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# The Law-Gospel Tension in Jeremiah

THEODORE M. LUDWIG

The relationship between judgment and grace is a basic question in Biblical interpretation. God's fierce judgment and His unconditional grace stand side by side in the Biblical testimony, and an unresolved tension exists between these two aspects of God's self-disclosure. The tendency among Bible scholars today is to try to resolve this tension by building a "bridge" between judgment and grace, by some theological interpretation which demonstrates that God's judgment on His people leads directly to their salvation. In the study of the Book of Jeremiah the tension is commonly resolved by the idea of God's judgment as a disciplinary measure; the destruction of Judah and the exile of the people cause the nation to repent and bring about their salvation. This solution takes away the tension between judgment and grace by merging the two. They are, in effect, the same thing.<sup>1</sup>

This study will attempt to show from

<sup>1</sup> Another "bridge" used especially for Amos, Isaiah, and Micah, is the idea of the "remnant," a small group of people which survives the judgment and, purified by it, experiences salvation. Cf. Franz Hesse, "Amos 5:4—6:14 f.," *Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft*, LXVIII (1956), 16; and Roland de Vaux, "Le 'reste d'Israel' d'après les prophètes," *Revue Biblique*, XLII (1933), 526, 538, who says, "Le Reste est comme le pont qui relie la menace du châtement à la promesse de restauration."

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the theology of Jeremiah that there can be no easing of the tension between judgment and grace. Full judgment and full grace stand side by side in the divine plan, having their unity in God Himself. The Lutheran Symbolical Books insist on the important hermeneutical principle: "The two doctrines [Law and Gospel] belong together, and should also be urged by the side of each other, but in a definite order and with a proper distinction" (FC SD V). Full Law and full Gospel stand side by side in unresolved tension, without any merging or without any softening of either. This is an important theological key to the testimony of Jeremiah and all the Biblical writers.

## THE LEITMOTIV OF JEREMIAH'S MESSAGE

From his call experience Jeremiah receives both his authority to be Yahweh's personal messenger and the basic elements of that message. The authority is completely from God. The divine wonder of election and procreation took place when Jeremiah had no existence at all by himself (1:5). Jeremiah objects to his calling as "a prophet to the nations," but Yahweh brushes aside his objections without giving any reason. Complete obedience is required. Yahweh places His powerful Word in Jeremiah's mouth and gives the prophet his commission:

See, I have appointed you this day over the nations and the kingdoms,  
to pluck up and to break down,  
to destroy and to overthrow,  
to build and to plant (1:10).

Jeremiah's task is to be a double-sided one.



As the plenipotentiary to the nations he is to pluck up and break down; but he is also to do exactly the opposite by building and planting. As Yahweh's prophet he is to carry out the functions of divine judgment and divine grace. He is able to perform this dialectical task because the prophetic Word has been placed in his mouth, the Word which burns and smashes as it shapes history and creates the future (23:29; 5:14). Thus the activities of destruction and creation, which seem so contradictory to the human mind, are united in the divine plan of action. There is no idea of a chronological succession here; both activities are simultaneous.<sup>2</sup>

In one of his inaugural visions (1:11, 12), Jeremiah sees a rod of almond, and Yahweh gives him the interpretation: "I am watching over My Word to perform it." Although some connection may be intended between the almond tree as the first to awaken in the spring and Yahweh who is waking over His Word,<sup>3</sup> the main accent seems to be on the similar sound of the two words, שָׁקֵד ("almond") and שָׁקֵד ("watch over," cf. Amos 8:1, 2). Yahweh is giving His personal assurance that the word the prophet is to proclaim will be an effective word. The power of God goes with His Word, and He will see to

it that His Word accomplishes its goal of breaking down and building up (cf. Jer. 31:28; 44:27). "The word over which Yahweh is wakeful is the word of threatening as well as the word of promise and hope."<sup>4</sup> The revelation given in his call became the leitmotiv of Jeremiah's whole career as Yahweh's prophet.<sup>5</sup> In his mission to the nations he was to enter into the divine work of judgment and grace by proclaiming the prophetic word which Yahweh would make effective in tearing down and building up.

#### THE ELECTION-REJECTION TENSION

Like the great prophets before him, Jeremiah connected the judgment which Yahweh was bringing against Israel directly with Yahweh's election of Israel. As Weiser states, "Thus God's wrathful judgment upon the faithless people is to be understood as the complement to His election."<sup>6</sup>

The people of Israel were well aware of their election. Even though the northern kingdom met destruction, the people of Judah held fast to the Davidic promises and the security implied in Yahweh's choice of Zion. The deep popular belief in the indestructibility of God's people and the inviolability of Zion became a guiding principle even in Judah's political policy. The people misunderstood Isaiah's insistence that Yahweh would "rescue"

<sup>2</sup> Artur Weiser, "Das Buch des Propheten Jeremia: Kapitel 1—25:14" in *Das Alte Testament Deutsch*, ed. Artur Weiser, 4th ed. (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1960), XX, p. 8, states, "The wonder of God's [grace] consists precisely in this that it is at work in His acts of judgment, building anew while destruction is being wrought, creating new life in the middle of the collapse [of the old]." (*Gerade darin besteht das Gotteswunder, dass in dem Gericht die Gnade Gottes am Werk ist, die aufbaut, indem sie zerstört, und mitten im Untergang neues Leben schafft.*)

<sup>3</sup> Cf. George Adam Smith, *Jeremiah*, 4th ed. (New York: Harper & Brothers, n. d.), p. 85.

<sup>4</sup> John Skinner, *Prophecy and Religion: Studies in the Life of Jeremiah* (Cambridge: University Press, 1922), p. 32.

<sup>5</sup> So Curt Kuhl, *The Prophets of Israel*, trans. Rudolf J. Ehrlich and J. P. Smith (Richmond: John Knox Press, 1950), p. 106.

<sup>6</sup> Weiser, XX, p. xxxi: *So ist Gottes Zorngericht über das treubruchige Volk als die Kehrseite der Erwählung Gottes zu verstehen.* Cf. W. Cossmann, *Die Entwicklung des Gerichtsgedankens bei den alttestamentlichen Propheten* (Giessen: Alfred Töpelmann, 1915), p. 89.



Zion (Is. 31:4, 5), and it became orthodox doctrine that Jerusalem would stand forever. Bright remarks, "It is entirely likely that Jeremiah's bitterest opponents (26: 7-11) were small-minded disciples of Isaiah not half up to their master's stature!"<sup>7</sup>

Thus Jeremiah had to contend with a perverted view of Israel's election; he had to oppose the "dogmatics of a guardian deity."<sup>8</sup> The people's blind hope in their election knew no bounds. For example, when the Babylonian army temporarily lifted its siege of Jerusalem to attend to the Pharaoh of Egypt, the people were convinced of the validity of their popular dogma: "Surely the Chaldeans will stay away from us." But Jeremiah knew that the covenant could and would be broken, and so he told the people:

Even if you should smite the whole army of Chaldeans who are fighting against you, and there remained of them only wounded men, each man in his tent, they would rise up and burn this city with fire. (37:10)

In Yahweh's counsel it did not hold true that Israel's election implied their indestructibility. In fact, just the opposite was true, according to Amos' dictum: "You only have I known of all the families of the earth; therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities" (Amos 3:2). Their election was not a sign of security but of tension, for to be drawn into such an intimate relationship with Yahweh was to be uniquely exposed to the burning fire of His righteousness. The oracle in Jer. 11:

<sup>7</sup> John Bright, *A History of Israel* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1959), p. 311.

<sup>8</sup> Martin Buber, *The Prophetic Faith*, translated from the Hebrew by Carlyle Witton-Davies (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1949), p. 178.

15-17, though it presents textual problems, shows strikingly the relationship between election and judgment:

What right has my beloved in my house,  
when she has done evil devices?

Can vows [יְהוָה לְיָמֵי] for [יְהוָה לְיָמֵי] and sacrificial  
flesh

cause your evil to pass from you,  
that you might then exult?

"A fresh olive tree, fair with goodly fruit,"  
Yahweh called your name;

but to the sound of a mighty storm  
He will kindle a fire upon her,  
and its branches will break.

For Yahweh of hosts, who planted you,  
has pronounced evil against you.

The judgment is the reversal of the election: Yahweh rejects His own people! From this abrogation of election flows both spiritual and physical judgment. The people's sin itself is part of Yahweh's judgment: "Have you not brought this upon yourself? . . . Your wickedness will chasten you, and your apostasy will reprove you" (2:17-19). Alongside this spiritual judgment is the physical destruction of the people. During his early ministry Jeremiah proclaimed a fierce destruction which was breaking upon Israel from the north (1:13 ff.; 4:5 ff.; 5:15 ff.; 6:1 ff., 22). Some scholars feel that Jeremiah wrote these oracles in reference to the hordes of Scythians, who, according to Herodotus, were erupting into the Near East at this time.<sup>9</sup> However, the evidence suggests that Jeremiah is not referring to a historical nation at all; the descriptions of an invading army easily pass over into the popular features of the Day of Yahweh

<sup>9</sup> E.g., Smith, pp. 73, 110 ff., 381-383; S. R. Driver, *An Introduction to the Literature of the Old Testament*, 1891 (New York: The Meridian Library, 1956), pp. 252-253; Skinner, pp. 39 ff. Herodotus, I, 103-106.



(יִם יְהוָה) with its eschatological overtones (4:13 ff., 23 ff.; 25:15 ff.). Of course, when the Babylonian threat grew imminent, Jeremiah proclaimed that Yahweh's plan included the use of this nation to destroy His people. But the important truth lies in this that it was no fateful march of history that spelled the ultimate doom for this tiny nation of Judah; it was Yahweh Himself, plucking up and breaking down the people of His own possession, who destroyed Judah in judgment. This is what gives Jeremiah's proclamation of judgment its fearful tension: "Now it is I who speak in judgment upon them." (4:12)

#### SALVATION BY JUDGMENT?

Precisely at the point when the people are doomed to destruction, the surprising thing happens, for alongside the oracles of judgment appear unexpected oracles promising full salvation for the people.<sup>10</sup>

Many scholars today think the problem is solved by viewing the judgment which Jeremiah proclaimed as a disciplinary judgment. Sanders, for example, finds the key in Jeremiah's use of the word מִסָּר, ("discipline"). The destruction of Judah causes the people to repent, and then God brings them salvation.<sup>11</sup> This view of מִסָּר is summed up by Sheldon H. Blank:

As employed by the prophets and especially, among them, by Jeremiah, the word *musār* is a technical term; it means a calamity, visited by God upon a person

or a nation, a calamity which, if humbly accepted and correctly interpreted, may serve as a lesson and from which, if the lesson is learned, salvation may result.<sup>12</sup>

Thus the tension between judgment and grace is resolved, for the two are in essence the same thing: "Judgment is Salvation."<sup>13</sup>

It is true that Jeremiah proclaims the judgment as part of God's plan of salvation. However, he does not attempt to resolve the tension between the judging and the saving activity of Yahweh. Yahweh tears down, and He builds up; both activities are juxtaposed without any lessening of the full impact of either. To be sure, Jeremiah does make considerable use of the verb יָסַר, "to discipline," and the corresponding noun, מִסָּר. However, a study of the usage shows that in almost every case these words and related concepts are used to document the people's inability to repent. "In vain have I smitten your children; they took no discipline, מִסָּר "correction," (2:30; cf. 17:23; 32:33; 35:13; 7:28; 30:11-13). In fact, instead of making the people repent, Yahweh's discipline makes their hearts grow even harder:

You have smitten them,  
but they felt no anguish;  
you have consumed them,  
but they refused to take correction.  
They have made their faces harder than  
rock;  
they have refused to repent (5:3).

Since Jeremiah stood in the succession of the prophets of judgment, sent to proclaim the doom of the nation and thus force the people to a decision of life or

<sup>10</sup> On the authenticity of some of these "oracles of salvation" see J. Mulenburg, "Jeremiah the Prophet," *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, ed. George Arthur Buttrick (New York: Abingdon Press, 1962), II, 830-834.

<sup>11</sup> Jim Alvin Sanders, "Suffering as Divine Discipline in the Old Testament and Post-Biblical Judaism," *Colgate Rochester Divinity School Bulletin*, XXVIII (1955), 64 ff.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 9.

<sup>13</sup> This is the often repeated theme of J. A. Sander's book, *The Old Testament in the Cross* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1961), *passim*.



death, he proclaimed the "it may be," **וְיָשׁוּב**, of repentance until the very end (cf. 26:3; 36:3,7; 42:10). But it never became a reality, for the people's hearts had become so hardened that they could not turn back to Yahweh. Jeremiah probed beyond the individual misdeeds and uncovered the essential sinful nature of the people. As Cossmann says, "In Jeremiah's understanding, sin is not primarily the individual act, but rather a disposition in the life of the individual and the people which is not subject to self-improvement."<sup>14</sup> This proclivity to evil made Israel's repentance impossible. They refused to be shamed (3:3; 6:15) and kept on protesting their innocence (2:35). There were some outward signs of repentance; the great reform of King Josiah based on the Deuteronomic Lawbook was undertaken early in Jeremiah's career. But Jeremiah condemns these halfhearted efforts as hypocrisy: "Judah did not return to Me with her whole heart, but in pretense, (**בְּשֵׁקֶר**), says Yahweh" (3:10; cf. 5:2; 8:8).<sup>15</sup> Their sin is engraved on their heart with a pen of iron (17:1,9). The prophet, sent as an assayer and tester among the people, finds that the refining process is in vain, for the people are wholly wicked: "'Refuse silver' they are called, for Yahweh has rejected them" (6:29,30). They turn away in "perpetual apostasy" (8:5-7). There is no hope that their sinful nature can be changed: "Can

<sup>14</sup> Cossmann, p. 161: *Die Sünde ist ihm ja keine Einzeltat, sondern ein habitus im Leben des einzelnen und des Volkes. Sie schafft einen Zustand, der keiner Besserung fähig ist.*

<sup>15</sup> On the relationship of Jeremiah to Josiah's reform, see Adam C. Welch, *Jeremiah: His Time and His Work* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1955), pp. 76—96.

the Ethiopian change his skin or the leopard his spots? Then also you will be able to do good, who art wont to do evil" (13:23). The verdict is *non potes non peccare*.<sup>16</sup> There can be no salvation by discipline, and therefore Yahweh must destroy the people in judgment.

#### SALVATION IN JUDGMENT

Jeremiah proclaimed unmitigated judgment which would completely destroy the people. But at the same time he proclaimed full, creative grace which would bring about salvation for Israel. The salvation comes completely from God's side, in a new act of creation.<sup>17</sup> The proclamation of unconditional grace does not take away in the least from the fierceness of the judgment. The judgment must be total so that the grace may be total. Thus the word of judgment and the word of grace—so contradictory to human logic—have their unity in the divine activity as God brings His purpose of salvation to completion.

Salvation in judgment—this is the theme of the great collection of oracles known as the "book of consolation" (chs. 30, 31).<sup>18</sup>

<sup>16</sup> Cf. Weiser, XX, p. 118; and Adolphe Lods, *The Prophets and the Rise of Judaism*, trans. S. H. Hooke (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1955), p. 170.

<sup>17</sup> Paul Volz, *Der Prophet Jeremia*, 3d ed. (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1930), p. 49.

<sup>18</sup> Some scholars attribute only portions in the book of consolation to Jeremiah. It may have passed through a complicated process of editing; but it fits well into the general lines of Jeremiah's theology, for the message is the same one revealed to Jeremiah in his call: Yahweh tears down and builds. Cf. Hans Schmidt, "Die Grossen Propheten," part 2 of *Die Schriften des Alten Testaments in Auswahl neu übersetzt und für die Gegenwart erklärt*, 2d ed. (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1921), II, 358; and Weiser, XXI, 273—275.



These oracles contain the full tension between judgment and grace, summed up in this statement:

Alas for that day is so great,  
there is none like it.

It is a time of tribulation for Jacob,  
and out of it (יָמֵי צָרָה) he shall be  
saved (30:7).

"That day" points to the whole range of God's activity in carrying through His purpose, that unique divine activity which has the inner tension of judgment and grace. Therefore "that day" is dialectical, for "Jacob's day of distress is the critical time of [for] salvation."<sup>19</sup> It is precisely in the midst of judgment that God creates salvation for His people.

The oracle in 30:12-17 gives a good example of divine logic. Because of the people's sin Yahweh has dealt them the blow of an enemy, an incurable wound (30:12-15). The judgment is complete. "Therefore," says Yahweh, "I will restore health to you, and your wounds I will heal" (30:16, 17). The One who destroyed them in judgment recreates them in grace. This is summed up in the oracle recorded in 31:28:

And it shall come to pass that as I have watched over them to pluck up and to break down, to overthrow, destroy and bring evil, so I will watch over them to build and to plant, says Yahweh.

The climax of the book of consolation, the new covenant oracle in 31:31-34, spells out Yahweh's activity in judgment and grace.

Behold, the days are coming, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah, not like the covenant which I made with

their fathers when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, though I was their husband, says the Lord. But this is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will put My law within them, and I will write it upon their hearts, and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. And no longer shall each man teach his neighbor and each his brother, saying, "Know the Lord," for they shall all know Me, from the least of them to the greatest, says the Lord; for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.

The fact that there would be a new covenant meant that the old covenant would be destroyed in judgment. The promise that Yahweh would give the people new hearts meant that the old hearts must be destroyed. But here is the great wonder, "that in the very center of His no stands God's grand yes."<sup>20</sup> God steps in and creates a new people with new hearts, a people who will respond with new hearts to Yahweh's loving mercy.

Jeremiah proclaimed this message in many other ways. While Jerusalem was under siege, he bought a field that was in the possession of the Babylonian army (32:6-44). The destruction was going to be complete (32:31), yet God was going to create new people and bring complete salvation (32:36-42). God will heal the very sinful nature which brought about the judgment (3:22). Although Yahweh will destroy the Davidic kingdom and make a radical break in history, yet He will recreate His people under the rulership of the righteous Branch (22:24—23:6). In

<sup>20</sup> Volkmar Hertrich, *Jeremia der Prophet und sein Volk* (Gütersloh: C. Bertelsmann, 1938), pp. 52—54: *dass es mitten im Nein das grosse Ja Gottes gibt.*

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, XXI, 277: *die "Notzeit" Jakobs ist die Krisis zum Heil!*



his letter to the exiles already in Babylon (ch. 29) Jeremiah indicates that God will watch over His word of promise and bring about their restoration—but only after a period of 70 years (29:10), a relative amount of time assuring a complete break brought about by the judgment.

Thus Jeremiah proclaims salvation in judgment. There is nothing to ease the tension between these two activities of God. They stand side by side, having their unity in the unsearchable purpose of God for the ultimate salvation of His people. The tension is based in God Himself.

#### THE PASSION OF THE PROPHET

The personal life and emotion of Jeremiah are recorded in great detail. He was invited to have a share in the divine activity of tearing down and building up (1:10), and this meant that he was personally involved in the tension between judgment and grace, both from God's side and from the people's side.

Jeremiah was completely taken up into the divine counsel and purpose. He stood in the council of Yahweh (23:18), and his life was shattered by Yahweh's Word (20:9; 23:9). God overpowered Jeremiah. In describing this, Jeremiah uses the legal terms for the seduction and raping of a woman, הָרַב ("deceive") and רָפַח: "O Yahweh, You deceived me, and I was deceived; You forced me, and You prevailed" (20:7).<sup>21</sup> In many oracles it is difficult to determine whether Yahweh or Jeremiah is the speaker (cf. 4:19-22; 5:31; 8:18—9:2; 10:19-21; 12:7-13). Jeremiah's thoughts and emotions have merged with Yahweh's; his prophetic sympathy

with the divine pathos is such that no sharp distinction is needed between the oracle of Yahweh and his own outbursts of feeling.<sup>22</sup>

Jeremiah also had a strong sense of solidarity with the people. He prayed for the people even when Yahweh had forbidden him to do so (14:11 ff.), and he felt one with them in experiencing the coming judgment (6:22-26; 8:14; 9:16 ff.). His solidarity with the people was so strong that he "did not hesitate to hurl at his God the bluntest accusations of unfairness"<sup>23</sup> (cf. 4:10). Jeremiah himself knew what it was to have an incurable wound (15:18), but he also experienced the recreating power of Yahweh's grace (15:19-21; 17:14). In him, as a representative of the people, Yahweh's saving activity in judgment and grace was realized to an unusual degree. (Cf. Is. 6:5-7.)

Because Jeremiah stood both on Yahweh's side and on the people's side, he experienced terrific tension in his life, the tension between judgment and grace. The so-called confessions of Jeremiah, unique in prophetic literature, illustrate the inner debate which he carried on with God in this tension. He begs God to take vengeance on the people (11:20; 15:15; 17:18), yet he bemoans the trouble he has caused the people (15:10). He accuses Yahweh of being a mirage and a deceiver (15:18; 20:7), and he curses the day of his birth (20:14-18). It is significant that

<sup>22</sup> Gerhard von Rad, *Theologie des alten Testaments* (München: Chr. Kaiser, 1960), II, 204; Aubrey R. Johnson, *The One and the Many in the Israelite Conception of God*, 2d ed. (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1961), p. 36; and Knight, p. 139.

<sup>23</sup> John Bright, *The Kingdom of God: the Biblical Concept and Its Meaning for the Church* (New York: Abingdon Press, 1953), p. 118.

<sup>21</sup> Cf. Harold Knight, *The Hebrew Prophetic Consciousness* (London: Lutterworth Press, 1947), p. 140.



this last confession ends in deepest woe. There is no resolution of the tension that pervades his life. The pain-producing doubleness remains to the end.

Yet it is clear that Jeremiah's suffering is an important part of his message. Much prominence is given to his sufferings throughout the Book of Jeremiah, but it is especially in the cycle of stories in chapters 37—45, apparently part of Baruch's memoirs, that the theological message of Jeremiah's suffering becomes apparent. This cycle of stories presents the close of Jeremiah's career as a record of futility. All his efforts fail, and he disappears from the scene in utter frustration, compelled to spend his last days in Egypt with a group of idolatrous Israelites. This is not mere biography; it is passion history, designed to show that suffering was one of the primary elements in Jeremiah's office.<sup>24</sup> And the key to this passion history is given at the end, in the form of an oracle from Yahweh to Baruch:

Thus says Yahweh, the God of Israel, to you, O Baruch: You said, "Woe is me! for Yahweh has added sorrow to my pain; I am weary with my groaning, and I find no rest." Thus shall you say to him: "Thus says Yahweh: Behold, what I have built I am breaking down, and what I have planted I am plucking up, that is, the whole land. And do you seek great things for yourself? Seek them not; for, behold, I am bringing evil upon all flesh, says Yahweh; but I will give you your life as a prize of war in all places to which you may go." (45:2-5)

Baruch and Jeremiah were sharing in God's own sufferings, and their pain and frustration was part of the pain and frustration

of their God.<sup>25</sup> The prophet's life of suffering reflects the corresponding tension between judgment and grace in God Himself.

#### GOD'S SUFFERING LOVE

Jeremiah indicates that the tension in God between His wrath and His love causes indescribable suffering—and this suffering is redemptive! It is God's suffering love, His love which suffers in conflict with His wrath, which brings redemption for His people. Thus the content of God's suffering love must inevitably be in the cross.

Jeremiah goes to great lengths to describe the sharp antithesis between God's love for His people and their cruel rejection of Him. Throughout their history God has been getting up early הַשֶּׁמֶת, "persistently," and sending prophets (7:13,25; 11:7; 25:3; 35:14; 44:4).<sup>26</sup> He waited and listened closely in hopes that He would hear an answer to His calling (8:6). He even closed His eyes to Israel's harlotry, for He thought, "After she has done all this, she will return to Me" (3:7). Yet without exception all of Yahweh's overtures of love proved to be in vain, and Israel rejected her Creator, Preserver, Father, and Husband.

Therefore Yahweh's spurned love turned to hatred: "She has lifted up her voice against Me; therefore I hate her" (שָׂנְאָתִיָּהּ) (12:8b). As Eichrodt says,

But the very greatness of the offer is what makes the situation so perilous; for love that seeks the ultimate response, the surrender of the personal will, cannot but

<sup>25</sup> Von Rad, p. 220.

<sup>24</sup> Johann Jakob Stamm, *Das Leiden des Unschuldigen in Babylon und Israel* (Zürich: Zwingli-Verlag, 1946), p. 72.

<sup>26</sup> Cf. H. H. Rowley, *The Faith of Israel: Aspects of Old Testament Thought* (London: SCM Press, 1956), p. 91.



destroy those who resist it. Condemnation is always close at hand.<sup>27</sup>

But the struggle between Yahweh's love and His wrath causes frustration and suffering, and Jeremiah becomes very graphic in describing this. God suffers the hurt of a doting father whose daughter spurns him (3:19,20). He has to bear the taunt of the people: "O Hope of Israel, its Savior in time of trouble, . . . why are you like a man confused, like a mighty man who is not able to save?" (14:8,9a). He cries out in sorrow: "I have given the beloved of My soul into the hands of her enemies" (12:7b).<sup>28</sup> Yahweh's lament in 10:19,20 is explicit:

Woe to me on account of my hurt!  
My wound is very grievous.  
And I said, "Surely this is an affliction,  
and I will bear it."  
My tent is destroyed,  
and all my cords are broken;  
My sons have gone forth from me,  
and they are not.

Chapter 45, in which God tells Baruch that his sufferings are only a pale reflection of the far greater sufferings of Yahweh, has already been discussed. "There is hardly a passage in the Old Testament which gives us a more impressive glimpse of the eternal cross in the heart of God."<sup>29</sup>

The passage interpreting God's suffering love is 31:20: God's everlasting love (31:3) continues to battle with His wrath, producing intense suffering, and out of this suffering comes the salvation of Israel.

<sup>27</sup> Walther Eichrodt, *Theology of the Old Testament*, translated from the German sixth edition by J. A. Baker (London: SCM Press, 1961), I, 254.

<sup>28</sup> Cf. H. W. Robinson, *The Cross in the Old Testament* (London: SCM Press, 1955), p. 183.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 186.

Is Ephraim My dear son?  
Is he My darling child?

For as often as I speak against him  
(יְרַבְרֵי בּוֹ),

I surely remember him still  
(זָכוֹר אֶזְכְּרֶנּוּ עוֹד).

Therefore my inward parts are pained  
for him;

I must have mercy on him!

Here the divine saving process is described. God must speak against His people, destroying them in judgment; yet His love causes Him to remember them graciously. The tension between the wrath and love produces intense pain. The verb קָפַח

literally means "growl," "be in commotion"; often it is used for intense sorrow of the heart (Is. 16:11; Jer. 48:36; 4:19).<sup>30</sup> And precisely out of this divine suffering comes the salvation of Israel. The infinitive absolute shows the compulsion of the result.<sup>31</sup> Yahweh issues the decree: "I must have mercy on him." There is no human reason for this salvation; it came forth from the suffering of God, the suffering which redeems His people. (Cf. the similar passage in Hos. 11:8,9.)

Therefore the suffering love of God as described by Jeremiah is an eloquent witness to the Cross of Christ, where this process of salvation was realized in concrete form. The Japanese theologian Kitamori, using Jer. 31:20 as the basis for what he calls "the theology of the pain of God," states:

Jeremiah states here that God still loves Ephraim, who rebelled against God, and

<sup>30</sup> Martin Luther, WA, *Deutsche Bibel*, II 1, 295, translates: "Darum bricht mir mein Hertz gegen im."

<sup>31</sup> Cf. Elmer A. Leslie, *Jeremiah* (New York: Abingdon Press, 1954), p. 105.



the Love toward sinners who rebel against Him is the Love revealed in the Cross of Christ.<sup>32</sup>

Thus it is seen that the theological key to the juxtaposition of judgment and grace in Jeremiah's preaching is the suffering love of God which redeems His people.<sup>33</sup>

Seen in this light, Jeremiah's prophetic description of salvation can shed light on Christ's atonement. God works in full judgment and full grace to accomplish salvation—this is the message of Jeremiah; and God's wrath and His love are seen in their fullest expression in the Cross of Christ. In Christ the two lines come together, the suffering of God and the suffering of men. Christ unites both into one supreme passion as the representative of the people and as God Himself. The parable of the wicked husbandmen (Mark 12: 1-12) shows that He continues the line of the suffering prophets, and God's own anguish is seen in His lament over Jerusalem's rejection of Him. (Luke 13:34, 35; 19:41-44)

The mystery of the resolution of this problem is, according to Jeremiah, carried back within the divine Being, and its product is salvation—not in the form of the victory of God's love over His wrath but in the form of redemptive suffering.<sup>34</sup>

We return to the statement of the Con-

<sup>32</sup> Kazoh Kitamori, "The Theology of the Pain of God," *Japan Christian Quarterly*, XIX (1953), 318. See also Richard Meyer, "Toward a Japanese Theology: Kitamori's Theology of the Pain of God," *CONCORDIA THEOLOGICAL MONTHLY*, XXXIII (1962), pp. 261—272.

<sup>33</sup> Weiser, XX, pp. xxxii, xxxiii.

<sup>34</sup> For a somewhat different interpretation of Luther's understanding of this problem see Gustaf Aulén, *Christus Victor: An Historical Study of the Three Main Types of the Idea of the Atonement*, translated by A. G. Hebert (London: SPCK, 1931), p. 130.

fessions: "The two doctrines [Law and Gospel] belong together, and should also be urged by the side of each other." Today, therefore, judgment and grace must be proclaimed together, without any confusing or toning down of either. For, as Roehrs states, "In the Bible He expresses and reveals Himself and His relationship to us in the same unfathomable 'double-ness' of His holy judgment and loving acts of redemption and salvation."<sup>35</sup>

If in the preaching of the church the love of God is stressed to the exclusion of His jealousy and wrath, the Cross of Christ becomes dispensable, for the Cross results from the full working of both God's wrath and His love. It is not God's "immediate" love that saves; it is God's love made to suffer by the apparent tension with His wrath that redeems. If the church, on the other hand, stresses the Law of God while neglecting His love, a theology of judgment results, in which man is saved because God leads him to repentance.

By proclaiming total judgment and total grace together the full impact of the Biblical doctrine of salvation is achieved. Man is judged, put to death together with any semblance of worth on his part; the destruction is complete. But God steps in and recreates him, bringing him to life by grace. The Sacrament of Baptism is a vivid portrayal of this process. There is a tension between this judgment and this grace, juxtaposed in the preaching of the church. But at the center stands the Cross of Christ, the concrete expression of God's suffering love, the symbol of full judgment and full grace.

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<sup>35</sup> Walter R. Roehrs, "The Unity of Scripture," *CONCORDIA THEOLOGICAL MONTHLY*, XXXI (1960), 299.