JEREMIAH'S CONCEPTION OF GOD:
AN ESSAY IN BIBLICAL THEOLOGY

Submitted as a Rabbinical Thesis by

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The problem of prophetic theology is the crux of the newer Biblical scholarship. An example of the significance of Biblical thought as it bears upon the modern mind is attempted in this explication of Jeremiah's God concept.

The transcendence of God is depicted by Jeremiah in several different contexts. Man is as nothing by the side of the Absolute Power. God has no need of any human witness of principality. Man cannot really know anything of his Maker, or of those final purposes which set the problem of theodicy before him. God stands over man as a threatening Judge and a universal Creator. The sin of man is representing any lesser power as The Power, of failing to discern the Other Who is Maker and Interpreter of all. This sin is punished in history by exile and ultimate destruction.

The immanence of God is wonderfully pictured in the figures of Groom, Father, and Friend. God wished Israel to love Him, and will consummate that people's scorn by His own lasting love. Israel stands between God and man, and its history is the record of God's pursuit and loss. The New Covenant in which God is the only significant Power will bind Israel and God in everlasting marriage. For the individual Jew the time of waiting may be bridged by prayer and confrontation which bring peace out of violence and victory out of despair. God needs the people or prophets, and Jeremiah stands for the eternal man of Israel who represents God on earth in humility and faith. To understand this is not a kind of thought but of life.

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I. INTRODUCTION

Perhaps the greatest testimony to the vitality, the truth, the divinity of the Bible is its surviving the stupid and confused way in which many generations of students have read it. The Bible, begotten of the spirit and blood of the Hebrew people, has weathered out the tea-pot storms of all the centuries. Today again it stands against the generation whose lot we share, enticing us to its fruitful gardens, rewarding us with its hard-bought truth, and judging for evil all of our little efforts at "explanation." We may be sure that our conceits and vanities will fail to shatter the ancient stronghold, and we may still hope that out of faltering investigations may in some slight measure echo the Word.

The age of Biblical scholarship which began with Wellhausen is over. Reacting against the superstitious obscurantism under which even the Jewish readers almost buried the Bible, flushed with the gospel of historicism, armed with fresh knowledge from a dozen newly begotten sciences,

the historico-critical school sallied forth to slay the dragons and rebuild the walls. Their successes were many: the documentary hypothesis, valuable in itself, in its ability to incite further creative thought, and finally to evoke violent criticism from writers as distinct as Morgenstern and Cassuto; the reconstruction of the legal portions of the Bible; the correlation of Jewish with world history; the enthusiasm of serious and devoted schools of study. Their only failure, one is tempted to over-state, was that they could not read the Bible. Their words (in the strictest sense possible) were good, their comprehension of those words inadequate. The trouble, as Shakespeare reminds us, is that "words without thoughts never to heaven go." The century of scholarship preceding our own, brought learning of dimension and variety, but failed to understand that Biblical scholarship must either transcend or betray science. They brought us to the brink of victory, and then sold heaven for a mess of historical pottage. It was terribly important to know precisely

when and why Amos or Jeremiah spoke, but only so that their words might live in ours. History is part of the answer, but history cannot save us; and salvation must be somewhere in the Bible. Criticism became not creation but fault-finding, and it was finally the devil who took the hindmost.

There is a new spirit in Biblical study which venerates and yet supercedes the older generation of scholarship. They are, indeed, the fathers who begat us. We do not insult the memory of our fathers; but, neither do we pretend them to be gods. The fruits of the historical method, wrung sacrificially from the dry ground of medievalism, are now ours for the picking. But we are at last seeking even nobler fruitage, and following newer paths.

A book like "Eyes of Faith" by Professor Minear exemplifies the new approach to Biblical studies. Sober and critical, it is in superb addition an evocation of the ideas of the Bible

as they bear upon the imagination of modern man. It tries to see life through the eyes of the Bible, and not only the Bible through the eyes of history. It is an attempt to read critically, rather than to criticize merely. It is, briefly, a new post-historical Biblical theology. The core of the book is, in the author's words, "...a mutual eagerness to hear what the Biblical writers say, and to look through their eyes so far as that is possible,...to stretch to the utmost our powers of imagination and empathy... to hear God speak to us through the Bible itself..."[1] The reader will recognize how much the new critical Biblical theology owes to the older school, and yet how subtly and bravely it has struck out for new fields. The work of Wellhausen is quoted and used, but here too are Barth and Brunner, Buber and Kaufmann, Auden and Silone. The Bible becomes what it has always been in theory and never in fact, a book to be read by the whole man, a book which faces the complete modern religionist.

In the light of reasons which need not be elaborated, it is the prophetic literature which is the central problem of this newer Biblical theology. For criticism the source of the law and the history, for Christianity the bridge to the Saviour, for Judaism the ripest fruits of an ever verdant garden, the prophets still take their stand within the course of modern history, defining it, exhorting it, and recreating it. This essay is an attempt to explicate the ideas of one of the prophets in terms that relate those ideas to modern man without distorting the original intent. There is no attempt to render unsavory concepts more palatable, nor to refurbish the magnificent archaisms with modern baubles. The author has attempted to avoid the Scylla of concealing the fiery eloquence of Jeremiah in the propositions of systematic theology, and the Charybdis of midrash, which elucidates only what the interpreter would like the prophet to have said. Against

both charges, however, it must be said that there is a logic to revelation as to poetry, thus that the prophet has nothing to fear from the rational analysis of his ideas; and that, on the other hand, the interpreter may be guilty of reading into the text only because the text has already shaped his psychic apparatus.

We are here concerned with Jeremiah's conception of God. This is meant specifically to rule out consideration of such questions as ritual and "practical religion" as well as of related theological propositions such as the mission of Israel. While overlapping is inevitable, strict measurable relevance to the central topic has been the continuous criterion. My sources for the originality of passages in question, except where specific exception is taken, have been Blank[3] and Pfeiffer[3]. The vast secondary literature on Jeremiah[4] has led me to many conclusions. The errors, failings, and confusions which still remain are my own. I can only hope

that they are the products of some slight originality of insight, that they are the errors which our age like all others pays as its price of intellectual courage. It is not modesty so much as necessity which leads me to remind the reader that the Book is greater than any of its interpreters.

II. A GOD AFAR

Judged by any standards available to his own time the life of Jeremiah was a failure. He was scorned and derided, mocked and flogged. His political career was underscored in violence and inutility. Like Kassandra he cried truth in vain; but he lacked even the minimal comfort of past joy that was not denied that Greek prophetess. And even from his own, fantastically broad horizons, his life must have bordered on uselessness and was surely tombed in pain. Accused by his nation, attacked by his king, scorned by his friends, lacking all familial amenities, forsaken and checked by his God, doom and sadness were the portion of his inner life. Half-conscious rebel and man of spirit that he was, he serves as the perfect model for Isaiah's portrait of the Suffering Servant of the Master-God. He drank to its bitterest drege the wine of sacrifice from the cup of life.

Thus, one of his living truths, living for

him because his experience distilled it, living for us because it guides and knifes into our days, is the utter impotence of man.

"I know, O Lord, that man's way is not
his own
That it is not in man's power to control
his steps as he walks..."[5]

The beginning of Jeremiah's slow vision of God is in his experience of the powerlessness of man. Having summoned his own innermost vigor, he finds himself at last stripped of any resources, bereft of any victory. Because this passage is so poignantly characteristic of the Jeremianic, Professor Blank has correctly described it as a confessional fragment imbedded in non-Jeremianic material.[6] It remains only to emphasize that man's powerlessness is not vis-a-vis natural or historical challenge, but before a Lord of proportions we are only beginning to discern.

The power of God as contrasted with the almost complete nakedness of man in the world may be discovered also in the way God uses His

instruments on earth. Josiah the righteous king who brought God back to Palestine was succeeded by Jehoiakim, an unworthy son who desecrated the memory and victory of his father. God, speaking through Jeremiah, has no qualms about using roughly this unjust Shepherd. But Jehoiakim's son may yet be the noble Instrument that Josiah had been. He is the hope of a witness among the chosen. He is the major representative of the Other Power in the politics of the lower world. We must be struck, then, by God's assertion,

> "As I live, though Conian the son of Jehoiakim king of Judah be the signet ring on my right hand, I will pluck you off and give you into the hand of those who seek your life--those of whom you stand in dread--into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, and the hand of the Chaldeans...And to the land to which you long to return, you shall not return."[7]

This is a profound illustration of the awful

independence of God. Bound as we shall see by ties of history and love to one people, He may yet cast his "signet-ring" into the stinking rubbish-heap of Babylon. Even his sign of royalty upon earth is as nothing in the face of His unique and distant sovereignty. "Yahweh," says Dr. Welch in his book "Jeremiah," "has a character which sets Him apart in lonely dignity."[8]

Roughly a hundred years before the composition of the book of Job, Jeremiah understood that the problem of evil was crucial for an understanding of the nature of God.

"Why does the way of the wicked prosper?"[9] is still the most central as well as the most troublesome problem of faith. It is to Jeremiah's intellectual character that credit must be ascribed for the most succint and precise statement of the problem, as well as its only possible "solution." The problem is only a problem for the believer. To the man who holds for the rootlessness and aimlessness of the world the prosperity of the wicked cannot appear more than a painful accident.

But if there is a God who reigns in power, then He must be assailed with pious accusations by the Knight of Faith. And this Jeremiah indicates by his introductory postulate,

"Thou must be in the right, O Lord,
If I take issue with Thee;
Yet would I lay my case before thee..."[9]

The very possibility of theodicy is token of the power of God, the distinctness of the Other. And glorious token, took is the answer, as it were, from the Whirlwind:

"If you have raced with men on foot and
they beat you,
How will you compete with horses?
If you flee from a safe land,
What will you do in the Jordan's jungle?"[10]

"Do you think things are bad now?" comes back the awful Voice, "Then what will you think when they become more crushing? Do you think your own petty problems are evidence of My severity? Then what will you think when your nation falls under the juggernaut of Babylon?". The

only answer Jeremiah (or Job, or any of us) knows for the theodicy is no answer at all: the Wholly Unknowable Power of God. Before it Jeremiah bends his spirit, and his voice breaks off in tears.

So, too, in the heart-tearing passion of the Confession found in Chapters 15 and 16, the passionate accusation,

> "Why is my pain unceasing, my wound
> incurable,
> Refusing to be healed?
> Will you be a brook that deceives me,
> Waters unsure?"[11],

is followed only by abysmal silence. The next verse, a tender calling, is hours later, hours of pain and unbearable emptiness. The quarrel is never taken up by God. God does not debate with men, even with the prophets of His people. His home is eternity, His language silence, His Face concealed. Indeed, all that we have said is in a single verse which is its own commentary:

> "Am I a God near-by?
> And not a God afar?"[12]

This is a question couched in the rhetoric of prophecy. Its only answer is the acknowledgment of our impotence beside the Distant One Who asks.

The Power of God, experienced in the failures as well as in the always partial victories of the prophet, lead inevitably to the concept of God as omnipotent Creator. Just as God is Power and gives of His power to the prophet, so He controls the world because He made it.

> "Thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel: 'I made the earth, with the men and beasts that are on the face of the earth, by My great power and my outstretched arm; and I give it to whom I please'".[13]

God Who is the force that stands against, separate utterly from, the prophet, so stands over the world which He made. His right is unbounded, since all the world is of Him.

> "Do you not revere Me?
> Do you not tremble before Me?
> I set the sand as a bound for the sea,
> A barrier everlasting which it cannot
> transgress---

Its tossing waves cannot prevail,
Its roaring billows cannot pass over--
Yet this people has a restless, rebellious
mind,
They veer off, away.
They do not tell themselves,
'Let us worship the Lord our God,
Who gives us both winter and spring rain
seasonally,
Keeping for us the harvest weeks."[14]

God is the Creator Who makes a world and runs it for his creation man. Nature serves Him as does history.

"Can any man hide in secret places?
That I cannot see him?
Do I not fill heaven and earth?"[15]

Here in one verse are set forth the basic doctrines of all western religion from Jeremiah's time to ours: the omnipotence, omnipresence, and omniscience of the distant God.

The logic of a God who fills heaven as well as earth, leads inexorably to the most complete and moving universalism. God who is above the earth

cannot be <u>in</u> less than all of it. While Montefiore's observation, that in Jeremiah, "Universalist hopes and predictions are not wanting, but they are neither prominent nor numerous,"[16] is undoubtedly true, it cannot be doubted that we are dealing with a vision of God which could not, by the entropy of its own movement, stop at less than a world. That Jeremiah's universalism flows from his experience of God's illimitable Power is demonstrated by the threat he puts into God's mouth,

> "My eyes are upon all their ways
> They are not concealed from Me ....
> Therefore behold I will show them,
> Once and for all will I show them,
> My power and might,
> And they shall know that the Lord is My name."[17]

Much in these verses is obscure. Some authorities would contest the originality of the last verse. But this much is clear: God manipulates the history of nations to punish those whom his allseeing Eye

lights upon. He is a God used to cosmic victories. That Jeremiah knew He could be worshipped as well as feared outside of Palestine, in the far-flung lands of the dispersion, is amply attested by the famous letter to the exiles in Chapter 33. The history of God does not end with the political downfall of his ambassadors on earth. He watches them in Babylon and by His power, which is undented by the heathen onslaught, will meet them again on the plains of human history where that power is manifest. The nationalistic motives of safety, numbers, and resiliency apart, Jeremiah is motivated in seeking the welfare of the Whore-city by the conviction born of confrontation that God is everywhere.

Valuable books on the prophets by Barton,[18] Cornhill,[19] and Peters,[30] all presuming to be summaries and interpretations of biblical theology, represent the great doctrines of Jeremiah under three rubrics: Theoretical monotheism, the centrality of inward universalism, and individual responsibility. These are elaborated and exemplified in great detail.

Yet the reader will feel the synthetic, unsympathetic spirit in which they are examined. There is no sense for the unity of prophetic experience, nor yet an explication of prophetic doctrine in relevant or significant terms. Leaving the third of the categories aside, we cannot but remark on how far from the single concept of the Far, World Embracing, God they were. For the monotheism of Jeremiah, as his universalism, is of a piece with the God of Power who answered him from the whirlwind of revelation. It is doubly distressing, however, to find that along with some other scholars, Pace considers Jeremiah incapable of monotheism at all.[31] Perhaps he is sufficiently refuted by his own observation that the question is "of secondary importance." Indeed, the question is highly central to the Jeremianic theology. How could the God of power admit idols of clay or servants of nature to reign alongside of Him? How could He who uprooted the holy sanctuary be content to be worshipped in the pantheon of human vanity?

Authorities largely agree that the magnificent diatribe against idolatry to be found in chapter 10 was composed somewhat later under the influence of Deutero-Isaiah. But other passages, unquestionably Jeremianic, indicate that the uncompromising monotheism of the later prophet was clearly foreshadowed in the earlier. The general indictment,

> "Has a nation changed its gods,
> Which are no-gods?
> Yet my people have changed their Glory
> For what is useless.
> Be shocked, heavens, at this.
> Be aghast, earth, beyond words,
> For my people have committed two crimes:
> They have forsaken Me, the Fountain of living water,
> To hew out cisterns, broken cisterns,
> That can hold no water."[32]

is followed by a specific attack on those who make idols at home,

> "Who say to a block of wood 'You are my father'

And to a stone 'You have borne me'."[33]

The agonized revulsion which the prophet feels for idolatry is based upon the utter impotence of the "no-gods." God, truly, is a fountain, a moving (in the strict sense) force in His world, nourishing the ground and the folk, giving them of His supernatural Power. But the idols are less even than man who stands dwarfed by his Maker. God is our "Father," the Greater One who raises us. But no piece of wood has any creative power at all. He is Life. They are dead.

The attack on the worship of natural forces is somewhat different. Clearly, they do have real power. The sun gives heat, the rain moisture, the firmament protection. Yet their power is not theirs. Just as the prophetic force which Jeremiah felt, beckoned to another, higher Force, so they point beyond themselves also.

"Are there any vanities of nations that
bring rain?
Or can the heavens by themselves make it
shower?

Is it not Thou, Lord our God, on whom we
set our hope?
For Thou doest all these things."[34]

The worship of natural forces is a compromise with the partial, a submission to the servant instead of the Master. They cannot be trusted, but the Creator-God is constant and omnipotent. The accusations of and scorn upon idolatry comprise one of the most constant themes of the book. We need only list on the appropriate passages and underline the ferocity of the attack.[35]

The God who uses history as His witness and dispenses His will almost arbitrarily is jealous and will punish those who deny or degrade Him. The passages which illustrate the just revenge of God are likewise very numerous. We shall quote only one because it is both typical and especially revealing.

"Since I am the Lord, the God of all flesh,
is anything too hard for me? Therefore, I
am giving this city into the hand of the
Chaldeans and into the hand of Nebuchadrezzar,

king of Babylon; and he shall take it. And the Chaldeans who are fighting against this city shall come and set this city on fire, and they shall burn it, with the houses on whose roofs men have offered sacrifices to the Baal and poured libations to other gods, so as to vex me. For the children of Israel and the youth of Judaea, from their youth up, have always done evil in my sight...they have set up their detestable things in the house called by My name, defiling it, and have built up the high places of the Baal which are in the valley of Ben-Hinnom, offering their sons and daughters burned alive to Moloch, which I did not command them...Therefore, through stress of sword, famine, and pestilence, the city is certainly to be given into the hand of the king of Babylon."[36]

The jealousy here ascribed to God is not the petty willfullness of the child or the sadistic ruth-

lessness of the underling. It is the off-hand, natural puissance of the King before whom anyone is nothing. Those who deny Him must pay, measure for measure. The invaders of the house of God who defiled it, will defile the earth with their unburied corpses. God is the distant Judge from whose decision there is no appeal. This vengeance may indifferently overwhelm a people, or merely a small group who affront His spokesman.[37] The Lord fights warrior-like on the side of Jeremiah, guaranteeing his victory.[38] But he also is the destroyer of the nations,

"...tearing down what I have built,
rooting out what I have planted..."

which in the exaggeration of the gloss is not less than

"the whole earth..."[39]

Appropriately is God called,

"Thou Who judgest righteously,
Who tests heart and conscience..."[30]

God faces man for evil. Even His prophet is not exempt from the aweful judgement of the Beyond.

Power bounded by the justice which is its essence undergirds and may yet crush man. In an especially bloody picture, God is seen in

> "a day of vengeance, to avenge himself on his enemies.
> And the sword shall devour till it is sated,
> It shall drink its fill of their blood.
> For the Lord God shall hold a sacrifice,
> In the north land by the Euphrates river."[31]

God may even sacrifice man to His own glory. Before Him man is a mere creature. He is That for which all, even men and nations, were formed. He is the Wholly Other, the God of the whole universe Who will wipe out all who give His glory to another. Just as the prophet aflame with rebellion and shame is the seed-bed of this Awful God, so the picture of the world in flame gives it its final representation. Were this all, religion would be, in truth, fear and trembling and nothing else. There is more, but not even the gentler Jeremiah can wholly erase this bitter truth, underlined in the blood of our

generation: God is not man, but the Creator, the Judge and the Vengeance.

III. GOD WITH US

The God transcendent was caught up in words neither first nor best by Jeremiah. To the somber and heroic dirge of Amos must we look for the pioneer. To the immense paens of Deutero-Isaiah must we turn for the completion. Jeremiah, suffering with and for his people as did Amos and the Great Unknown, brought out of his suffering a penetrating vision of the absolute omnipotence of the Commanding Other. But in his suffering he discovered a more subtle and beautiful truth: the humanity of God. It would be a partial and unjust picture of Jeremiah to think of him as the prophet of lamentation, bewailing the crushing of his people and prophesying its demise. So too would it be an overstatement to claim that Jeremiah came unscathed from the nether-world of angst to the Elysium of peace of mind. For Jeremiah there was a truth in tears but higher than tears; bringing not peace, but holy struggle and, in the final end, vindication.

The ambivalence of Jeremiah's feeling for his

people is the essence of prophetic love. On the one hand, a sheer judgement, for the right to pronounce which he gave up all the elements of life which lesser men consider necessary. On the other, the tenderest of love and lose toward the people which was his and also His. Many times the prophecies seem like a eulogy pronounced at the grave of a virgin daughter by a mourning father who had been compelled by his calling to minister for the occasion. Yet this is a eulogy of purest truth, as unvarnished as a wooden coffin.

Where Jeremiah discovered this loving, serving God cannot be known. Neither the sympathetic research of the biblical scholar, nor the bold knife-dissections of the psychoanalyst can wholly find the obscure yet powerful vision which the Biblical writers had of God. Yet there is reason to believe that, like many Jews before and since, Jeremiah's concept of a tender God came from his knowing love of Israel.

Jeremiah had cause to hate this people which had denied and degraded him. Yet even as he pro-

nounced the doom which must come, the love of Israel, his only mother, his only bride, bore another more compassionate mood. And this feeling, too, he projected, as it has been put, upon the God in Whose name he spoke. Yet to so depict would be a caricature rather than a portrait. It was not that God felt with the prophet's feeling, but rather that the prophet became, for an eternal moment, the lips which, receiving the kiss, spoke the words of love. Of his concept of prophecy we shall see more later. But this is the light in which one must interpret the divine Confession, well translated by Professor Gordon:

"I thought, 'How I would rank you among
the sons,
And give you a pleasant land,
The goodliest heritage of all the nations!'
And I thought, 'Surely you will call me
"Father!",
And will not turn back from me'.
But as a woman is faithless to her lover,
So were you faithless to me, O house of
Israel,"[33]

The tempestuous fire God of earlier prophecy gives place to Israel's Lover and Father. God chose Israel, not only for a mission, but as a father, any father, chooses any son, especially the oldest of a patriarchal society. Israel was given by unearned grace a land, its land, but it scorned the Giver and desecrated the gift. How poignant in the mouth of God is the phrase, "And I thought, 'Surely you will call me "Father"'". Almost as though He had been deceived God grieves for the ungrateful son. Yet even He cannot buy or force Israel's love. As the rabbis later put it, "Everything is in God's power but the fear of God." God is limited by His own pattern. Atheism or idolatry is the price God pays for giving freedom to man.

And Israel, the people of His choice, His "woman," scorns Him. There is nothing He can do, but weather out the silence of the rejection. Rejected prophet, rejected God stand weeping over the unburied body of Israel, unhearing as if already dead.

Israel is really God's people. The figure

of the bride, the figure of the son which we have seen are characteristic of this phase of Jeremiah's thinking. Some other images, newer and more striking, serve the same illustrative purpose. Israel becomes the bridal ornaments which God wears to His festal occasions.[33] God even may be said to put Israel as a girdle on His loins:

> "For as a girdle clings to the loins of a man, so did I make the whole house of Israel and the whole house of Judah cling to Me, that they might become for Me a people of honor and praise and glory...,"[34]

Israel, as it were, covers the shameful parts of God in history, obscuring His brilliance that the nations might look upon Him unafraid. The figure of "clinging," "d'vekut" is of great significance to later Jewish mysticism, especially in the Psalms and Chassidism. Israel rubs God without any intermediary to come between them. Israel itself acts as the screen between God and the rest of His world. The nearness and "feel" of God are

as bold" here signified as can be done short of blasphemy. Even in His rejection of the "girle," love and nearness are not denied. This appears likewise in the fiery denunciation:

"I have forsaken My House and abandoned
My inheritance;
I have given My loved one into the power
of enemies.
My heritage is become a lion in the
foreet,
And since she lifted up her voice against
Me,
I hate her."[35]

Israel is the house in which God lives, the unique vehicle of his manifestation among men. He inherits her, as a son his father's property. And when the one He loves turns against Him, He is human enough to hate. As Jeremiah is indignant, so God is angry; but as Jeremiah is a member of the house of Israel, so too is that the habitation of God. God is both tender and regretful, though neither of these limit or deny His justice. If

it is frustration that brings hatred, and fear, that calls up agression, we may behold in Jeremiah's God both fear an failure. God cannot do precisely what he most wants to do, and his cup of wrath is the vessel in which tenier tears are treasured. The hybris of Israel is punished by a God stronger than His people, yet not strong enough to compel or create their love.

God's love for Israel is manifest, too, in the history of that people. From Sinai to Babylon the story is a romantic tale, the record of a God of Love pursuing, enticing, and finally losing His beloved. Thus God becomes not only the Host and the Father, but the Summoner and the Bringer. God interwenes in the history of one people; His mercy traneforms His ordering justice into living love.

"I recall your youthful devotion, your
bridal love,
How you followed me through the desert,
unsown land.
Israel was sacred to the Lord, His first
harvest:

All who ate of it were guilty and trouble took them...

The Lord brought us up from Egypt land,
Led us through the desert,
Through a land of steppes and pits,
A land of drought and heavy darkness,
A land unwalked by man,
Where no man dwelt.
I brought you to a garden land."[36]

This theo-history is quite different from the cool philosophy of a Second Isaish. It conceives of history not as exemplification of God's justice, but rather as a link binding God and His people together. God becomes the "Glory" of Israel[37] who gives meaning to the otherwise disorganized record of the people. And, in a significant sense, that people's history gives meaning to Him.

This view of the history of Israel is beautifully illustrated in a prayer of Jeremiah to be found in the thirty-second chapter of the book. It is assuredly a composite work, perhaps a late synagogual fragment, but with Pfeiffer and

Blank we may be certain of its intrinsically Jeremianic spirit. If it is entirely post-Jeremiahic, which Pfeiffer and other deny, its inclusion in this place would be highly apropos. For, it summarizes beautifully the Jeremianic picture of a God of history Who speaks through men to Israel, and through all the generations to His beloved:

> "Ah Lord God! Thou Who hast made the heavens and the earth, by Thy great power and by Thine arm outstretched, nothing is too hard for Thee. Thou showest kindness to thousands and repayest the guilt of fathers upon their children after them. Thou art the great and mighty God, whose name is the Lord of hosts, great in counsel, mighty in action, whose eyes are open to all the ways of the children of men, rewarding each according to his ways and according to the fruit of his deeds. Thou didst perform signs and wonders in the land of Egypt both toward Israel and others,

> which deeds are remembered until now, thus winning Thy present reputation. Thou didst bring Thy people Israel out of the land of Egypt with signs and wonders, with a strong hand and an arm outstretched and with great terror; and thou gavest them this land which thou didst swear unto their fathers to give them, a land flowing with milk and honey ..."[38]

It is not that Israel is better than the other nations, nor is it quite that God loves them because they ennance his reputation (though this Ezekiel-like concept is not utterly absent,) but rather that He both chooses and punishes them out of arbitrary love. God is the God of all, Creator, Omnipotent King. But He reaches down (down in a physical and in a moral sense, for Israel is become the lowest of the low) to embrace the people of His love. Egypt, where only a universal God could have power, is the scene of His greatest testing and of His greatest deliverance. Palestine

is the dowry with which he enriches the bride of His choice. And as the passage continues to promise, by the symbol of the field that Jeremiah must buy, God's love is unmodified by either the guilt or the suffering of His people.

"The Lord from afar shall appear to Israel.
With an everlasting love have I loved you,
With kindness will I draw you unto Me."[39]

The God afar draws near, first of all in temporal and logical succession, to the people of His choice. Like a man He loves, passionately and blindly and almost arbitrarily. But since He is God, His love is almost irresistible and quite eternal.

The God of love is a merciful God. He cannot prevent the exile of the unjust nation, but He loves them even in exile. The unwilling bride is still betrothed, and even in Babylon,

"I will give them a heart to know Me as
the Lord; and they shall be My people
and I will be their God."[40]

God is still absolutely just, but mercy is

the framework of His justice. Crushed by His justice, Israel will yet be awakened by His revivifying love. As God says to Jeremiah, so too does He entreat the people,

"If you turn I will restore you."[41]

Repentance is nothing more nor less than the acceptance of God's love, which love will pour forth regardless of the acceptance. But only the repentant people can manifest the love which God feels and would show forever. The Israelite, especially the prophet, is bidden to follow this God, to imitate Him, to boast of being self-made in the image of

"...the Lord who practices loyalty,
Justice and righteousness on the earth..."[43]

To the problem of evil there is no individual solution. Man will suffer despite his goodness, though, as we shall see, the awareness of his meaning and the meaning of his suffering constitutes redemption. But in history, especially in the history of His People, lovingkindness finally limits and even overwhelms justice. This is meaning of

the doctrine of the New Covenant, described in Chapter thirty-one. The old convenant was the marriage ceremony between God and people. It was a contract with both parties agreeing and both responsible. But the bride was weak and lusted after the loves of the nations. Only the Groom, brooding and terrible, was constant in love. The bride must suffer and even the suffering will not necessarily redeem. The process of history cannot cleanse; Israel is not purified by the princelings of the Whore-city, Babylon. As children of men they are children of evil, and they must be redeemed by the Conqueror of evil. God will no longer trust to their feeble affections. He will embrace them with His arms and lead them with His hand. Egypt was the foreshadowing of this new Calling. There he wed them in the flesh. Now He unites them with His spirit. He will be their God, which is to say He will meet them on His own level in his own place. They will be His people, that is the symbol of His kinship with men.

The promise of the New Covenant is an earnest that after suffering, after death, after history, Israel will be made anew. They will be everlasting in love, like God. They will be sinless like God. They will be immortal, independent of time, like God. They will be, if it were possible to so say, as God; entering the Fire of His wrath, they shall be unconsumed and One.

We must concede, then, that the concept of the New Covenant is organic to Jeremiah. It is foreshadowed in his view of the first calling[43] and attested by such authorities as Marti, Cornill, Montefiore and Pace. Should the opposing school of Stade, Smend, Duhm, and Cheyne be correct in viewing the concept as non-Jeremianic, some such concept must still be posited to complete the relationship of God and Israel. The nearness of God, which was the sublimest[5] vision of Jeremiah is incomplete without the conclusion that God will redeem Israel from the suffering which history has brought and reward his people with the knowledge of its own eternal destiny.

Jeremiah was a son of Israel, heir to its

suffering, sensitive to its striving. Out of the common ills of the time, and the special yoke which his own sensitivity and God's call laid upon him, he drew a deep cognition of the abiding Presence. God neither lightened nor refined his suffering; but God gave him the power to relate it to the larger grief, and finally to the ultimate salvation. As a later generation saw in the resurrection of Israel a proof of the indestructibility of the human person, so did Jeremiah's promise to the people of a final covenant which could not be broken indicate to him the possibility of personal confrontation of God by man.

Prayer begins with intercession. The selfish seeker cannot even look for Him who may be sought. Only the angry or passionate man who is sufficiently outside himself to cry for another, can finally find the great Other. Jeremiah began with a prayer for Israel:

"Truly have I heard Ephraim bemoaning:
Thou hast chastened me and I let myself
be chastened,

Like a novice calf;
Restore me that I may be restored,
For Thou art the Lord my God".[44]

This is a prayer not to avert an event, but to understand and fulfill the event. Jeremiah begs that God who has punished will interpret and complete, for He is a God who may be called unto. Jeremiah ceases to be God's messenger for the moment, and becomes the medium of the people's communication upward. Easy enough is the transition from this intercessory prayer to the great Confessional entreaty:

"Heal me, O Lord, and I shall be healed;
Save me, and I shall be saved;
For Thou art my praise."[45]

Jeremiah becomes Israel, and prays with the mouth of his people. Crushed by the malignant time in which he was born, cursing his day, and sunk in despair, he bellows like a wounded animal his half-inarticulate pain-word. "Be God!" he begs, "Be the merciful Listener and Saviour that I and my people have praised." He cannot know

exactly what he wants, perhaps because it is not a "what" that he wants. Only the answering Voice can mollify his wound and heal the broken people of which he is sharer and symbol.

Somehow the answer came. It was not a verbal answer, for words could not heal. It was not an event, for history could not save. It was not a person, for he and his people were beyond the helping of man. The magnificent confessions which initiated an epoch in the history of man's worship, which anticipated the Psalms, which depicted the soul of a great and consecrated man, somewhere found a higher Confession which echoed and softened their plaint. As Buttenweiser so sensitively translates the answering confession:

"God being with me,
I am a mighty hero!"[46]

The answer is not exactly a promise, just as the New Covenant did not precisely offer anything to Israel. It is only the assurance that the suffering not only is but means. The strength to suffer is the confutation of fear and atheism. It

is the immediate presence of God which lifts Jeremiah, not by extricating him from his situation, for indeed he suffered and lived all the more poignantly, but by lifting the entire circumstance to a different plane. God gives nothing but Himself, and that is all that is needed to turn pain into victory. Prayer ends not in faith, so far as this indicates a mood or a security, but in life, in the self-consciousness of the prophet and the people.

Self-consciousness is the ladder to God-consciousness. Jeremiah had a cognition of being called and pursued which borders both on the psychotic and the blasphemous. His faith is so bold and so sharp that it cuts beyond theorizing to the unio mystica, so far as a Jew is permitted to/God for himself.

"Thou hast enthralled me, Lord,
And I let myself be enthralled.
Thou hast been too strong for me,
And hast prevailed."[47]

Jeremiah feels himself followed, shadowed by God. No longer is he capable of interpreting

events, but only of speaking His interpretation. No longer is he able to contend or rebel, but only to answer, "Here am I." God has, in the American translation of the verse, "duped" him, and the omnipotent Mind cannot be put to rout. Just as the concept of the New Covenant means that not two parties, God and Israel, but only one, God, is signatory and decisor, so now it is not God and the prophet who converse, but only God who traps and finally swallows the prophet alive. There is no possibility of refusal or interpretation, for the Other when it becomes near is "too strong" for any child of man.

Jeremiah thus becomes the "mouth" of God.[48] After sin, suffering, punishment, and repentance, Israel, too, is called by God and cannot but answer. So Jeremian, acting out the fate and calling of his people, completes the historical cycle and is incorporated in the immanence of God. It is not so much that suffering has made him worthy of being God's spokesman, as that suffering is the <u>sine qua non</u> for this deepest grace.

Then follows what Professor Heschel has described as the pathetic relationship of the prophet with God. As God is wrathful, so Jeremiah feels wrath. As God is sad and loving and forgiving, so Jeremiah loves and heals. He is no longer a part of his society (Israel, in the messianic future, is no longer a part of history,) and must forsake the natural course of human fellowship. His home, in the most literal sense, is heaven. He seems to die, that he may enter the hierarchy of the supernatural. Only after this cleansing and this calling can he be instrument for the faraway God.

It is no accident that throughout the book of Jeremiah the reader is often baffled as to whether God or the prophet is speaking. In the final days, Jerusalem will be the source of divine wisdom for all men. Not the heavenly Jerusalem, but David's city in the Land of Israel. So, too is the prophet the mouthpiece of divinity now, without surrendering his human form and mien. Jeremiah becomes, as it were, God, to the people,

and Jerusalem will become heaven to the world.

The reason for this is never stated but only hinted at. It is, perhaps, too great a mystery to need or use description. But it is suggested by passages like these:

"Thus, the Lord:

'Behold I am tearing up what I have built
And I am rooting up what I have planted...
But your life will I give you."[49]

God is, as it were, exhausted by man. He is worn out by a history which far from bringing man to Him, obscures the vision and corrupts the heart. So He will make an end of the building and decay. Wistfully, He smashes his most prized possessions. Tearfully He exiles His people and crucifies His prophet. Yet at the last, He cannot bear the suffering which His justice imposes on His world. He has covenanted with Israel; though they flee Him, He is theirs. He has created a world; though it betray Him, He is bound up with its fate. And the prophet, now standing for Israel and mankind, must not die. Jonah cannot in the end scorn God; that would be too much for

God to bear. The flood of tears can drown almost a world; but Noah must live to see the rainbow of Grace. Jeremiah, he at least, must suffer along with God, for even the Omnipotent cannot bear that agony of silent suffering alone.

The meaning of Israel for the prophet, is that it is the servant who suffers, the lamb sacrificed on the altar of fate. Christianity is the reveree of truth. It is not that God is vicarious atonement for man, but that man, Israel, the prophet himself, suffers for God. Jeremiah is sympathetic with God. He acts out the pangs of birth which will someday produce a Covenant that cannot end, a people eternally called and calling. He is coworker with God in the creation of that day; he is co-sufferer in that night which is the life of man on earth.

For Jeremiah, God is with us. Not that we become God, nor that we can magically invoke and control Him. Not that God becomes man, to suffer on earth and die to the flesh. The history of man in our time is still history; the prophet still is erring and in pain. But the pain has

meaning, for it is His. We all shall become bearers of His name and of His victory.

This is a teaching which continued in the later prophets, particularly Deutero-Isaiah, and in the Psalms. It continues also in the lives of men. For the highest witness of Scripture is its power to transmute through the Word. By learning to experience along with Jeremiah, to know his message, we come in time to glimpse Him who is beyond all knowing and all feeling. To anyone who stands outside the faith we are as before. But to those within we are changed entire. We are part of a vision which magnifies our small successes, wipes out our immense transgression, and links us with eternity. Forgiven, healed, ennobled, we can stand face to face with Jeremiah's awful and compassionate God.

NOTES

1. Paul S. Minear, Eyes of Faith (Philadelphia, 1946), p. 6.
2. Sheldon Blank, Introduction and Critical Notes To The Hebrew Text of Jeremiah 1-45 and 52 (Cincinnati, 1940-41).
3. Robert H. Pfeiffer, Introduction to the Old Testament (New York, 1941).
4. Cf. bibliography.
5. Jer. 10.23 in the American Translation of Alex. R. Gordon (Chicago, 1939). I have in every case compared with the Hebrew text this striking and successful English rendering, but the translations incorporated in the text are my own. The references to the book of Jeremiah will henceforth be given only by chapter and verse.
6. Blank, p. 35.
7. 33. 34, 37
8. Adam C. Welch, Jeremiah (London, 1938), p. 60.
9. 13.1

12. 13.5

11. 15.~~10~~ 12

13. 33.23

13. 37.5

14. 5.23 ff. original ?

15. 33.34

16. Claude G. Montefiore, Lectures on the Origin and Growth of Religion (London, 1893), p. 316

17. 16.17, 31

18. George A. Barton, The Religion of Israel (New York, 1918), pp. 133 ff.

19. Carl Cornhill, The Prophets of Israel (Chicago, 1895), pp. 98 ff.

20. J. P. Peters, The Religion of Israel (Boston, 1914), p. 324.

21. Edward Pace, Ideas of God in Israel (New York, 1924), pp. 155f.

22. 3.11 ff.

23. 3.37

24. 14.23 original ?

25. Cf. inter alia 1.16; 3.5f; 3; 4.1, 17; 5.2a,7a 10b; 8.3; 11.17; 13.10, 25, 27; 18.15; 19.4f; 31; 44. = wrong ref.

26. 32.35ff. original ?

27. 11.31 f.

28. 30.11

39. 45.4

30. 11.30

31. 46.10 ?

33. 3.19f

33. 3.33

34. 13.11

35. 13.7f.

36. 3.3ff.

37. 3.11

38. 33.17-33.

39. 31.3

40. 34.7

41. 15.19

42. 9.3

43. cf. inter alia 3.16f; 11.3ff. ?

44. 31.18; cf. Lam. 5.31

45. 17.14

46. 30.11

47. 30.7

48. 15.19

49. 45.4, 6.

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