, but rather as proof-positive of God's presence in the world and evidence of an impending "house cleaning." Isaiah believed Judah would be purged of her immoral leaders, punished for her sins, and left to rebuild. Isaiah exclaimed: "Zion will be redeemed by law and her returnees with justice. And rebels and sinners will together be broken, and those who forsake Adonai will be consumed (Isaiah 1:27-28)." This destruction, according to Isaiah, would extend outward to the nations of the world. Isaiah describes God standing triumphantly over the ruined nations (Isaiah 2:12-22, Isaiah 18-24). Isaiah explains God will destroy the nations for a number of reasons: idol worship, arrogance (Isaiah 2:12-18), and oppressing Israel (Isaiah 14:25). For Isaiah, an expectation of right action toward God was not only levied upon Israel, but upon all nations.

Isaiah devotes nine complete chapters to constructing an eschatological vision for the people. This vision, which presents a markedly different focus than the other prophets, is central to Isaiah's prophecy. It is notable that the one eighth-century prophet who does not prophesy the destruction of Jerusalem is the one who focuses the most on post-destruction visions. In reading Isaiah, one has a sense of an other-worldliness. Isaiah describes nations as God's tools and the future in fanciful terms.

Isaiah presents a clear future vision, including a number of snapshots of what "that day" will look like. For Isaiah, "that day," is the time in which Israel is restored to her grandeur and is realigned with the will of God. Isaiah targets a number of groups who

will see a new beginning on "that day": the other nations, who will be destroyed because of their idol worship and arrogance (Isaiah 2:12-18); the women of Zion, who will be stripped of jewelry and made bald because of their haughtiness (Isaiah 3:16-24); and the men of Zion, whose warriors will be killed in battle (Isaiah 3:25). This first "day," which is seen as a day of destruction, will be followed by another "day," which will be a time of justice, during which a descendant of David will rule over a remnant of the people in justice (Isaiah 11:10). At this time, God will bring the remaining exiles of the people back to Israel (Isaiah 11:11).

Isaiah 11:1-9 reads:

> And a shoot of Jesse will branch out and a twig will sprout from its roots. And the spirit of Adonai will guide him: a spirit of wisdom and understanding, a spirit of counsel and might, a spirit of knowing and awe of Adonai. He will perceive in his awe-of-Adonai and he will not judge by the sight of his eyes, and he will not listen to what his ears maintain. But he will judge the poor with justice and decide with uprightness for the weak of the land. He will strike the land with the rod of his mouth and with the breath of his lips he will smite the wicked. And justice will be the waistcloth of his loins. And the wolf will dwell with the sheep and the leopard lie down with the kid. And the calf and the lion cub and the fatling, together, with a young youth to drive them. And the cow and the bear will graze together, and their children will lie down together, and the lion, like cattle, will eat straw. And a baby will play over the cobra's hollow and a weaned child will stretch out his hand over a serpent's den. They will not hurt nor destroy on any of my sacred mountain for the land will be filled with the knowledge of Adonai, as waters cover the sea.

In this eschatological vision, Isaiah brings forth his belief that a descendant of David will rise up to lead the people. This descendant, Isaiah explains, will be imbued with a divine spirit. Isaiah's description of this leader undoes common notions of a "powerful" leader. Instead of this leader being armed with might, he will be armed with justice. Justice, for

Isaiah, is the most powerful weapon a leader can wield. It is interesting to note that visions of a true justice realized are included in the same prophecy as such idealized images as a wolf and a sheep lying down together. Could it be that, for Isaiah, true justice was just as much a dream as a reversal of the natural order? Note, as well, for Isaiah, the concept of an ideal world is one in which all the earth is filled with the knowledge of God.

In Isaiah 25, Isaiah reaffirms his eschatological vision. He explains how God will bring destruction to the earth—even destroying cities that seem to be impenetrable. Isaiah extols, "For You made a city into a heap; a walled town into a ruin; a palace of foreigners to no city—never again to be rebuilt. Therefore, a strong people will give honor to You, a city of ruthless nations will fear You" (Isaiah 25:2-3). For Isaiah, this destruction is not cause for lamentation or pain, but for rejoicing. This destruction, according to Isaiah, is a victory for the poor. He exclaims, "For You have been a strength for the poor, strength for the needy in his distress, a refuge from a rainstorm, a shadow from the heat, for the wind of the ruthless is like a rainstorm against a wall" (Isaiah 25:4). Isaiah, essentially, assumes the end of days will mean a toppling of the social order—with the rich and powerful reduced to rubble and the poor protected under the shelter of the Divine. This vision of destruction followed by a new holy order is not reserved exclusively for other nations, but for Judah as well. Isaiah sings, "For He bows down all who dwell on high; the exalted city, He brings it low; He brings it low to the ground; he strikes it to dust. Trampled underfoot by the feet of the poor and the soles of the needy" (Isaiah 26:5-6).

Deutero-Isaiah also delivers repeated messages of future deliverance. These messages parallel First Isaiah's pre-exilic warnings: Judah will be cleansed of her sinners and Jerusalem will be returned to her status as a holy center. Isaiah addresses Jerusalem as Zion, God's consort, and says, "Awake, awake! Dress yourself in your might, O Zion. Dress yourself in clothes of your glory, O Jerusalem, the holy city. For the uncircumcised and the impure shall never enter you again. Shake off the dust, arise, and sit down, O Jerusalem. Loose the bonds from your neck, O captive daughter of Zion (Isaiah 52:1-2). The one issue with this type of proclamation, however, is the fact that Isaiah 1-38 prominently featured prophecies telling the people Jerusalem would not be destroyed. And so, while this prophecy of a Jerusalem restored functions as a promised realization of earlier warnings, it also gives voice to the disconnect between First Isaiah's promises and the people's realized reality. Boldly, Isaiah promises a new Jerusalem, grander and more splendid than the first. To this end, Isaiah uses the metaphor of a once barren woman, an עֲקָרָה, to describe Jerusalem. Tamara Eskenazi points out that while the word "עֲקָרָה" means "barren woman," no עֲקָרָה in the Tanakh ever remains childless. And so, Isaiah's message of Jerusalem's restoration is made even more powerful by her promise of future growth: "'Sing, O barren one, who did not bear, break forth singing, and cry aloud, you who did not travail! For the children of the desolate one will outnumber the children of espoused,' said Adonai. 'Enlarge the site of your tent and stretch out the size of your dwelling-place, do not spare! Lengthen your ropes and strengthen your tent-pegs. For on the right and on the left you shall spread out and your seed shall dispossess the nations and inhabit the desolate cities'" (Isaiah 54:1-3).

One of the best-known characteristics of the latter half of Isaiah is the book's description of a servant of God. In many passages, the "servant" refers explicitly to "the nation Israel or the faithful within Israel;" however, one may read certain passages as possibly referring to Cyrus, the prophet Isaiah, or the Messiah (Sommer 867). The servant has been brutalized (Isaiah 53:3), but will rise up again (Isaiah 53:12). The servant is seen both as being blessed by God's delight and bound by certain expectations: "This is my servant, whom I uphold. My chosen one in whom I delight. I put my spirit upon him. He shall bring out judgment to the nations." (Isaiah 42:1). In this instance, the servant is given the privilege of chosenness and a Divine spirit, but he is also responsible for bringing about justice to the nations. In Isaiah 65:13-14, the servants are characterized as the righteous ones of Israel and are promised redemption, while the unrighteous are separated out for punishment. "Therefore, thus said Adonai God, Behold, My servants shall eat, but you shall be hungry. Behold, My servants shall drink, but you will be thirsty. Behold, My servants will rejoice, but you will be ashamed. Behold, My servants will sing for joy of heart, but you will cry out in pain and wail in heartbreak." (Isaiah 65:13-14). While the future described by First Isaiah is presented as concrete (and is then proven false), the fluid metaphor of the servant in Deutero-Isaiah suggests the sobered prophet of the latter half of the book is willing to leave more to uncertainty.

Despite these differences, the figure of the redeemed servant demonstrates another motif of First Isaiah's which finds its way into the latter half of the book: It will not be all of Israel that is saved, only a holy remnant of the people will be redeemed. Isaiah extols, "'And the Redeemer will come to Zion and to those who turn from transgression in

Jacob,' declared Adonai" (Isaiah 59:20). Note here that redemption is only promised to those who repent. There is no promised restoration for those who continue to sin against God or one another. This theme is picked up again in Isaiah 65:11-12, "But as for you who forsake Adonai, who forget the holy mountain, who set a table for luck and fill mixed-wine for destiny, I will appoint you to the sword, you all will bow down to be slaughtered. For, while I called out, you did not answer. I spoke, but you would not listen. Rather, you did evil before my eyes and chose that in which I did not delight." For Isaiah, redemption is far from universal; rather, it is to be earned and awarded only to those meriting it.

While Isaiah falls short of prophesying the destruction of Jerusalem, Micah repeatedly prophesies that the destruction of the Northern kingdom, the Southern kingdom, and Jerusalem, is imminent. And yet, surprisingly, Micah looks on the destruction not with anguish, but with hope. Micah explains even though Israel might cry because of her exile from Jerusalem, once she reaches Babylon, she will be delivered and redeemed (Micah 4:10). Therefore, while Micah is the first prophet to prophesy the destruction of Jerusalem, he is emphatic in his belief that God will quickly end the exile. Micah says of those who will despair in their lot, "But they do not know the thoughts of Adonai and they do not understand His counsel, for He will gather them as sheaves to the threshing floor" (Micah 4:12). After a farmer gathers sheaves, he beats them to yield the grain. The result is a harvest. Micah is so confident that the exile will end he explicitly describes what Jerusalem will be like upon the exiles' return.

In Micah 4:1, Micah explains, "But in latter days, the Mountain of the House of Adonai will stand firm about the mountains. And it will be lifted above the hills and peoples will stream onto it." Micah sees these "latter days" as a time of peace for the entire world, "Nation will not take up sword against nation, nor will they study war anymore" (Micah 4:4). Micah is willing to entertain contradictory notions of what this "peace" might look like. On the one hand, Micah sees the destruction as leading to a time when all peoples will be united under the message of God and see Jerusalem as God's center. He prophesies, "And many nations will come and say 'Come and we will go up to the Mountain of Adonai, to the House of the God of Jacob. And He [God] will teach us His ways and we will walk in His path, for Torah comes forth from Zion and the word of Adonai from Jerusalem'" (Micah 4:2). In this passage, Micah imagines the peoples of the world voluntarily praising God and "streaming" toward his Mountain. On the other hand, Micah imagines destruction will lead to a time of cooperation, but not uniform belief; he exclaims, "For all peoples will walk each in the name of his God and we will walk in the name of Adonai, our God, for ever and ever" (Micah 4:5). Ben Zvi suggests these contradictory prophecies are meant to "inform and balance one another" (Ben Zvi 1211). Perhaps these prophecies might represent alternative, but equally favorable outcomes of what peace amongst the nations could be.

Both of Micah's futures lead to his final vision—one that includes a new social order: "'On that day,' declared Adonai, 'I will assemble the lame and gather the outcast and the afflicted. And I will make the lame into a remnant and the outcast into a strong nation. And Adonai will rule over them from Mount Zion, from now until forever" (Micah 4:6-

7). Micah's God, similar to Isaiah's, is deeply concerned about the weakest members of society. In this vision, those members of society who are perceived as helpless will be made into the powerful. This message has another layer, as well: It is rooted in Zion. For the prophets, the future of Israel was ultimately in Jerusalem. Each of them had an unwavering belief that, come what may in the near future, God would eventually restore Israel to her home.

Micah is willing to trust in God and see God in the people's midst, and even offer eschatological visions of peace and unity, but he is also very much committed to and focused on human action. Micah prophesies that one of the people, from Bethlehem of Ephrath, the weakest tribe, will rise up to lead the people upon their return to Zion (Micah 5:1). He will reassert justice and right leadership; he will lead from a place of strength. Micah preaches that this leader will be a remnant of Jacob and, while this notion of a remnant is not as developed as it is in Isaiah, Micah's vision is clear enough: A remnant of Jacob will rise up and stand tall among the many nations of the world (Micah 5:6-7). This remnant will lead through God's power and might and will protect the people and the land from invasion (Micah 5:1-14). This leader, however, will not be in charge of any internal housekeeping of rooting out injustice amongst the people or unseating Israel's corrupt leadership. Micah's presumption is that God will already have accomplished the work of real change.

Amos echoes aspects of the messages of hope found in Isaiah and Micah. Amos, like Micah, prophesies the destruction of Jerusalem, while simultaneously joining in with

Isaiah's assertion that a remnant of David would survive (Amos 9:8b, 9:10). In place of destruction, a new Israel would be built—an Israel flush with agricultural bounty (Amos 9:13-15), which would never again be destroyed. This vision of a restored Israel stands in stark contrast to the destroyed land described in earlier parts of the book. It is notable that there is no prescribed action to bring about this restoration; it is simply a natural conclusion to the exile.

Jeremiah offers the most concrete of future visions; however, like Isaiah's pronouncement that Jerusalem will never be destroyed, the specifics of Jeremiah's immediate prophecies are proven wrong by history.[11] It is critical for readers to realize that the most typical of all the prophets are the two whose future tellings are proven incorrect by history. Seeing the future is not the litmus test for a credible prophet. Boldly, Jeremiah announces, "For thus said Adonai, 'When Babylon's seventy years are completed, I will visit you and fulfill unto you my good words, to return you to this place'" (Jeremiah 29:10). In later chapters, Jeremiah expands on these concrete images of restoration and imagines a future redemption, "Thus said Adonai, 'Again it will be heard in this place, which you say is ruined—is without person and is without beast, in the towns of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem, which are desolate without person, and without inhabitants, and without beast—the voice of joy, and the voice of happiness, and the voice of bridegroom, and the voice of bride, the voice of those who will say 'Give thanks to Adonai of Hosts, for Adonai is good, for His mercy is eternal!' bringing thanksgiving-offerings to the House of Adonai. For I will restore the fortunes of the land,

[11] Jeremiah claims that the Babylonian exile will last "seventy years."

as at the first,' said Adonai" (Jeremiah 33:10-11). While other prophets' visions of restoration tend to focus on idealized images, Jeremiah's descriptions are balanced between visions rooted in reality (Jeremiah 33:10-11) and promises of a future messianic time (Jeremiah 33:15-16). Jeremiah declares hopefully, "In those days, and in that time, I will branch out a righteous branch of David and he will make judgment and righteousness in the land. In those days, Judah will be delivered and Jerusalem will dwell secure. And this is what she shall be called, Adonai is our Righteousness" (Jeremiah 33:15-16). These balanced descriptions speak of the realities of Jeremiah's prophetic reign—he needs to address the immediate longings for restoration along with the deeper longings of a world to come.

The future visions of the prophets are meant to give hope to the people. By looking forward to a time beyond one's own, in which the world is re-ordered and a future peace is realized, one is able to cope better with the present—no matter how bitter that present may be. And yet, even as enticing as they are, the prophets present future themes only as peripheral prophetic messages. By not relying solely on future seeing, the prophets let the people know they are primarily concerned with their immediate actions. Such a grounding in the present, with hints of a future, offer the people the voice of conscience they need most.

God in Exile

Jeremiah and Isaiah understand their roles as prophets differently. During the siege and destruction of Jerusalem, a time period in which both prophets were active, the book of Isaiah falls silent, while Jeremiah graphically describes the events. What is remarkable, though, is not what the prophets say about the destruction, but how they alter both their messages and purposes during the exile—shifting from social critics to compassionate comforters. The prophets may be best known for their statements about justice and their sharp criticisms of society, but their empathic presence during the exile illustrates their deep compassion for their communities.

Isaiah offers these words of consolation to the exiled people: "'Comfort, comfort, my people,' says your God. 'Speak tenderly to Jerusalem and call out to her that her warfare is accomplished, that her iniquity is pardoned, for she has received at the hand of Adonai double for all her sins' (Isaiah 40:1-2). This message of comfort responds to what surely would have been the people's deepest fears—further loss, pain, and punishment. With this message, Isaiah informs the people the fighting is over, they have been forgiven, and their punishment has been meted out.

Isaiah employs a number of metaphoric images to let the people know they have not been abandoned in Babylon. Isaiah assures them, God is with them—existing even in a foreign place, existing even though their home had been destroyed: "Like a shepherd shepherds his flock, His arm will gather the lambs, and He will carry them in His bosom, and lead those with young" (Isaiah 40:11). Note that Isaiah's message goes beyond a

straightforward assertion of God's presence and proclaims to the people that they are assured an enduring existence. Isaiah calls upon an ancient image of the tribes of Israel, reminding the exiled community that, even without a land, they are still a flock—still Israel. There is still a homeland to which they will be led. Even in a foreign place, God promises to gather them close to one another, not even allowing their weakest members to wander off. These messages were critical for the Israelites' survival. With the Temple destroyed and the people in exile, they needed Isaiah to reassure them that they could endure and that God would remain with them.

Isaiah comforts the exiled people with messages of God's might and power—God, Isaiah seems to say, is not contained in a single place, but is present in all places, "Do you not know? Have you not heard? Has it not been told to you from the beginning? Have you not understood the foundations of the earth? It is He who sits on the circle of the earth so that her inhabitants are like grasshoppers, who spreads out the heaves like a curtain, as a tent to dwell in. He brings rulers to nothing, makes judges of the earth as emptiness" (Isaiah 40:21-23). Note here how the majestic, grandiose, royal images of the Divine, which so characterized the first 39 chapters of Isaiah, endure in these sections as well. While these metaphors were apt before, here they become critical messages of hope: God, the Royal King, has dominion and keeps watch over the people, even in this exiled land. Isaiah is also quick to remind the people their God—this omnipresent Deity, is the only God; he sings, "Thus said Adonai, King of Israel, and their redeemer, Adonai of Hosts, 'I am first and I am last and there are no other gods beside me'" (Isaiah 44:6).

These messages of God's heavenly might are balanced with more immediate images of God's earthly presence. Isaiah explains to the people God is with them and will remain with them, "When you pass through water, I will be with you. Through streams, they shall not overtake you. When you walk through fire, you shall not be scorched. And through flame, it shall not burn you." (Isaiah 43:2). And, in a statement of deep empathy, Isaiah explains God has suffered along with the people, "In all their affliction, He was afflicted" (Isaiah 63:9a).

In this time of trouble and pain, Isaiah sends a new prophetic message to the people—a message of forgiveness. For fifteen chapters (Isaiah 40-55), Isaiah subdues his voice of social criticism and instead offers comfort. In Isaiah 43:22-34, Isaiah takes on the voice of the Divine and gently (at least by Isaiah's standards!) admonishes the people for not offering sacrifices, but then coos, "It is I, I, who wipe out your transgressions for my own sake, and your sins—I will not remember" (Isaiah 43:25). To this end, Isaiah retells the events of the exile, focusing on God's role in the people's punishment, as well as God's role in their deliverance. By pointing out God's control of this entire process, Isaiah provides a backdrop for the people to transcend their immediate reality and see history through a divine lens—they have not been abandoned or forgotten, all is within God's control.

Jeremiah, similar to Isaiah, prophesies messages of hope to the exiled people, "'Do not fear the king of Babylon, whom you fear, do not fear him,' declared Adonai, 'For I am with you, to deliver you and to save you from his hands. And I will give you mercy and

he will be merciful to you and bring you back to your own land'" (Jeremiah 42:11-12). Jeremiah, in a letter he sends to the captives in Babylon, gives the exiled Judeans permission to settle in Babylon and to make lives for themselves there, "Thus said Adonai of Hosts, God of Israel, 'To all of the exiled ones whom I exiled from Jerusalem to Babylon: Build houses and dwell in them, and plant gardens and eat their fruit, take wives and give birth to sons and daughters. And, take for your sons wives, and your daughters, give them to men, so they may bear sons and daughters and multiply there and not be diminished' (Jeremiah 29:4-6). Jeremiah responds to the immediate earthly needs, of the people. Jeremiah lets the people know that, despite their exile, they can still continue living as Israelites. Through these messages, Jeremiah attempts to ensure that an identifiable Israelite nation will endure.

Jeremiah is passionate in his pleas with the people not to settle in Egypt. Jeremiah believes in order for the people to be redeemed, they must stay together. Jeremiah explains to the people what settling in Egypt will mean for them: "And now, therefore, hear the word of Adonai, You remnant of Judah, thus said Adonai of Hosts, God of Israel, 'If you surely set your faces to enter Egypt and you go there to live, then it shall come to be that sword, which you feared, will overtake you there, in the Land of Egypt, and the evil, which you worried about, will follow close after you in Egypt, and there you will die. And all the men that put their faces to go to Egypt to live there will die by sword, by famine, and by pestilence. And there will be no remnant or one who escapes from the evil that I will bring upon them" (Jeremiah 42:15-17). In this way, Jeremiah

comforts the people who remain in Babylon and uses criticism to ensure they remain intact.

Finally, the book of Jeremiah ends with Jeremiah offering a new sense of comfort to the people—the destruction of the surrounding nations. In a feature found in all of the major prophetic works, Jeremiah prophesies against Egypt, Philistine, Moab, Ammon, Edom, Teman, Damascus, Kedar, Elam, and, finally, Babylon (Jeremiah 46:1-51:64). With these nations neutralized through his word, the people are set to be redeemed.

Isaiah and Jeremiah both exemplify what it means to meet a community where its members are. In these chapters, the prophets respond to the immediate needs of the people, comforting them, responding to their fears, and helping them see hope for the future. While there are certainly elements of critique in portions of these prophecies, the words offered here are overwhelmingly empathic.

Prophetic Methodologies

Different prophets use different techniques to communicate their prophecies. In the same way that the prophets come from a variety of backgrounds, address a variety of issues, and speak to a variety of communities, the prophets also make their messages heard in a variety of ways. What is most notable about this diversity is the prophets' unwavering commitment to speak to their audience using whatever techniques are necessary. The prophets answer God's call and address the people with determination and clarity of message.

Prophetic Messages Directed Toward the People

Many of the prophetic books include statements targeted at a general audience—the community or the people. These prophecies are recorded in the form of poetry or prose, but the text often does not include specifics as to how they were either delivered to or received by their intended audiences. Prophetic messages directed toward the people often have a different focus than prophetic messages directed toward Israel's leaders; they suggest transformation must occur within each person. These messages demand changes in practice from the ground-up, as opposed to the top-down. These calls for action often include statements about the "stuff" of every day life. To make these messages heard, the prophets utilize a variety of literary techniques (e.g. metaphors, images, symbols).

For example, the book of Amos is organized around a unified agricultural metaphor, which seemingly originates from Amos' background as a sheepherder. Amos speaks to

the people about injustice, punishment, and redemption in language that comes from his own experience—the language of the land. This is a language the people can understand. In Amos 3, Amos asks a series of nine rhetorical questions of the people. Embedded in these questions is a reoccurring image—that of a lion roaring. In Amos 3:4, Amos asks: "Will a lion roar in the forest when he has no prey? Will a young lion give voice from his den if he has no capture?" The sound of a wild beast roaring is something the people, and surely Amos the sheepherder, knew well. In this metaphorical statement, God is the lion and the people are the prey. These questions are meant to inform the people that God is flexing to punish them and, presumably, to fill them with fear.

The nine questions in Amos 3 build on one another, leading up to two final questions, which revisit the metaphor of the lion: "The lion has roared, who will not fear? Adonai God has spoken, who cannot prophesy?" (Amos 3:8). This verse is composed in a parallel style that Robert Alter calls "intensification;" that is to say, the second verset intensifies the message of the first verset (Alter 62). In this case, the language shifts from figurative to literal and the urgency of the message intensifies in the second verset. When an animal roars, the human reaction of fear is instinctual. An animal roaring is a signal of imminent danger. The figurative language of the first verset is intended to lead the recipient of the prophetic message to a deeper understanding of the second verset: God's speech should affect you like a lion's roar. Just as one acts instinctually at the sound of a wild beast, so too should one act instinctually at a pronouncement from the Divine. The text lets its audience know the natural reaction to God's utterance is prophecy.

Amos 3:12 summarizes the intended prophetic message, incorporating the metaphor of a lion: "Thus said Adonai, 'As the shepherd saves two legs or a piece of an ear from the mouth of a lion, so too shall the children of Israel who dwell in Samaria be saved—in the corner of a bed or in the cover of a couch.'" Here, the lion represents the Divine and the prey represents Israel, but this time the threat is not pointed to (like a lion's roar), but experienced (the prey, here, has been caught). This prophecy of doom dreadfully informs the Israelites of their impending destruction. The image of the shepherd saving only bits and pieces of the captured prey is ironic. The shepherd is able to save a remnant of the sheep, but this salvation is woefully inadequate. Through this metaphor, Amos informs the people: While a remnant of the people will be saved, Israel's core will be destroyed. Amos' unique attribute is his ability to deliver complex, even difficult, messages through accessible metaphors.

In contrast to Amos, Jeremiah speaks to the people through the metaphor of adultery. He illustrates in concrete terms how God views polytheistic worship by Israel, His people, as an act of infidelity. Even though Jeremiah comes from a priestly lineage and speaks directly to powerful members of society, he uses accessible metaphoric language to connect with the people. In Jeremiah 3:6-10, Jeremiah delivers the following statement to the people:

> Adonai said to me during the days of King Josiah, 'Have you seen what backsliding Israel has done? Going up every high mountain and under every green tree and whoring there? And I said: After she has done all these things, she will return to me, but she didn't return. And her treacherous sister Judah saw it. And I saw: For when backsliding Israel committed adultery, I sent her away and gave her a bill of divorce, but her treacherous sister Judah did not fear and she also went and whored. And it

> came to pass because of her casual whoring that she polluted the land and committed adultery with every stone and tree. And after all this her treacherous sister Judah, did not return to me with her whole heart, but insincerely,' declared Adonai.

In this section, Jeremiah weaves literal and figurative language together. He lends meaning to past events—describing Northern Israel's destruction (an event with which everyone in Judah would have been familiar) as a Divine punishment wrought upon Israel because of Israel's sins of idolatry. By calling Judah "Israel's sister," Jeremiah is suggesting that Judah has followed a path similar to Israel's, that of polytheistic worship, and that these acts will be met with a punishment similar to Israel's. The point of departure between the two, which Jeremiah elucidates to the people, is that Israel blatantly worshipped other gods while Judah now claims to only worship One God. This technique—of mixing figurative and literal language helps to shift a seemingly removed practice of foreign worship into the immediate language of personal morality—adultery. The prophecy then pushes the audience beyond a framework of personal morality and suggests the people's adultery is not only a danger to the individuals who sinned, but causes the entire land to become polluted, thereby endangering the entire people. This metaphor of sexual unfaithfulness rings painfully true both in the ancient world and today. However, Jeremiah's construction of the metaphor is troubling, as he labels the female partners as "bad" and the male partner as "good."

Both of these examples illustrate the ways in which a prophet can make acts of injustice relevant to the people's lives. This form of prophecy is radically different than the methodology discussed in the next portion—Political Action.

Political Action

It was the mission of many of the prophets to deliver messages to individuals in positions of power. Some of the prophets had easy access to these leaders, while, for others, approaching them meant imprisonment. Understandably, those in power often did not welcome the prophets' dire messages and saw them as political threats, rather than words from the Divine. The language of these messages and the elaborate staging that surrounded their delivery stands in contrast to the more direct, familiar prophecies delivered to the people.

Among the prophets, Isaiah clearly had the easiest access to powerful leaders. He was called upon by a succession of kings who sought his counsel, even if they did not always follow his advice. Although Isaiah often speaks to people of power directly, there are other cases in which he simply relays a divine denouncement of Judah's leadership without stating an assumed audience. For example, in Isaiah 3:13-15, the prophet describes a court scene, in which God rises up to testify against Judah's leaders. "Adonai stands up to plead and rises to judge the peoples. Adonai will raise charges against the elders of His people and its officers: And you ravaged the vineyard and that which you stole from the poor is in your houses. How could you crush My people and grind the faces of the poor,' declares Adonai, God of Hosts" (Isaiah 3:13-15). In this indictment, Isaiah speaks out against Judah's leaders, calling them unjust. While Isaiah is concerned with Judah's foreign policy, he is also concerned with how Judah's leaders treat their own people.

At one point, God instructs Isaiah to take his son and approach King Ahaz and deliver a message to him. This message is to be delivered immediately following an attack on Jerusalem, during which Syria (Aram) and Northern Israel (Ephraim) had hoped to overthrow King Ahaz and replace him with an ally (Sommer 797). The text reads:

> And Adonai said to Isaiah, go out to call upon Ahaz, you and *Sh'ar-Yahshuv* (A-Remnant-Will-Return), your son, to the end of the conduit of the upper pool in the highways of the Fuller's Field. And say to him, 'Be guarded and quiet. Do not be afraid and do not soften your heart over the two tails of these smoking firebrands, or over the fierce anger of Rezin and Aram and the son of Remaliah. Because Aram, Ephraim, and the son of Remaliah have taken evil counsel against you, saying, 'Let us go up to Judah and trouble her and split her for ourselves and set up Ben-Tabeel as a king within her.' Thus said Adonai, 'It shall not stand and it shall not come to be. For the head of Aram is Damascus and the head of Damascus is Rezin and within 65 years Ephraim will be broken as a people. And the head of Ephraim is Samaria and the head of Samaria is Ben Remalia's son. If you do not believe, surely you cannot be trusted (Isaiah 7:3-9).

In this prophecy, Isaiah instructs King Ahaz to stand firm and not join in with Syria and Northern Israel's alliance. This message presents a number of common ideas found in Isaiah's prophecies—that Judah's leaders should not make alliances with other nations and that the Northern kingdom of Israel, characterized here as Judah's enemy, will be destroyed. In addition to Isaiah's verbal message, readers will note the presence of Isaiah's son, *Sh'ar-Yahshuv*, meaning A-Remnant-Will-Return, offers a final piece of Isaiah's message: Even if Judah is attacked, a remnant of the people will return (Sommer 798). Together, the words of Isaiah's prophecy and his son's name deliver the central tenets of Isaiah's prophetic message: Judah should not get involved in international

affairs, for other nations' actions are evidence of the Divine will, and after Judah's destruction, a pure remnant of the people will survive.

Like Isaiah, Jeremiah is called upon repeatedly to speak truth directly to power. In one such instance, Jeremiah is sent before the House of Adonai. There, he declares "Thus said Adonai of Hosts, God of Israel, 'Behold, I will bring to this city and all of her towns all the evil that I have spoken about to her, for they have hardened their necks, so they will not hear my words" (Jeremiah 19:15). The Priest Pashur son of Immer hears Jeremiah's words and has Jeremiah put up on the stocks as punishment; "And Pashur the son of Immer, the priest who was the chief officer of the House of Adonai, heard that Jeremiah prophesied these things. And Pashur flogged Jeremiah the prophet and put him on the stocks at the Upper Benjamin Gate, which was at the House of Adonai" (Jeremiah 20:1-2). Jeremiah might have been humiliated and pained by this punishment, but he did not stop prophesying. As soon as Jermiah is released from the stocks, he hurls more prophecies, this time leveling them directly at Pashur the priest; "And it came to pass on the morrow that Pashur released Jeremiah from the stocks. And Jeremiah said to him, 'Adonai has not called you by the name Pashur, but *Magor-Missaviv*, Terror All Around.' For thus said Adonai, 'Behold, I am going to deliver you and all your friends to terror. And they will fall by the sword of their enemies and your eyes will behold it. And all of Judah I will deliver into the hand of the king of Babylon or slay them with a sword'" (Jeremiah 20:3b-4). What is notable about Jeremiah's response is that he answers Pashur's punishment by attacking him directly with words. While Jeremiah's first prophecy is delivered to a wide audience, his second prophecy spells out exactly how his

dire news will affect Pashur personally. On the one hand, one could interpret this message as Jeremiah retaliating against his captor using the weapon he knows best—his words. On the other hand, one could read this prophecy as evidence of Jeremiah's unflinching resolve to deliver God's holy word, even when it means provoking a man who is in a position to torture him.

In another such instance, priests, prophets, and the people threaten Jeremiah with death while he prophesies in the House of Adonai (Jeremiah 26:7-15). These negative encounters continue until, finally, Jeremiah is barred completely from the House of Adonai. Without options or the ability to have his prophecies heard, Jeremiah writes God's message on a scroll and sends another prophet, Baruch son of Neriah, as an emissary to speak his word. Temple officials tell Baruch he and Jeremiah must go into hiding, but promise they will bring the prophetic message before the king. King Jehoiakim responds by burning the scroll, piece by piece, ignoring the message. Even with this seemingly final defeat, God does not allow Jeremiah to rest. The Divine calls upon Jeremiah to rewrite the prophetic scroll and declare to King Jehoiakim that he will die a terrible death and that his descendants will have no seat on the Davidic throne that is to come (Jeremiah 36:4-33). Jeremiah's encounter with King Jehoiakim is markedly similar to his encounter with Pashur. Jeremiah responds to leaders' rebuffs with messages of their own demise. Jeremiah is slated to endure divine demands and royal defeats at a level unparalleled by another prophet. Jeremiah also displays an unparalleled level of endurance.

Jeremiah, in the midst of the Babylonian siege of Jerusalem, finds himself mistakenly arrested for treason, as a guard believes he is defecting to the Babylonians (Jeremiah 37:13-14). Jeremiah is imprisoned and beaten (Jeremiah 37:15). While he is in prison, King Zedekiah summons Jeremiah and asks him if he has heard any word from the Divine (Jeremiah 37:17). "And Jeremiah said, 'There is,' and he said, 'You will be delivered into the hands of the king of Babylon.' And Jeremiah said to King Zedekiah, 'How have I sinned against you or against your servants or against this people that you have put me in prison? And where are your prophets that prophesied to you saying, 'The king of Babylon will not come to this land'? But now, please, listen to me, my lord king, and grant my supplication: Do not send me back to the House of Jonathan the Scribe to die there'" (Jeremiah 37:17b-20). Jeremiah repeats the message of Judah's doom to the king and, unflinchingly, asks the king to spare his own life. Just as Jeremiah advocates for God, he also advocates for his own freedom.

In the book of Jeremiah, one finds detailed descriptions of God's instructions to the prophet, as well as account of the process by which Jeremiah delivers his messages. Amos' truth-speaking, in comparison, is more concealed. Readers do learn, however, that Amaziah, the priest of Bethel, comes to hear Amos' prophecies and is disturbed enough by them to send a message about Amos to the King of Israel, Jeroboam. The account of Amaziah's message to King Jeroboam comes directly after Amos' prophecy against King Jeroboam and the nation of Israel. In this condemnation, Amos says "And Adonai said, 'Behold, I will place a plumb line in the midst of my people Israel. I will not pardon them again. And the high places of Isaac will be desolate and the holy places

of Israel will be destroyed. And I will rise up against the House of Jeroboam with a sword'" (Amos 7:8b-9). Amaziah immediately sends a message to Jeroboam, using language that echoes Amos', "Amaziah, the priest of Bethel, sent this message to King Jeroboam of Israel, 'Amos is conspiring against you in the midst of the House of Israel. The land is not able to contain all his words. For thus Amos said, 'Jeroboam will die by the sword and Israel will be exiled from their land'" (Amos 7:10-11). Amos' words are perceived as being so threatening to the establishment that Amaziah advocates for him to be forcibly removed from the North. Amaziah does not stop at merely informing the king; he speaks directly to Amos: "And Amaziah said to Amos, 'Seer, go and flee to the Land of Judah and eat bread there and prophesy there. But do not prophesy again at Bethel, for it is a king's sanctuary and a royal house" (Amos 7:12-13). According to Amaziah, there was no room for a voice of dissent in the king's court. Amaziah understood king and priest to be on one side of the political line and the prophet to be on the other.

Many of the prophets were called upon to speak the voice of the Divine to Israel's rulers. Because the prophets, save for Isaiah, did not have ready access to the ruling classes, they were forced to make their words heard through extreme actions. Their messages, harsh in content, were not easily digested, for they directly threatened the power bases of their society. In response to their words, Israel's leaders often attempted to have these social criticizers silenced, rather than confront their warnings. In this sense, part of the prophets' role was to serve as the conscience for their societies. In much the way a person can struggle to silence the voice of morality within himself, so too did many of

Israel's leaders seek to push aside the prophets. With determination and resolve, the prophets returned again and again to the sides of Israel's leaders, hoping their messages would be heard.

Symbolic Action

The prophets delivered their messages in a variety of ways. While speech was the most common means of making themselves heard, the prophets also performed physical acts, or symbolic actions, in order to deliver their messages. These symbolic actions served as physical embodiments of the divine word and were intended to grab the attention of the prophets' communities.

Of all the prophets, Jeremiah was called upon the most to act out his prophecies through symbolic action. As I asserted earlier, I believe this calling exemplifies the uniquely close relationship that God had with Jeremiah and speaks to the depths of their connection. The Divine asks Jeremiah to employ drastic measures in order to attract others to his prophetic message.

In Jeremiah 27, Jeremiah is called upon by God to wear "bonds and yokes" on his neck (Jeremiah 27:2) in order send a message to the kings of Edom, Moab, Ammon, Tyre, and Sidon (Jeremiah 27:3). The purpose of this message is to illustrate to the leaders of Judah and a delegation of other nations' leaders that it is God's will for them to submit to the rule of Babylon or, in other words, to put their necks under the king of Babylon's yoke.

This message, radically and surprisingly, pronounces to these leaders God is the Creator and Ruler of the world and He has decided to award all of these lands—including Israel and Jerusalem—to Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon (Jeremiah 27:6). Here, Jeremiah, citing the Divine will, announces to King Zedekiah: "Bring your neck under the yoke of the king of Babylon and serve him and his people, and live" (Jeremiah 27:12). Readers should not have a hard time imagining how the Judeans and King Zedekiah responded to these messages. Jeremiah, in a single pronouncement, gave King Nebuchadnezzar divine permission to besiege Jerusalem and counseled King Zedekiah to submit to his rule. Jeremiah effectively reversed the core of the divine covenant with his words and actions—ripping the Promised Land from the hands of God's people and delivering it to another nation.

Jeremiah 27 reads:

> Thus said Adonai to me: 'Make yourself bonds and bars of a **yoke** and put them on your neck. And send them [a message] to the king of Edom, and to the king of Moab, and to the king of the Ammonites, and to the king of Tyre, and to the king of Sidon, by the hand of the messengers who have come to Jerusalem to Zedekiah, king of Judah. And command them to say to their masters: 'Thus said Adonai of Hosts, God of Israel,' thus you will say to your masters: 'I made the land and the earth and the cattle and all that is on the face of the earth, with my great strength and my outstretched arm and I give it to whoever is fitting in my eyes. And now I will give all of these lands into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, my servant, and also all the beasts of the field I give to him to serve him. And all the nations will serve him and his son and his son's son until the time of his land comes, and then many nations and great kings will serve him. And it will come to be that the nation or kingdom that does not serve Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon and that will not put its neck under the **yoke** of the king of Babylon, I will visit by sword, and by hunger, and by pestilence on that nation,' thus said Adonai, 'until I have destroyed it by his hand. And, you, do not listen to your prophets, or to your diviners, or to your dreamers, or to your practitioners-of-witchcraft, or to your

> sorcerers who speak to you, saying 'You will not serve the king of Babylon.' For it is a lie that they prophesy to you, with a result that you will be moved far from your land. And I will drive you out and you will perish. But the nation that bring its neck under the **yoke** of the king of Babylon and serves him, I will let it remain on its own land,' declared Adonai, 'and they will till it and dwell on it' (Jeremiah 27:2-11).

By wearing a yoke, Jeremiah figuratively delivers a symbolic message, which he later delivers literally to the nations' leaders by letter. Jeremiah's actions and message are attempting to give meaning to the currents of the time and are meant to directly influence not only Judah's foreign policy, but also the foreign policies of the surrounding nations.

God goes to great lengths in order to explain the dire circumstances of Judah's situation not only to the Judeans, but also to the prophet Jeremiah himself, thereby reinforcing their close relationship. In one such instance, relayed in the first person singular by Jeremiah, God tells the prophet to put on a loincloth. Jeremiah is then instructed to hide the loincloth in a far off place among some rocks. After a significant period of time, when the loincloth begins to disintegrate, God commands Jeremiah to find the loincloth again. The loincloth, Jeremiah tells God, is ruined (Jeremiah 13:1-8). To this God replies, "Thus said Adonai, 'Like this I will corrupt the pride of Judah and the great pride of Jerusalem'" (Jeremiah 13:9). Notice here how Jeremiah is not commanded to take the message revealed by this symbolic action to any leader or any portion of the people. This is a private prophecy meant to communicate God's plans to Jeremiah.

In Jeremiah 16, God forbids Jeremiah to marry or have children—his celibacy is meant to deliver a Divine message to the people, "You will not take for yourself a wife and you

will not have sons or daughters in this place. For thus said Adonai about the sons and daughters that are born in this place, and about their mothers who bore them, and about their fathers who begot them: In this land, they will die gruesome deaths" (Jeremiah 16:2-4a). Jeremiah's symbolic action is intended to let the people know their time in the land is severely limited. Jeremiah, perhaps the most tragic of all the prophets, will be left alone in the world as a symbol of God's plans for destruction.

Another form of symbolic prophetic action is the prophet's act of naming someone, in particular a child, for the purpose of delivering a message. Isaiah names one of his sons *Sh'ar-Yahshuv*, meaning, "A-Remnant-Will-Return." In contrast to citations in the book of Hosea or elsewhere in Isaiah—when the prophet is called upon by God to bestow symbolic names upon his children, we have no indication as to whether or not God directed Isaiah's naming of this child or if Isaiah did it on his own accord. In any case, the exact words of Isaiah's son's name, שְׁאָר יָשׁוּב, are directly quoted later in Isaiah's prophecy in Isaiah 10:21, "A remnant shall return (שְׁאָר יָשׁוּב), a remnant of Jacob, to the mighty God." The son comes to serve as a living embodiment of Isaiah's central message.

In Isaiah 8, Isaiah is commanded by God to name another of his sons with a symbolic name. Isaiah, speaking in the first person, reports: "And I was intimate with a prophetess and she conceived and bore a son. And Adonai said to me, 'Call his name *Maher-Shalal-Hash-Baz* (Spoil-is-Fast, Plundering-is-Swift). For before the young boy knows to call 'my father' or 'my mother, the wealth of Damascus and the spoil of Samaria shall be

carried off before the King of Assyria" (Isaiah 8:3-4). This name, which God commands Isaiah to print on a banner and have witnessed by two reliable witnesses (Isaiah 8:1), is meant to prophesy Syria and Samaria's collapses and encourage King Ahaz not to make an alliance with them. It is worth noting two of Isaiah's sons play an integral role in delivering political messages to King Ahaz.

While verbally communicated prophecies tend to have a clear message and often a clear intended audience, symbolic actions are often more difficult to interpret and have a more nebulous intent. On the other hand, symbolic actions are far more dramatic than the simple spoken word and, therefore, may be more easily noticed. For example, one cannot be sure that any of Jeremiah's contemporaries ever fully grasped the intent of his celibacy. One cannot know if the average passerby would have correctly guessed the meaning behind Jeremiah wearing a yoke or if King Ahaz would have rightly interpreted the symbolically named *Sh'ar-Yahshuv*. The intent of a symbolic action, though, is to evoke questions: What are you doing? Why did you name your child this? In these ways, symbolic actions draw the audience in and, once they are lured, deliver critical messages.

Lament

The prophets are often described as solely being mouthpieces for the Divine, but this is far from a full definition of the prophetic role. The prophets did not only quote the Divine, but also directly addressed God—both speaking out against the people and arguing for their safety. This act of crying out to God is called "lament." There are many instances of prophetic lament and these examples help to illustrate the dialogue the prophets' had with the Divine.

In one instance of lament, Jeremiah cries out to God on the people's behalf.

> Have You utterly rejected Judah? Do You loathe Zion? Why have You smitten us so there is no healing for us? We do we hope for peace and there is no good, for a time of healing and behold terror. We acknowledge, O Adonai, our wickedness, the iniquity of our fathers, for we have sinned against You. For Your name's sake, do not despise us, do not disgrace Your throne of glory. Remember, do not break Your covenant with us. Are there any amongst the vanities of the nations that can cause rain? Can the heavens give showers? Are you not He, O Adonai, our God? So we hope in You, for You have made all these things (Jeremiah 14:19-22).

In this lament, Jeremiah switches to the first person plural, describing himself as a part of the people. No longer is Jeremiah chastising his community; now he has joined it in prayer. Heartbreakingly, Jeremiah lays out the people's pleas for forgiveness and reveals the deepest truths of their condition: They hope in God's salvation. In this lament, Jeremiah reasserts God is the only source of life in the world and asks simply, "Are you not He, O Adonai, our God?" With the covenant on the verge of complete demolition, Jeremiah hopes for a sign of its endurance.

Jeremiah not only calls out to God asking Him to save his community—speaking in the first person plural, but he calls upon God to save him—speaking in the first person singular, as well.

The prophet Habakkuk, whose book is characterized by lament, takes issue with the Divine a number of times. In one such instance, Habakkuk questions God's decision to bring the Babylonian (Chaldean) invasion as a punishment against the people. Habakkuk exclaims, "Are you not from everlasting, Adonai. My Holy God, Let us not die. O Adonai, You placed law upon them. O Rock, You have established them for reproach" (Habakkuk 1:12). Here, Habakkuk begs the Divine directly, saying "Let us live," and then challenges God's decision to place law in the hands of the Babylonians. He follows this with a curious statement: "You whose eyes are too pure to see evil or to look upon trouble, why do you look upon those who act treacherously and remain silent while a wicked one swallows up the one more righteous than he" (Habakkuk 1:13). In this response, it is unclear who is "wicked" and who is "righteous." In this hierarchy, does Habakkuk see the Babylonians as being so "wicked" he is willing to look upon the people as righteous once again? Or, possibly, has Habakkuk shifted his focus from the Babylonians back to the people and is referring here to a hierarchy of wickedness within the Judeans themselves. In either scenario, the thrust of the message is clear: Habakkuk is questioning God's decision and taking issue with his pronouncement.

Evidence of lament in the prophetic books illustrates to readers that the prophets did not solely seek to change society according to their theologies, but also sought to change God

according to their theologies. In some instances, theurgy was just as much a prophetic concern as social action. These laments suggest the prophets were not always willing partners with the Divine. At times, the prophets questioned God's motives and actions, and felt deep empathy for the people they so readily chastised.

Conclusion

In the previous chapter, I suggest Reform Jews need to become fluent in a language of text and tradition as a first step in articulating a prophetic theology. There are, obviously, many definitions of fluency and, furthermore, a myriad of possibilities of which texts would compromise a representative prophetic canon. In this chapter, I have described a number of prophetic characters and outlined a broad range of prophetic issues, methodologies, and definitions of justice. The central aims of this chapter have been to show that each of the prophets has his own unique message and, therefore, that the prophets, as a whole, respond to a wide variety of similar social-religious issues through their own understandings of God and justice. This chapter represents my own attempts to become fluent in the language of text. I hope this work may be useful to other students of our tradition who are hoping to gain surer footing in prophetic metaphor and thought.

Below, I have outlined a loose course of study for groups that wish to engage in their own paths toward fluency. I hope this outline of learning inspires others to begin accessing these remarkable texts. I look forward to becoming a part of this conversation in the near future and fervently hope that we may yet see a day when members of our movement will work toward realizing a Prophetic Judaism together.

The first step in studying prophetic texts is understanding the background of the prophet. Where is the prophet from? To whom is he speaking? What is his socio-political context? What his family background? Why and how was he called to prophecy? Such study introduces learners to the idea that there is no one sort of person who can speak on

issues of theology and justice. Rather, the prophets represent a wide-range of citizens. Understanding the ways in which a prophet's personal story affects his message is fodder for critical conversation about the role of narrative in today's steps toward prophetic action.

Next, learners should consider how different prophets think about the Divine. How do they imagine God? How do they communicate with God? How do they understand God's relationship with the world? What role do they articulate God playing in history? These questions can lead learners to begin articulating their own concepts of God and to reflect on how their theologies affect their actions in the world.

From here, learners can examine how the prophets think about justice in the world. How do they define "justice"? What sources of injustice do they identify in their communities? Learners should reflect on the fact that prophets who live during the same periods define justice differently and describe different aspects of the same society. How do these various images work together to create a full picture of justice? From here, students can begin discussing the issues in their society that speak to them. They can begin considering the injustices of their lives and reflect on what oppresses them. Realizing that different prophets focus on different issues, and considering some of the reasons behind these variances, can help learners to begin discussing how their own narratives affect the issues of justice they feel are central to them.

Next, learners should explore the relationships different prophets draw between ritual acts and ethical behavior. How do the different prophets describe the relationship between religious expressions and pursuits of justice? From these comparisons, learners can begin articulating what a relationship of justice and ritual might look like in their own community.

Learners, from here, should explore the different ways in which prophets conceptualized the future. Learners can consider the role of punishment and hope in the prophets' messages and reflect on ways these lenses of seeing might affect their own beliefs in the future of our world.

As learners begin to have a deeper understanding of who the prophets were, how they came to prophesy, why they began prophesying, and what they said, the conversation will naturally extend into the ways in which these prophets made their messages heard. Learners should move beyond the prophets' prolific spoken messages to their communities and explore the prophets' symbolic actions, their attempts to access power, their conversations with God, and their own attempts to affect change both in God and in their communities. Learners should use these methodologies as a touchstone for considering their own abilities to make change in their communities.

Finally, learners should begin sharing their own stories. They should see the prophets both as role models for their own behavior as well as agitating voices in their lives. They should study how the prophets have affected thinkers such as Stephen S. Wise and

Gustavo Gutiérrez and dream about how these texts might affect them. They should share what they learn and begin acting for a better day, when our world will know peace and all of humanity will experience justice.

Chapter Three:
Lesson: The Meaning of Prophecy

Enduring Understandings:

- ✓ There is no single character of "prophet." Each of the prophets has his/her own theological lens through which s/he sees society and understands justice.
- ✓ Wrestling with prophetic texts gives students tools to wrestle with contemporary issues related to God, justice and society.

Goals:

- ✓ To introduce students to a multiplicity of prophetic voices/characters
- ✓ To give students an opportunity to wrestle with ideas of justice
- ✓ To give students an opportunity to consider different notions of God/ theology

Set Induction:

- ✓ Each student should sit with a partner or "One-on-One."
- ✓ Each student should take three minutes and answer the following question (by telling a story): What was a time in your life when you saw something so unfair it made you angry?
- ✓ Partners will listen to each other's stories.
- ✓ Afterwards, the students will go around the room and each student will share, in one or two sentences, the gist of their partner's story.
- ✓ As the students share, the teacher will group the students' experiences into categories (e.g. prejudice, poverty, bullying, etc.)
- ✓ Once all students have shared, the teacher will explain: "In biblical times, there were people called prophets. The prophets looked around their worlds and saw things that made them angry. The prophets didn't hold their anger inside, though. Instead, they spoke to the people about injustice. What do you think were the kinds of issues the prophets thought were unjust or unfair in their lives?"
- ✓ The teacher should list these issues on the board next to the issues categorized from the students' own lives.
- ✓ The teacher will explain: "We are now going to leave these categories behind and jump straight into some prophetic texts. Once we have gone through these texts, we will compare your guesses about the prophets to the issues we discover."

Middle:

- ✓ As a group, with each student taking a turn to read, read through each of the prophetic texts.[12]
- ✓ For each text, ask the questions:
  - o How were the people unjust?

---

[12] I do not necessarily suggest using all of these texts in a single lesson. Rather, teachers should select which texts work best for the group they are teaching. In particular, I would not use Jeremiah 3:1-13 with younger students.

- How did God react to this injustice?
- How can the people make it better?

✓ Create the following chart on the board:

	The People's Injustice	God's Reaction	How the people can make it better
Isaiah 1:10—18 (People are unjust but can change their actions)	✓ Not doing good ✓ Not devoting oneself to justice ✓ Not aiding the wronged ✓ Not upholding the rights of the orphan ✓ Not defending the cause of the widow (i.e. powerless in society)	✓ God won't accept sacrifices ✓ God doesn't want to respond to the people's celebrations ✓ God will turn away from the people	✓ Learning to do good ✓ Devote yourselves to justice; ✓ Aid the wronged. ✓ Uphold the rights of the orphan; ✓ Defend the cause of the widow. ...i.e ACTION—reversing what you did wrong
Jeremiah 7:1-11 (People are unjust but can change their actions)	✓ Believing that the Temple and being in relationship with God will keep them safe from harm ✓ Not being just to one other ✓ Oppressing the stranger, orphan, and widow (i.e. powerless in society) ✓ Shedding innocent blood ✓ Worshipping other gods ✓ Stealing ✓ Murdering ✓ Committing adultery	✓ Watching ✓ If they don't mend their ways, God won't let them dwell in the land, if they do, they can	✓ Mend their ways and their actions ✓ Execute justice between one man and another ✓ Not oppressing the stranger, the orphan, and the widow (i.e. powerless in society) ✓ Not shedding the blood of the innocent ✓ No follow other gods
Habakkuk 1:1-11 (Destruction is inevitable)	✓ Raiding and violence ✓ Creating strife and contention ✓ There is no justice in the courts	✓ God is sending the Babylonians to conquer Israel	✓
Micah 3:1-12 (Exile is inevitable)	✓ The leaders hating good and loving evil ✓ The leaders "devouring" the People's flesh (i.e. taking advantage of them completely) ✓ False prophets telling the people everything is okay when really it is very bad ✓ Rulers, prophets and priests judging, prophesying, and ruling for bribes	✓ God will not answer the rulers' cries ✓ God will hide God's face from Israel's rulers ✓ The false prophets will get confused and not be able to speak ✓ God will destroy Zion, Jerusalem, and the Temple	✓

	The People's Injustice	God's Reaction	How the people can make it better
Amos 9:7-15 (Human action is not part of the equation)	✓	✓ Israel's sinners will be destroyed ✓ The House of David will be restored and Israel will once again be mighty ✓ The people will be restored ✓ Israel will never be destroyed again	✓
Jeremiah 3:1-13 (God will take Israel back if the people recognize what they did wrong)	✓ Worshipping other gods	✓ If Israel repents, God will redeem her	✓ Recognize what they did wrong and commit only to God

Conclusion:

- ✓ The people's injustices. Ask the following questions:
  - Can you draw any general conclusions about the people's injustice as defined by the prophets?
  - How do these types of injustices relate the injustices you listed earlier in this lesson?
- ✓ God's reaction. Ask the following questions:
  - The prophets describe God as having a lot of reactions to the people's unjust acts. One of the most common reactions they describe is anger. How do the prophets believe that God expresses anger?
  - Why do you think the prophets believe that God gets angry when we behave unjustly?
  - The prophets interpreted events in the world, like wars or invasions, as being evidence of God's anger. As Reform Jews, we don't believe in a God who punishes people in these ways. But, it is possible for us to believe in a God who gets angry at us when we are unjust to one another. What kinds of things do you believe might make God angry today? Why do you think it is important to believe in a God who gets angry but who doesn't punish us?
- ✓ What the people can do. Ask the following questions:
  - Can you draw any general conclusions about what the prophets think people can do to make the world better and stop injustice?

- Why do you think some of the prophets don't think the people can do anything to make our situation better?
- Think back to the injustices you listed at the beginning of class. What do you think people can do to make the situations you described better?

Prophets' Texts

Isaiah 1:10-18

Is 1:10 Hear the word of Adonai, You chieftains of Sodom; Give ear to our God's instruction, You folk of Gomorrah!
Is 1:11 "What need have I of all your sacrifices?" Says Adonai. "I am sated with burnt offerings of rams, And suet of fatlings, And blood of bulls; And I have no delight In lambs and he-goats.
Is 1:12 That you come to appear before Me — Who asked that of you? Trample My courts
Is 1:13 no more; Bringing oblations is futile, Incense is offensive to Me. New moon and sabbath, Proclaiming of solemnities, Assemblies with iniquity, I cannot abide.
Is 1:14 Your new moons and fixed seasons Fill Me with loathing; They are become a burden to Me, I cannot endure them.
Is 1:15 And when you lift up your hands, I will turn My eyes away from you; Though you pray at length, I will not listen. Your hands are stained with crime —
Is 1:16 Wash yourselves clean; Put your evil doings Away from My sight. Cease to do evil;
Is 1:17 Learn to do good. Devote yourselves to justice; Aid the wronged. Uphold the rights of the orphan; Defend the cause of the widow.
Is 1:18 "Come, let us reach an understanding, — says Adonai. Be your sins like crimson, They can turn snow-white; Be they red as dyed wool, They can become like fleece."

Jeremiah 7:1-11

Jer 7:1 The word which came to Jeremiah from Adonai:
Jer 7:2 Stand at the gate of the House of Adonai, and there proclaim this word: Hear the word of Adonai, all you of Judah who enter these gates to worship Adonai!
Jer 7:3 Thus said Adonai of Hosts, the God of Israel: Mend your ways and your actions, and I will let you dwell in this place.
Jer 7:4 Don't put your trust in illusions and say, "The Temple of Adonai, the Temple of Adonai, the Temple of Adonai are these buildings."
Jer 7:5 No, if you really mend your ways and your actions; if you execute justice between one man and another;
Jer 7:6 if you do not oppress the stranger, the orphan, and the widow; if you do not shed the blood of the innocent in this place; if you do not follow other gods, to your own hurt
Jer 7:7 then only will I let you dwell in this place, in the land that I gave to your fathers for all time.
Jer 7:8 See, you are relying on illusions that are of no avail.
Jer 7:9 Will you steal and murder and commit adultery and swear falsely, and sacrifice to Baal, and follow other gods whom you have not experienced,
Jer 7:10 and then come and stand before Me in this House which bears My name and say, "We are safe"?—Safe to do all these abhorrent things!
Jer 7:11 Do you consider this House, which bears My name, to be a den of thieves? As for Me, I have been watching — declares Adonai.

Jeremiah 3:1-13

Jer 3:1 The word of Adonai came to me as follows: If a man divorces his wife, and she leaves him and marries another man, can he ever go back to her? Would not such a land be defiled? Now you have whored with many lovers: can you return to Me?—says Adonai.

Jer 3:2 Look up to the bare heights, and see: Where have they not lain with you? You waited for them on the roadside Like a bandit in the wilderness. And you defiled the land With your whoring and your debauchery.

Jer 3:3 And when showers were withheld And the late rains did not come, You had the brazenness of a street woman, You refused to be ashamed.

Jer 3:4 Just now you called to Me, "Father! You are the Companion of my youth.

Jer 3:5 Does one hate for all time? Does one rage forever?" That is how you spoke; You did wrong, and had your way.

Jer 3:6 Adonai said to me in the days of King Josiah: Have you seen what Rebel Israel did, going to every high mountain and under every leafy tree, and whoring there?

Jer 3:7 I thought: After she has done all these things, she will come back to Me. But she did not come back; and her sister, Faithless Judah, saw it.

Jer 3:8 I noted: Because Rebel Israel had committed adultery, I cast her off and handed her a bill of divorce; yet her sister, Faithless Judah, was not afraid — she too went and whored.

Jer 3:9 Indeed, the land was defiled by her casual immorality, as she committed adultery with stone and with wood.

Jer 3:10 And after all that, her sister, Faithless Judah, did not return to Me wholeheartedly, but insincerely — declares Adonai.

Jer 3:11 And Adonai said to me: Rebel Israel has shown herself more in the right than Faithless Judah.

Jer 3:12 Go, make this proclamation toward the north, and say: Turn back, O Rebel Israel — declares Adonai. I will not look on you in anger, for I am compassionate — declares Adonai; I do not bear a grudge for all time.

Jer 3:13 Only recognize your sin; for you have transgressed against Adonai your God, and scattered your favors among strangers under every leafy tree, and you have not heeded Me — declares Adonai.

Micah 3:1-12

Mic 3:1 I said: Listen, you rulers of Jacob, You chiefs of the House of Israel! For you ought to know what is right,

Mic 3:2 But you hate good and love evil.

Mic 3:3 You have devoured My people's flesh; You have flayed the skin off them, And their flesh off their bones. And after tearing their skins off them, And their flesh off their bones, And breaking their bones to bits, You have cut it up as into a pot, Like meat in a caldron.

Mic 3:4 Someday they shall cry out to Adonai, But He will not answer them; At that time He will hide His face from them, In accordance with the wrongs they have done.

Mic 3:5 Thus said Adonai to the prophets Who lead My people astray, Who cry "Peace!" When they have something to chew, But launch a war on him Who fails to fill their mouths:

Mic 3:6 Assuredly, It shall be night for you So that you cannot prophesy, And it shall be dark for you So that you cannot divine; The sun shall set on the prophets, And the day shall be darkened for them.

Mic 3:7 The seers shall be shamed And the diviners confounded; They shall cover their upper lips, Because no response comes from God.

Mic 3:8 But I, I am filled with strength by the spirit of Adonai, And with judgment and courage, To declare to Jacob his transgressions And to Israel his sin.

Mic 3:9 Hear this, you rulers of the House of Jacob, You chiefs of the House of Israel, Who detest justice And make crooked all that is straight,

Mic 3:10 Who build Zion with crime, Jerusalem with iniquity!

Mic 3:11 Her rulers judge for gifts, Her priests give rulings for a fee, And her prophets divine for pay; Yet they rely upon Adonai, saying, "Adonai is in our midst; No calamity shall overtake us."

Mic 3:12 Assuredly, because of you Zion shall be plowed as a field, And Jerusalem shall become heaps of ruins, And the Temple Mount A shrine in the woods.

Habakkuk 1:1-11

Hab 1:1 The pronouncement made by the prophet Habakkuk.
Hab 1:2 How long, O Adonai, shall I cry out And You not listen, Shall I shout to You, "Violence!" And You not save?
Hab 1:3 Why do You make me see iniquity Why do You look upon wrong?— Raiding and violence are before me, Strife continues and contention goes on.
Hab 1:4 That is why decision fails And justice never emerges; For the villain hedges in the just man — Therefore judgment emerges deformed.
Hab 1:5 "Look among the nations, Observe well and be utterly astounded; For a work is being wrought in your days Which you would not believe if it were told.
Hab 1:6 For lo, I am raising up the Chaldeans, That fierce, impetuous nation, Who cross the earth's wide spaces To seize homes not their own.
Hab 1:7 They are terrible, dreadful; They make their own laws and rules.
Hab 1:8 Their horses are swifter than leopards, Fleeter than wolves of the steppe. Their steeds gallop — their steeds Come flying from afar. Like vultures rushing toward food,
Hab 1:9 They all come, bent on rapine. The thrust of their van is forward, And they amass captives like sand.
Hab 1:10 Kings they hold in derision, And princes are a joke to them; They laugh at every fortress, They pile up earth and capture it.
Hab 1:11 Then they pass on like the wind, They transgress and incur guilt, For they ascribe their might to their god."

Amos 9:7-15

Am 9:7 To Me, O Israelites, you are Just like the Ethiopians — declares Adonai. True, I brought Israel up From the land of Egypt, But also the Philistines from Caphtor And the Arameans from Kir.
Am 9:8 Behold, Adonai GOD has His eye Upon the sinful kingdom: I will wipe it off The face of the earth! But, I will not wholly wipe out The House of Jacob — declares Adonai.
Am 9:9 For I will give the order And shake the House of Israel — Through all the nations — As one shakes sand in a sieve, And not a pebble falls to the ground.
Am 9:10 All the sinners of My people Shall perish by the sword, Who boast, "Never shall the evil Overtake us or come near us."
Am 9:11 In that day, I will set up again the fallen booth of David: I will mend its breaches and set up its ruins anew. I will build it firm as in the days of old,
Am 9:12 So that they shall possess the rest of Edom And all the nations once attached to My name — declares Adonai who will bring this to pass.
Am 9:13 A time is coming — declares Adonai — When the plowman shall meet the reaper, And the treader of grapes Him who holds the bag of seed; When the mountains shall drip wine And all the hills shall wave with grain.
Am 9:14 I will restore My people Israel. They shall rebuild ruined cities and inhabit them; They shall plant vineyards and drink their wine; They shall till gardens and eat their fruits.
Am 9:15 And I will plant them upon their soil, Nevermore to be uprooted From the soil I have given them — said Adonai your God.

Chapter Three:
Lesson: Politics and Religion

Enduring Understandings:

- ✓ Within the Reform movement opinions about how religion and politics should mix have changed over time.
- ✓ One of the tenets of today's Reform movement is that religion and politics should mix.

Goals:

- ✓ To introduce students to a multiplicity of Reform opinions about religion and politics
- ✓ To give students an opportunity to wrestle with ideas of justice
- ✓ To help students consider how their Jewish beliefs and values might affect their emerging political identities

Set Induction:

- ✓ Say to students: In 1922, Emily Post wrote *Etiquette in Society, in Business, in Politics and at Home*. This is a book that is supposed to tell Americans how to behave politely. In her book she says that religion, politics, and money are not considered polite conversation. Do you think this is still true today? Why?
- ✓ Do you think the prophets we discussed in the last lesson would think this is true? Why?

Middle:

- ✓ Look back at last week's notes. Ask: How do you think the prophets thought that religion and politics related to one another?
- ✓ How do you think the rabbis and educators in this congregation think religion and politics relate to one another? Support your answers with specific examples.
- ✓ As a class, go to the RAC website "about us" page. http://rac.org/aboutrac/. Read the "about us" information together. Ask students: How do you think the Reform movement believes religion and politics relate to one another?
- ✓ Explain: The Reform movement is the only American Jewish movement to have a Washington DC office. The RAC is evidence of our movement's commitment to political action. But, the RAC didn't just open itself. The Reform movement has had a complicated and diverse relationship with politics. Today, we are going to study what some Reform rabbis and Jewish leaders have had to say about the relationship between politics and religion. When we are done, you are going to have a chance to think about how you think politics and religion should mix!
- ✓ Read through the following statements. After each statement, ask the question: How does this figure see religion and politics mixing?
- ✓ Write the answers on the board.
- ✓ After all of the answers have been written, ask: Based on these statements, how have Reform Jews' ideas about politics and religion changed over time?

- ✓ Ask: Out of all of these thinkers, which opinion about politics and religion best matches your own and why?

Conclusion:

- ✓ Say to students: Open up to your haftarah portion that you will be reading at your bar/bat mitzvah.
- ✓ Ask:
  - What does your portion say about justice?
  - How does your portion describe issues of politics?
  - What can you learn from this?

In the February 1, 1861, edition of the *Israelite*, Isaac Mayer Wise writes:
Politics in this country means money, material interest, and no more. The leaders of all parties are office-seekers or office-holders....Politics is a business, and in many instances a mean business, which requires more cheat and falsehood than a vulgar scoundrel would practice.[13]

The first principles of Reform Judaism were published in the Pittsburgh Platform in 1869. Below is the seventh and final principle of Reform Judaism:
In full accordance with the spirit of the Mosaic legislation, which strives to regulate the relations between rich and poor, we deem it our duty to participate in the great task of modern times, to solve, on the basis of justice and righteousness, the problems presented by the contrasts and evils of the present organization of society.

In 1949, Stephen S. Wise writes in his autobiography *Challenging Years:*
I felt very early in my ministry the necessity and advantages of the minister going into politics. To me neither religion nor politics was remote or sequestered from life. Religion is a vision or ideal of life. Politics is a method, or *modus vivendi*. To say that the minister should not go into politics is to imply that ideal and reality are twain and alien. Politics is what it is because religion keeps out of it.[14]

In 1965, Vorspan and Lipman write the following in *Justice and Judaism: The Work of Social Action*:
The rabbis who devoted themselves to social idealism did not expect their congregations to support them at all times, and sometimes the laymen did not. Not infrequently was there vocal opposition expressed both to the views and actions of the rabbis.

In February 1929 at the UAHC Biennial, Mr. Roscoe Nelson said in a speech:
The truth is that this Union has never conceded that any subject is more vitally Jewish than that of Social Justice...Our privilege and our duty in this behalf is not discharged by the most gracious of permits to the Central Conference of American Rabbis to adopt a program of Social Justice. It would be a strange voice in Israel which suggested that gropings for Social Justice must be vicariously conducted through a Hierarchy of Rabbis or a House of Bishops. I have grossly misinterpreted the history, philosophy, and tradition of our people, if passivity and impersonality in connection with the most profound interests of humanity suffices for spiritual identification with the sources of Jewish inspiration.[15]

---

[13] Temkin, Sefton D. *Isaac Mayer Wise, 1819-1875*. Cincinnati: Hebrew Union College, 1964, 176.
[14] Wise, Stephen Samuel. *Challenging Years*. New York: G. P. Putnman's Sons, 1949, 109.
[15] Vorspan, Albert and Eugene J. Lipman. *Justice and Judaism: The Work of Social Action*. New York: Union of American Hebrew Congregations, 1956 20.

In 1941, Abraham Cronbach writes:
Within the recollection of most of us, there was a time when religion was believed to be entirely detached from such matters as the wages paid to labor, hours of labor, factory conditions, trade unions, housing, vocational training, public recreation, old age pensions, international relations, or any of the bewildering problems which we designate by the term 'social.' Our religion was supposed to consist of the rituals—many of them a little strange in our American surroundings—and some precepts of personal morality received from our ancestors. But changes have now occurred. We are beginning to realize that our religion on the one hand and, on the other hand, the vital economic and social questions of the hour are closely interrelated. Religion has come to require a social interpretation.[16]

In 1955 at the UAHC Biennial Rabbi Maurice Eisendrath said:
A guide for Reform Judaism do we desire? Indeed we do. But not for ritual and rites alone—but for righteous conduct and decent behavior between man and man; not merely for the forms of services but for the service of God in the affairs of men; not merely a minimum code for liturgical worship but a minimal code of moral conduct incumbent upon anyone who calls himself a Reform Jew presuming to be the heir of Hebrew prophet and sage. Even the prophet prefaced his command to 'walk humbly' with the demand 'to do justly and love mercy.' The resemblance between the noble name we bear and our bearing toward our neighbor must be more than coincidental. It must be fundamental. It must translate our preachment into practice, our dogmas and doctrines into deed, our creed into conduct, our prayers into programs of moral righteousness and social justice, our invoking of God's name—too frequently in vain—into the establishment of His kingdom on earth[17]

---

[16] Cronbach, Abraham. *The Bible and Our Social Outlook*. Cincinnati: Union of American Hebrew Congregations, 1941, 3.

[17] Vorspan, Albert and Eugene J. Lipman, 21.

Chapter Four
The Prophet Habakkuk

Introduction

As I began writing about the prophets, I searched for stories written about prophetic figures to share with primary grade students. I looked, in vain, for picture books that introduced students to particular prophets and helped them to understand the kinds of enduring issues the prophets addressed in their times.

After meeting with a group of Kindergarten through First Grade teachers, I set out to write a book that met the aforementioned goals—a book that would introduce students to a prophetic figure and help students grapple with the issues central to that prophet's message. Once my task was outlined, the prophet Habakkuk was my clear choice for a subject.

As my work on this thesis has progressed, I have found myself drawn more and more to the prophet Habakkuk. I believe that Habakkuk teaches an important message to children. Habakkuk was called to prophecy not by God, but by his own feelings of despair. When Habakkuk looked out at the broken world around him, his instinct was to cry out to God. For Habakkuk, prophecy did not mean chastising his fellow Israelites, but addressing the Divine forcefully and frankly.

We make it a point to teach our children decorum and manners. We teach our children to be polite. I believe these are worthy lessons and ones that will be of good service to our students. And yet, there is a danger in these instructions. When students are sent the message that they must be polite and respectful to people in power, they can also come to learn a more insidious lesson—that being polite means accepting the status quo. If our students look to God as the "Person in Power," there is a danger that they will come to believe that God is to be respected and spoken to nicely. Habakkuk teaches our children a very different message.

Habakkuk teaches children that respect does not always mean acceptance: It is okay to be angry with God and to yell at God. Habakkuk teaches children that having a personal relationship with the Divine does not necessarily mean believing in an all-powerful God who acts in history or describing God solely through anthropomorphic images. Rather, Habakkuk introduces children to the complexities of Divine metaphor, suggesting that one can portray the Divine using brilliant images and abstract concepts. Such imaginings are far from the "Super Hero" God of the Torah and the Rabbis. Exposing students to an individual—a Jewish hero—who looks inside his mind and sees God as a burning light means introducing students to deep theological possibilities.

Finally, this story aims to give our students a language for discussing the injustices they perceive and for opening our students' eyes to the injustices they might not yet perceive. I believe that it is our role as educators to awaken our students, even at an early age, to the brokenness of our world. When we both recognize and give name to these realities,

we teach students that even "hard stuff" belongs in the synagogue and that Jewish life has something to say about its existence.

The particular images, concepts, and ideas found in this story come straight from the text of Habakkuk. This book simply presents these notions at a developmentally appropriate level.

The Prophet Habakkuk

In a time and a place that was different than ours, lived a man named Habakkuk (yes, he had a funny name!).

Hab. A. Kkuk. Habakkuk.

Habakkuk looked around him and saw a broken world.[18]

He saw violence.[19]

He saw people in pain.[20]

He saw one person treating another person unfairly.[21]

He saw these things too many times. Again and again.

And Habakkuk cried out to God, "Won't you save us?"[22]

Habakkuk heard nothing.

Habakkuk cried out again, "God, the people around me are behaving like fish—swimming where they want and doing what they want—with no rules. They are behaving like animals who have no owner."[23]

Habakkuk heard nothing.

Habakkuk cried out again. "God, I won't move. I won't take a step. I will wait and wait and wait until I hear Your voice. Answer me, God!"[24]

God answered, "Let the whole earth be quiet once again."[25]

Habakkuk looked into his mind and he saw God. In his mind, Habakkuk saw God as a burning light with bright rays coming out. In the center of that light was God's power. [26]

---

[18] Habakkuk 1:3
[19] Habakkuk 1:3
[20] Habakkuk 1:3
[21] Habakkuk 1:4
[22] Habakkuk 1:13
[23] Habakkuk 1:14
[24] Habakkuk 2:1
[25] Habakkuk 2:20
[26] Habakkuk 3:3-4

When Habakkuk saw this he believed in God's power. He thought: Even though the trees have no buds and there are no grapes on the vine, even though the olive trees grow no fruit and the wheat has not come out of the ground, I still believe.[27]

I believe in the power of God.[28]

I believe in a day when trees will be covered in flowers, when grapes will sag off the vines, when olives will grow juicy, and when wheat will wave back and forth, lazily, in the wind.

I believe in the power of people, who are created in the image of God.

I believe in a day when people will support one another and work together for peace. I believe in a day when everyone will treat each other fairly.

I believe in a day when we will decide to change our world.

---

[27] Habakkuk 3:17
[28] Habakkuk 3:18

Works Cited

Adler, Rachel. *Engendering Judaism.* Boston: Beacon Press, 1999.

Alter, Robert. *The Art of Biblical Poetry.* Basic Books, 1985.

Ben Zvi, Ehud. "Amos," *The Jewish Study Bible.* Edited by Adele Berlin and Marc Zvi Brettler. New York: Oxford University Press, 2004.

Ben Zvi, Ehud. "Micah," *The Jewish Study Bible.* Edited by Adele Berlin and Marc Zvi Brettler. New York: Oxford University Press, 2004.

Bonino, José Míguez, Ed. *Faces of Jesus: Latin American Christologies.* Translated by Robert R. Barr. Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, c1983.

Brueggemann, Walter. *Hopeful Imagination: Prophetic Voices in Exile* (2nd ed.). Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001.

Brueggemann, Walter. *Texts that Linger Words that Explode.* Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 200).

Brueggemann, Walter. *The Prophetic Imagination.* Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986.

Cronbach, Abraham. *The Bible and Our Social Outlook.* Cincinnati: Union of American Hebrew Congregations, 1941.

Gutiérrez, Gustavo, *A Theology of Liberation: History, Politics, and Salvation.* Translated and edited by Sister Caridad Inda and John Eagleson. Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1988, c1973.

Gutiérrez, Gustavo. *Essential Writings.* James B. Nickoloff, Editor. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996.

Gutiérrez, Gustavo. *The Power of the Poor in History: Selected Writings.* Translated by Robert R. Barr. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1983.

Gutiérrez, Gustavo. *We Drink From Our Own Wells: The Spiritual Journey of a People.* Translated by Matthew J. O'Connell. Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books; Melbourne, Australia: Dove Communications, 1984.

Heschel, Abraham Joshua. *The Prophets.* New York: Perennial Classics, 2001.

Meyer, Michael A. *Response to Modernity: A History of the Reform Movement in Judaism.* New York: Oxford University Press, 1988.

Osterman, Paul. *Gathering Power: The Future of Progressive Politics in America.* Boston: Beacon Press, 2002.

Peterson, David L. *The Prophetic Literature.* Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002.

Putnam, Robert and Lewis M. Feldstein, with Don Cohen. *Better Together: Restoring the American Community.* New York: Simon and Schuster, 2003.

Sarna, Jonathan. *American Judaism: A History.* New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004.

Segundo, Juan Luis. *Liberation of Theology.* Translated by John Drury. Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1976

Segundo, Juan Luis. *Signs of the Times.* Edited by Alfred T. Hennelly; Translated by Robert R. Barr. Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1993.

Sobrino, Jon. *The True Church and the Poor.* Translated by Matthew J. O'Connell. Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1984.

Sobrino, Jon. *Spirituality of Liberation: Toward Political Holiness.* Translated by Robert R. Barr. Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1988.

Sommer, Benjamin D. "Isaiah," *The Jewish Study Bible.* Edited by Adele Berlin and Marc Zvi Brettler. New York: Oxford University Press, 2004.

Suggs, Jack, Katharine Doob Shakenfeld, and James R. Mueller (eds.). *The Oxford Study Bible.* New York: Oxford University Press, 1992.

Sweeney, Marvin A. "Jeremiah," *The Jewish Study Bible.* Edited by Adele Berlin and Marc Zvi Brettler. New York: Oxford University Press, 2004.

Temkin, Sefton D. *Isaac Mayer Wise, 1819-1875.* Cincinnati: Hebrew Union College, 1964.

Melvin. Urofsky. *A Voice that Spoke for Justice.* Albany: State University of New York Press, 1982.

Vorspan, Albert and Eugene J. Lipman. *Justice and Judaism: The Work of Social Action.* New York: Union of American Hebrew Congregations, 1956.

Wise, Stephen Samuel. *Challenging Years.* New York: G. P. Putnman's Sons, 1949.

Appendix

The Philadelphia Conference (Nov. 3-6, 1869)

There were present:

S. Adler of New York; J. Chronik of Chicago; D. Einhorn of New York; B. Felsenthal of Chicago; J. K. Gutheim of New York; S. Hirsch of Philadelphia; K. Kohler of Detroit; L. Mayer of Selma, Ala.; M. Mielziner of New York; S. H. Sonnenschein of St. Louis; M. Schlesinger of Albany, N. Y.; I. M. Wise of Cincinnati.

The following statement of principles was adopted:

1. The Messianic aim of Israel is not the restoration of the old Jewish state under a descendant of David, involving a second separation from the nations of the earth, but the union of all the children of God in the confession of the unity of God, so as to realize the unity of all rational creatures and their call to moral sanctification.

2. We look upon the destruction of the second Jewish commonwealth not as a punishment for the sinfulness of Israel, but as a result of the divine purpose revealed to Abraham, which, as has become ever clearer in the course of the world's history, consists in the dispersion of the Jews to all parts of the earth, for the realization of their high-priestly mission, to lead the nations to the true knowledge and worship of God.

3. The Aaronic priesthood and the Mosaic sacrificial cult were preparatory steps to the real priesthood of the whole people, which began with the dispersion of the Jews, and to the sacrifices of sincere devotion and moral sanctification, which alone are pleasing and acceptable to the Most Holy. These institutions, preparatory to higher religiosity, were consigned to thepast, once for all, with the destruction of the Second Temple, and only in this sense—as educational influences in the past—are they to be mentioned in our prayers.

4. Every distinction between Aaronides and non-Aaronides, as far as religious rites and duties are concerned, is consequently inadmissible, both in the religious cult and in social life.

5. The selection of Israel as the people of religion, as the bearer of the highest idea of humanity, is still, as ever, to be strongly emphasized, and for this very reason, whenever this is mentioned, it shall be done with full emphasis laid on the worldembracing mission of Israel and the love of God for all His children.

6. The belief in the bodily resurrection has no religious foundation, and the doctrine of immortality refers to the after-existence of the soul only.

7. Urgently as the cultivation of the Hebrew language, in which the treasures of divine revelation were given and the immortal remains of a literature that influences all civilized nations are preserved, must be always desired by us in fulfilment of a sacred duty, yet it has become unintelligible to the vast majority of our coreligionists; therefore, as is advisable under existing circumstances, it must give way in prayer to intelligible language, which prayer, if not understood, is a soulless form.

Medellín Conference (1968)

Medellín Conference Documents: Justice and Peace

Justice

I. Pertinent Facts

1 There are in existence many studies of the Latin American people...The misery that besets large masses of human beings in all of our countries is described in all of these studies. That misery, as a collective fact, expresses itself as injustice which cries to the heavens....

But what perhaps has not been sufficiently said is that in general the efforts which have been made have not been capable of assuring that justice be honored and realized in every sector of the respective national communities....

2. The lack of socio-cultural integration, in the majority of our countries, has given rise to the superimposition of cultures. In the economic sphere systems flourished which consider solely the potential of groups with great earning power. This lack of adaptation to the characteristics and to the potentials of all our people, in turn, gives rise to frequent political instability and the consolidation of purely formal institutions. To all of this must be added the lack of solidarity which, on the individual and social levels. Leads to the committing of serious sins, evident in the unjust structures which characterize the Latin American situation....

III. Projections for Social Pastoral Planning

6. Our pastoral mission is essentially a service of encouraging and educating the conscience of believers, to help them to perceive the responsibilities of their faith in their personal life and in their social life. This Second Episcopal Conference wishes to point out the most important demands, taking into account the value of judgement which the latest Documents of the Magisterium of the Church have already made concerning the economic and social situation of the world today and which applies fully to the Latin American continent.

Direction of Social Change

7. The Latin American Church encourages the formation of national communities that reflect a global organization, where all of the peoples but more especially the lower classes have, by means of territorial and functional structures, an active and receptive, creative and decisive participation in the construction of a new society. Those intermediary structures-between the person and the state-should be freely organized, without any unwarranted interference from authority or from dominant groups, in view of their development and concrete participation in the accomplishment of the total common good. They constitute the vital network of society. They are also the true expression of the citizens' liberty and unity....

Political Reform

16. Faced with the need for a total change of Latin American structures, we believe that change has political reform as its prerequisite.

The exercise of political authority and its decisions have as their only end the common good. In Latin America such authority and decision-making frequently seem to support systems which militate against the common good or which favor privileged groups. By means of legal norms, authority ought

effectively and permanently to assure the rights and inalienable liberties of the citizens and the free functioning of intermediary structures.

Public authority has the duty of facilitating and supporting the creation of a means of participation and legitimate representation of the people, or if necessary the creation of new ways to achieve it. We want to insist on the necessity of vitalizing and strengthening the municipal and communal organization, as a beginning of organizational efforts at the department, provincial, regional and national levels.

The lack of political consciousness in our countries makes the educational activity of the Church absolutely essential, for the purpose of bringing Christians to consider their participation in the political life of the nation as a matter of conscience and as the practice of charity in its most noble and meaningful sense for the life of the community.

Information and "Concientización"

17. We wish to affirm that it is indispensable to form a social conscience and a realistic perception of the problems of the community and of social structures. We must awaken the social conscience and communal customs in all strata of society and professional groups regarding such values as dialogue and community living within the same group and relations with wider social groups (workers, peasants, professionals, clergy, religious, administration, etc.)

This task of "*concientización*" and social education ought to be integrated into joint pastoral action at various levels.

18. The sense of service and realism demands of today's hierarchy a greater social sensitivity and objective. In that regard there is a need for direct contact with the different social-professional groups in meeting which provide all with a more complete vision of social dynamics. Such encounters are to be regarded as instruments which can facilitate a collegial action on the part of the bishops, guaranteeing harmony of thought and activities in the midst of a changing society.

Peace

I. The Latin American Situation and Peace

1. "If development is the new name for peace,"...Latin American underdevelopment with its own characteristics in the different countries is an unjust situation which promotes tensions that conspire against peace.

We can divide these tensions into three major groups, selecting, in each of these, those variables which constitute a positive menace to the peace of our countries by manifesting an unjust situation.

When speaking of injustice, we refer to those realities that constitute a sinful situation; this does not mean, however, that we are overlooking the fact that at times the misery in our countries can have natural causes which are difficult to overcome.

In making this analysis, we do not ignore or fail to give credit to the positive efforts made at every level to build a more just society. We do not include this here because our purpose is to call attention to those aspects which constitute a menace or negation of peace...

II Doctrinal Reflection: Christian View of Peace

14. The above mentioned Christian viewpoint on peace adds up to a negation of peace such as Christian tradition understands it.

Three factors characterize the Christian concept of peace:

a) Peace is, above all, a work of justice....It presupposes and requires the establishment of a just order...in which men can fulfill themselves as men, where their dignity is respected, their legitimate aspirations satisfied, their access to truth recognized, their personal freedom guaranteed; an order where man is not an object but an agent of his own history. Therefore, there will be attempts against peace where unjust inequalities among men and nations prevail.

Peace in Latin America, therefore, is not the simple absence of violence and bloodshed. Oppression by the power groups may give the impression of maintaining peace and order, but in truth it is nothing but the "continuous and inevitable seed of rebellion and war"...

"Peace can only be obtained by creating a new order which carries with it a more perfect justice among men"...It is in this sense that the integral development of a man, the path to more human conditions, becomes the symbol of peace.

b) Secondly, peace is a permanent task...A community becomes a reality in time and is subject to a movement that implies constant change in structures, transformation of attitudes, and conversion of hearts.

The "tranquility of order," according to the Augustinian definition of peace, is neither passivity nor conformity. It is not something that is acquired once and for all. It is the result of continuous effort and adaptation to new circumstances, to new demands and challenges of a changing history. A static and apparent peace may be obtained with the use of force; and authentic peace implies struggles, creative abilities and permanent conquest...

Peace is not found, it is built. The Christian man is the artisan of peace...This task, given the above circumstances, has a special character in our contingent; thus, the People of God in Latin America, following the example of Christ, must resist personal and collective injustice and unselfish courage and fearlessness.

c) Finally, peace is the fruit of love....It is the expression of true fraternity among men, a fraternity given by Christ, Prince of Peace, in reconciling all men with the Father. Human solidarity cannot truly take effect unless it is done in Christ, who gives Peace that the world cannot give....Love is the soul of justice. The Christian who works for social justice should always cultivate peace and love in his heart.

Peace with God is the basic foundation of internal and social peace. Therefore, where this social peace does not exist there will we find social, political , economic and cultural inequalities, there will we find the rejection of the peace of the Lord, and a rejection of the Lord Himself....

The Problem of Violence in Latin America

15. Violence constitutes one of the gravest problems in Latin America. A decision on which the future of the countries of the continent will depend should not be left to the impulses of emotion and passion. We would be failing in our pastoral duty if we were not to remind the conscience, caught in this dramatic dilemma, of the criteria derived from the Christian doctrine of evangelical love.

No one should be surprised if we forcefully re-affirm our faith in the productiveness of peace. This is our Christian ideal. "Violence is neither Christian nor evangelical"...The Christian man is peaceful and not ashamed of it. He is not simply a pacifist, for he can fight,...but he prefers peace to war. He knows that "violent changes in structures would be fallacious, ineffectual in themselves and not conforming to the dignity of man, which demands that the necessary changes take place from within, that is to say, through a fitting awakening of conscience, adequate preparation and effective participation of all, which the ignorance and often inhuman conditions of life make it impossible to assure at this time."...

16. As the Christian believes in the productiveness of peace in order to achieve justice, he also believes that justice is a prerequisite for peace. He recognizes that in many instances Latin America finds itself faced with a situation of injustice that can be called institutionalized violence, when, because of a structural deficiency of industry and agriculture, of national and international economy, of cultural and political life, "whole towns lack necessities, live in such dependence as hinders all initiative and responsibility as well as every possibility for cultural promotion and participation in social and political life,"...thus violating fundamental rights. This situation demands all-embracing, courageous, urgent and profoundly renovating transformations. We should not be surprised, therefore, that the "temptation of violence" is surfacing in Latin America. One should not abuse the patience of a people that for years has borne a situation that would bot be acceptable to anyone with any degree of awareness of human rights.

Facing a situation which works so seriously against the duty of man and against peace, we address ourselves, as pastors, to all the members of the Christian community, asking them to assume their responsibility in the promotion of peace in Latin America.

17. We would like to direct our call in the first place to those who have a greater share of wealth, culture and power. We know that there are leaders in Latin America who are sensitive to the needs of the people and try to remedy them. They recognize that the privileged many times join together, and with all the means at their disposal pressure those who govern, thus obstructing necessary changes. In some instances, this pressure takes on drastic proportions which result in the destruction of life and property.

Therefore, we urge them not to take advantage of the pacifist position of the Church in order to oppose, either actively or passively, the profound transformation that are so necessary. If they jealously retain their privileges and defend them through violence they are responsible to history for provoking "explosive revolutions of despair."...The peaceful future of the countries of Latin America depends to a large extent on their attitude.

18. Also responsible for injustice are those who remain passive for fear of the sacrifice and personal risk implied by any courageous and effective action. Justice, and therefore peace, conquer by means of a dynamic action of awakening "concientizacion" and organization of the popular sectors, which are capable of pressing public officials who are often impotent in their social projects without popular support.

19. We address ourselves finally to those who, in the face of injustice and illegitimate resistance to change, put their hopes in violence. With Paul VI we realize that their attitude "frequently finds its ultimate motivation in noble impulses of justice and solidarity."...Let us not speak here of empty words which do not imply personal responsibility and which isolate from the fruitful non-violent actions that are immediately possible.

If it is true that revolutionary insurrection can be legitimate in the case of evidence and prolonged "tyranny that seriously works against the fundamental rights of man, and which damages the common good of the country,"...whether it proceeds from one person or from clearly unjust structures, it is also certain that violence or "armed revolution" generally "generates new injustices, introduces new imbalances and causes new disasters; one cannot combat a real evil at the price of a greater evil."...

If we consider then, the totality of the circumstances of our countries, and if we take into account the Christian preference for peace, the enormous difficulty of a civil war, the logic of violence, the atrocities it engenders, the risk of provoking foreign intervention, illegitimate as it may be, the difficulty of building a regime of justice and freedom while participating in a process of violence, we earnestly desire that the dynamism of the awakened and organized community be put to the service of justice and peace.

Finally, we would like to make ours the words of our Holy Father to the newly ordained priests and deacons in Bogota, when he referred to all the suffering and said to them: "We will be able to understand their afflictions and change them, not into hate and violence, but into the strong and peaceful energy "of constructive works."...

III. Pastoral Conclusions

20. In the face of the tensions which conspire against peace, and even present the temptation of violence; in the face of the Christian concept of peace which has been described, we believe that the Latin American Episcopate cannot avoid assuming very concrete responsibilities; because to create a just social order, without which peace is illusory, is an eminently Christian task.

To us, the Pastors of the Church, belongs the duty to educate the Christian conscience, to inspire, stimulate and help orient all of the initiatives that contribute to the formation of man. It is also up to us to denounce everything which, opposing justice, destroys peace.

In this spirit we feel it opportune to bring up the following pastoral points:

21. To awaken in individuals and communities, principally through mass media, a living awareness of justice, infusing in them a dynamic sense of responsibility and solidarity.

22. To defend the rights of the poor and oppressed according to the Gospel commandment, urging our governments and upper classes to eliminate anything which might destroy social peace; injustice, inertia, venality, insensibility.

23. To favor integration, energetically denouncing the abuses and unjust consequences of the excessive inequalities between poor and rich, weak and powerful.

24. To be certain that our preaching, liturgy and catechesis take into account the social and community dimensions of Christianity forming men committed to world peace.

25. To achieve in our schools, seminaries and universities a healthy critical sense of the social situation and foster the vocation of service. We also consider very efficacious the diocesan and national campaigns that mobilize the faithful and social organizations, leading them to a similar reflection.

26. To invite various Christian and non-Christian communities to collaborate in this fundamental task of our times.

27. To encourage and favor the efforts of the people to create and develop their own grass-roots organizations for the redress and consolidation of their rights and the search for true justice.

28. To request the perfecting of the administration of justice, whose deficiencies often cause serious ills.

29. To urge a halt and revision in many of our countries of the arms race that at times constitutes a burden excessively disproportionate to the legitimate demands of the common good, to the detriment of desperate social necessities. The struggle against misery is the true war that our nations should face.

30. To invite the bishops, the leaders of different churches and all men of good will of the developed nations to promote in their respective spheres of influence, especially among the political and financial leaders, a consciousness of greater solidarity facing our underdeveloped nations, obtaining among other thing, just prices for our raw materials.

31. On the occasion of the twentieth anniversary of the solemn declaration of Human Rights, to interest universities in Latin America to undertake investigations to verify the degree of its implementation in our countries.

32. To denounce the unjust action of world powers that works against self-determination of weaker nations who must suffer the bloody consequences of war and invasion and to ask competent international organizations for effective and decisive procedures.

33. To encourage and praise the initiatives and works of all those who in the diverse areas of action contribute to the creation of a new order which will assure peace in or midst.

Pittsburgh Platform (November 16-19, 1885)

Convening at the call of Kaufmann Kohler of New York, Reform rabbis from around the United States met from November 16 through November 19, 1885, with Isaac Mayer Wise presiding. The meeting was declared the continuation of the Philadelphia Conference of 1869, which was the continuation of the German Conference of 1841 to 1846. The rabbis adopted the following seminal text:

1. We recognize in every religion an attempt to grasp the Infinite, and in every mode, source or book of revelation held sacred in any religious system the consciousness of the indwelling of God in man. We hold that Judaism presents the highest conception of the Godidea as taught in our Holy Scriptures and developed and spiritualized by the Jewish teachers, in accordance with the moral and philosophical progress of their respective ages. We maintain that Judaism preserved and defended midst continual struggles and trials and under enforced isolation, this Godidea as the central religious truth for the human race.

2. We recognize in the Bible the record of the consecration of the Jewish people to its mission as the priest of the one God, and value it as the most potent instrument of religious and moral instruction. We hold that the modern discoveries of scientific researches in the domain of nature and history are not antagonistic to the doctrines of Judaism, the Bible reflecting the primitive ideas of its own age, and at times clothing its conception of divine Providence and Justice dealing with men in miraculous narratives.

3. We recognize in the Mosaic legislation a system of training the Jewish people for its mission during its national life in Palestine, and today we accept as binding only its moral laws, and maintain only such ceremonies as elevate and sanctify our lives, but reject al such as are not adapted to the views and habits of modern civilization.

4. We hold that all such Mosaic and rabbinical laws as regulate diet, priestly purity, and dress originated in ages and under the influence of ideas entirely foreign to our present mental and spiritual state. They fail to impress the modern Jew with a spirit of priestly holiness; their observance in our days is apt rather to obstruct than to further modern spiritual elevation.

5. We recognize, in the modern era of universal culture of heart and intellect, the approaching of the realization of Israel s great Messianic hope for the establishment of the kingdom of truth, justice, and peace among all men. We consider ourselves no longer a nation, but a religious community, and therefore expect neither a return to Palestine, nor a sacrificial worship under the sons of Aaron, nor the restoration of any of the laws concerning the Jewish state.

6. We recognize in Judaism a progressive religion, ever striving to be in accord with the postulates of reason. We are convinced of the utmost necessity of preserving the historical identity with our great past. Christianity and Islam, being daughter religions of Judaism, we appreciate their providential mission, to aid in the spreading of monotheistic and moral truth. We acknowledge that the spirit of broad humanity of our age is our ally in the fulfillment of our mission, and therefore we extend the hand of fellowship to all who cooperate with us in the establishment of the reign of truth and righteousness among men.

7. We reassert the doctrine of Judaism that the soul is immortal, grounding the belief on the divine nature of human spirit, which forever finds bliss in righteousness and misery in wickedness. We reject as ideas not rooted in Judaism, the beliefs both in bodily resurrection and in Gehenna and Eden (Hell and Paradise) as abodes for everlasting punishment and reward.

8. In full accordance with the spirit of the Mosaic legislation, which strives to regulate the relations between rich and poor, we deem it our duty to participate in the great task of modern times, to solve, on the basis of justice and righteousness, the problems presented by the contrasts and evils of the present organization of society.

E.

1918 Report of Committee on Synagogue and Industrial Relations

TO THE CENTRAL CONFERENCE OF AMERICAN RABBIS,

Gentlemen: The next few decades will have as their chief concern the rectification of social and economic evils. The world will busy itself not only with the establishment of political, but also with the achievement of industrial democracy through social justice. The ideal of social justice has always been an integral part of Judaism. It is in accordance with tradition, therefore, that the Central Conference of American Rabbis submits the following declaration of principles as a program for the attainment of which the followers of our faith should strive:

(1) A more equitable distribution of the profits of industry.
(2) A minimum wage which will insure for all workers a fair standard of living.
(3) The legal enactment of an eight hour day as a maximum for all industrial workers.
(4) A compulsory one day of rest in seven for all workers.
(5) Regulation of industrial conditions to give all workers a safe and sanitary working environment, with particular reference to the special needs of women.
(6) Abolition of child labor and raising the standard of age wherever the legal age limit is lower than is consistent with moral and physical health.
(7) Adequate workmen's compensation for industrial accidents and occupational diseases.
(8) Legislative provision for universal workmen's health insurance and careful study of social insurance methods for meeting the contingencies of unemployment and old age.
(9) An adequate, permanent national system of public employment bureaus to make possible the proper distribution of the labor forces of America.
(10) Recognition of the right of labor to organize and to bargain collectively.

(11) The application of the principles of mediation, conciliation and arbitration to industrial disputes.
(12) Proper housing for working people, secured through government regulation when necessary.
(13) The preservation and integrity of the home by a system of mothers' pensions.
(14) Constructive care of dependents, defectives and criminals, with the aim of restoring them to normal life wherever possible.

Respectfully submitted,

HORACE J. WOLF, *Chairman*
MOSES J. S. ABELS
LOUIS BERNSTEIN
A. BLUM
SEYMOUR G. BOTTIGHEIMER
ABRAM BRILL
RUDOLPH I. COFFEE
HENRY COHEN
JACOB FEUERLICHT
ABRAM HIRSCHBERG
CHARLES B. LATZ
EMIL W. LEIPZIGER
HARRY S. LEWIS
SOLOMON C. LOWENSTEIN
HARRY H. MAYER
MAURICE M. MAZURE
ALFRED G. MOSES
SIMON PEISER

F.

1928 Report of Commission on Social Justice

Deriving our inspiration for social justice from the great teachings of the prophets of Israel and the other great traditions of our faith, and applying these teachings concretely to the economic and social problems of today, we, the Central Conference of American Rabbis, make this declaration of social principles:

I. The Duty of Social Mindedness

It is the tragic record of human-kind that many of those who find comfort in the existing order often fail to apply themselves seriously to the ills that plague society. It is part of the great social message of the prophets of our faith that salvation can be achieved only through the salvation of society as a whole. It is therefore incumbent upon all men to study the ills of the existing social order and to form intelligent opinions on the subject of social reconstruction. Instead of questioning God's goodness because of the evils in individual and communal life, we should address our God-given intelligence to the extermination of those circumstances which allow slums, vice, feeble-mindedness, poverty, degeneracy and the like to continue, with only palliative efforts for their improvement. We call this situation to the attention of all elements in industry, employers, employees and investors. Too often are investors content to accept profits from industries administered out of harmony with principles of social justice. The investor has the moral duty to know the ethics of the business from which he derives his dividends and to take a definite stand regarding its moral administration.

II. The Distribution and Responsibilities of Wealth

We regard those tendencies to be unjust which would make the fundamental goal of industry the exploitation of the material world on the basis of unbridled competition and the unlimited and unrestricted accretion of goods in the hands of a few while millions are in want. Inequalities of wealth can find no moral justification in

a society where poverty and want, due to exploitation, exist. We sympathize with measures designed to prevent private monopoly. We regard all ownership as a social trust implying the responsibility of administration for the good of all mankind. We maintain that the unrestrained and unlimited exercise of the right of private ownership without regard for social results is morally untenable.

III. Industrial Democracy

In the production and distribution of the material goods of life, the dictatorship of any class, capital or labor, employer or employee, is alike autocracy. The solution of the ills which beset our social order are to be found not in any class conscious struggle but in the triumph of sound humanitarian principles which regard mankind as ONE. No materialistic philosophy, whether it be exploitation for the many or the few, can solve these problems. It is in a finer industrial democracy that we place our hopes. The worker who invests his life's energies and stakes the welfare of his family in the industry in which he works has inviolable rights along with him who stakes his family's welfare in that industry through the investment of capital.

IV. The Sacredness of the Individual Personality

The mechanization of our present age and the building of large industries employing hundreds and thousands of workers have led to the custom of regarding labor as a mass in which the personality of the individual is lost or is not considered. We who uphold a religious philosophy of life cannot sanction this practice which tends more and more to treat labor as only an instrument. The dignity of the individual soul before God cannot be lost sight of before men. Machinery and industry exist for man and not man for them.

V. The Right of Organization

The same rights of organization which rest with employers rest also with those whom he employs. Modern life has permitted wealth to consolidate itself through organization into corporations. Workers have the same inalienable right to organize according to their own plan for their common good and to bargain collectively with their employers through such honorable means as they may choose.

VI. The Fundamental Rights of Society

Contribution to the common good and not the selfish service of a class is the touchstone of all moral endeavor. A moral order in industry must achieve the betterment of society as a whole above all else. Those who labor, those who lead labor, as well as those who employ labor or invest capital in industry must alike recognize this principle in the exercise of any and all functions, rights and privileges.

VII. Arbitration of Industrial Disputes

In conformity with the principle of the welfare of society as fundamental, we regard our adherence to the principle of arbitration of industrial disputes rather than resort to open conflict. In any break in industrial relations, the moral responsibility for the evils that ensue rests with that group which refuses to enter into the orderly processes of arbitration and mediation.

VIII. The Moral Right to a Living Wage

In the moral stewardship of the earth, society must guarantee each of its members the chance to labor and to earn a living wage. Such a wage must be considered the first charge upon any industry. Those industries which do not pay their workers a living wage or which try to establish themselves economically by beating down the standards of living of their employees cannot be tolerated by any just social order. The definition of a living wage includes more than the immediate needs of the worker and his family on a generally accepted standard. It implies also sufficient to enable him to make full provision against sickness and old age.

IX. Unemployment

The right to work is a spiritual necessity. Unemployment not only breeds poverty; it is the source of moral disintegration from which every man and his family must be protected. The increase of labor saving machinery, the processes of efficiency in industry and the intensification of mass production are making the problem of unemployment of ever-increasing social importance. We advocate the adoption by business, state and nation of some form of unemployment insurance, as well as some system of nationally interlocking employment agencies and vocational guidance agencies which will intelligently direct labor and aid in averting crises of unemployment. We urge the adoption of such plans as provide for the formation of municipal, state and national sinking funds in times of employment and prosperity, which can be administered in times of depression for the speeding up of necessary public works. We

feel, moreover, that there should be an effort at some more permanent stabilization of employment than exists today. We urge that employers, without unduly jeopardizing their rights, but if necessary, at some inconvenience and cost to themselves, adopt the system in times of depression of working all, or at least a greater number of their employees, part time rather than only some few of them at full time; thus avoiding shifting the entire burden of unemployment on any one particular group.

X. Social Insurance

We record our endorsement of pensions for old age which give the worker and his wife dignity in age and rid him of the fear of ultimate pauperism and the poorhouse after a life of labor; of sickness and disability insurance which will protect the worker from poverty in event of accident or illness, of mothers' pensions which will prevent the separation of children of poor widows from their natural guardian and protect the integrity of the home, of special protection of the worker from industrial dangers and diseases, and of the rehabilitation of industrial cripples under the direction of the state.

XI. Hours of Labor and Days of Rest

Particularly under the nervous strain of our present mechanical age are the tensions of fatigues of factory life extremely exhausting to the worker. With a complete physical and nervous exhaustion comes an inability to appreciate and enjoy those finer interpretations of life which religion holds to be the noblest achievement of the human soul. We therefore stand for the reduction of the hours of labor to the lowest possible point consistent with physical, mental and moral good, with a maximum of eight hours per day, and for the reduction of the working week to five instead of six days where, after a thorough and just examination, this is at all possible.

XII. Women in Industry

Women, in particular, must be protected from the nerve-wracking and debilitating effects of industrial excesses. Especially where women are employed must safe and sanitary conditions prevail. There must be for women in industry an absolute maximum of an eight-hour day. There must be no exploitation of women in industry by giving them less than equal pay with men for equal work.

XIII. Child Labor

It is our moral responsibility to children to see that they are well born, properly nourished and educated and given the fullest opportunity to develop their physical, mental and moral powers. Chief among the factors which interfere with these developments is child labor in its various forms. We therefore oppose child labor unqualifiedly and call upon society to enact proper legislation to bring it to an end. If such legislation is not possible from a Federal point of view, the individual states must handle the problem without equivocation or delay.

XIV. Prisons and Penal Laws

Society has the right to protect itself against those who constitute social menaces. This right, however, implies the solemn obligation to do everything possible to remove the causes which tend to make men criminals and to make punishment corrective in its spirit rather than retributional.

XV. Lynching

In the spirit of justice to all men, regardless of race, color or creed, we decry the mob violence of lynching and heartily condemn both the deed itself and the moral attitude which actuates or condones it.

XVI. Civil Liberties

Society's means of protecting the individual's claims to social justice are exemplified in government by constitutional rights. We urge the unqualified adherence to these rights, especially with regard to freedom of speech, press and peaceable assemblage. We maintain not only the just right but the just duty of a free pulpit. Among the encroachments on constitutional liberty, we view with dismay the uses to which the Federal injunction has, on many occasions, been put, particularly in inhibiting freedom in the expression of economic, political and social points of view. We condemn this use of the injunction as contrary to the spirit of our governmental freedom and of all social justice.

XVII. Social Justice in International Relations

We believe in the outlawry of war by the nations of the earth. We support all movements which conscientiously and honestly strive to that end. We denounce all types of economic imperialism which lead to greater armaments to protect national greed. We deplore and denounce the policy of State Department to support the claims of investors in foreign countries by force of arms and equally denounce the attitude of investors in foreign countries who refuse to abide by the laws of the country in which their investment is made.

We re-emphasize the stand of the conference that a popular referendum precede any declaration of war by Congress and that there be no restrictions on freedom of speech or press during this referendum. We also re-emphasize our support of an international conference to prevent the manufacture of arms by private citizens. We reaffirm our opposition to the militarization of our schools and colleges by compulsory military training. We advocate in all educational systems an increasing emphasis on the comity and partnership of nations and, rather than the extolment of military prowess, the glorification of the heroes who have made for peace and progress.

Respectfully submitted,
EDWARD L. ISRAEL, *Chairman*
HENRY J. BERKOWITZ,
RUDOLPH I. COFFEE,
ABRAHAM CRONBACH,
HARRY W. ETTELSON,
G. GEORGE FOX,
EPHRAIM FRISCH,
SAMUEL H. GOLDENSON,
FERDINAND M. ISSERMAN,
SAMUEL KOCH,
EMIL W. LEIPZIGER,
SAMUEL S. MAYERBERG,
LOUIS A. MISCHKIND,
VICTOR E. REICHERT,
LOUIS WOLSEY.