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I dedicate this work to my lovely wife Molly Akinyi, who bore all the parental duties while I was away for studies. To my children Magi, Jerim, and Jerome for bearing my fatherly absence. To my parents and siblings who missed my presence. To my church, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Kenya, for recommending me to pursue studies at Concordia Seminary, St. Louis. To all my friends who stood by me and my family in any hour of need. To you all I owe this dedication.

Thus says Yahweh: “Stand in the courtyard of the house of Yahweh, and you shall speak concerning all the cities of Judah who come to worship in the house of Yahweh all the words that I command you to speak to them. Do not hold back a word. Perhaps they will listen and return each person from his evil way and I will repent concerning the evil that I am planning to do to them because of their evil deeds”

—Jeremiah 26:2-3

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ABBREVIATIONS

AIC	African Inland Church
Akk.	Akkadian
CEV	Holy Bible, Contemporary English Version
ELCK	Evangelical Lutheran Church in Kenya
G	The Septuagint
GKC	<i>Gesenius' Hebrew Grammar</i> (2nd ed; ed E Kautzsch; trans. A. E. Cowly: Oxford, 1963).
GNB	Good News Bible
Int	Interpretation: A Journal of Bible and Theology
JNES	Journal of Near Eastern Studies
JTS	The Journal of Theological Studies
K	Ketib (the written text)
M	Masoretic Text
MSS	Manuscripts
NRSV	The New Revised Standard Version
NT	New Testament
OT	Old Testament
PCEA	Presbyterian Church of East Africa
Q	Qere (the spoken text)
SDA	Seventh Day Adventist
SJT	Scottish Journal of Theology
T	Targum
V	Vulgate

WE Warren Backer & Eugene Carpenter. The Complete Word Study
Dictionary Old Testament. Tennessee: AMG, 2003.

ABSTRACT

Magero Jared Otieno “The power of God’s Word: Jeremiah speaks to Kenya today.”
Master of Arts Thesis. Concordia Seminary, 2018. 106pp.

This thesis searched what moved Jeremiah to keep proclaiming God’s Word when the people opposed it, when by proclaiming God’s Word Jeremiah himself went through a lot of suffering and persecution, and when the people instead heard and delighted in the words of false prophets. My research explored how the theology of the powerful Word of God and the task of its proclaimer speak to my church in Kenya where, even though we are a confessional church, we are still surrounded with self-proclaimed prophets and apostles. These groups of self-made clergies bring confusion especially when they assert that it is by the power of the word of God they can perform miracles. This research tried to give a biblical response using texts from the book of Jeremiah. This work proves to be helpful to the proclaimers and members of our church in Kenya. The texts from Jeremiah herein analyzed set the basis of understanding the power of God’s word and the task of its proclaimer. The passages are used to examine the theological and biblical meaning of the power of the Word and the task of the prophet to lay foundation for the motivation of the faithful ministers serving in the Kenyan context today.

An exegetical look at texts (Jeremiah 1:4–12; 7:27; 14:13–14; 15:16–21; 20:1–18; 23:9–32; 26:1–24; 28:1–17; and 31:31–34) was accomplished. These are the texts which are related to the thesis topic, chapters, and the thesis question. Each text was summarized to give what it says about the Word of God and the task of proclaiming it. It is described how these texts are to be understood in the context of Jeremiah’s own time and place. The features of focus in this thesis are as follows: the call of Jeremiah to be the prophet and the proclaimer of the powerful word of God; the challenges and persecution that Jeremiah faced as a messenger of Yahweh; the presentation of Jeremiah versus the false prophets and what made the false prophets popular. Provided also, is a summary of the overall constellation of theological emphases. This thesis also described the current conditions in Kenya and discussed how this theology speaks and relates to our situation in the Evangelical Lutheran Church, and why the theology of Jeremiah is important for Kenya. Jeremiah’s theology of the Word speaks a powerful and relevant message to faithful ministers working in Kenya today.

INTRODUCTION

INTRODUCTION TO THE POWER OF GOD'S WORD: JEREMIAH SPEAKS TO KENYA TODAY

In this introduction, I propose to give an account of the situation in Kenya¹, the context into which the proclamation of the word of God takes place and then introduce the emphasis on the word of God in Jeremiah.

Evangelical Lutheran Church in Kenya and Kenya's situation

Kenya is a country of many contrasts, from its landscape to demographics, and more so, its social and economic inequalities. Even though the government is trying to improve the economy, Kenya remains one of the most unequal countries in the sub-region. Forty two percent of its population of 44 million live below the poverty line.² Access to basic quality services such as health care, education, clean water, and sanitation, is often a luxury for many people.

On the economic front, Kenya's economic freedom score is 54.7, making its economy the 129th freest in the 2018 Index.³ Its overall score has increased by 1.2 points, with improvements

¹ The Democratic Republic of Kenya, a British protectorate after the Anglo-German agreement of 1890, lies across the equator on the east coast of Africa. It borders Somalia, Ethiopia, and Sudan to the north; Uganda to the west; Tanzania to the south; and the Indian Ocean to the east. The country covers an area of 222,845 square miles, approximately the size of the state of Texas USA. The 2010 census estimated the population at 40 plus million, with 42 ethnic groups, each with a unique language, but Swahili (*Kiswahili*) is the national language spoken by nearly all Kenyans, and English is the official language and the medium of instruction. Religiously, Kenya at one time, was represented by dozens of tribal beliefs. Today, Kenya has lost its religious diversity and is now a predominately Christian country (at least nominally). The Muslims number around 10% of the population and are especially located in the coast area around Mombasa. At the same time, many Christians and Muslims mix their main religion with traditional African beliefs.

² Institute for Economic Affairs, *Our problems, Our solutions: An Economic and Public Policy Agenda for Kenya*. (Nairobi: The Institute for Economic Affairs, 1998), 283.

³ 2018 Index of Economic Freedom, <http://www.heritage.org/index/country/Kenya>.

in business freedom and property rights offsetting declines in the government spending and fiscal health indicators. Kenya is ranked 22nd among 47 countries in the Sub-Saharan Africa region, and its overall score is above the regional average but below the world average. The country has a growing entrepreneurial middle class⁴ and has enjoyed steady growth, but its economic and development trajectory is impaired by weak governance, ineffective rule of law, and corruption. Corruption is everywhere in Kenya, it is a cancer that eats Kenya, it is crippling the country in all sectors of life. Despite an impressive economic growth since 2005, poverty still affects millions of people's lives. It appears that a minority of wealthy individuals and investors are creaming off the yields of the country's economic performance. While this minority of super-rich Kenyans are accumulating wealth and income, the fruits of economic growth are failing to trickle down to the poorest. The rich are capturing the lion's share of the benefits, while millions of people at the bottom are being left behind. If inequality remained at the same level for the following five years, 2.9 million more people could be living in extreme poverty. Divine voices that rise to talk about corruption menace are either, threatened by death or brutally murdered. But those divine voices must continue to rise to the occasion and raise their voices louder.

On the social front, the social structure that evolved in Kenya during colonial times emphasized race and class. The dominance of whites over blacks was reinforced through segregation of the races and, within the black African population, of the various ethnic groups. Within each ethnic group, wealth largely determined status. After Kenya gained independence in 1963, race ceased to be an important indicator of social status, but wealth and ethnic identity remained significant. Today, several Kenya's problems result from disparities in wealth. These

⁴ Brian Ngugi, "Nairobi hosts a third of the fast-growing middle class," *Business Daily*, December 15, 2016, <https://www.businessdailyafrica.com/markets/Nairobi-hosts-a-third-of-the-fast-growing-middle-class/539552-3487>.

problems include pervasive urban and rural poverty, overcrowded and substandard housing in urban areas, and a relatively high rate of unemployment. In the 1990s the country also witnessed periodic clashes between ethnic groups, particularly between Kalenjin and Kikuyu peoples in west central Kenya. Notwithstanding, tropical diseases, including malaria, have long been a public health problem in Kenya. In recent years, infection with the human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) that causes acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (AIDS) has also become a serious cause for concern. Many people have died because of HIV/AIDS leaving behind many orphans with majority of them ending up in the streets.

Political condition in Kenya has been very unstable since independence leaving it with an extensive track record of political violence. This has generally been ethnically mobilized, stemming from grievances over land and exacerbated by vigilantes and militias deployed by politicians to garner support. Ethnic land grievances can be traced back to colonial rule. White settlers expropriated vast tracts of land, where they built their territories. The creation of ethnically exclusive reserves and African labor forces saw further tribal displacement, hence the continuous tribal boundary clashes in Kenya to date. Recently, Kenyan political class has managed to endorse a kind of political thuggery that shames the country. Every electioneering season, Kenya must come face to face with this menace. Kenya city streets have been turned into battlegrounds. Predictably, too, the marauding gangs unleashing violence on political rivals and innocent Kenyans do so with impunity as those charged with ensuring security watch the events from the comfort of their offices. These are scenes that do not belong where the rule of law prevails.

Scriptures talk extensively about the proliferation of false prophets, who speaks lies in Yahweh's name, when he did not speak to them or send them (Jer 14:14–17). The Evangelical

Lutheran Church in Kenya as a confessional Lutheran church body, with doctrine centered upon the solid teachings of the Old and New Testaments as the inspired word of God, the three Ecumenical Creeds and the text of the Lutheran Augsburg Confession of 1530 together with Martin Luther's Large and Small Catechisms, finds herself in the middle of Kenya's religious contest with the emerging false prophets of the twenty-first century. ELCK's mission is to proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ, carry out the proper administration of the sacraments, and teach the confessional Lutheran teachings and Her vision is to proclaim the good news of the crucified and resurrected Christ, the only way to salvation, a teaching referred to by false prophets as sixteenth-century business that does not fit the current Kenya. ELCK as a church body on earth is met with these challenges posed by false proclaimers who emerge from new emerging religious movements.

In the recent past, several people have emerged claiming to be prophets of God. Dr. David Edward Owuor⁵ of Ministry of Repentance and Holiness is the most notable one among several who has asserted himself as a prophet of God. He gathers extra-ordinary and fanatical multitudes wherever he goes, mainly a people affected by worse conditions in Kenya. He promises the sick healing because his ministry includes miracle performance. One time, the country was treated to the spectacle of his followers washing the streets with water and detergents in preparation for his arrival in one of the major towns. Right from the onset of his ministry, he has consistently castigated the church in Kenya orthodox or otherwise for its corruption and money-making concerns. He claims that every other "man of God" is in the business of preaching the gospel of

⁵ Prophet Owuor was born in 1966 in Goma village, Usenge in Bondo District in Kenya. Dr David Edward Owuor of the Ministry of Repentance and Holiness, he is a scientist by profession, but now turned prophet and televangelist. He earned his first degree from Makerere University, his second at University of Nairobi, and his masters' degree in Genetics (Inheritance) at Ben Gurion, Israel before proceeding for his PhD in Molecular Genetics at University of Haifa (also in Israel). He also holds a degree from the University of Giessen's Institute for Genetics (Germany).

prosperity, which eventually leads to sexual sin, with some pastors even abandoning their call to join politics. He threatens everybody who raises a question about his ministry with curses. A closer examination of him reveals that, there is not a single positive thing that Dr Owuor has said about the church. The only true “church” is his ministry. In other words, believers are only assured of holiness and belonging to God when and if they become his (“prophet”) true followers. By such an insinuation, whether covertly or overtly, he has successfully replaced Jesus Christ as the only way to God. Dr. Owuor’s teachings are mostly weird, he teaches repentance and holiness, but not faith in Jesus. His teaching never touches the message of the cross. His followers don’t give offerings in their services but his entourage to his crusades is huge. Where does he get the money to buy and maintain his cars? There is no Holy Communion in his Church, no proclamation of the gospel, no pronouncement of Absolution. His predictions are just proclamations of disasters without any hope. One of his weird claims is that, the baptism he gives cleanses HIV/AIDS⁶. Owuor is aware of HIV pandemic in Kenya and he is incorporating this into his ministry and many people with HIV/AIDS flock his crusade for healing. Many followers of Owuor have stopped using Anti-Retroviral drugs hence many deaths leading to many orphans in the society. Even those who have been baptized in the mainline churches go there to be baptized by prophet Owuor. All these things qualify Owuor as a false prophet.

It is a worrying trend in Kenya that the false teachings have permeated their way into the church and the false teachers are on the increase. They are banking on the socio-economic and political challenges of the country to propagate their false doctrines. On 5th November 2014, there was a news expose of “Prophet” Victor Kanyari of Salvation Healing Ministries that aired

⁶ David Owuor, “Teaching on Baptism and the Wedding Gown–Part 2 *Slide Share* 2015,” <https://www.slideshare.net/gems2015/teachings-on-baptismandweddinggownpart2/161126175043/95>.

on a television channel. It showed the false miracles and the tricks used to go about performing these so-called miracles.⁷ The miracles are the prophet's way of responding to the challenges and problems facing Kenyans. He tells his congregation and TV viewers to 'sow a seed' (most commonly known as "Panda Mbegu" a Swahili maxim which means to "plant a seed") of 310 shillings, referencing Malachi 3:10. He asserts to his viewers and followers that sowing of a seed will come with many blessings in the life of the sower, that is, getting employment, buying a car, and having a good house. Within weeks the so-called "prophet" was very rich, he was able to buy a range rover, an expensive house, and other good things. Many people planted seed through mobile money transfer. On the other side of the river, there is a pastor serving in a protestant church in the rural area who cannot even afford a bicycle. He is left confused, whether to start faking miracles or not. According to Kanyari's teachings, salvation is deliverance from poverty. In this way, he and his colleagues are propagating theology of glory where wealth is a sign of faith. Salvation to them has no connection with the work of Christ. In truth, many of the pastors in the mainline churches are not well paid due to economic crises bedeviling the poverty-stricken members who are not able to give what is enough to take care of the church workers. So, when false prophets like Kanyari are live on television talking and performing fake miracles that attract many people, the aura of confusion reigns in the minds of the servants of God serving faithfully but can barely feed their families. However, one thing stands great; the word of God proclaimed in its truth and purity remains powerful to convict and to save. Another false proclaimer of the word is Apostle Francis Musili who said he used faith and prayer to heal the sick, find love for the forlorn and give hope to the hopeless by driving out demons that possessed their bodies and

⁷ Albert Nyakundi, "Worshippers Flock Pastor Kanyari Church Despite Fake Miracles Expose, Besieged Prophet Locks Out Media," *The Star*, November 9, 2014, <https://www.the-star.com.ke/news/2014/11/09/worshiper-flock-pastor-kanyari-church-despite-fake-miracle-expose-c1034498>.

souls.⁸ These false proclaimers does not preach the true message of God's word to the disillusioned Kenyan Christians. Sometimes they prophesy peace when people are yet to face political challenges. Majority of these false prophets speaks prosperity gospel to the people and fake miracles.

The Prophet Jeremiah

Jeremiah, the son of Hilkiah, a Levitical priest, was likely born between 650 and 645 BC. He was from the small village of Anathoth about three miles northeast of Jerusalem in the territory of Benjamin (Jer 1:1). As a Judaeen prophet, his ministry covered four of the most wild decades in his country's history. He received his call to be a prophet in the thirteenth year of the reign of King Josiah (627/626 BC) and continued his ministry until after the siege and capture of Jerusalem by the Babylonians in 586 BC. The prophet Jeremiah is an exceptional figure in Old Testament records, as is attested by his own oracles when he announced God's judgment and restoration. He was convinced that his mission was to announce to his people the judgment of God upon them for their disloyalty. At one point, his opposition to the sacrificial system from which his relatives would gain their livelihood would make them bitter against him in years to come. Of all the Old Testament prophets, Jeremiah is the one whose message comes home with the great and eventful days in which we now live.

The Word of God in Jeremiah

The word of Yahweh came to Jeremiah at a time when the land was full of vices and idolatry. On many occasions, the people slew prophets and would have their own vices and

⁸ Gobe Joselow, "Kenya's Healing Churches: Faith or Fiction?" *VOA News*, August 28, 2013, <https://www.voanews/a/faithorfiction-kenya-healingchurches/1738660.html>.

idolatry go unrebuked. God gave Jeremiah the overview of his prophetic ministry: “Behold, I have put My words in your mouth. See, I have this day set you over the nations and over the kingdoms, to root out and to pull down, to destroy and to throw down, to build and to plant” (Jer 1:9–10). This meant that God had appointed Jeremiah to proclaim the destruction and building of nations that would eventually lead to the Kingdom of God. God called Jeremiah to be a proclaimer of his powerful word to the nations; Jeremiah’s words are God’s words. Central to the book of Jeremiah is “the word of Yahweh.” For Jeremiah, God’s word is central to his calling and proclamation. This divine word is powerful. It moves Jeremiah to proclaim weal and woe, hope and comfort. Uncontrollable and all-powerful, it leads Jeremiah to an awareness of what is and a consciousness of what will be. According to Shead, “the word of God is the subject of the book of Jeremiah, addressing us as it once addressed him.”⁹ In the opening two verses of Jeremiah the book presents itself to us both as the written words of Jeremiah, and as the spoken word of God that addresses us so that we may hear it, just as it once addressed Jeremiah himself. As we read the words of the prophet we read them as God’s word. The word of God that comes to us through them determines the way we read them. Shead shows that the Word of God is a dominant theme in Jeremiah. He finds that the powerful Word is God’s spoken message and that it refers to what we have as written word as still the divine revelation. He asserts that “the written words not only witness to the spoken Word, and do not only become the word, but now are the word, the powerful, personal speech of God.”¹⁰ The word of God is a message spoken by God. The words are then spoken by the prophet in turn and either rejected by listeners or received, and if received, what the listeners hear is the word of God, even though it was not God’s direct voice

⁹ Andrew G. Shead, *A Mouth Full of Fire: The Word of God in the Words of Jeremiah* (Downers Grove, IL: Apollos: InterVarsity Press, 2012), 62.

¹⁰ Shead, *A Mouth Full of Fire*, 235–36.

they heard. Shead explains that, “Not only are God’s words presented to us in a way that preserves their original orality, but in Jeremiah the spoken words we hear are made as much as possible into the words of God. One of the techniques by which this is achieved may be dubbed ‘drift of speaker’, whereby the prophet’s voice is displaced without notice by the encroaching voice of God.”¹¹ As it comes to the hearers, the word of God is not a disembodied message, and the words of Jeremiah communicate to the hearer the word of God through the way they come to us, embodied in and by their speaker. During and before Jeremiah’s time, the word of God has been a strong force, which unfortunately comes up against incurably deaf listeners. Jeremiah’s proclamation failed to turn the nation back to God, but it does not mean that the word of God failed. It can only fail to penetrate, but the word of God does not fail. It does precisely what God told Jeremiah at his call it was going to do; it sounds over nations and kingdoms to uproot and to tear down.

Even though the word of God failed to penetrate the deaf ears of its listeners, it is still powerful and full of truth. It is refused by the nation as a transformative word; it became instead a word of destruction to them. That the word of God has real power to transform a hearer at all is established in the person of Jeremiah. His call and commissioning show Jeremiah to be a total product of the indwelling divine word, determining his thoughts (15:16), emotions (15:16; 23:9), his words (1:7–9), and actions. The extent to which he is under control of the divine word is revealed in Jeremiah’s confessions (20:7–9). The word of God is powerful, nothing competes with it. It gives hope and transform people’s lives, but it is not magic. In Jeremiah’s words also was a lot of judgment on the prophets of the lie and those who delighted in it. Therefore, as we read Jeremiah, we need to hear what he has to tell us because a gospel emptied of the wrath of

¹¹ Shead, *A Mouth Full of Fire*, 111.

God is a gospel emptied of truth and power. To see that, one only must see the moral corruption and decline of churches that deny the reality of judgement. At the same time, God does not judge as humans do, and a large part of the power and glory of the gospel is found in the unique qualities of divine wrath.

The words in the entire book of Jeremiah, weaved through verse after verse, are prophecies that speak of the Christ who was to come. Jesus the Christ is the fulfillment of Scripture. He is the Word. He is the Light. He is the Way, the Truth, and the Life. No man comes to the Father but through Him. Jesus has fulfilled every single prophetic word. This Word, when read by Christians, finds its fulfillment in Christ and his church and his final salvation. The word of God in the words of Jeremiah are prophecies proleptically fulfilled in the birth, death, and resurrection of Christ, waiting for the final consummation when Christ himself will return. This word encouraged and motivated Jeremiah ahead of time, strengthened and gave him courage to proclaim it in truth and its purity without any fear.

CHAPTER ONE

THE CALL OF JEREMIAH TO BE THE PROPHET AND PROCLAIMER OF THE POWERFUL WORD OF GOD: AN EXEGETICAL LOOK AT JEREMIAH 1:4–12; 7:27; 15:16–21

Jeremiah 1:4–12

Introduction

Chapter one of the book of Jeremiah is an introduction to the prophet and his message, and, is concerned with experiences associated with the call of Jeremiah to the prophetic office, the confirmation of the call, and definition of his task. Understanding the call of Jeremiah is crucial to grasping the in-depth meaning of a call into a prophetic office. The message the prophet brings to his people is that tragedy will come in the form of an attack from the enemy from the north because God's people have forsaken him (1:16). A closer look in the text to find out what it entails is necessary.

Translation¹

⁴And the word of the Yahweh came to me:

⁵Before I formed you in the belly I knew you

and before you came forth from the womb I declared you holy

a prophet to the nations I made you

⁶But I said, 'Ah, Lord Yahweh, Look, I do not know how to speak, for I am

¹ Jack R. Lundbom, *Jeremiah 1–20: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* AB (New York: Doubleday, 1999), 226. The translation is a reprint of Jack Lundbom's translation.

only a boy’

⁷And Yahweh said to me: do not say ‘I am only a boy’

For on all that I send you, you shall go

and all that I command you, you shall speak.

⁸You must not be afraid because of them

for I am with you to rescue you,

oracle of Yahweh.

⁹And Yahweh extended his hand and hit my mouth. And the Yahweh said to me:

Look, I have put my words in your mouth

¹⁰See, I have appointed you this day

over the nations and over the kingdoms:

to uproot and to break down

and to destroy and to overthrow

to build up and to plant.

¹¹And the word of Yahweh came to me: “What do you see, Jeremiah?” and I said: An almond branch, I see.” ¹²And Yahweh said to me: “You are good at seeing, for I am watching over my word to do it.”

Notes

1:4 And the word of Yahweh came to me - וַיִּקְרַי (waw consecutive qal imperfect third masculine singular from **היה** meaning to be, become, come to pass, exist or happen) translated as it came to me. Heb. **לְאמָר** (saying) is left untranslated in a number of translations to function as the English colon or as quotation marks.

1:5 The twofold **בְּטָרִם** is key, telling us what God did; God foresaw and saw in his divine

vision before Jeremiah historically existed. Before Jeremiah was formed in his mother's belly Yahweh knew him; before he came forth from the womb Yahweh declared him holy. The point is that Yahweh's call of Jeremiah into prophetic office took place long before the present moment when Jeremiah is informed of the decision.

אֶצְרֶךָ (qal imperfect, first person common singular) *I formed you* is imperfect from Hebrew רָצִי (to form, fashion, frame) which is one of the important verbs of creation. This is because an imperfect normally comes after בָּטְרָם to refer to the past. I agree with the many translations which have "I formed you" because it brings the sense of Genesis 2, a sense of molding into a form, especially as a potter; the word can be used figuratively to mean determine i.e. form a resolution.

The two words בֶּטֶן and רֶחֶם are stereotyped pair.² The word "belly" in the translation above renders the feminine noun בֶּטֶן, which has no definite Hebrew cognates.³ The virtually exclusive meaning of רֶחֶם is "womb" (with the use in Judg 5:20 as "woman-slave" being an understandable development).

לְגוֹיִם נְבִיא prophet to the nations, spokesman or speaker, meaning inspired man to the nations. גוֹיִם as is naturally understood means gentiles, a people other than Israel and Judah, or foreign nations.⁴ "Nations" refers to Israel and Judah in Ezek 37:22, but in Jeremiah the term refers to nations of the world. Beginning with Elijah and Elisha, prophets were international figures who brought Yahweh's word to foreign kings and foreign nations.

1:6 The interjections אֶהֱיָה and הִנֵּה express shock and alarm. Lundbom explains that the

² Lundbom, *Jeremiah 1–20*, 230.

³ *BDB*, 105b–106a.

⁴ Lundbom, *Jeremiah 21–36*, 232.

word אָהָה is stronger, said to convey opposition to divine self-disclosure.⁵

Hebrew נָעַר here means boy (NJV; NRSV). It is true that the term may in certain cases refer to males having a higher chronological age, e.g. it can mean young man of marriageable age, soldier or slave. For the OT usage of נָעַר the word is used to cover a wide range of age groups, from unborn child (Judg 13:5, 7, 8, 12), to one just born (1 Sam 4:21) to three-month-old child (Exod 2:6), to a child not yet weaned (1 Sam 4:22), to seventeen-year-old (Gen 37:2), to thirty-year-old (Gen 41:12). There seems to be no case where נָעַר was married. Thus, we may conclude that one meaning for נָעַר is that it refers to any young person from infancy to just before marriage.

1:9 The Hebrew עַל-פִּי וַיִּגַּע (hiphil imperfect 3rd masculine singular from the root עגג) is translated by Lundbom as “touched my mouth”. It means “to strike upon my mouth,” because this imagery may require something more vigorous than the usual “he touched.”⁶

1:10 The verb הִפְקִדְתִּיךָ is hiphil perfect 1st common singular from the root דקפ which has many varieties of meaning in OT. Many have translated it to “appoint” in a position of authority. Here it has a sense of Jeremiah being made an overseer.

The verb נָתַח changes the imagery from plants to some structure such as the walls of a city. The basic meaning is “break down” a structure of some kind, as in Jeremiah 4:26 and 33:4.⁷ Thus, in chapters 39:8 and 52:14 (2 Kgs 25:10) the Prophet Jeremiah applies the word, specifically, to the breaking down of the walls of Jerusalem by the Babylonian soldiers of Nebuchadnezzar. The metaphorical application of the verb to a people is, indeed, seemingly

⁵ Lundbom, *Jeremiah 1–20*, 232.

⁶ Lundbom, *Jeremiah 1–20*, 235.

⁷ *BDB*, 683a.

restricted to the passages already cited in which Jeremiah conjoins **נָטַשׁ** with **נָתַח** forsake, destroy (1:10; 18:7 and 31:28)⁸

1:11 **שֶׁקֶד מִקֵּץ** An almond branch, is one of botanical references in the prophecies of Jeremiah. According to Herder (1833 I:30) quoted by Lundbom, the Hebrew language makes up for its lack of abstractions with abundance of sensuous terms. Hebrew **שֶׁקֶד** is an almond tree, which Tristram (1884:293) and Zohary (1982:66–67) both quoted by Lundbom identify with the *amygdalus communis*. Because of the wordplay with watching or wakeful **שֶׁקֶד** following, the tree is thought to be blossoming.

רָאָה אֲנִי qal participle *I see*. Jeremiah sees the blossoms in the vicinity of Anathoth. Lindblom (1965:139–40) quoted by Lundbom calls this a “symbolic perception which differs from other visions in that some real object in the real world is observed.”⁹

The Narrative Analysis

After introductory statements (1–3) concerning prophet Jeremiah’s parentage and period of ministry, this text immediately presents Jeremiah's call narrative, recounting the prophet's commissioning by God into his prophetic vocation. The installation of Jeremiah with prophetic office follows in four acts: the call on the part of Yahweh, verses 4–7; Jeremiah’s consecration for his calling, verses 9–10; and the two signs by means of which the Lord assures him of certain success in his work and of powerful support in the exercise of his office, verses 11–19. The call narrative begins with a familiar statement: “the word of the Lord came to me” (1:4), introducing an experience in the form of a dialogue between the Lord and Jeremiah written in a manner of

⁸ BDB, 683a.

⁹ Lundbom, *Jeremiah 1–20*, 236.

first-person account. Dempsey states that, “One can picture Jeremiah as enthusiastic and filled with a sense of awe and wonder from having had an experience of God and having been encountered by God’s word, an experience he just cannot wait to share with others.”¹⁰ The Lord takes the first initiative by choosing Jeremiah before birth, sets him apart and appoints him a prophet to the nations. Not without reason, Jeremiah endeavored to step politely away from the overwhelming announcement of his God. Stulman points out that, “Like other great figures in the scriptures, Jeremiah shrinks at the prospect of divine service,” “Ah, Lord Yahweh, behold, I do not know how to speak, for I am only a boy” (1:6).¹¹ The prophet insists that he is too young and inexperienced to address the nations. His hesitation is reminiscent of Moses (Exod 4:10) claiming in his fourth objection to have a heavy mouth and tongue and of Solomon (1 Kgs. 3:7) who calls himself a child for lacking experience how to tackle the problems of administering a great people. God immediately quells Jeremiah’s fears. Jeremiah needs not be afraid because Yahweh promises to protect and be with him (1:8). Yahweh then strikes Jeremiah’s timid mouth (1:9), thereby putting his word into Jeremiah’s mouth. The action was “sacramental” in nature. In a way beyond human reason God really did put his words into Jeremiah’s mouth so that the prophet would proclaim truthfully God’s words. When God calls, God empowers and when he demands, he provides resources to accomplish the assignment

In v 10, one finds a summary of the message Jeremiah was to proclaim. In the formulaic phrases that will run throughout the whole of the book, the prophet’s message captures the disaster that would see their world “plucked up and pulled down”, “destroyed and overthrown.” But in spite of this large-scale devastation that is captured in these four verbs, there is still the

¹⁰ Carol J. Dempsey, OP. *Jeremiah: Preacher of Grace and Poet of Truth*. (Minnesota: Collegeville, 2007), 2.

¹¹ Stulman Louis, *Jeremiah* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2005), 41.

hope of building and planting which foreshadows the hope that will be preached in Jeremiah 31:31–34. Finally, with the vision of a branch of an almond tree, Yahweh assures Jeremiah that he (Yahweh) will watch over the word and eventually fulfil it (1:11–12). It is difficult to capture the wordplay in English, Jeremiah saw an “almond tree” (*shaqed*); God will be “all-minding” (*shoqed*) over his word to it.

Meaning and Message

Jeremiah 1:4–12 records and introduces the prophet’s details of call and inaugural encounter with Yahweh. As this divine-human drama opens, we encounter a God who is intimately involved in human affairs. Verse 4 is not an afterthought but part of the Jeremiah’s public proclamation, by which from the first he stood forth, claiming to act by an external authority, and to speak not his own words, but those of the Lord. In verse 5, the Hebrew verb יָדַעְתִּי (qal perfect 1st common singular I knew you is from root word יָדַע to know) is not merely fore-knowledge, but something more. In Amos 3:2, it is equivalent to choosing and selecting and it constantly means a thorough approval consequent upon experience. Lundbom states that, “Yahweh begins the present dialogue in grand hyperbole. He says he knew Jeremiah before he was formed in the belly of his mother; that a consecration took place before he was born; and at this early time—known only to himself—Jeremiah was designated a prophet to the nations.”¹² Keil and Delilitsch explain further that, “Divine knowing is at the same time a singling out; and of this, choosing is the immediate consequence. But the choosing takes place by means of הִקְדִּישׁ sanctifying that is, setting apart and consecrating for a special calling and is completed by institution to the office.”¹³ The personal knowing of which God speaks here is, of course, much

¹² Lundbom, *Jeremiah 1–20*, 236.

¹³ C. F. Keil and F. Delilitsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament in Ten Volumes: Jeremiah, Lamentations*,

more than an intellectual knowledge, since God knows all things and all people equally in such a sense according to His divine omniscience. Nor does "take note" do justice to the conception of this usage of *yd'*, despite the lexical statements to this effect.¹⁴ The idea is by no means "acknowledging" the "true servants" of God based on His "recognizing" them.¹⁵ The reference rather, when God knows people, is to His knowing them with a divine intention which establishes a personal relationship between Him and them, whether as a corporate entity (such as Israel) or as individuals. This usage emphasizes, as is clearly true here, the absolute monergism in the initiation of any personal relationship between God and man. The specific reference here, however, differs evidently from the divine foreknowledge which elects people to salvation through faith in Jesus Christ. Jeremiah was, of course, the beneficiary of such a predestination to salvation as is any Christian. The Lord here, however, makes no mention of eternity (before the creation of the world), and the parallel clause speaks specifically of God choosing Jeremiah, even before His birth, to be His prophet. The whole passage emphasizes, indeed, the monergistic nature of the prophetic office. The prophets spoke and wrote, by divine inspiration, all those words and only those words which God gave them to speak and write. God forms from the womb, knows, declares holy, and appoints Jeremiah, not for Jeremiah's sake but for the sake of the world. God has a concern for the wayward and rebellious world, not only Judah and Jerusalem, but his interest reaches far beyond the borders. Jeremiah is to be a royal messenger in the employ of Yahweh, the King. He will go on whatever missions Yahweh sends him and speak whatever Yahweh commands him to speak, to kings, princes, priests, prophets, scribes, ambassadors, foreign kings, and foreign peoples. Jeremiah's call is in poetic form.

vol. VIII (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1973), 39–40.

¹⁴ *BDB*, 394a, 393a-395a.

¹⁵ *BDB*, 394a.

Verse 5 has paired phrases indicating that God's decision to use Jeremiah came prior to his birth. His appointment to be a prophet for the nations was God's decree, fixed before he was conceived. Before Jeremiah was conceived and born, God had chosen him to be the extraordinary instruments of his grace, appointed to be an instrument for the carrying out of redemptive schemes of his kingdom. The final clause Jer 1:5 states, "I have made you a prophet to the nations" in reference to the destination, "the nations" with no restriction implies already the mandate to proclaim to the world the word of truth; Jeremiah was to write down as well as speak the words of God to allow them to be heard and read in all the world to the end of history. Jeremiah is made the prophet to speak a divine word to the nations, Yahweh equally furnished his equipment for this task and the scope of his commission as Welch admits: "He who is to undertake a world-mission must be equipped with a quite peculiar care."¹⁶

The call narrative embodies Jeremiah's testimony that he is a legitimate prophet commissioned by Yahweh to speak and act on his behalf. In Verse 6, Jeremiah's brief protest to his call is a frank statement affirming that his career is in no sense something he devised for himself, but was a task laid upon him by Yahweh. **דִּבַּר יְדַעְתִּי־לֹא** (I do not know how to speak) are words used by Jeremiah to express his lack of oratory powers necessary for success. He cannot do it by his own reason and strength and abilities. The prophets of Israel were the national preachers in religious matters and their orators in political. His complaint for being a boy was not enough reason for the objection. What is imperative is being Yahweh's messenger, not his fear. Therefore, Yahweh's agenda for Jeremiah lays out in general terms the career of the new spokesperson. He is to speak Yahweh's words, which have extraordinary power to bring destruction and reconstruction, not just to Judah but also to other nations and kingdoms.

¹⁶ Adam C. Welch, *Jeremiah: His Time and His Work*. (Oxford: Blackwell, 1955), 38.

However, “as did other prophets,” states Efird, “Jeremiah felt a distinct unworthiness to undertake this massive task. Humanly speaking it was beyond him.”¹⁷ On the other hand, seeing himself as a boy is not the best thing, the best is to obey the divine commission comprehensively and completely. As Longman and Garland put it, “He must therefore see himself as God sees him—not as a mere youth, unprepared and unready for action, but rather as a committed servant of the Lord who will do all that his Master calls him to do.”¹⁸ He received a specific commission to go and to proclaim, reminding us Yahweh sends the prophet. He shall go because removes his timidity by the promise given in the next verse.

God exhorts his servant (verse 8) not to fear the opposition. There will always be a crowd of opposition lurking somewhere in the shadows, to oppose the prophet. There is a certain fear with the prophetic calling, a kind of persecution consciousness, but one that is inevitably all too real. They will not like your prophetic message, they may even greet you warmly, but all the while they are scheming and plotting your downfall, slandering you behind your back, sometimes rejecting you to your face. Yahweh is to be with the prophet and will rescue him. Jeremiah needs this assurance because whatever words he will speak from his mouth will be the source of opposition. Any little proclamation calling people to repent sets the proclaimer against his age and as time goes by, the proclaimer will be mercilessly clobbered. But God promises to rescue him from every distress and danger which the fulfilment of his duties can bring upon him.

The verb **עָנַן** in verse 9, both here and Isa 6:7 is the hiphil or causative conjugation. In Dan 10:16, where there is no such inauguration, we have the simple conjugation, he did strike. This touching is the bestowal of divine grace and help, by which that want of eloquence, which the

¹⁷ James M. Efird, *Jeremiah, Prophet Under Siege* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 1979), 36.

¹⁸ Tremper Longman III and David E. Garland, *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Jeremiah ~ Ezekiel* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 75.

prophet had pleaded as a disqualification, was removed, and distinctly was an external act, impressing itself objectively upon his consciousness. In order to assure him by an overt act of his support, the Lord gives him a palpable pledge. He extended his hand and touched the mouth of the prophet. The hand is the instrument of making and doing; the touching of Jeremiah's mouth by the hand of God is consequently the emblematical token of that God frames in his mouth what he is to speak. By the stretched hand, God has consecrated Jeremiah to be his prophet, and endowed him for the discharge of his duties; he may now entrust him with his commission to the peoples and kingdoms, and set him over them as his prophet who proclaims to them his powerful word:

God's presence was not only promised for Jeremiah's future ministry but also manifested there and then in a striking experience, a commissioning act of sacramental symbolism. In Isa 6:7 the touching of Isaiah's mouth with a burning coal brought by a seraph had expiatory power. Here divine touch transfers to Jeremiah's mouth so that he can speak them. To put words in someone's mouth is to give that person a message to pass on (e.g., in Exodus 4:15; Deut 18:18; 2 Sam 14:19).¹⁹

The contents of his proclaiming are indicated in the following infinitives of verse 10. These six verbs follow a temporal order in terms of their negative and positive effects: First, uprooting, tearing down, destroying, and overthrowing; then rebuilding and planting. The verb "tear down," as used in Jeremiah is often about tearing down idolatrous or polluted altars, certainly apt in terms of fruit of Jeremiah's ministry. The verb "demolish" is found in the hiphil six times in Jeremiah and the verb destroy is found seven times. Out of these verbs of Judgment, the predominant theme in Jeremiah, particularly in Judah, is one of uprooting. The root *bnh* to build appears 23 times in Jeremiah and to plant 16 times. Though the general tenor of Jeremiah does not reflect this, reference to building and planting outnumber references to uprooting, tearing

¹⁹ Leslie C. Allen, *Jeremiah: A Commentary*. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2008), 27.

down, destroying and demolishing. And the means by which Jeremiah would accomplish the Lord's mission was the word. With the word he would uproot and tear down, destroy and overthrow. This word was all he had. This word was all he needed, for it was living and powerful, accomplishing all of God's purposes. The Lord would never abandon him or fail him. His heart put at rest by the might of the Lord's promise, the prophet accepted his calling. He was ready to proclaim the powerful word of God.

Verses 11–12 is about the first vision Jeremiah saw. He saw an almond branch. "The almond bush was first to come to life in the spring. The blossoming of the pink flowers of the almond tree was a sure sign that spring was coming," says Gosdeck.²⁰ So, the almond branch was a symbol of the coming fulfillment of the Lord's Word. This is the true mark of the true prophet of Yahweh. What he says happens (Deut 18:21). The Lord was watching over his word to carry it out. The Lord will carry out his word without delay and there will be no obstacle on its way. The period of waiting, the period of warning, was over; the time of judgment on Judah and Jerusalem had come. The Lord would delay no longer; now he will surely act.

Conclusion

The time came when Jeremiah was called to be a proclaimer of God's word when he was still young. He never liked the idea as Hyatt puts it, "Jeremiah's reaction was to protest that he was not eloquent, and only a youth. But God spoke again to him, to assure him of his constant presence with him, to strengthen him, and give him words he should speak."²¹ As a proclaimer of God's powerful word, Jeremiah is uniquely called to be a prophet to the nations (1:10). This is

²⁰ David M. Gosdeck, *Jeremiah-Lamentations* People's Bible Commentary (Saint Louis: Concordia, 2004), 13.

²¹ J. Philip Hyatt *Jeremiah, Prophet of Courage and Hope* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1952), 32.

not a call to do mission work among the nations, but a commission to proclaim a word to Israel that will catch up the future of other nations (especially Babylon). This word is a testimony that God's presence and activity has to do with the peoples of the world, not just Israel. This word of God is an effective reality in the life of other nations, whether they realize it or not. It is the powerful word of God that convicts the world of sin. In this segment, and its immediate context, Jeremiah records the details of his call to the prophetic ministry, including two visions and God's promise to be with him. Through Jeremiah, God would warn his people of impending judgment for their sins. Idolatry and immorality eventually bring disaster upon sinners. God wants his people to repent and turn back to him, averting disaster and receiving mercy. God's actions will destroy and rebuild. Not only that. God's very words spoken by the prophet destroy and break-down and then renew and build up. God's words are powerful and bring about what they say.

In the process of calling Jeremiah, God gave him an assurance. This assurance motivated and moved Jeremiah to continue proclaiming the word of God even when the intended listeners rejected it, and even when he was persecuted he had strength to move on. God took steps to reassure the timid, hesitant young prophet of divine help in the discharge of his prophetic duties. He was led to understand that he is to speak only that which he is commanded to speak (Jer 1:7). His own intellect is not to be the source for the oracles which he is to utter. They are to come from God and will carry divine authority within themselves. Consequently, "Jeremiah is preeminently the prophet of the word. From the start of his career he was manifestly conscious of being guided by a will not his own."²² Jeremiah was then assured of the divine deliverance from his enemies: "Be not afraid of their faces: for I am with thee to deliver thee" (Jer. 1:8). It was but reasonable that the young prophet should fear those who were to be his hearers. Sinful men never

²² Harry F. Baughman, *Jeremiah for Today* (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1947), 32.

had welcomed a message of judgment and condemnation, and there was a strong possibility of reprisal. With such thoughts in his mind, Jeremiah was given assurance that when “God sends forth His servants He goes with them.”²³ The prophet was not promised that he would be preserved unhurt, but that he shall be delivered from destruction at the hands of his enemies.

Jeremiah 7:27

Introduction

The text is the beginning of the section that deals with wholesale punishment (7:27–8:3). Jeremiah will speak the word of the Lord, Judah will not listen, and the Lord characterizes them as unresponsive to correction.

Translation ²⁴

And you shall speak to them all these words, but they will not hear you; you shall call them, but they will not answer you.

Notes

7:27 *And you shall speak.* The word וְדַבַּרְתָּ is perfect verb from root word דַּבַּר (to speak, declare, converse or command) with a waw consecutive at the beginning making it future. I therefore concur with numerous translators²⁵ who translated the word you shall speak.

Narrative Analysis

Chapter seven presents to the reader Jeremiah’s first public appearance to deliver the message he got from Yahweh. Jeremiah went to the court of the Jerusalem temple at a time when

²³ L. Elliot Binns, *The Book of the Prophet Jeremiah* (London: Melhuen, 1919), 5.

²⁴ Lundbom, *Jeremiah 1–20*, 480. Translation is a reprint of Jack Lundbom’s translation.

²⁵ NASB, KJV 2000 Bible, ESV, NHEV, NAS 1977, AKJS, WE Bible and many others.

great crowds were flocking there, probably in celebration of the crowning of King Jehoiakim in the autumn of 609 BC (7:1–15). But it seems apostasy is so deep-rooted and widespread that intercession on behalf of the people is now futile. Judah’s infatuation with other gods is on the high gear. This verse (27) echoes the language of verse 13 and applies the rejection of Yahweh’s prophetic revelation to Jeremiah’s ministry. It falls within the section containing an oracle proclaiming the divine law and intent pertaining to sacrifice and worship (21–28). It provides a bridge between verses 26 and 28 by explicitly including Jeremiah in the chain of prophetic witness and making his work a clinching proof of Judah’s repudiation of Yahweh on the lines of Jeremiah’s complaint in 6:10. God makes it clear that the people of Israel have missed the mark. They have shown no inclination whatsoever of walking in the way that God commands. They do not obey or incline their ear; they insist of going their own way and paying no attention to the prophets whom God has sent; they stiffen their necks and resolve not to listen.

Meaning and Message

The divine word had been given and proclaimed. It was Jeremiah’s responsibility to declare it. It was part of his understanding and experience that the people might not listen (1:8, 17–18). Prophets before and after him had the same experience (Ezek 2:3–8; 3:4–11). But an audience that had already rejected the covenant would neither hearken nor respond. Verse 27 is not a prediction of Hebrews future conduct, but a statement of their present disobedience. Their determinate rejection of the last prophet before captivity justifies the assertion that they were worse than their fathers. Jones explains that, “The prophet may not intercede further for the people; but must declare their sin and pronounce punishment.”²⁶ Regardless of the central

²⁶ Douglas Rawlinson Jones, *The New Century Bible Commentary: Jeremiah*. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992), 155.

significance of defiance to the divine voice, the people had continuously ignored it, preferring to accept their own advice, supremely self-confident, but moving backward with every assured step forward. This general history of decline had not gone unnoticed; the prophets had been sent to warn Israel of the consequences of its action, but they had been constantly ignored by each generation, so that the nation's backward progress had accelerated to the awful state that existed in Jeremiah's time. Thus, for all Jeremiah's preaching and prompting, he was met by deaf ears and hardened hearts; the passage of time had done its fixing task, so that it seemed to Jeremiah that he addressed a people beyond redemption.

In any case, the words declared by Jeremiah in verse 28 ring with the echo of an epitaph: the people of Judah had become a nation conditioned to disobedience, perverse in their refusal of instruction, and no number of offerings, burnt-offerings, and sacrifices could change the miserable future of Judgment they were shaping for themselves. Longman and Garland are right to assert that, "Juda's refusal to hear is a foregone conclusion (cf. Ezek 3:7; Jer 7:16), leading to dire pronouncement: It is the very nature of this nation (*goy*), the legacy by which they will be remembered, to be obdurate, (cf. Isa 30:1a, 8–9), not receiving correction. So deluded are they by falsehood (verse 4) that truth is gone from the land, cut off from their lips."²⁷ When Jeremiah speaks, it is the voice of God people hear. God did command his children at Sinai to obey his voice, do the commands of the covenant and walk in his way. Unfortunately, when Jeremiah spoke, the people did not obey, walking instead in their own stubborn way, which was evil. They showed Yahweh their backs, not their faces, which was blatant disrespect. The directive to Jeremiah bids him to speak these words to the people. Jeremiah will remain a peculiar treasure to Yahweh by speaking even when people don't listen. He shall continue hearkening to Yahweh's

²⁷ Longman III and Garland, *Jeremiah~Ezekiel*, 169.

voice. But the people, since they are the people they are, will not listen. A paramount message to the audience is that Judah is rejecting truth, they are closing their ears and do not want truth to enter, as Longman III and Garland puts it, ‘Truth has perished. They have rejected Yahweh, the truth and pursued a lie, false gods.’²⁸

Jeremiah 15:16–21

Introduction

Chapter 15:16–21 presents the reader with a prayer of complaint, one of the most soul-stirring confessions. His personal stress level becomes more intense as he voices his mixed feelings of joy and sorrow. But God being who he is, compassionate, caring, and loving, reassures Jeremiah as we shall see in the exposition of the text below.

Translation²⁹

¹⁶Your words were found, and I ate them,

and your word was to me for joy

and for the gladness of my heart,

For your name is called upon me,

Yahweh, God of hosts.

¹⁷I sat not in the happy crowd and acted jolly

because of your hand, all alone I sat

for with indignation you filled me.

¹⁸Why has my pain become continual

²⁸ Longman III, & Garland, *Jeremiah~Ezekiel*, 76.

²⁹ Lundbom, *Jeremiah 1–20*, 739–40. Translation is a reprint of Jack Lundbom’s translation.

and my blow desperate

refusing to be healed?

Will you really be for me as a deceptive stream

waters that are not for sure?

¹⁹Therefore thus said Yahweh:

If you return, then I will let you return

before me you shall stand;

And if you bring forth what is more precious than trash

as my mouth you will be.

They, they will turn to you,

but you will not turn to them.

²⁰And I will make you to this people

a fortified wall of bronze;

They will fight against you

but will not overcome you,

For with you am I

to save you and rescue you,

oracle of Yahweh.

²¹Yes, I will rescue you from the hand of evildoers

and I will redeem you from the grasp of the ruthless.

Notes

15:16 *Your words were found* - נִמְצְאוּ is niphal perfect 3rd common plural which I translate

‘were found’. As for דְּבַרְיֶיךָ K has *dbryk*, “your words”; Q has *dēbārkā*, your word.³⁰ explains that the reading of the *M* is certainly reinforced by the use by Ezekiel 2:8–3:3 of the Phrase “and I ate them; he noted particularly the diction of Ezekiel 3:1, what you find, eat.

for your name is called - Hebrew נִקְרָא is qal imperfect 1st common plural from root word meaning אָרַק to call, call out, to encounter, befall, meet.

15:17 *I sat* - Hebrew יָשַׁבְתִּי is qal perfect 1st common singular of יָשַׁב meaning to dwell, remain, sit, abide. “To sit” is the root idea. And other meanings are derived from this. The subject of the verb may be God, human, animal (Jer. 50:39) or inanimate matter. The word sometimes emphasizes the location of persons.”³¹

מִשְׁחֵקִים-בְּסוּד “in the assembly of happy crowd,” are such gatherings that reminds me of usual circles of men in groups that gather in my rural villages in the evenings to gather news of the day, to tell stories.

15:18 *will you really* - The infinitive absolute הָיִי before תִּהְיֶה “you are becoming” underlines the affirmation of the verb against an assumed denial, you are, are you not.

15:19 *If you return* - תִּשׁוּבֵי־אֵם If you return, the relative pronoun plus verb relative pronoun, verb qal imperfect 3rd feminine singular verb שׁוּב can translated to repent, meaning turn back from evil and return to God.

And if you bring forth what is more precious than what is worthless – From Jeremiah has come forth מִזִּלְלִים (עִשָׂ) in the hipphil stem) some worthless trash (qal participle of זָלַל to be light, worthless) when he should be speaking words of more precious nature (יָקָר costly or precious 1

³⁰ William L. Holladay, *Jeremiah 1: A Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Jeremiah Chapters 1–25* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1986), 458.

³¹ Warren Baker and Eugene Carpenter, *The Complete Word Study Dictionary, Old Testament* (Chattanooga, TN: AMG, 2003), 479–80.

Kings 10:2).

Narrative Analysis

Jeremiah's call begins with a delightful discovery. God's words "were found" (verse 16). This discovery proved so significant to Jeremiah that he immediately internalized it. He tells us that this was an entirely pleasurable experience. Finding and ingesting God's words brought him joy and delight. After his discovery, Jeremiah does not immediately publish his findings. Verse 17 indicates that the prophet holds his tongue. He waits to speak, deepening his thoughtfulness. This period of waiting, where he refrains from celebration, reveals another aspect to prophetic speech. The words take on a difficult weight. Holding his tongue begins to produce a range of emotional responses in Jeremiah. He feels angry, isolated, and wounded. From verse 15, it seems likely that Jeremiah's patient silence includes social torment of some kind. For certain, Jeremiah lashes out at God and accuses him of lying to him. Where previously Jeremiah felt joy at the discovery of God's words, over time the words begin to feel like a dead end: "waters that fail" (verse 18).

The delight Jeremiah felt could be likened to a blue sky with brilliant white clouds. However, these are harbingers to a rain storm. In such a storm, with thunder, darkness, and drenching rain, one quickly loses sight of the lofty clouds that first inspired. And this is exactly where Jeremiah arrives, at bleak anger and wounded confusion. What happens next makes Jeremiah's call to prophetic speech truly amazing. Jeremiah has a choice. God indicates that Jeremiah could offer the world two kinds of speech: worthless speech or precious speech (verse 19). "Worthless" speech might be their natural corruptions, impatience, and hasty words. Worthless speech probably stems from anger and hurt. Worthless speech flows out of the disappointment and isolation Jeremiah feels after the glow of his inspiration fades. The

remarkable thing is that Jeremiah does not choose to proclaim worthless speech to Israel. God gave him a decision, and Jeremiah chose to speak weighty words. Once again, the text does not provide detail about "precious" or "weighty" speech. But some things are implied. Weighty speech does gratify public opinion ("you will not turn to them," verse 19). Weighty speech is strong enough to endure critique ("wall of bronze," verse 20). Weighty speech requires confidence in nothing less than the protection of God.

Meaning and Message

Jeremiah recalls the finding of Yahweh's word on the Temple scroll and his eating of them in verse 16, which symbolized his acceptance of the call to become Yahweh's prophet as Lundbom³² puts it. In Hebrew, the verb *to find* is used in a very general sense for anything obtained without labor or offered without being sought for on the receiver's part as in Ezekiel 3:1. It therefore signifies that Jeremiah's summons to prophetic office had not been expected or sought for by him. This word was joy and delight to him, for he belonged to Yahweh and had been his from the time he was born. Yahweh's word was delectable to the young prophet who now carries the Lord's name by association. He enjoyed the eating of the divine word which expresses the close union between that which is from God and the prophet's own being. From the time God called Jeremiah he abstained from things innocent (verse 17), and that a gravity came over him beyond his years. The prophet thus taught of God sees the sins of the people in a more heinous light, as offences against God.

Yet despite Jeremiah's clear understanding of the cost and consequence of being the mouthpiece of Yahweh to this generation under wrath as expressed in verses 15–17, he still

³² Lundbom, *Jeremiah 1–20*, 747. The call was not accepted when it was issued to the young Jeremiah in 627; it was accepted in 622, or shortly after.

wonders in verse 18 as to why his perpetual pain is unending and his wound incurable. Longman and Garland interpret it that, “The prophet is apparently looking for consolation in the Lord himself, since he is hardly expecting consolation from his surroundings.”³³ Could this be the greatest source of the prophet’s pain, imagining that Yahweh has let him down now? He can bear the reproach and loneliness, but he cannot bear the thought of his God, his refuge, strength, and hope, being like a deceptive, disappointing stream of unreliable waters. Yet once more in verses 19–21, the prophet’s lament receives a surprising divine response from Yahweh. Even though it is a response full of a mingling of comfort and reproof, it is a life-giving rebuke. Three promises are entailed in the rebuke if only Jeremiah repents, he must return. Then Yahweh will let him return to his active service as well as to have the privilege of prophetic intercession and can once again stand before him. Secondly, he will have the extraordinary honor of being Yahweh’s mouth. The common rendering spokesman understates the degree to which Jeremiah will speak God’s words. Thirdly, he must continue in his path of separation from the world, not yielding to it in the least; rather the world will turn to him. Verse 20 restates almost verbatim the promise given to Jeremiah on the day of his calling, a promise that must carry far greater significance for him now that he has firsthand, face-to-face experience with fierce opposition that had also promised him on that day. Yahweh will make him impregnable wall against his adversaries, delivering and rescuing him because he is with him.

Conclusion

Jeremiah gets an identity of being a sufferer, he suffers because he is Yahweh’s faithful prophet among the apostate Israelites and precisely because he dwells among them filled with the

³³ Longman III and Garland, *Jeremiah-Ezekiel*, 245.

word of the Lord. Therefore, he complains that everyone stands against him because of his message. He comes close to accusing God of deceiving him into thinking that his job as a prophet was going to be easier than it has been. Because of this, God calls Jeremiah to repentance for his doubt and promises to strengthen him for the work ahead, a great motivation for Jeremiah. The ministers of the word in this age are often weak and afraid to proclaim God's word boldly, fearing the reprisals they might suffer. God's strength, grace, protection, and mercy are sufficient for their weakness, and his Holy Spirit empowers them to proclaim his powerful word faithfully. Jeremiah is a great exemplar for today's ministers. The word of God itself gave him joy, this kept him going on proclaiming the powerful word of God amid challenges. The discovery of the word was a great thing for him, it was to delightful to hold back. God gives what strengthens his ministers to proclaim his word even in worst conditions.

CHAPTER TWO

THE CHALLENGES AND PERSECUTION THAT JEREMIAH FACED AS A MESSENGER OF YAHWEH: AN EXEGETICAL LOOK AT JEREMIAH 20:1–18; 26:1– 24

Jeremiah 20:1–18

Introduction

The text is about the suffering of the prophet; Jeremiah's incarceration by Pashhur, the principal officer of the temple, for prophesying within its precincts and renewing his predictions against the city. This chapter discusses and brings to the attention of the reader the challenges and sufferings that the proclaimer of Yahweh's word faces in the course of his duty. When the word of Yahweh is proclaimed as Yahweh wants it to be spoken, both in truth and purity, the world turns against it. Jeremiah is one prophet who tasted the bitter part of proclaiming Yahweh's truth as will be explained in the subsections of the chapter below.

Translation¹

¹And Pashhur son of Immer, the priest (he was the chief overseer in the house of Yahweh), heard Jeremiah prophesying these words. ²And Pashhur struck Jeremiah the prophet and put him in the stocks that were in the upper Benjamin Gate in the house of Yahweh. ³And it happened on the next day that Pashhur let Jeremiah out of the stocks, Jeremiah said to him, "Yahweh calls your name not Pashhur, but 'Terror-on-every-side.'"

⁴For thus said Yahweh:

¹ Jack R. Lundbom, *Jeremiah 1–20*, 842–65. Translation is a reprint of Jack Lundbom's translation.

“Look I am making you a terror to yourself and to all your dear friends, for they will fall by the sword of their enemies as your eyes look on! And all Judah I will give into the hand of the king of Babylon, and he will take them captive to Babylon and strike them down with the sword.
⁵And I will give away all the wealth of this city, all its assets and all its treasured possessions; and all the collections of the kings of Judah I will give into the hand of their enemies; and they shall seize them as spoil, take them away and bring them to Babylon. ⁶And you, Pashhur, and all the inhabitants of your house, you shall go into captivity, Babylon you will enter, and there you will die, and there you will be buried, you and all your dear friends to whom you have prophesied by The Lie.”

⁷You enticed me, Yahweh, and I was enticed.

You laid hold of me and you overcame.

I have become a joke all day long

they all make fun of me

⁸For too often I speak, I cry out

violence and destruction, I proclaim

for the word of Yahweh has become for me

reproach and ridicule all day long.

⁹Then I say, I will not mention him,

I will not speak any longer in his name,

But it becomes in my heart like a burning fire

shut up in my bones

I am weary from holding it in

and I cannot overcome.

¹⁰For I hear whispering in the crowd:

‘Terror-on-every-side!

Tell, let us tell on him!’

All my trusted friends watch for my fall:

‘Perhaps he can be enticed, and we will overcome him,

and we will take our revenge on him.’

¹¹But Yahweh is with me like a fearless warrior therefore, my pursuers will stumble and will not overcome. They are greatly ashamed, for they did not succeed; eternal disgrace will not be forgotten! ¹²Yahweh of hosts, who tests the righteous who sees the inner being and the heart let me see your vengeance upon them when to you I have set forth my case.

¹³Sing to Yahweh; Praise Yahweh; For he rescued the life of the needy from the hand of evildoers! ¹⁴Cursed be the day on which I was born, the day my mother bore me; Let it not be blessed. ¹⁵Cursed be the man who brought my father the news ‘A male child is born to you’ making him very glad; ¹⁶Let that man be like the cities which Yahweh overthrew and did not pity; Let him hear a cry in the morning and an alarm at noontime; ¹⁷Let that day be like; because he did not kill me in the womb so my mother would have been my grave and her womb eternally pregnant. ¹⁸Why this: from the womb I came forth to see hard times and sorrow and my days end in shame?

Notes

20:1 Pashhur son of Immer traces his genealogy to family of priests dated from the time of David (1 Chr 24:14), and its descendants were among the survivors of the Babylonian Exile (Chr 9:10–12). Pashhur means liberation and it is the name of four Israelites.

The definite article ה attached to פִּהֵן acts as a demonstrative pronoun² helping us to know that Pashhur was a renown priest at the temple, and not just an ordinary person.

וַיִּשְׁמַע is Verb qal imperfect 3rd masculine singular with a prefixed waw consecutive that makes it past instead of future tense, from root word שָׁמַע to hear, listen, or to obey. As it is used here, Pashhur heard Jeremiah speak, what I am not sure of is whether Pashhur heard Jeremiah intelligently with implication of attention and obedience.

נִבֵּא is niph'al participle of the root word אָבַן to prophesy, to speak under divine influence as a prophet. Craigie, Kelly, and Drinkard, explain that, “the word may be either a perfect or a participle. The point is not that Pashhur necessarily heard Jeremiah proclaiming the oracle, but that he heard the event had taken place.”³ I prefer to translate as participle. Gesenius explains that, “the Hebrews used the passive forms niph'al and hithphael in this verb because they regarded the prophets as moved and affected by a higher influence, rather than by own powers.”⁴

20:2 There is no compelling reason to translate וַיִּכֶּה (hiphil imperfect 3rd masculine singular) from the root word הִכָּה with “caused the direct object to strike” (causative) rather than “struck” (active). Longman and Garland explain that, “both being equally feasible on lexical and grammatical grounds but the latter reflecting the more common usage and, in the context, the more natural.”⁵

Holladay admits that the meaning of the word הַמִּהְפֹּכֶת translated here “stocks” is uncertain.⁶ It occurs only in this and the following verses in 29:26, and in 2 Chr 16:10 in the

² Gesenius, *Hebrew Grammar*, 110.

³ Craigie, Kelly, and Drinkard, *World Book Commentary: Jeremiah 1–25* (Dallas: Word, 1991), 267.

⁴ William Gesenius. *Hebrew and English Lexicon*. (Andover, 1824), 638.

⁵ Longman III and Garland, *Jeremiah~Ezekiel*, 283.

⁶ Holladay, *Jeremiah 1*, 542.

phrase “house of stocks” for a sort of place of confinement.

20:3 Hebrew **מִסְבִּיב מִגּוֹר**: was “a favorite expression of Jeremiah,”⁷ Lundbom states.

Gesenius defines **מִגּוֹר** as fear, terror. Terror-on-every-side is the new name for Pashhur. *Magor-missabib* is a phrase normally translated terror on every side.

20:7 Hebrew **פְּתִיתָנָה** is a verb piel perfect 2nd masculine singular from root word **התנפ** which in the piel stem mean to persuade any one, deceive, delude. I go with persuade to avoid deceive and entice which brings negative connotation with them. God does not deceive; his initiatives are ever true and for a good purpose.

20:10 **שְׁלוֹמִי אֲנֹשׁ** is a Hebrew phrase translated my trusted friends literally means “man of my peace”

20:11 Hebrew **גִּבּוֹר** means powerful with implications of warrior. In 14:9 the people compare the Lord to an impotent **גִּבּוֹר** but in this text Jeremiah understand him a violent and terrifying **גִּבּוֹר**.

20:14 **הִצִּיל** is a verb hiphil perfect 3rd masculine singular from the root word **לצנ** with the infinitive definition to snatch away, deliver, rescue, save, strip. “The phrase **לצנ** hiphil plus **מִן** ‘save from the hand of,’ though common in the OT, appears in 15:21, ‘save from the hand of the wicked,’ part of another confessional passage.”⁸

Narrative Analysis

The breaking of the bottle in chapter 19 had been done so solemnly before the witnesses of such high position, and its meaning had been so unmistakably proclaimed in the temple, that those in authority could endure such proclamations no longer. Jeremiah acted out the threatened

⁷ Lundbom, *Jeremiah, 1–20*, 847.

⁸ Holladay, *Jeremiah 1*, 558.

punishment of Judah in a dramatized parable. He prefaced the symbolic action with a scathing denunciation of his people's heinous crimes. Jeremiah proclaims God's judgment against his people by breaking a piece of pottery near the valley where the children had been sacrificed to pagan gods. Provoked therefore to anger by the sight of the listening crowds, Pashhur, the deputy high-priest, who took notice of Jeremiah's oracles, heard (20:1) without truly hearing (19:5; 7:27), caused Jeremiah who had prophesied that Yahweh is against the city, and that it will suffer severe, even irrevocable, consequences for its infidelity (19:14–15), to be arrested, inflicted upon him the legal forty stripes save one, and made him pass a night in the stocks, exposed to the jeers of the scoffers, at the most public gate of the temple (20:2). Pashhur will not tolerate such words; he cannot endure such a frontal attack on the nation and its beloved institutions. As the guardian of sacred systems, Pashhur acts against the untamed Jeremiah in accordance to the Deuteronomic law (25:2–3) which gives him the mandate of maintaining order by thwarting any attempt to violate existing systems. Reminiscent of other trustees of the empire including Amaziah, the priest at Bethel, who attempted to control disturbing Amos (Amos 7:10–17), Pashhur seeks to silence Jeremiah's anti-establishment rhetoric. Pashhur's attempt terribly fails. Jeremiah's enemies cannot eliminate or silence Yahweh's word. The prowess of the nation's power people cannot frustrate Yahweh's sovereign purpose. One can imprison Jeremiah but not the word of God. When released from his confinement, Jeremiah delivers a scathing oracle against Pashhur and the nation (20:3–6). He renames Pashhur "Terror-on-every-side" (20:3) and then explains the meaning of his symbolic action. Yahweh is making Pashhur a "terror" to himself and his priestly associates. Moreover, all Judah will suffer the terror of the king of Babylon, the foreign ruler will plunder and pillage the land of Judah (20:4–5). In the end Pashhur and his fellow priests will find themselves in Babylon where Pashhur will eventually die (20:6).

Verses 7–18 is about Jeremiah’s final confessions, containing an individual lament (20:7–13) which begins with an address “O Yahweh” (20:7a) and then sets forth the complaint itself (7b–10). A brief petition is present in verse 12b where the prophet pleads for retribution upon his foes. Unlike other confessions of Jeremiah, this lament includes both word of confidence (20:11–12a) and a concluding expression of praise (20:13). The second passage (20:14–18) is a curse that is like Job 3. While Jeremiah expresses some hope for vindication in the first lament (20:7–13), he plunges into the depth of despair in the second. In this passage Jeremiah’s hopelessness reaches its most critical level. He curses both the day of his birth (20:14) and the bearer of the news of his birth (20:15–17). As a target of terrible abuse, the prophet bemoans his toil and sorrow (20:18).

Meaning and Message

The text is the sermon of Jeremiah, spoken to a bigger audience that happens to be in a special occasion. It is brief and to the point. Yahweh will bring on Jerusalem and its surrounding cities unwanted evil. The people are resolute in their disobedience and will not heed Yahweh’s word. In 20:1–2, there is no indication that Pashhur⁹, a priest, was among the priestly elders who accompanied Jeremiah to Ben Hinnom; rather he reacted when he heard Jeremiah’s temple pronouncement (19:14–15) taking on himself to beat and punish Jeremiah. Longman and Garland point out that, “It is fitting that here, the first time the phrase occurs, it is in the clause, ‘he had Jeremiah the prophet beaten.’ The pattern for prophetic ministry is predictable: When prophets prophesy blessing, people bless them; when they prophesy cursing, people curse them.

⁹ Pashhur the son of Immer, the father of the Gedaliah mentioned in Jeremiah 38:1, he was the head of the sixteenth reign of priests (1 Chr, 24:14). This Pashhur is to be distinguished from Pashhur son of Malkijah in 21:1; 38:1, as well as from Pashhur found in Ezra 2:38. The name was common in the ancient Israel according to biblical and inscripational evidence.

When they prophesy happiness, people are happy with them; when they prophesy smiting people smite them.”¹⁰ It is worth noting that had Jeremiah prophesied smooth things and given utterance to soothe the people in their sin, he would have been held in honor and esteem.

Jeremiah is described as prophesying in the temple, where Yahweh sends him to address people and places with the word of destruction (19:3–9). He commands the attention, respect and cooperation of the priests and other leaders (19:1). In such instances we may detect a figure who is both priest and prophet (1:1–2), who comes and goes at the divine command (13:1, 4), and who therefore opposes priest-prophets who are false because they oppose him (20:1,6; 29:24–32). Carrol admits that, “The movement at the divine command motif makes this strand of the tradition present Jeremiah as a figure in the Elijah mold of prophets.”¹¹ He adds that, “He is one who comes and goes, but only when the deity speaks, who delivers the commanded word and then returns to the point of departure.”

Verse 3 records the change of name Jeremiah gives Pashhur. The change is a reversal from positive to negative. Holladay has a convincing word play in the name.¹² He suggests Pashhur is by assonance taken to be from two Aramaic words, **פּוֹשֵׁט**, a participle of **פּוֹשַׁע** meaning “fruitful,” and **סְחָוֹר**, “round about.” The word play then would be a reversal from fruitful all around to terror/destruction on every side. The scathing word Jeremiah delivers to Pashhur cannot be taken merely as an emotional outburst or the product of human frustration. It is a specifically worded prophecy that goes beyond Pashhur himself, in complete harmony with dozens of other judgment oracles throughout the book both individual and corporate. Verse 4–5 explicate the name change

¹⁰ Longman III and Garland, *Jeremiah~Ezekiel*, 281

¹¹ Robert P. Carrol, *Jeremiah: A Commentary* (London: SCM Press, 1986), 392.

¹² William Holladay, “The Covenant with the Patriarchs overturned: Jeremiah’s Intention in Terror on Every Side (Jer 20:1–6)” *JBL* 91 (1972): 305–20.

of verse 3. Pashhur will become terror or a symbol of terror not just to himself but to all those who are around him. It will be death on his face; his family and friends will die as he watches. He will witness as the sword of the enemy fells his friends. The mention of king of Babylon in verse 4 is an explicit reference to the place of exile. Prior to this, the threat has been an unnamed foe from the north (1:13). Pashhur will also witness as the wealth and treasures are carried off by their enemy. Their wealth will be gone, and poverty will set in. In verse 6, Jeremiah now calls down curses upon Pashhur and his house, a clear violation of the law in Exod 22:28, where it says no one should curse the priest. But it is also apparent that Pashhur is no longer a true priest. Therefore, he will die and will be dishonored by being buried in a foreign soil. Lundbom observes that, “the last words of Jeremiah were the worst. If anything will enrage the prophet, then it will be what Jeremiah says about him having prophesied by The Lie. These words will go to the heart of the man, for they imply that Pashhur is not the man of God he and other people think him to be.”¹³

In verses 7–18, one can imagine how difficult it was for Jeremiah to proclaim the powerful word of God. The prophet ended his long proclamation with a bitter cry of grief, bordering on despair. As he pondered on his prophetic office, he grieved over the astounding impenitence of his listeners, the people, and the leaders of Judah. His grief welled up out of a profound love for souls. Jeremiah grieved because all his preaching had failed to produce repentance or any kind of turning toward the Lord. He knew the Lord would keep his word and destroy the city. Because the people of Jerusalem had turned away, nothing could stop its destruction. He learned with sorrow that God’s law does work wrath. It drives the impenitent into even more ferocious hatred for God. He also learned that for some the promise becomes the smell of death. In his grief,

¹³ Lundbom, *Jeremiah 1–20*, 850.

Jeremiah lashed out to God, complaining that not one word from his proclamation had been fulfilled, but continued to preach the word because there was no way he could stop.

As Jeremiah continued to grapple with grief, he grasped at the promise God had made to him. All his friends deserted him and every word he proclaimed was under closest scrutiny. But deep down he knew he was not alone. The Lord was his ever-present help; he would not allow Jeremiah to be overcome, because overcoming Jeremiah meant overcoming his word and his promises, but nothing overcomes God. Momentarily, the prophet's spirit lifted, he knew he was right with the Lord. A hymn of praise sprang to his lips as he exulted in the rescue the Lord would bring. But suddenly the joyous moment gave way to deep despondency, the storm of grief came again leaving Jeremiah cursing the day he was conceived and born. The Lord remained silent allowing the prophet's grief to pass. He knew his prophet rested upon a solid rock of his promises. He knew that Jeremiah would stand strong in the end and continue with the work to which the Lord had called him.

Conclusion

Anyone considering going into ministry would do well to read the Jeremiah chapter 20. A perusal of this text will dispel any relaxing notions one might have about what it means to accept a call into ministry, what it means to be God's messenger. Unique among the prophets, Jeremiah shares not only his message, but also details of his experience as a messenger. Jeremiah complains bitterly about the opposition he has experienced in response to the dire warnings he proclaimed to the people. His predictions of destruction stand unfulfilled, giving his enemies grounds to beat him, imprison him, and plot against his life. Jeremiah calls on the Lord for help and praises his name, but he cannot help expressing the anger and despair he genuinely feels. In all this the prophet never gave up. What motivates Jeremiah to continue proclaiming the word of

God in this text is not the positive results of his proclamation because there are no marks of success for his proclamation. Jeremiah had spoken not smooth words, he had not soothed the people, but was hard on them telling them that Yahweh will bring punishment. The wrath of the impenitent leaders fell on him. However, the comfort that what he said was the word of God, and that God was with him and for him in the face of opposition and persecution, moved, motivated, and strengthened him to continue the proclamation.

Jeremiah 26:1–24

Introduction

The passage gives a glimpse into legal proceedings and brings before us significant groups of people; the prosecutors, priests and the prophets, the judges, princes, elders, and the accused Jeremiah. Procedures takes place at the gate of Lord's house and there is prosecution and defense. The prosecution demands the death penalty of Jeremiah who conducts his own defense and because the Lord was with him, he gets acquitted. Much of what followed is discussed in the narrative analysis and the rest of the explanation of the text.

Translation¹⁴

¹In the beginning of the reign of Jehoiakim son of Josiah, King of Judah, this word came from Yahweh: ²Thus says Yahweh: Stand in the courtyard of the house of Yahweh, and you shall speak concerning all the cities of Judah who come to worship in the house of Yahweh all the words that I command you to speak to them. Do not hold back a word. ³Perhaps they will listen and return each person from his evil way and I will repent concerning the evil that I am planning

¹⁴ Jack R. Lundbom, *Jeremiah 21–36, A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* AB (New York: Doubleday, 1999), 281–83. Translation is a reprint of Jack Lundbom's translation.

to do to them because of their evil deeds. ⁴And you shall say to them: Thus says Yahweh: If you do not listen to me to walk in my law that I have set before you, ⁵to listen to the words of my servant the prophets whom I am sending to you, constantly I am sending, although you have not listened, ⁶then I will make this house like Shiloh, and this city I will make a swearword for all the nations of the earth. ⁷And the priests and the prophets and all the people heard Jeremiah speaking these words in the house Yahweh. ⁸And it happened as Jeremiah finished speaking everything that Yahweh commanded him to speak to all the people, the priests and the prophets and all the people then laid hold of him, saying, ‘You shall surely die! ⁹Why have you prophesied in the name of Yahweh saying, Like Shiloh this house shall become, and this city will dry up without inhabitant?’ And all the people crowded up to Jeremiah in the house of Yahweh. ¹⁰And the princes of Judah heard these things and came up from the house of the king to house of Yahweh, and they sat at the entrance of the New Gate of the house of Yahweh. ¹¹And the priests and the prophets said to the princes and to all the people: ‘A death sentence for this man! because he has prophesied to this city according to what you have heard with your ears.’ ¹²Then Jeremiah said to all the princes and to all people: Yahweh sent me to prophesy to this house and to this city all the words that you have heard. ¹³And now, make good your ways and your doings, and obey the voice of Yahweh, your God; and then Yahweh will repent concerning the evil that he has pronounced against you. ¹⁴But as for me, Look I am in your hands. Do to me as seems good and right in your eyes. ¹⁵Only know for sure that if you put me to death, then you will bring innocent blood upon yourselves and to this city and to its inhabitants; for in truth, Yahweh sent me against you to speak in your ears all these words.

¹⁶Then the princes and all the people said to the priests and to the prophets, ‘There should be no sentence of death for this man, because in the name of Yahweh our God he has spoken to

us.’¹⁷ Then some of the elders of the land stood up and spoke to the entire assembly of the people:

¹⁸Micah, the Morashtite, prophesied in the days of Hezekiah, king of Judah; and he spoke to all the people of Judah saying: Thus, said Yahweh of hosts: Zion shall be plowed a field and Jerusalem shall become ruins, and the mountain of the house high places of a forest.¹⁹ Did Hezekiah, king of Judah, and all Judah indeed put him to death? Did he not fear Yahweh and soften the face of Yahweh? And did not Yahweh repent of the evil that he spoke against them? But we are committing great evil against ourselves!²⁰ Also, a man prophesied mightily in the name of Yahweh, Uriah son of Shemaiah; From Kiriath-jearim. And he prophesied against this city and against this land in words like those of Jeremiah.²¹ And King Jehoiakim heard his words, also all his officers and all the princes, and the king sought to put him to death. But Uriah heard of it, and he was afraid and fled, and came to Egypt.²² So King Jehoiakim sent men to Egypt, Elnathan son of Achbor and men with him to Egypt.²³ And they fetched Uriah from Egypt and brought him to King Jehoiakim, and he struck him down with the sword and cast his dead body into graves of the common people.²⁴ But the hand of Ahikam son of Shaphan was with Jeremiah, so as not to give him into the hand of the people to put him to death.

Notes

26:2 **דַּבֵּר תִּגְרַע־אֵל** *do not omit a word*, the Lord is warning Jeremiah not to in any way weaken the message. The expression occurs in Deuteronomy 4:2 as **מִמְּנוֹ תִּגְרַעוּ וְלֹא** (do not hold back from it) which Weinfeld lists among idioms of Deuteronomy that may have influenced Jeremiah.¹⁵ Lundbom explains that “Yahweh issues this warning because Jeremiah may have

¹⁵ Moshe Weinfeld, *Deuteronomy and the Deuteronomistic School* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972), 360n14.

been tempted not to speak the divine word in full.”¹⁶

26:4 *to walk in my law* Hebrew **לְלַכְתּוֹתַי לְלֶכְתָּ** is an idiom appearing also in 32:23; 44:10, 23; 2 Kings 10:31; and Psalms 78:10, where people are faulted for not walking in the Lord’s Torah.

20:8 The infinitive absolute **תָּמוּת מוֹת** *you shall surely die* is used here for emphasis to remind Jeremiah about the formula of certain crimes in Covenant Code.¹⁷

26:13 Hebrew **וַיִּנָּחֵם** is niphil imperfect 3rd masculine singular from root word **נָחַם** in regard to others¹⁸ it means to be sorry to pity, to conform, to repent. In regard to one’s own doings, it means to grieve, to repent, to cancel a previous decision. The usage in Hosea 13:14 helps because it shows the compassion God would not have toward sinful Ephraim. The implication here is that God will not punish his people when they turn and return to him. This is a God who repents and changes his mind from wrath to compassion.

26:15 **יְהוָה שְׁלָחַנִי בְּאֵמֶת** in truth, the Lord has sent me. A reaffirmation of what Jeremiah stated at the beginning of his testimony, only with an added “in truth.” The matter now is judging between true and false prophecy, and ball is in the hands of the hearers to be judges and judge truly.

26:17 **מִזְקְנֵי** of the elders. The elders are men of age rather than status, mature in years, whose words carry authority. Hebrew *Zaqan* is an old man as Koehler and Baumgartner puts it, one wearing a beard, all fully grown, of legally competent citizens of society¹⁹. As it is used in this verse, it is referring to the elders who are able to put things historical perspective and here they are people who remember what had happened in the past.

¹⁶ Jack R. Lundbom, *Jeremiah 21–36*, 287.

¹⁷ *GKC* §45a

¹⁸ Gesenius, *Hebrew and English Lexicon*, 664.

¹⁹ Ludwig Koehler & Walter Baumgartner, *The Hebrew & Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*, Study Edition, vol 1, ed. M. E. J. Richardson (Leiden: Brill, 2001), 278–79.

26:19 *וַיִּחַלֵּף יְהוָה פָּנָיו־אֵת וַיִּחַלֵּף* and *soften the face of Yahweh* is a stark anthropomorphism meaning to mollify, appease, or supplicate Yahweh.

26:22 *Elnathan son of Achbor*. This individual sent to fetch Uriah is the same person who was sitting among Jeremiah's friends in the palace library when Baruch's reading of Jeremiah's scroll in 604 B.C.

Narrative Analysis

This chapter is a narrative reporting a dramatic preaching event in the life of Jeremiah, followed by a trial, to which has been added a report of another prophet who preached the same judgment as Jeremiah but whose life was an exchange for truth (verses 20–23). The narrative begins by dating the event in the beginning of Jehoiakim's reign (v 1) and ends by stating how Jeremiah survived this crisis because of protection received from Ahikam son of Shaphan (v 24). God instructs Jeremiah to enter the temple and address those who come to worship (26:2). Should the hearers turn from their evil, they can still forestall the coming disaster (26:3). Notwithstanding this opportunity, the sermon itself (26:4–6) is cast in the negative: the temple and the city face a grim future if the community continues its defiant posture. Disobedience to the prophetic message holds grave consequences: Yahweh will "make this house like Shiloh," and Jerusalem will become "a curse for all the nations of the earth." The remainder of the chapter elaborates the charges brought against Jeremiah (26:7–11), as well as his self-defense (26:12–15), corroboration (26:16–23), and eventual acquittal (26:24). When Jeremiah finishes his sermon, the priests, prophets, and people bring charges against him. The opponents of Jeremiah evidently interpret his message as a frontal assault on the national-cultic state and its conception of reality. To thwart his subversive words, they sentence him to death. Jeremiah appreciates the gravity of his accusers' charges and defends himself before them. He does so by testifying that

his words are not his own but God's (26:12). If his sentence is commuted, the city will be granted yet another reprieve (26:13). But if he is put to death, his executioners will bring bloodguilt upon the nation (26:14–15).

Unexpected turn of event is explicit in 26:16–23. The court officials deciding the case reverse the decision of the temple priests and prophets in verse 16. They appeal to written prophecy to show that Jeremiah's is entirely tenable, as compared to the prophesy of Micah whom Hezekiah never put to death for the fear of the Lord, repented and God spared Jerusalem. Even though Uriah was killed by Jehoiakim's henchmen, his oracles add weight to Jeremiah's defense. In effect, textual authority, that is, written prophecy, and historical precedence (26:20–23) vindicate Jeremiah. The court proceedings, however, are not yet finalized, some parties are still seeking to take Jeremiah's life. Ahikam son of Shaphan (26:24) made sure that the innocent blood of Jeremiah did not shed.

Meaning and Message

At first glance chapter 26 appears to continue the saga of Jeremiah's rejection and persecution. Jeremiah proclaims God's message and he encounters the usual adversity. In verses 1–11 is the prophecy that evoked the animosity of the leaders and the people. The provocation was too high, how can Jeremiah compare the house of Yahweh to the ruined and uninhabited Shiloh? Blank states that, "he spoke these thoughts at the very gate of the temple in the ears of a worshipful gathering, confident by reason of their piety. That was a statement that the accused Jeremiah had to withdraw or defend."²⁰ The leaders of the nation arrest him and demands his execution. Therefore, the superficial message of chapter 26 is that Jeremiah nearly died because

²⁰ Sheldon H. Blank *Jeremiah: Man and Prophet* (Cincinnati: Hebrew Union College, 1961), 16.

of his prophesying Yahweh's message. There is little new here, except that the stakes for the nation and the prophet increase. Then when all looks hopeless for Jeremiah and Judah, the tide changes and the seeds of hope take root. The narrative begins to hint at a possibility of a new beginning for a community whose old world is in the verge of ending. The following are the hints of better times for the people of God: Firstly, although Jeremiah suffers unjustly, his life is spared, and his sentence of death is commuted as Davidson puts it "Jeremiah survived; neither heeded like Micah nor martyred like Uriah, he survived to be ignored."²¹ As a result, the voice of God is not silenced. Secondly, with Jeremiah's deliverance, the community is extricated from bloodguilt and the resultant retribution. Thirdly, is the emergence of faithful supporters of Jeremiah among the royal officials and from the community elders (26:24). The fourth hint of better life for the community is finding some who entertain the thought that Jeremiah might be proclaiming the truth, despite the disturbing character of his message. Lastly, Jeremiah is vindicated not only by faithful supporters but also by a prophetic text.

Jeremiah is certain that the old arrangements must give way before new ones emerge, which brings overtures of both hope and suffering. It is evident that the convergence of hope and hardship crystallizes in the prophetic identity. The story presents Jeremiah as a suffering servant whose affliction is inseparably related to the people he represents as well as to the God who sends him.

Conclusion

Jeremiah 26 is all about the prophet's trial and deliverance. It teaches the reader that bold declaration of the word of the Lord comes with its consequences. God sends Jeremiah to warn

²¹ Robert Davidson, *Jeremiah*, vol. 2, Daily Bible Study Series (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1985), 52.

the people about the destruction of Jerusalem and its temple due to their sin. If they confess their sin, God will forgive them. For Jeremiah's faithful proclamation, he is arrested and tried for treason. Hard hearts resist every overture of mercy from God and ignore all his warnings of impending judgment. God's heart longs to forgive sinners, even though they resist his word and murder his prophet. Even though it is a tough task in the part of the prophet, a proclaimer of the truth has a duty and the duty is declare the whole truth, as Jeremiah is commanded to omit not a word from the divine message even if the word he was to proclaim would lead him in trouble. To preach as Jeremiah did takes courage and it must be that courage that fears not death. Also featuring prominently in the text is that God provides advocates when his servant is on trial. Ahikam proves himself to be a true friend of Jeremiah by standing with him in times of danger. God provides him with courage and dared all the perils that could come along it. God is able to bring timely help to his own people when they remain faithful to his word and are proclaiming it in truth and purity. Faithful proclamation of God's word often brings serious and fatal opposition, but God rescues the proclaimers of his word from physical harm, but not only that, he rescues from eternal condemnation through Jesus Christ. Something different is happening in this text, what motivates Jeremiah comes from outside him. First, his rescue from death becomes a great motivation to continue the proclamation of God's word. Second is the rise of faithful supporters among the royal officials and the people. Third is the written prophecy about the rescue of Micah. These three encouragements give Jeremiah the power and strength to continue proclaiming the word of God in the middle of fierce opposition.

CHAPTER THREE

JEREMIAH VERSUS FALSE PROPHETS AND THEIR POPULARITY: AN EXEGETICAL LOOK AT JEREMIAH 14:13–18; 23:9–32; 28:1–17

Overview

The aim of this chapter is to examine the collection of oracles against the prophets in Jeremiah 14:13–18, 23:9–32, and 28:1–17. The questions to which answers will be sought are: Who were the prophets opposing Jeremiah, and why are they called false prophets? What were the reasons for the conflict, and what criteria are applied to judge the opponents? It is clear in these texts that, opposing prophets were part of the power structures in Jerusalem and significant contributors to the moral depravity in Judah. We are dealing with a Jerusalem-based prophetic group close to the power base in Jerusalem. They are blamed for transgressions similar to those committed by the kings of Judah and were therefore as guilty as everyone else in violating the covenant stipulations. Their deception of the people, however, extended further in that they falsely prophesied under the pretense of speaking on behalf of Yahweh. The people of Judah and its leaders, because of Yahweh's punishment, would be exiled to Babylonia.

Jeremiah 14:13–18

Introduction

The influence of the false prophets seems great. They are persuade the people that they would not experience sword and famine but would enjoy enduring peace. They are painting too optimistic picture of the future, making Jeremiah to present a plea before the Lord. Unfortunate for the prophets, the Lord puts it clear that he did not send them. They are just a bunch of

deceivers who will one day meet the wrath of God.

Translation¹

¹³Then I said: ‘Ah, Lord Yahweh, look, the prophets are saying to them, “You shall not see sword, and famine shall not come to you; but I will give you true peace in this place.”’ ¹⁴And Yahweh said to me: ‘A lie the prophets are prophesying in my name. I did not send them, and I did not command them, and I did not speak to them. A lying vision, and a worthless divination, and a deceit of their mind they are prophesying away to you.’ ¹⁵Therefore thus said Yahweh concerning the prophets who are prophesying in my name when I, I did not send them, and those who are saying: ‘Sword and famine shall not come in this land’: By sword and by famine those prophets shall be finished. ¹⁶And the people to whom they are prophesying shall be thrown into the streets of Jerusalem because of the famine and the sword, with none to bury them, they, their wives, and their sons and their daughters, for I will pour out upon them their wickedness. ¹⁷And you shall say to them this word: Let my eyes run down with tears night and day, and let them not stop. For a major shatter has been shattered, my dear virgin people a most incurable stroke. ¹⁸If I went out to the field, then look! Those slain by sword; And if I entered the city then look! The diseases of famine; For also prophet also priest wander to a land that they do not know.

Notes

14:13 NRSV translation of אמת שלום as *lasting peace*. As Lundbom explains, a few MSS add “and” which produces a hendiadys: peace and truth.²

False vision שקר תזון The word תזון is word that signifies the direct, specific

¹ Lundbom, *Jeremiah 1–20*, 703–10.

² Lundbom, *Jeremiah 1–20*, 707

communication between God and the people through the prophetic office.³ Here it is used in reference to the message of false prophets.

14:14 Hebrew **רִשְׁקָה** is emphatic. It is all falsehood and lies the prophets of Jerusalem proclaim in Yahweh's name. Longman and Garland state that "this makes their sin all more grave, since they are guilty of misrepresenting the Lord."⁴

they are prophesying away to you. The hithpael **קִתְּנַבְּאִים** means 'behave as a prophet,' originally referring to the ecstatic state of those engaged in prophecy, whether on behalf of God or Baal.

to you. Hebrew **לָהֶם**. A number of MSS have *lāhem* (to them), which was adopted by NEB but none of the other modern English Versions.

Narrative Analysis

These verses of chapter 14 starting from verse 10 consist of two oracles of judgment (vv 10, 15–16) in the middle of which is a dialogue between Yahweh and the prophet (vv 11–14), which is in the middle of chapters 13:1–15:21, a section made up of prose and poetic materials that depicts a mournful prophet and people, and more intriguingly, a grief-stricken God who participates in their distress. It is now Jeremiah's turn to voice his lament (14:13) and God is no less sympathetic to his plea (14:14–16). Jeremiah shifts from Israel to the false prophets. They have deceived the people by prophesying falsehood. They have been promising peace when disaster was looming.

The threefold use of the first person (I did not send them, I did not command them, and I did not speak them) with the negative underscores the divine assertion that the prophets' message

³ WE, 325 no. 2377

⁴ Longman III and Garland, *Jeremiah ~ Ezekiel*, 233.

of peace is fake and was not authorized by God. What the prophets are prophesying are deceit and worthless divination and they, the prophets will meet the fate that they deny. They along with many people in Jerusalem, will surely die by the sword and famine without honorable burials (14:14–17). In verses 17–18, the prose turns to poetry as God continues to respond to Jeremiah’s lament. In utter reversal of the fake prophets’ message of peace, God presents a realistic picture: war ravaging the land. God’s virgin daughter suffers a crushing blow that causes grievous wound (14:17). Wherever God looks, God sees sick and wounded people, City and countryside are full of the dead. The sword and siege have done their work; they have produce starvation, confusion, and defeat. The people’s plight is the source of great sadness (14:17)

Meaning and Message

In the beginning of this text, Jeremiah responds to the Lord, saying that other prophets are prophesying true peace. The Lord answers, saying that such are prophesying falsehood in his name. He has not sent them, he has not spoken to them. “Their lying visions and worthless divinations are a deceit permeating all the ranting and ravaging they are doing to Jeremiah and to everyone else.”⁵ Keil and Delitzsch state that, “Deceit of their heart is not self-deceit, but deceit which their heart has devised.”⁶ But the people who listen to these deceitful prophets and blocking their ears from the truth, are to perish by sword and famine and to lie unburied in the streets of Jerusalem. Keil and Delitzsch adds that, “They are not therefore held excused because the false prophets told them lies, lies that flattered their sinful passions, and have not been willing to hear or take to heart the word of the true prophets, who preached repentance and return

⁵ Lundbom, *Jeremiah 1–20*, 710.

⁶ C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch. *Jeremiah, Lamentations*, 250.

to God.”⁷ It is clear from the text that God denies the validity of the false prophets’ words of hope through two triads: “I did not send, command, or speak to them,” and a lying vision and divination.” Huey states that, “God agreed with Jeremiah that the prophets were leading the people astray by their reassuring words. However, he had not appointed them or spoken to them. They were deceiving the people by various means.”⁸ Because the people had listened to falsehood of the prophets, the Lord emphasized the coming destruction by singing through the prophet a funeral dirge before the funeral itself even occurred. He showed his people his deep grief; he looked, he saw death. Those who tried to escape to the countryside lay dead by the sword of their pursuers. Those who stayed behind the safety of fortified walls died from starvation. The false prophets were no more; they were either dead or carried off into exile. The priests who failed in their duty to test and judge false doctrine share the fate of the false prophets. The outcome can never be any different when the nation or individual surrenders the word for lies. The best thing to do is to surrender the lies for the word of God.

Conclusion

Jeremiah expresses his frustration over false prophets who tell the people that peace lies ahead, though Jeremiah has warned them destruction is coming. The primary problem of Israel in Jeremiah’s day that sealed their destruction was their declaration that they are safe, and never bothered to listen to the proclamations of Jeremiah. False preaching preaches prosperity and happiness to stubborn sinners. True preaching calls stubborn sinners to repentance and announces the future coming judgment if they remain stubborn sinners. People need to know and

⁷ Keil & Delitzsch, *Jeremiah, Lamentations*, 250.

⁸ F. B. Huey, Jr. *Jeremiah, Lamentations: The New American Commentary*. (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1993), 154.

acknowledge they are sinners, condemned by God's law. Then, crushed by the law, the repentant sinner is ready for the message of hope, comfort, and the healing word of God that grant abiding peace.

Jeremiah 23:9–32

Introduction

Jeremiah is at odds with the other prophets of his day, whom he regarded as false prophets, and he never ceased denouncing them. The sayings collected here concentrate on the problem of false prophecy and provide a good picture of why Jeremiah was opposed to them. This text is going to tell us how to recognize the false prophets; their apostasy reveals them, they also speak unauthorized words from their heart, as they indulge in popular wishes, always foretelling peace even if the days are evil. Another key thing to be analyzed is their dependence on dreams which have nothing in common with the word of God.

Translation⁹

⁹To the prophets:

My heart is broken within me,

all my bones waver;

I have become like a drunken man

and like a mighty man whom wine has overcome,

before Yahweh,

and before of his holy words.

⁹ Jack R. Lundbom, *Jeremiah 21–36, A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary AB* (New York: Doubleday, 1999), 178–203. Translation is a reprint of Jack Lundbom's translation.

¹⁰Indeed of adulterers

the land is full!

Indeed before the curse the land mourns

pastures of the wild are dried up

Yes, their course has become evil

and their might is not right.

¹¹Indeed even prophet

even priest, they are polluted!

Even in my house

I have found their evil,

oracle of Yahweh.

¹²Therefore their way shall become to them

like slippery ground in thick darkness;

they shall be pushed and fall upon it.

Indeed I will bring evil upon them

in the year of reckoning,

oracle of Yahweh.

¹³Now in the prophets of Samaria

I have seen a foolish thing:

They prophesied away by Baal

and led my people Israel astray.

¹⁴But in the prophets of Jerusalem

I have seen a horrible thing:
Committing adultery and walking by the lie;
they even strengthened the hands of evildoers
so that no person turned from his evil.

All of them have become to me like Sodom
and her inhabitants like Gomorrah.

¹⁵Therefore thus says Yahweh of hosts concerning the prophets:

Look I will feed them wormwood
and will make them drink poisoned water,
Because from the prophets of Jerusalem,
pollution has gone forth to all the land.

¹⁶Thus says Yahweh of hosts:

Do not listen to the words of the prophets who prophesy to you; they make you nothing; a vision of their own heart they speak, not from the mouth of Yahweh, ¹⁷continually saying to those who spurn me, 'Yahweh has spoken, "It will be well for you"'; and to everyone who walks in the stubbornness of his heart they say, 'Evil will not come upon you.'

¹⁸For who has stood in the council of Yahweh?

then let him see and let him hear his word!

who has hearkened to my word and heard?

¹⁹Look! the tempest of Yahweh,

wrath goes forth,

yes, a whirling tempest;

Upon the head of the wicked it whirls

²⁰the anger of Yahweh will not turn back,
until it does and until it fulfills
the purposes of his heart.

In the days afterward,
you will consider the meaning in this.

²¹I did not send the prophets
yet they, they ran

I did not speak to them
yet they, they prophesied.

²²Now if they had stood in my council
and caused my people to hear my words
Then they would have turned them from their evil way
and from the evil of their doings.

²³Am I a God nearby
oracle of Yahweh,
and not a God far off?

²⁴If a person hides himself in secret places
do I myself not see him?
oracle of Yahweh.

The heavens and the earth
do I not fill?
Oracle of Yahweh

²⁵I have heard what the prophets say who are prophesying a lie in my name: 'I have dreamed, I

have dreamed.' ²⁶How long will there be in the heart of the prophets prophesying the lie, yes, prophets of their deceitful mind, ²⁷those who plan to make my people forget my name with their dreams, which they recount each person to his fellow, as their fathers forgot my name because Baal? ²⁸The prophet who has with him a dream, let him recount his dream; and the one who has my word with him, let him speak my word faithfully.

What is the grain to the straw?

Oracle of Yahweh.

²⁹Is it not so, my word is like fire

Oracle of Yahweh

and like a hammer shattering rock?

³⁰Therefore look I am against the prophets

oracle of Yahweh,

who steal my words each person from his fellow.

³¹Look I am against the prophets,

oracle of Yahweh

who heed their own tongue and oracle an oracle

³²Look I am against those prophesying lying dreams

oracle of Yahweh;

yes, they recount them and lead my people astray

with their lies and their wantonness.

For I, I did not send them

and I did not command them

and they are no profit whatever to this people,

oracle of Yahweh.

Notes

23:9 לַנְּבִיאִים the phrase “concerning the prophets” seems to look like the title of the oracle. Attention is now directed to another group of leaders, in a different way liable for the national calamity.

עֲצְמוֹתַי־כָּל רָחַפוּ all my bones grow soft. The qal of רָחַף is translated in many versions as “tremble” or “shake,” the meaning given in is grow soft,¹⁰ relax and Aramaic is translate be soft.

23:10 M reads אָלָה “curse,” “the land mourns because of a curse.” This reading is confirmed by Aq, who renders M with malediction, also attested by Origen recension of G: orkou ‘oath’ as well as by V: maledictionis. Waard proposes that “NJB can be taken as a model: ‘yes, because of a curse, the country is in mourning.’ Or if more explicit information is wanted, GNB: ‘because of the Lord’s curse the land mourns.’”¹¹

23:11 For both prophet and the priest, they are polluted. The verb הִנָּה which many versions translate ungodly or godless basically means to be polluted, be defiled. “The basic idea is that Jerusalem’s prophets and priests have defiled themselves and as a result have lost their holiness”¹²

23:12 Hebrew אַפְסֵלָה is thick darkness (2:31; Exod 10:22; Deut 28:29). Lundbom asserts that slippery ground is dangerous; in deep darkness even more so with a push one can easily fall.¹³

¹⁰ BDB, 934

¹¹ Jan de Waard, *A Handbook on Jeremiah Textual Criticism and the Translator*, vol. 2 (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2003), 101.

¹² Lundbom, *Jeremiah 21–36*, 183

¹³ Lundbom, *Jeremiah 21–36*, 183

Jeremiah is thus describing the judgment in store for Jerusalem’s unholy priests and prophets.

23:13–14 *Now... also*. “The initial waws set up a contrast, not a comparison as the AV translates (“and also”). explains Lundbom.¹⁴ Coordinating waws commonly mean “both... and’ but here a contrast is intended between Samaria’s bad prophets and Jerusalem’s prophets, who are worse.

The word **הִנְבִּיאוּ** “*they prophesied*” is a hithpael perfect, third person masculine plural; the **נ** has been assimilated with **נ** (GKC § 54c; BDB incorrectly calls the form an imperative).

The word **וַיִּתְעוּ** is a hiphil from **תָּעָה** and means “cause to wander, lead astray, mislead.” It is used several times of sheep going astray (Isa 53:6) or being lead astray (Jer 50:6). The latter meaning fits the context here and again brings the shepherd-sheep image of vv 1–4 to mind.

23:15 **לְעֵזָה** *wormwood plant* “has a bitter taste and is probably to be identified with the genus *Artemisia*. It is coupled here as elsewhere in the OT with ro’s (gall or bitter poison), a fatally poisonous herb.”¹⁵ The Lord’s verdict on the false prophets was bitterness and tragedy.

23:17 **לְמִנְאֲצֵי** (inseparable preposition verb piel participle) *to those who despise me*. The verb spurn is associated with the covenant-breaking in 14:21 (the Lord) and Deut 31:20 (the people). In the latter, Yahweh worries that once his people taste good things in the land of promise they will turn to other gods, despise him and break the covenant he has with them.

23:18 **יְהִיָּה בְּסוּד מַדְעַ** *stood in the council of the Lord*. The word **עָמַד** is a verb qal perfect 3rd masculine singular to stand, endure, remain. To stand before Yahweh is to be in his service; to stand in the council is a maxim used by Jeremiah, meaning to stand ready as a royal messenger in the heavenly precincts, into which one has been transported by means of a vision (1 Kings

¹⁴ Lundbom, *Jeremiah 21–36*, 186

¹⁵ Lundbom, *Jeremiah 21–36*, 188.

22:19–23; Isa 6:1–8).

23:20 **הַיָּמִים בְּאַחֲרֵיתָם** *in the last days*. As used in the text, the expression refers to things of the future which can also be translated as “in days to come” carrying with it an eschatological meaning.

you will understand the meaning in this. The Hebrew **בְּיָנָה בְּהַתְּבוּנָתִי** employs a cognate accusative (GKC§ 117p–r).

23:24 in the secret places. Hebrew **מִסְתָּרִים** is used of the ambush in which people or animals wait. The word is cognate with the verb “hide” here, explains Holladay¹⁶ (p 640).

23:25 Hebrew **הִלְמַתִּי הִלְמַתִּי** the repetition is for emphasis, to portray the giving of one dream after another.

23:26 Hebrew **מִתִּיַעַד** how long? is a term of lament, appearing elsewhere in 4:14, 21; 12:4; 13:27; 31:22.

in the heart of the prophets. Hebrew **לִבָּב** in the heart is translated in the mind by many versions. The ancient thought that the heart is the seat of thought and the will influences my translation. In the NT, it is said that evil thoughts and evil speech issue from the heart.

23:31 *and oracle an oracle*. Here, Hebrew **וַיִּנְאָמוּ וַיִּנְאָמוּ** is another cognate accusative where ‘they oracle,’ may be Jeremiah’s own coinage.

Narative Analysis

This is the longest discourse on prophesy in the Bible (23:9–32). The unit consists of five prose and poetic sections that scrutinize prophets who speak under the guise of divine authority. The individual parts are 23:9–12, 13–15, 16–17, 18–22, and 23–32. Prophets are called to

¹⁶ Holladay, *Jeremiah 1*, 640.

proclaim the divine word, a message upon which the nation relies. When the prophets distort this message as is expressed in Jeremiah 23:9–32, they jeopardized the very existence of community life. The five denunciations of false prophets in Jeremiah 23:9–32 are diverse, but together they produce a treatise on the conduct, message, origin, and fate of prophets who do not speak at God's command. First is a comparison between prophets who embellish the message with Jeremiah, who proclaims the word of God, sets the tone for the larger discourse (23:9–12). As a true prophet Jeremiah is fully engaged in God's purposes on earth. He is brokenhearted and drunk with the wine of God's word (23:9). His heart is crushed and his bones shake because of the message he must speak. Unlike prophets who fabricate their message, he speaks at the bidding of God, grieves deeply over human evil, and suffers beyond words on account of his prophetic charge.

The second oracle likens the prophets of Jerusalem to the prophets of Samaria who speak in the name of Baal (23:13–15). The damning comparison claims that the former who presumably prophesy in the name of Yahweh, are even worse than their northern counterparts. They commit adultery, they walk in falsehood instead of truth and they strengthen the hands of evildoers rather than expose the nation's corruption (23:14). They will come to an end, God will feed them wormwood and poisoned water (23:15).

Third, Jeremiah 23:16–17 exhorts the community to reject the false prophets whose false messages confirm stubborn sinners in their sinful ways, whose message is void of ethical content and whose vision of the future is one of complacency and unabashed nationalism. They are deluded and do not utter the word from the Lord. They are no longer the conscience of Israel, but are rather co-conspirators of evil. Fourth part is Verses 18–22 which stresses the moral vision of prophesy. Prophets who stand in the council of Yahweh and heed his word explode with

Yahweh's wrath in the face of evil rather than wince at it. In the fifth denunciation (23:23–32), God asks a series of questions that call attention to one incisive point: God sees and holds the guilty accountable. He is privy to their falsehood and disparages their dreams and oracles. He has not sent them. These opponents of Jeremiah are nothing but imposters. They fabricate their messages, mimic the words of others and want only to deceive the audiences. Their announcements are merely human invention masquerading as truth. Under the semblance of divine authority, they lead God's people astray (23:32). They lead them to empty faith and false hope.

Meaning and Message

Jeremiah begins the dialogue by expressing his weakened condition before the Lord and his holy words. Broken is his heart; the word **רָבַשׁ** in the niph'al stem which means to be broken, crushed, brings the sense that Jeremiah's whole being has been shaken and shattered by his experience. His members and all his faculties have been rendered incapable, and his bones shake out of control. He compares himself to a man drunk on wine. He is heartbroken from the Lord's words, because of the strong judgment spoken against the people and the leaders. Nevertheless, he must proclaim the word. The Lord answers the prophet, saying he understands fully that the land is full of adultery. While analyzing verses 9–12, Thompson states that, "In the passage before us the national apostasy is seen as adultery, probably a reference to the participation of the people in Canaanite religious rites, which not only indicated Israel's attempt to share her allegiance with other gods (hence the term adultery), but sometimes involved the people in sexually oriented fertility rites. Verse 9 has indicated that, because of Yahweh and his holy words, what is happening in Judean society is not acceptable. In contrast to Yahweh, who is holy and whose words are holy, the land of Judah is full of adulterers. This term, according to

Lundbom, is “a general term for an apostate people”¹⁷. In 9:1 the same term is used: the people of Judah are called “adulterers,” and is qualified in the same sentence by the reference to them as “a crowd of unfaithful people” (NIV), or as “a band of traitors” (NRSV). The context of 8:18–9:3 makes it clear that the people are regarded as unfaithful because they worship useless idols. It seems safe to say that, in most cases in Jeremiah, the term “adulterers” refers to Judah’s unfaithfulness in terms of the worship of false gods and idols. Craigie, Kelly & Drinkard argue that “the term “adulterers” indicates social and moral offence, but also points to Baal worship.”¹⁸ Instead of worshipping the true and holy God, the people addressed in verse 10 are labelled adulterers for worshipping false gods. The leaders of this apostasy were the prophets and priests.”¹⁹ The course of men is evil, and that evil is found even in the temple. But Yahweh has promised them evil in their year of reckoning. The next verse (vs. 12) commences with לְכֹן, to indicate what the outcome will be of the evil practiced by the prophets and the priests: a proclamation of judgement. They are on a course that is described as slippery, and they will be driven even deeper into misery. The imagery used describes the severity of the judgement and the calamity.²⁰ Yahweh will act against these leaders who are profaning his name by bringing disaster upon them. The “year of reckoning” refers to a time of punishment. Carroll (1986:453–454) regards verse 12 as a fitting conclusion to 23:10, but credits verse 11 to the redaction history of the poem under discussion.

God in this speech (verses 13–15) intends to contrast between the prophets of Samaria and the prophets of Jerusalem. In the former, he saw foolish Baal prophecies leading people down

¹⁷ Lundbom, *Jeremiah 1–20*, 182.

¹⁸ Craigie, Kelly and Drinkard, *Jeremiah 1–25*, 337.

¹⁹ J.A. Thompson, *The Book of Jeremiah*. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), 493.

²⁰ Lundbom, *Jeremiah 1–20*, 183.

the wrong path. Samaria's prophets had committed immorality, serious immorality. But then God says that the prophets of Jerusalem are worse. They compromised their holiness by committing adultery and living by falsehood. Rather than aiding all those who belong to the community, these prophets are helping the evil doers. God entrusted the spiritual welfare of his people to the prophets but they desecrated their sacred office with false teaching and immoral living. The results of these sins is that all the people have become to Yahweh like the inhabitants of Sodom and Gomorrah, very ripe for his wrath. This will include drastic reversals. Instead of eating communion meal shared by worshipers and priests in the temple, food and drink will be poison. As a reward for their celebrated living, Yahweh will set a table of wormwood and poisoned water and Yahweh will make sure they eat and drink to the full, a fitting punishment for the proclaimers who have spread their pollution throughout the land.

God tells the people (verses 16–21) not to listen to the prophets who are only enhancing their vanity. This is the best direct advice because prophets in Judah were not preaching messages from God. They were giving false hope to those who despised and refused to believe the Lord's word. They left the impenitent with the impression that sin is no big thing and does not matter. In verse 18, Yahweh begins the speech by asking who has stood in the heavenly council. Whoever has, let him see and hear Yahweh's word. Here, Yahweh emphatically states that he did not send the prophets, yet they ran; he did not speak to them yet they prophesied. If they stood in the heavenly council, they would have brought Yahweh's true message. They would have turned the refractory souls from their evil sin. Their message had no impact at all in the lives of the apostates. Jeremiah in the intervening judgment speech directs the audience attention to Yahweh's wrath which will turn back until Yahweh has accomplished what he set out to do. Verses 23–32 teaches that Yahweh is a God both near and far, one who sees in

darkness and light, and who fills the heaven and earth. Many Jews felt that Yahweh seemed distant, they would have known that Yahweh is a God for whom all boundaries were non-existent. God bursts the limits with which the false prophets tried to hedge him in. They had suggested that God was limited in his reach, that he was only a local deity, and that he could not see all that they were doing. He rejected the attempts of the false prophets to put their dreams on a par with his word. Habel has this to say about dreams, "Dreams are purely subjective, retorts Jeremiah. They express personal opinions, not God's direct word. The prophet is at liberty to relate his dream if he wishes, but he has no right to pass it off as a sure word of God."²¹ God badly exposed the source of their message, it is from their dreams and not from God. Let the dreamer dream; let the prophet of Yahweh speak Yahweh's word faithfully, counting on that word to do the work the Lord intends. That word is powerful and it does its work so well.

Conclusion

Jeremiah's attack on the falsehood of the prophets is in the first instance a powerful piece of moral theology, as it traces the deep interconnections between beliefs, actions and the society they engender. In Jeremiah's powerful rhetoric the character of the prophets is visible in their false religion, their moral depravity, and their seduction of the people. Of these dimensions, it is unfaithfulness towards God that lies at the root of the others, and infects all of the person's speech and behavior manifest in outward immorality. If such a person should begin to speak for God as a prophet, his misrepresentation of God becomes a source of unfaithfulness in others, and so attracts a special criticism. Leaving the true God for a false god is the highest sin of a prophet; it is following an evil course and proclaiming evil thoughts. God will punish all who proclaim

²¹ Norman C. Habel. *Jeremiah, Lamentation*: Concordia Commentary. (Saint Louis: Concordia, 1968), 190.

falsehood as if it were his word. Gosdeck says that, “They were godless, They had embraced Baal worship, even allowing it in the Lord’s temple. They lived the lie. All of these practices had sad consequences.”²² By their prophecies they had emptied the Lord’s word, the law, of its meaning. They allowed anyone to make his own convenient interpretation, an interpretation suited to cover his own self-chosen, sinful actions.

Both the prophets and priests were profane (Jer 23:11). They had no reverence for holy things and defiled them, even bringing their defilements into God’s temple. Their profaneness even included swearing and they encouraged others to do it (Jer 23:10, 15). They prophesied for Baal, not Jehovah, but used Jehovah’s name as they prophesied for Baal (Jer 23:13). They were adulterous liars. Their adultery was spiritual (cheating on God with other gods) and physical (cheating on their wives). False prophets encouraged the people in their sins, prophesying prosperity, and peace for the wicked (Jer 23:14, 17). As they do today, back then many prophets refused to call people to repentance as God expected them to (Jer 23:22). Instead, they promised them they were living their best life now and that God wanted to bless them despite their unrepentant sins. Same as today. Israel’s false prophets were like Sodom and Gomorrah (Jer 23:14). Worship of Baal included male prostitution, so they were the equivalent of today’s gay rights activists who infiltrate churches with their abominations. Their made-up prophecies were centered around puffing people up with self-glorification (Jer 23:16). They used God’s name constantly, but God did not anoint, ordain, or send them (Jer 23:21). They subtly taught things and spoke of having prophetic dreams that would draw people away from God, not to him (Jer 23:27).

²² David M. Gosdeck. *Jeremiah Lamentation: People’s Bible Commentary* (Saint Louis: Concordia, 2004), 147.

This is how false prophets of our age have waged a vigorous war against faithfulness of God and his word. They are not only attacking the word directly, but also undermining it by limiting the Lord and making his word less important or applicable. But God's word will never be limited nor despised. The one who despises God's word, him will end but not the powerful word of God. To wield power, to have strength, to achieve success as the Lord counts success, to get real comfort and help, to reach people and save them, one need only use the Lord's word. May nothing turns us aside from it.

How can people of our age know the false prophets? Apostle Jhn says, "de not believe every spirit. for many false prophets have gone out into the world" (1John 4:1-3). Only the spirit that confesses Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God. Satan wants to draw us away from the savior, who suffered, bled, and died for us. All false prophets have this in common: none of them come as God in the flesh of Jesus Christ. Saint Paul admonishes that it is good to weigh, distinguish, judge what the prophets say (1 Cor 14:29). It is to judge whether doctrine and practice are based on His Word.

Jeremiah 28:1-17

Introduction

Chapter 28 is a sequel to chapter 27. Jeremiah carried his prophecy of the yoke to its conclusion. He pointed to a specific example of the sort of opposition he had to face. Not only did the false prophets speak without restraint, but the priests and the people tolerated their lies with unseemly readiness to hear and believe them. They were so far removed from the truth that in the name of fairness and tolerance, they approved the lie. The prophet Hananiah whose name means "the Lord has been gracious," used the first and oldest deception in the world. He directly and boldly denied everything the Lord had said through Jeremiah. He spoke a message that

would find immediate and favorable reception in the hearts of the listeners. Jeremiah confronted him with a public attack when he prophesied salvation. The narrative and meaning below explain more on this chapter.

Translation²³

¹And it happened in that year, in the beginning of the reign of Zedekiah, king of Judah, in the fourth year in the fifth month, Hananiah son of Azzur, the prophet who was from Gibeon, said to me in the house of Yahweh in the presence of the priests and all the people, saying: ²Thus said Yahweh of hosts, God of Israel: I have broken the yoke of the king of Babylon. ³Within two years' time I will bring back to this place all the vessels of the house of Yahweh that Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, took from this place and brought to Babylon. ⁴And Jeconiah son of Jehoiakim, king of Judah, and all the exiles of Judah who came to Babylon, I will bring back to this place, oracle of Yahweh, for I will break the yoke of the king of Babylon. ⁵Then Jeremiah the prophet said to Hananiah the prophet in the presence of the priests and in the presence of all the people who were standing in the house of Yahweh; ⁶and Jeremiah the prophet said: Amen! So may Yahweh do so! May Yahweh confirm your words that you have prophesied, to bring back the vessels of the house of Yahweh and all the exiles from Babylon to this place! ⁷But do hear this word that I speak in your ears and the ears of all the people: ⁸The prophets who were before me and before you, from ancient times, yes, they prophesied to many lands and against great kingdoms of war and evil and pestilence. ⁹The prophet who prophesies peace, when the word of the prophet comes to be, the prophet whom the Lord has truly sent will be known.' ¹⁰Then Hananiah the prophet took the yoke bar from upon the neck of Jeremiah the prophet and

²³ Lundbom, *Jeremiah 21–36*, 325–26.

broke it. ¹¹And Hananiah said in the presence of all the people: Thus said Yahweh: even so will I break the yoke of Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, within two years' time, from upon the neck of all the nations. And Jeremiah the prophet went his way. ¹²Then the word of Yahweh came to Jeremiah after Hananiah the prophet broke the yoke bar from upon the neck of Jeremiah the prophet saying: ¹³Go and you shall say to Hananiah: Thus said Yahweh: Yoke bars of wood you have broken, but you have made in their place bars of iron. ¹⁴For thus said Yahweh of hosts, God of Israel: A yoke of iron I have put upon the neck of all these nations to serve Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, and they shall serve him; even the beasts of the field I have given him. ¹⁵And Jeremiah the prophet said to Hananiah the prophet: Do listen, Hananiah, the Yahweh has not sent you, and you, you have made this people trust in a lie.

¹⁶Therefore thus said Yahweh: Look I will send you away from off the face of the earth. This year you will die, for you have spoken rebellion concerning Yahweh. ¹⁷And Hananiah the prophet died in that year, in the seventh month.

Notes

28:1 said to me. Hebrew אָלֵי אָמַר. Lundbom explains that “Although the first-person ‘to me’ is well attested in the versions, many scholars delete or emend it because of the third person in v 5.”²⁴

וְכָל־הָעָם הַכֹּהֲנִים לְעִינָי in the presence of the priests and all the people. “This may have been a Sabbath or other occasion when a large number of people would be present at the Temple”²⁵

28:2 The most natural reading of שָׁבַרְתִּי is “I have broken” (NASB), though NIV’s “I will break” is supported by the futuristic nature of the pronouncement (note the phrase “within two

²⁴ Lundbom, *Jeremiah 21–36*, 331.

²⁵ Lundbom, *Jeremiah 21–36*, 332.

years”; see verse 3, 11; and the imperfect אֶשְׁבֵּר I will break in verse 4, 11). “It is best, then, either to render שָׁבַרְתִּי as “I have broken” as does the NASB, or else to understand verse 2 to contain a proleptic prophetic announcement, which is certainly not uncommon in the scriptures, declaring what is about to take place as though it had already happened since (allegedly in this case) the Lord has spoken the word.”²⁶

28:3 Hebrew יָמִים שְׁנַתַּיִם בְּעוֹד translated within two years’ time or within two full years is interesting. Prophecies stating a definite time of fulfillment are rare, yet Jeremiah is similarly specific in prophesying Hananiah’s death (v 16: ‘This year you will die’).

28:6 Hebrew אָמֵן is an adverb that literally means ‘it is true’ but has a lot of meanings as to support, confirm, be faithful, believe, Amen and the hiphil form turns to the right, verily or truly may not apply in this text, but here explains Lundbom, “because of the optative imperfects and ironic tone, it means: “Be it true (even though it is not true)!”²⁷

28:7 Hebrew הַדְּבָר *the word*, here means witness not preached word per se.²⁸ The T and Vg have simply this word.

28:8 *from ancient times*. Hebrew הָעוֹלָם־מִן is also can mean from time immemorial. עוֹלָם is a masculine noun meaning a very long time. With the preposition ל or עַד it refers to the future. With the preposition מִן as here it refers to the past. It is a term which is indeterminate past or future time (5:15; 6:16).

28:13 yoke bars of iron. Hebrew בְּרִזְלֵי מַטְוֵת a term for iron barzel is of foreign origin²⁹

²⁶ Longman III and Garland, *Jeremiah~Ezekiel*, 352.

²⁷ Lundbom, *Jeremiah 21–36*, 234.

²⁸ Lundbom, *Jeremiah 21–36*, 334.

²⁹ Lundbom. *Jeremiah 21–36*, 338.

28:15 the word **הלש** in the qal form means to send and in the Piel form means send off, dismiss. ‘If Yahweh did not send Hananiah, he will surely send him off to death.’³⁰

Narrative Analysis

This chapter is about about Jeremiah versus Hananiah the prophet. The controversy over prophetic messages takes shape in specific confrontation between Jeremiah and a Judean prophet called Hananiah son of Azzur. No longer are Jeremiah’s opponents nameless and faceless. Jeremiah and his opponent Hananiah give two contradictory interpretations of Judah’s crisis. Hananiah whose name means “Yahweh is gracious” speaks out of a conviction that the length of the exile will be short, and so he urges the populace to resist Babylonian hegemony. Jeremiah feels just as certain that the Neo-Babylonian power over Syria-Palestine will be a continuing political reality. Thus, he calls upon the Judean community to submit willingly to Babylonian rule as to God’s will. The class between the two prophets takes place in the temple before the priests and the people. Hananiah renders stunning interpretation of the yoke around Jeremiah’s neck. According to him, the Lord will break the stranglehold of the king of Babylon; within two years the temple treasures as well as those taken to captive to Babylonia will return to Jerusalem. Jeremiah wants to believe Hananiah’s message (28:5–9), but knows that Hananiah’s message contradicts the message given to him; the message does not conform to the prophetic oracles of the past, which predict war, famine, and pestilence (28:8). Jeremiah feels that Hananiah’s message salvation must meet the strigent criteria before Jeremiah can embrace it: prophecies of peace must come to pass to validate their divine origin (28:9). Unfortunately, Jeremiah’s refutation intimidates Hananiah not. He grabs the yoke from Jeremiah’s neck, breaks it and

³⁰ William L. Holladay, *Jeremiah 2: A Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Jeremiah Chapters 26–52* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1989), 129.

reiterates his message, leading Jeremiah to leave in silence (18:11). Later on Jeremiah returns to the scene with a message from the Lord (28:12–17). With boldness and full of confidence, Jeremiah declares that the Lord has replaced the wooden yoke that Hananiah had broken with an iron yoke which symbolizes the certainty of Babylon’s world domination and Juda’s exile.

Meaning and Message

The disagreement between Jeremiah and Hananiah is one of the most poignant prophetic face-offs in the Bible. It highlights the difficulty involved in discerning true from false prophecies. The matter is perplexing because both proclamations are delivered by recognized prophets. Jeremiah never questions his opponent’s sincerity, nor impugns his integrity. Hananiah introduces his message with the customary messenger formula, “thus says the Lord,” and practices the customary symbolic action (28:10). Thus, his form and delivery follow the conventional patterns.

Even though Hananiah proclaims a message that is similar to Isaiah’s, that Zion will survive the onslaught of its enemies, something is amiss with his prophecies. He speaks so well and out of the authoritative traditions of ancient Israel, but he is out of touch with the political and spiritual subtleties of his moment in history. Hananiah doesn’t understand that the rebellion against Babylonian rule could only result in further oppression and hardship to God’s people. In contrast to Jeremiah, who has the right word for the right people at the right time and place, Hananiah speaks out of the place and thereby misses the mark. He proclaims promise to stubborn sinners who needed to hear law and judgment. In verses 2–3, Hananiah’s oracles announce Nebuchadnezzar’s defeat by means of the yoke metaphor introduced in chapter 27 and illustrated by Jeremiah’s sign-act. Hananiah introduces his oracles using the divine first person statement, “I break the yoke of the king of Babylon” making his oracle attractive in form as well

as content. This oracle brings together three themes of chapters 27–29: first, the limit of Babylonian hegemony, secondly the fate of temple furnishings, the king, and other exiles, and thirdly, the Lord’s intention to return them all to Judah and Jerusalem. “All of these elements are also part of God’s word through Jeremiah, the difference is more than a matter of timing, Hananiah’s two years to Jeremiah’s seventy. The difference is the Lord’s command for the Israelites to serve Nebuchadnezzar (27:11–12).”³¹

The verb used is the same verb used in the Lord’s promise in 29:10.³² It is certainly significant that Jeremiah’s reply does not include any mention of breaking Nebuchadnezzar’s yoke. Jeremiah has not disobeyed his own warning by listening to Hananiah. He has not advocated rebellion against Babylon. Verse 8 resembles the motif of God’s persistent sending and people’s consistent rejection of prophets in the past. Varughese explains:

Submission to Babylon is in real sense submission to Yahweh’s will; rebellion against Babylon is rebellion against Yahweh. Those who proclaim a contrary message are not authentic prophets. Anyone who proclaims peace to a sinful generation cannot be accepted as a true prophet. (28:5–9). Authentic prophets speak judgment and not peace to sinners. The clear basis for the recognition of a true prophet is the fulfillment of his words, which he claims to have come from Yahweh.³³

In verses 10–17, Hananiah responded to Jeremiah’s rebuke with foolish obstinacy. With his own hands he broke the yoke off Jeremiah’s neck, dismissing the prophet’s words with contempt. He reaffirmed his own prophecy, at the same time calling God a liar. By his actions he encouraged the priests and the people of Judah to follow him. Unfortunately, his actions did not disturb any of those who saw it. They had believed his false promises or at least agreed enough

³¹ Gerald L. Keown, Pamela J. Scalise, & Thomas G. Smothers. *Jeremiah 26–52: World Biblical Commentary* vol. 27. (Dallas, Texas: Word Books, 1995), 54.

³² **וָיָקַם** Is a hiphal, to “establish,” or to “fulfill.”

³³ Alexander, Varughese. *Jeremiah*, in *Asbury Bible Commentary*, ed. Eugene E. Carpenter. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), 669.

to give him an equal hearing. At first Jeremiah did not respond but soon a response came from the Lord. Hananiah had made it worse for Judah and other nations. He had incited them to continue in their headlong rush to ruin. Instead of mere yoke of wood, they would now wear a yoke of iron. Hananiah had committed a grievous sin and the people had done nothing but look on. They failed to purge out evil amongst them as is required by the law in Deuteronomy 13:5. His sin led to his death two months later.

Conclusion

In 594 BC, Hananiah proclaims and predicts falsehood about the return of the temple furnishings taken to Babylon in 597 BC and the Judean captives. On the other hand, Jeremiah proclaims and warns the people of Jerusalem that the worst is yet to come. God does not deal with sin casually as Hananiah thought. The wages of sin is death. However, God does not delight in punishing sinners. He sends true prophets and faithful ministers to turn people from death to life. Jeremiah survives the challenges, trials and persecutions and the divine word given through him is intact and strengthened (wooden yoke-bars are replaced by iron, what is short-term suffering for the nation is exchanged with a long term one). However, the greatest challenge for this text is the command to submit to the superpower, to serve Nebuchadnezzar. But this voluntary submission is offered as a way to avoid conquest and death. But how can surrender be a mark of faithfulness? Chapters 27–29 point at least three ways to answer these difficult questions coming out of this text. First, the assignment of authority to Nebuchadnezzar is an exercise of the creator’s rule, not an abdication. Nebuchadnezzar is victor only because he acts as the Lord’s vassal, supplying troops in service of his suzerain’s purposes. Second, “submit to the king of Babylon” is historically conditioned command. The explanatory addition of Nebuchadnezzar’s name and the date formulas define the particular circumstances in which the

command is in effect. Neither submission nor resistance to the despot is taught as an exclusive, eternal principle. Third, the greatest threat to God's people was not the loss of independent statehood but the decay of national and personal integrity of faith and service to God. It was the ministry of God's servants the prophets to warn them against their true peril and to invite them to return to the Lord. The true prophet called them to repentance and not to false confidence in the status quo. The sinners needed to hear judgment, not prosperity promises.

Hananiah becomes an exemplar of a false prophet when what he prophesied never come to pass but what Jeremiah prophesied against Hananiah and the nation was fulfilled. Hananiah the impostor, has the mark of false prophet by declaring that Yahweh is already ending the Babylonian servitude. He is speaking his own mind not the mind of God. False prophets give people hope which is not from God, peace which is not from God, and they want people to be happy when God wants his people to repent. The future is to demonstrate which prophet the Lord had truly sent. Because Hananiah made people to trust in a lie, he would not live the two years within which his prediction was to have come true. Teaching false doctrine is not a trifling misdemeanor but a heinous crime because it misleads people to defy the will of God. Dire consequences awaits such perverters of truth. This text teaches that the true prophet of God is known when what he prophesied come to pass. Jeremiah was motivated to continue propagating the word of Yahweh when the the prophecies he oracled was fulfilled.

CHAPTER FOUR

WORDS OF HOPE: THE NEW COVENANT: AN EXEGETICAL LOOK AT JEREMIAH 31:31–34

Jeremiah 31:31–34

Introduction

Chapter 31:31–34 is one of the greatest proclamations that Jeremiah delivered. It is a prophecy that foretells a new hope that anticipates a new covenant. The words were uttered at a time of national disaster. Jerusalem was captured by the Babylonians, and Jeremiah was taken prisoner to Ramah. During the time of his imprisonment he looked forward to the day when Israel should again be free. Before that could happen, however, he saw that a great change must come over the people. The sinful people had broken the Old Covenant. Now the glory of Jeremiah is that in that dark night his heart was filled with hope. The old order changes, yielding place to new.

The announcement in Jeremiah 31:31–34, marks a pivotal point in the history of God and his relation to his people. It is his promise of a new covenant. This is the first biblical reference to a new covenant. The words are addressed to a people in exile, far from home and bereft of hope. The covenant between God and Israel, the covenant made so long ago at Sinai, is (or seems to be) broken. God has not protected Israel from harm and they have been taken into exile. Into such a situation, the prophet speaks words of promise. But he frames those promises in terms of the very relationship in question. The prophet speaks of a covenant, like the one made at Sinai, between Yahweh and Israel. There is both continuity and discontinuity with what has come before. The continuity lies in the character of God and the love God continues to have for a

wayward people. God will not abandon Israel forever. God will not forget God's promises made so long ago at Sinai. Just so, in this new covenant, God promises, "I will be their God, and they shall be my people" (Jer 31:33). The relationship is not new. Israel knows this God, and God knows this people. The promises Jeremiah speaks build on a long and shared history between YHWH and Israel, a history marked by wavering on the part of the people and by faithfulness on the part of YHWH. God continues to love this wayward people; they continue to be God's treasured possession. In this new covenant there is indeed continuity with what has come before. The discontinuity is implied with the term, "new." This is a new covenant with Israel, not like the covenant at Sinai, "a covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, says YHWH" (Jer 31:32). Still, what is new about this covenant is not so much its *content*, but the *means* by which God will bring it about. Unlike the old covenant, then, written on stone tablets that can be broken and scrolls that can be lost, the new covenant will be written within the people, on their very hearts. No need for remedial religious education, because everyone will know YHWH, from the king to the stable boy, from the oldest elder to the youngest child.

Translation¹

³¹"Look! days are coming, oracle of Yahweh, when I will cut with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah a new covenant, ³²not like the covenant that I cut with their fathers in the day I took them by the hand to bring them out from the land of Egypt, my covenant that they, they broke, though I, I was their husband," oracle of Yahweh .

³³"But this is the covenant that I will cut with the house of Israel after those days," oracle of Yahweh, "I will put my law in their inward parts, and upon their hearts I will write it. And I will

¹ Jack R. Lundbom, *Jeremiah 21–36, A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* AB (New York: Doubleday, 1999), 464. Translation is a reprint of Jack Lundbom's translation.

be their God, and they will be my people. ³⁴And they shall not again instruct each person his fellow and each person his brother, saying, ‘Know Yahweh,’ for they, all of them, shall know me, from the least of them to the greatest of them,” oracle of Yahweh, “for I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will not remember again.”

Notes

31:31

הִנֵּה Translated as ‘behold’ the word is an attention-getter.² This has a two-fold function here: first, to give attention to what is being said, because of its importance and secondly. to make clear that something new is being said.

בָּאִים is Verb qal participle from hollow root **אוּב** with infinitive definition to go in, enter, come, go, come in. Days are coming is used here bring the sense that the new covenant is proclaimed for the future.

The word **וְכָרַתִּי** “I will cut” is the best translation. Even in my context, whenever there is a dispute between families or communities, the elders will broker a peace deal which involved cutting a dog into two pieces as a sign of reconciliation and a new peace agreement.

The term **הַדָּשָׁה בְרִית** “a new covenant,” a new pact (because made by passing between pieces of flesh, passing between two flesh was a sign that whoever breaks the covenant will be like the carcass of the animal sacrificed). This phrase denotes the basis on which a future relation between God and his people will rest following the collapse of Mosaic covenant and Israel’s loss of nationhood in 586 B.C.

31:32 the **אֲבוֹתֵיכֶם-אֵת** fathers here as used are the Exodus generation, making the covenant in

² B.M. Newman and P.C. Stine, *A Handbook on Jeremiah* (UBS Handbook Series; New York: United Bible Societies, 2003), 30.

reference the Sinai covenant. Lundbom cites the Qumran Temple Scroll (11QT 29:10) “according to the covenant which I have made with Jacob at Bethel,” which I think gives the phrase positive but different interpretation.³

קָהַרְתִּי I took (to fasten upon; hence, to seize, be strong (figuratively, courageous, causatively strengthen, cure, help, repair, fortify), obstinate; to bind, restrain, conquer) them by hand. Lundbom calls this phrase, “A metaphor of parental guidance derived perhaps from Hosea 11:3.”⁴

31:33 תּוֹרַתִּי “my law” (my instruction taught in the Pentateuch). Yahweh’s law will remain in the new covenant and the obligation to comply with its demands will still exist; nevertheless, conditions will be vastly improved because Yahweh promises to write the law on the human heart.

Narrative Analysis

Jeremiah 31:31–34 envisions another stunning and great reversal of Israel’s distressing condition. This section focuses on the rapprochement of the Lord and Israel and the advent of a new spirituality. As part of the nation’s restoration, Yahweh resolves to make a new pact with the house of Israel and the house of Judah (31:31). This new covenant resembles the old one in certain ways, especially the demands and effects of the Torah are the same, but it is not merely a renewal of Sinai covenant. The new covenant represents an entirely distinct mode of action with fresh action with fresh understanding of the divine-human relationship. Verse 32 reinforces the contention that the chosen people have been unfaithful covenant partners. By violating the commandments, they rendered the covenant null and void and the violation came with dire

³ Lundbom, *Jeremiah 21–36*, 467.

⁴ Lundbom, *Jeremiah 21–36*, 467.

consequences; the people of the covenant became exiles, landless in Babylon and without any claim on God. In a bold and unprecedented move God offers those who have broken the covenant a fresh start. In the new covenant God is planning to inscribe the divine instruction on people's hearts. When God has performed this internal operation, there is no need to teach others to know God, all will know God (31:34). Lastly the new covenant is based on unqualified forgiveness to broken people who can no longer bear the burden of their guilt.

Meaning and Message

The new covenant offered a new hope for the people of Israel who had lost their identity and were sufferers in exile. While in the exile, they had no land and no temple, key pillars of the Israel community. Even though, God had repeatedly warned them of the punishment, if they did not obey him, they would not listen. Now that the punishment and the wrath had befallen them, God had compassion on them. He makes a new covenant with Israel. For centuries, their lives revolved around the covenant which God established with them at Mount Sinai when he took them by hand out of the land of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. His commandments were written on a stone tablet and kept in the temple. But now they were destroyed. Their identity was in crisis. So, God offers them a new hope with the new covenant. The Lord will write His laws in their hearts and deposit it within them. It made the loss of the land and loss of the temple immaterial. They could now hope for a union with God which could not be taken away by the external factors.

The new covenant is new because God initiates the relationship in the face of the people's abject infidelity and stubbornness. Even though, the people failed to live by the dictates of the Lord's statutes, God now makes a new pledge to engrave the law of the covenant on their inner being of men and women who make up Israel. The internalization of the law empowers Israel to

love and obey God. It allows Israel to break out of its circle of failure and fulfil the demands of the covenant. In the old world, the knowledge of God was conspicuously absent; neither priest nor the people knew God (2:8; 4:22; 9:3); neither rich nor poor understood the ways of God (5:4–5). This scarcity of knowledge led the community down a treacherous road of corruption. In the new world, regardless of social or economic position, all know God; that is, the entire community enjoys an intimate relationship with the Lord and practices justice (22:16).

The new covenant is an eschatological promise for the future where there will be eternal restoration which has begun to be a present reality. Hummel refers to the term “New” as “semitechnical for ‘eschatological fulfillment of prophecy.’” He explains further that, “The essential contents of the new covenant will be the same as the old, except that now they will be written on the heart.”⁵ In this new arrangement, absolution of sins comes with no strings attached or without reference to the temple or sacrifice.

The Fulfillment

We Christians believe that Jesus is the fulfillment. The fulfillment is proleptic waiting for the final consummation. As Israel's Messiah Jesus is Israel-reduced-to-one, Israel in one. “The entire history of God’s dealing with Israel finds fulfillment in Jesus.”⁶ He will redo history on behalf of all of Israel. But where Israel failed, Jesus will succeed. Where Israel, which includes you and me, was unfaithful and ungrateful, Jesus will be perfectly faithful and obedient because He desires to please His Father in all things. This means that Jesus received in himself what Jeremiah 31 promised. Jesus had the Torah written on his heart and he freely and completely

⁵ Horace, D. Hummel. *The Word becoming flesh: An Introduction to the origin, Purpose, and Meaning of the Old Testament*. (St. Louis: Concordia, 1979), 251.

⁶ Jeffrey, Gibbs. *Matthew 1:1–11:1: Concordia Commentary, A Theological Exposition of Sacred Scriptures*. (St. Louis: Concordia, 2006), 52.

obeyed God's Torah. Jesus was God's own people and God was his God (and eternal Father). Jesus did not need a teacher but knew the LORD. And Jesus was punished for the sins of the world and then raised from the dead and thereby Jesus was "forgiven" for our sins he bore. The elements of the promise in Jeremiah 31 were first actualized and realized in Jesus. Then those same blessings carry over to us, to all those who belong to Jesus, who are baptized into him. So, we by faith now enjoy the benefits of the new covenant promised by Jeremiah so long ago.

Conclusion

Jeremiah's proclamation of the New Covenant is a consolation and hope to a group of people who lost their identity. Everyone will know the Lord. This will be a gift for all; a gift of mercy and forgiveness. In a world which is broken and full of hurting relationship, the covenant promises us a right relationship with the Lord which will be spilled over to the relationship with our brothers and sisters. If we imbibe the spirit of this covenant, we will be able to heal many broken hearts. And indeed, we have been far from being such a New Covenant Community.⁷

The Lord promises to restore his people to the promised land after the exile in Babylon. The exile is temporary, for God himself will save the remnant and return them to their home. God could destroy them for their sin, but out of his deep love and compassion he merely discipline them with exile and even gives them the home of return. He promises his people a new relationship. The promise finds its fulfilment in Jesus the Christ and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit in NT (Heb 8). First of all, Jesus is the new obedient Israel with Torah written on his heart. Then in and through him God's Israel becomes obedient, including Gentiles.

⁷ John Bright, "An Exercise in Hermeneutics: Jeremiah 31: 31-34," *INT* 20, no. 2 (1966): 208.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE CONDITIONS IN KENYA, AND HOW JEREMIAH SPEAKS TO SITUATION IN EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH IN KENYA

Kenya's religiosity resembles what is common in many parts of the world. Majority of Kenyans say they are Christians, with the Anglican and Roman Catholic Churches standing out as the most established Christian denominations. Other well-established denominations include the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Kenya (ELCK) African Inland Church (AIC), Seventh Day Adventists (SDA), and the Presbyterian Church of East Africa (PCEA). In addition, there are several Evangelical churches and Independent African Christian churches. Even though Kenya's religiosity was shaped by mainline churches, self-proclaimed ministers have emerged and are posing challenge and competition as is discussed in the introduction. Unfortunately, many Kenyans are living in worse conditions, both in the urban and rural set up, and false proclaimers are taking advantage of the situation. Many do not have health insurance and cannot afford the high cost of medical expenses, and this has led to the rise of many miracle healers both in the rural and urban areas. They are trying to address the health menace by healing people, unfortunately all the miracles performance is fake. As it discussed in the introduction many false prophets have arisen in Kenya going about deceiving people. ELCK is one of the Churches hit by these prophets of lie, the office of holy ministry is under attack by those parading themselves as true servants of God, dissuading people to follow them. They even go ahead to issue threats of God's wrath to their followers. And with their fake miracles, many pastors in the Christian church are disillusioned, and therefore it is better to listen to Jeremiah who had to contend to the most lethal circumstances of his times.

How Does the Theology of Jeremiah Speak to the Situation in Kenya and the Kenyan Church?

What can a book written over two and half thousand years ago possibly say to us today?

According to Jeremiah, there is a clear connection between the spiritual condition of God's people and the events that happen in their political history. But Yahweh remained sovereign Lord of history. Kenya is in the similar situation as the people of Jeremiah's time. Jeremiah speaks to Kenya, specifically the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Kenya as he spoke to the people of his time, that Yahweh's plan is to uproot and tear down, to destroy and overthrow sinners, and then to build and to plant them and bless them with new covenant. There is no other God like this. The LORD of hosts has the grace to always be there for the one who comes to Him through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. The King of glory, who commands the armies of heaven and who will eventually defeat all His enemies in this world, is none other than Jesus Christ. He is the LORD of hosts.

Israel and Judah are disloyal covenant partners. Loyalty in covenant is demonstrated in obedience. Majority of Kenyan Christians are very disloyal to God's covenant just like God's people have been disobedient during the time of prophet Jeremiah. Worse than disobedience is a deliberate commitment to waywardness: everyone says, we will continue with our own plans; each of us will follow the stubbornness of his evil heart. In brief, Israel and Judah have "broken the covenant". Consequences will follow. A trio of disasters of sword, famine, and plague, to which is added exile, surfaces frequently, in whole or in part (14:12, 16, 18; 15:2;16:4). Could this be the reason as to why there are many disasters, widespread famine, diseases, and poverty in Kenya especially in ELCK? Kenyan Christians should learn from this message to remain loyal partners of the new covenant in Christ.

Theology of Jeremiah also brings the message of a God as a God of persistence, integrity, and freedom. God is depicted not as an umpire who upon determining that the covenant is

broken heartlessly announces the punishment. On the contrary, God coaxes his fickle covenant partner to keep the covenant intact. Symbolic actions are a marked feature in chapters 11–20. Two of these, one about a belt and another about a jar, symbolize an evil portent of ruin (13:9; 19:11). God employs every means verbal appeals (11:4), warnings (15:7), and sign-acts to mend a covenant that is breaking. This is the good news is that God is free to initiate a new covenant (31:31–34). God is and remains free. Loyal partners all over the world including ELCK members will ever remain in the new covenant that the Yahweh establishes.

Prominent also in the book Jeremiah is the people of God, violating the God's law and more. The Temple Sermon pinpoints Judah's sin. Urgings toward repentance, a concept that is deepened, are many. *shuv* ("turn" and "return" in the sense of repent) is a verbal trademark of the book. This theology is very relevant to ELCK's situation where the voice of a faithful minister is ridiculed as people delight in those who tell them all is well. Many Christians in Kenya are turning in large numbers going to attend crusades organized by the likes of Dr. Owuor. They also listen to those who preach prosperity gospel with the hope that their lives will be better. There is no truth in the words of false prophets. They are just a bunch of commercialized religion for self-gain. Kenyan Christian is called to ever turn and return to the God who repents, for forgiveness, for renewal, and for a new covenant in Christ Jesus.

The prophetic ministry of Jeremiah speaks to Kenya Christian. It entails Jeremiah's call to a difficult task, his initial reluctance, but his lifelong faithfulness has much to teach us about ministry. Jeremiah's open, honest relationship with God has much to teach us about prayer. Believers and faithful ministers in Kenya are to trust Jeremiah's experience of God as instructive and encouraging. Jeremiah was a chosen vessel, set apart before his birth, to proclaim God's word concerning the nation of his day. God's word in Jeremiah's words is likewise a chosen

vessel intended for the instruction of the later generations. Believers and faithful ministers in Kenya ought to know that God does not call all believers to be prophets; some, however are called to engage in prophetic activity, and are called to trust the efficacy of the prophetic word proclaimed by the prophets. Therefore, no one should seek self-vindication and popularity but rather should depend on God for vindication. The call message also teaches the believers and faithful ministers in Kenya how a person gets to be God's messenger. The word of the Lord came to Jeremiah, meaning that it is outside him. Call to be a prophet is a forensic task, a task that does not emanate from inside, but from outside, from God. The one called is grasped, leaving no room for self-declaration; only false prophets can declare themselves as messengers of God. A proclaimer of God's divine word is chosen and consecrated to be there with the people and affect their lives. He will tear down much that his audience believes. Jeremiah's message tears down corruption, tribalism, false prophesy, adultery, apostasy, and many other vices that befall believers in Kenya. The prophetic role consists of confrontation. The episodes of Jeremiah's are mostly about encounters of confrontation and disputation with leaders. Standing over the king, given Israel's hierarchy, is the prophet who in the name of God calls the king to account (1:10). The prophet names the evil in the lives a nation's dignitaries and calls down the consequent punishment. Today called and ordained pastors have the duty to proclaim God's prophetic and apostolic word in its truth and purity even before the political leaders without fear.

On the suffering of a prophet, Kenyan believers and faithful ministers learn that suffering comes with the task of being a proclaimer of God's powerful word. The prophets had to endure great sufferings, and they could not expect to have an easy go of things. That has always been the case with those who speak for God. It must be the cross to bear for being a proclaimer of the powerful word of God, as well if we are to faithfully represent God to a hostile world. Jeremiah's

call includes a call to separation and pain (1:17–19). There is no more guarantee of ease for him than there was for Abraham, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, Elijah or at times the nation itself. Something about God allows him to let the remnant endure, indeed call the remnant to, harsh circumstances. And Jeremiah, being human, was not thrilled with all this suffering. Yet as we already noted, he continued resolutely in performing his divine calling.

The account of Pashhur's humiliation of Jeremiah is but one in a long series of scriptural accounts of the persecution of the proclaimer of God's word. Those who oppose God's word will oppose Jeremiah. Those who oppose God's word in our time will not spare God's ministers of our time. Being a servant of the word come with a cost and a cross. With all these persecutions, the prophets and the priests wanted to shame Jeremiah because, shame was a powerful mechanism in the ancient world, and Jeremiah suffers public shame for being faithful to his prophetic call. Being human his physical and emotional pain reach intense level and he needs divine grace. In all these challenges and persecution, Jeremiah never lost hope but soldiered on in proclaiming the word of God in purity. The ministers in Kenyan Christian church must expect such things, they will be put to shame but they must remember that the one sending them is omniscient and omnipotent. He sees and knows, he is with them. Even though death will threaten them, they never must lose hope because the mighty fortress is omnipresent. He delivered Jeremiah, from the hands of those whom have decreed his death. He will deliver the faithful ministers in their hours of need.

The Jeremiah message reminds the proclaimers of God's truth that the church and her ministers who stand for truth will often face a tribunal, they will be tried for proclaiming judgment. People, especially in Kenya now, those who are living a good life do not want to hear what may interfere with their comfort. They can kill to retain and remain in their comfort zone.

Just as it was during Jeremiah's time, the prophets and the priests were enjoying some comfort, and never wanted to hear what is contrary. The religious authorities forbade Jeremiah to exercise his functions in the temple so that he might be prevented from influencing the people. They were convinced of mischievous character of his power over the populace. The faithful ministers in ELCK must be ready to contend with them, for they only delight in the words of false prophets who proclaim peace to them. The political class in Kenya enjoys life in Kenya, they live with a big spoon on their mouths and any church minister who dares to talk against them, will have to meet their wrath. It calls for perseverance of all faithful ministers who knows that the redeemer who calls and commissions them is alive.

God is not infinitely patient but nevertheless gracious. God pleads for the people not to listen to counterfeit messages (27:16; 29:8–9). Patiently God has dispatched prophets “again and again” (25:4). But God's patience has a limit, which is reached when people and especially leaders reject his communication. Jehoiakim burns the written word (chap. 36). Zedekiah silences the oral word by incarcerating Jeremiah (37:16–38:9). God's patience is exhausted (36:31). A keyword, “burn,” in chapters 37–38 recurs in the historical record (39:8). Beyond judgment lies hope. God's intention is not destruction. His plans for his people are to give them “a hope and a future” (29:11). God remains accessible (29:13). He will watch over the exiles, give them a heart to know him (24:7), and return them from exile to their land (24:6; 23:5–6). Therefore, in Jeremiah we learn another crucial lesson here: we must beware of preaching for popularity and the praises of men. This was certainly not what Jeremiah was all about. Indeed, during his day the only popular prophets were the false prophets. They were very well received indeed. But not Jeremiah. His constant messages of repentance and wrath to come were hardly crowd pleasers. Indeed, he told God's people to repent many times. Yet incredibly we read of

only two people in the entire book who responded favorably to his message. Just two! Everyone else rejected him and his hard word. How many Kenyan ministers would be as true to the Jeremiah today, in spite of such complete rejection and opposition? Indeed, how many Christian leaders today would be told to just give up, given that so little fruit is being borne? They would be told they were failures with such a poor record of accomplishment, and they should look for another day job. Such an apparent lack of success would spell the doom of many a modern Kenyan minister, because the false prophets emerge who claims to be speaking in God's name and are faking miracles. Apart from fake miracles, false prophesy is taken to the next level. False prophets are not only preaching on television or holding popular city events. They are also sitting on parish committees in mainline churches impeding the work of the Holy Spirit⁸. In these meetings they suggest many things which are contrary to the Word of God. For example, a very organized church may be influenced by the dire need of money, such that they will pass a resolution to allow gay marriage, women ordination, replacement of altar wine with either banana wine, or anything else in the name of fitting in the context, because they are affiliated with a church which makes that a precondition for financial support.

The dynamics of hope in the book of Jeremiah speaks to Kenyan church situation. The book of comfort (chaps. 30–33) occupies a strategic place in the larger book in two ways. The book's chiastic structure puts these four chapters in a pivotal position. Seen as introductory to the second half of the book, these chapters may be compared with the speeches that introduce the first half of the book. The pivotal section takes up, as might be expected, all the threads of the book, but one hope dominates. The motivation for words of hope, unlike the judgment speeches,

⁸ Jesus cautions us to discern the truth and to follow it. The Holy Spirit not only admonishes or convinces us of sin, but also admonishes what is righteous and acceptable.

is without rationale other than God's willing: "I have loved you with an everlasting love" (31:3; 33:11 cf. Deut7:7–8). The saving God comes to his own. Echoes of the judgment, even allusion to God's anger, have not disappeared (30:23–24; 32:2; 32:28–29), but the promised salvation lies beyond the exile. God will create a new thing on the earth: his people will be enamored of God (31:22). The theme of the little "book," announced in the opening verses, is restoration: a people spiritually restored to God, a people physically restored to the land (30:3, 3a is better rendered "bring about the restoration of my people Israel"). A spiritually restored people will be intent on the worship of Yahweh instead of idols (30:9; 30:17; 31:6). Geographically a deported people will be returned from exile to their own land (30:10; 31:8–9; 31:16). The message is exhilarating: "There is hope for your future" (31:17) This is the hope for the Holy Christian Church in Kenya and the whole Catholic church, the hope for disillusioned Kenyan Christian church who are facing various challenges because of holding to the truth. Yahweh who is their God is promising a future of good things, future when all the sufferings they see will be gone.

Why the Theology of Jeremiah Important for the Church in Kenya?

Politically, times were unstable in Judah. It was a confused and contradictory age during which Jeremiah repeatedly asserted that Judah's sin would be her ruin. And then the end came. The state collapsed, security vanished, the city fell and the people, if not destroyed by famine or sword, were exiled. Such a catastrophic end could not come, some said. Religiously, Judah in Jeremiah's time was characterized by its morality of convenience, its lack of scruple, a professed interest in religion but a simultaneous disregard of its claims. The poor were oppressed, corruption was the trademark of the age (5:25–28; 7:6; 9:3). About all this the people were unconcerned. "Are they ashamed of their loathsome conduct? No, they have no shame at all" (8:12). The Evangelical Lutheran Church in Kenya is in the same situation now; into the

unsettled political situations and stale religious atmosphere of twenty first century Kenya comes Jeremiah the prophet. His message points to ELCK that God is the great actor in history, both Israel's and the world's (23:7–8; 25:15–32). His message builds on the covenant promises of the past; more particularly, he singled out the covenant requirements and declared them violated. Jeremiah takes on politicians, prophets, priests, and the populace generally, all of whom, he says, forsakes God, and expects judgment. His overall message, though larger than single words, crystallizes around such terms as: repentance, deception, God's wrath, nations, obedience, and hope. "Prophecy is essentially a ministry of disclosure, a stripping bare."⁹ In laying bare the crimes of society, Jeremiah simultaneously pled for repentance, a spiritual turn-around (*shuv*). "No prophet explored the meaning of this root sub more than did Jeremiah."¹⁰ "Turn to God; he called to an ever-turning people, and prescribed for them how their turning, or repentance (*sub*), might be phrased: We have sinned against the Lord our God, both we and our fathers; from our youth to this day we have not obeyed the Lord our God (3:25b). The New Testament, however, echoes Jeremiah. As Yoder has well said, "The Gospel does not say anything about sin as an unavoidable phenomenon in all human existence; it says, 'repent!' which, being interpreted, does not mean 'continue in sin, but sorrowfully,' but rather 'STOP IT!'"¹¹ Jeremiah's denunciations are disconcertingly relevant.

Jeremiah's theology is important to the church in Kenya; it is full of relevant warnings, he warns against invalid theological viewpoint. It was indeed true that God was with his people, as the false prophets claimed. But because of altered conditions, God was not now present to save, but to judge. In Hezekiah's and Isaiah's time, a century earlier, God assured Jerusalem's safety.

⁹ Wolff, *Confrontations with Prophets* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983), 35.

¹⁰ Thompson. *The Book of Jeremiah*. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), 111.

¹¹ J. H. Yoder, "A Light to the Nations," *Concerns* 9 (March, 1961), 18.

The mood had been fervent. Now the mood was defiant; everywhere people disregarded God's law. "Don't be deceived," cried Jeremiah: one cannot rightly claim the blessings of the covenant and seize on a fragment of the truth, such as God's promise of his presence, while ignoring the other truth that his presence calls for holiness among his people. Jeremiah warned against the deception lurking in the notion that one could serve God but, for double insurance, pay one's respects to idols. Idols, he said, were a fraud (51:17). To trust in them was to be fatally deceived. Theology of Jeremiah calls the church in Kenya to direct their allegiance to God alone not to gods. Jeremiah spoke much and often, with heavy heart, about another vicious deception: the consolations of the false prophets. "With no group was Yahweh's prophet more bitterly, more irreconcilably at odds than with the prophets!"¹² They minimized the coming catastrophe (28:3). They endorsed the evil status quo (23:9–40). Their message was in accord with the spirit of the age, and not with the spirit of God. They had not, as Jeremiah had, stood in the councils of God. Like ill-informed weather forecasters, they promised good times ahead. Theology of Jeremiah warns the church in Kenya of false prophets who come with twisted word and try to distract people from God.

Jeremiah's theology is important to the church in Kenya because it points out to Kenyan believers that judgment is not Yahweh's last word to his people. God's grace is at work even in the midst of great sins of Kenya believers, giving hope and future to a nation full of corruption, tribal clashes, extra judicial killings, immorality, and all kinds of sin. Judah's restoration is pivotal to Jeremiah's eschatology, but not only Judah, but even other nations, Kenya included. There will be a new beginning even for Kenyan Church. God's people will live under faithful leadership of Jesus who is seated at the right hand of the Father. This bright future is not in

¹² John Bright, *Jeremiah* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1965), cvi.

politics and political kingpins, or in government, or the economy, or weather. It is only in Jesus the Messiah who established the New Covenant promised by Jeremiah of the old. Only in Jesus, God's Son in the flesh, the true obedient Israel, is there hope for Kenyans. Turn away from self to Him.

Motivation to Faithful Ministers in the Christian Church in Kenya

What moved, motivated, and gave Jeremiah strength to continue proclaiming God's Word in spite of the tough times he faced? First, it was his call from the God of Israel. Second, it was nature of God's Word as powerful to break down and build up. The aim of God's strong Word is to lead sinners to repentance and faith. The words of the false prophets were not intended to do this action of breaking down and building up. Third, it was God's assurance that he would fulfill his Word. Finally, it was the comfort that God was with him and for him in the face of persecution. God himself forthrightly revealed to Jeremiah that he would have to face such resistance. The ministers in Kenyan Church especially those of the Evangelical Lutheran church in Kenya who accepted the call when ELCK called them, and even those who will receive their calls in future, should learn and always remember that, it is God who calls people into the office of public ministry. He calls his servants to be proclaimers of his word in truth and purity. Once he calls, he protects, he strengthens, and provides all the words his servant will say at appropriate time. It is proper and in order for the ELCK ministers to delight in the call, for God has called them in a noble office of being messengers of Yahweh. Being a messenger of Yahweh is not a small thing, but a call to a task of calling people from darkness to light, from falsehood to the realm of truth, to pluck people from the grip of the devil's talons and bring them to a haven which is the palm of Jesus where they will forever find eternal peace.

Over the past years I have served as a minister in ELCK, I have come to accept that

without God and his word, a minister can achieve nothing. People are so much into sin that they delight in it. Repentance is a word which is quickly becoming irrelevant, people don't want to be called back to God. Thieves don't want to be called thieves but heroes, adulterous will curse if called so, corrupt leaders want to be glorified. Calling sin as it is, is becoming a taboo and that is why the ministers of our age must go back to the text and say it the way it is. That is what God wants and he promised to be with his faithful ministers even if they are in the midst of economic crisis, even if they can't feed their family, but God will feed them. As God gave Jeremiah an assurance that he will fulfill his word, he will do the same to those ministers who remain steadfast.

God never told Jeremiah that things will be easy, it will not be easy to the ministers of today too, but as God promised he will be with each minister always. Even though you don't have a national health insurance, God is your assurance of good health. Even though you walk long distances to visit congregations to preach, God is beside you, to watch over you. Even though you cross rivers because there are no bridges, God will sail you through.

Conclusion

While God began to fulfill his Word already in Jeremiah's time with the Babylonian captivity, God ultimately fulfilled his Word through Jesus, the new and greater prophet and the suffering and risen Messiah of Israel. Through him these very same features provide motivation to ministers today working in Kenya. They should expect that some people will reject the Word of God taught and preached by them. They should expect resistance. They should expect that some hearers will follow other false voices. Nevertheless, the God of Israel, through his Son the Messiah, has called them to the ministry of the Word. He promises to work through his strong Word in leading sinners to repentance and faith. And he promises to be with and for his faithful

ministers. In fact, they have been given the even greater privilege of being ministers of the new covenant, promised in Jeremiah 31 and fulfilled in Jesus.

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