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An analysis of the religious self-consciousness of Jeremiah

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Thesis

AN ANALYSIS OF THE RELIGIOUS
SELF-CONSCIOUSNESS OF JEREMIAH

by

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"There is a Master in my heart
   To whom, though oft against my will,
I bring the songs I sing apart
   And strive to think that they fulfil
His silent law, within my heart.

But He is blind to my desires,
   And deaf to all that I would plead.
He tests my truth at purer fires
   And shames my purple with His need.
He claims my deeds, not my desires.

And often, when my comrades praise,
   I sadden, for He turns from me.
But, sometimes, when they blame, I raise
   Mine eyes to His, and in them see
A tenderness too deep for praise."

- Alfred Noyes
OUTLINE

Introduction...................................................... 1

Chapter I. The Sources............................................. 2

Chapter II. The Backgrounds....................................... 15
   A. Social...................................................... 15
   B. Political.................................................. 15
   C. Prophetic.................................................. 18

Chapter III Biography of Jeremiah................................ 21
   A. Reign of Josiah........................................... 22
   B. Jehoahaz and Jehoiachim................................. 23
   C. Until the Siege (587).................................... 25
   D. The Siege and Fall of Jerusalem......................... 26

Chapter IV. Jeremiah - A Man of Conflicts....................... 28
   A. Two Inmovable Forces.................................... 29
   B. Dual Personality......................................... 29
   C. The Prophet's Doubts..................................... 32

Chapter V. Recognition............................................. 35
   A. Jeremiah prepared until hardship actually came........... 35
      1. Call.................................................... 35
      2. Commission............................................. 36
   B. Oriental Nature of Shrinking....................... 37
Chapter V. (Continued)

C. Men Persecute Him.......................... 38

D. Why Do Men Persecute Him?............. 39

1. Misconstruct his motives................. 39
2. Patriotism................................... 39
3. Doom, Destruction and Violence........ 40
4. Deuteronomical Code....................... 40

E. The Effect Upon Jeremiah................. 41

1. Despondency, Agony, Discontent........ 41
   a. Desertion................................. 42

2. Argued with God............................. 42
   a. Hatred..................................... 43
   b. Retribution................................. 43
   c. Recognition................................. 44
3. Temptation Exposed.......................... 44
   a. Hatred and Wrath............................ 45

Chapter VI. Loneliness.......................... 48

A. Jeremiah's Nature.......................... 49

1. Tender........................................ 49
2. Statesman..................................... 50
3. Temper........................................ 50

B. His Message and its Significance....... 50

1. People did not understand............... 51
2. Prophecied against individuals as well as nations........ 51
3. Felt isolated................................ 52
4. Sympathies intensified.................... 54

C. Speaks to God............................... 56

1. "Father of Prayer"......................... 56
2. What He Prays for........................... 57
3. Prayer more than Petition............... 58
Chapter VII. Assurance.......................................................... 59

A. Seeking Something Stronger Than Himself.......................... 59
   1. Sense of Helplessness............................................. 59
   2. Considers giving up Mission.................................. 60
   3. Tests Himself.................................................... 60
   4. Asks God to Remember His Good Works....................... 62
   5. Prayer........................................................................ 63

B. Quest Ends in Assurance...................................................... 63
   1. Turning Point.......................................................... 64
   2. Permanent Essence................................................. 66
   3. Dependence Equals Strength.................................... 66
   4. Pure Thought.......................................................... 66

C. Results of Quest............................................................... 66
   1. Certainty of God....................................................... 66
   2. Optimism................................................................. 66
   3. Struggle over peace................................................ 66

Chapter VIII. Contribution to the Prophet's Thought... 68

A. List of Contributions....................................................... 69

B. Suggestions of Present Day Values.. 74
INTRODUCTION

This paper will deal with the famous "confessional" passages of Jeremiah. By careful analysis and evaluation it will be my intent to have them serve as windows through which we may come into closer and more intimate companionship with the great prophet, Jeremiah.

These passages are intriguing for they seem to blaze new paths through the maze of uncertainty to a firm and illuminating assurance.

Longacre tells us that these passages are

intimate personal, first-hand reports of the spiritual wrestlings and aspirations of one of the purest, noblest, most courageous souls that ever lived. 1

It is this inward struggle that we will analyze. The struggle I believe to be universal and therefore we may find that Jeremiah's wanderings through uncertainty to certainty may show others the way. His solution to this common experience may be useful to others.

Chapter I

THE SOURCES

The passages with which I am particularly interested in this study are commonly called the "confessional" passages of Jeremiah. They number seven and are found in the book bearing the prophet's name. These passages are interspersed through his prophecies. The entire seven, however, are to be found within the middle section of the book, namely, between chapters eleven and twenty. For the sake of convenience I shall list the references here.

2. Chapter XII: 1-3, 5, 6
3. Chapter XV: 10 and 15-21
4. Chapter XVII: 9-10 and 14-18
5. Chapter XVIII: 18-23
6. Chapter XX: 7-12
7. Chapter XX: 14-18

The famous conversion and commission passage found in the first chapter, verses four through ten, will also be included in the following pages. It forms a splendid foundation stone upon which much may be built. This passage, in my opinion, cannot be classed with the "confessionals." It is written in the personal tense and thus has a close kinship to the "confessionals" but on the other hand its
emphasis is slightly more autobiographical than is the emphasis in the more heart searching passages known as the "confessionals."

These poetic utterances were most likely, Skinner affirms, placed in the book in their present positions by an editor. This conclusion was reached because of the fact that they appear as isolated sections in their present position. It seems very likely to me that they were written by Jeremiah with no anticipation of ever publishing them. They certainly came directly from the heart and are of such a personal nature that we may readily believe that they were written in private and very likely intended to be kept in private. A later edition of the book, possibly Jeremiah's own faithful scribe, Baruch, may have inserted them. Baruch, as far as we know, was upon more intimate terms with Jeremiah than any other person. It is, therefore, very likely that it was he who might have inserted these precious passages into the book. The fact that they were inserted and were probably not included in the book when Jeremiah dictated it to Baruch \(^1\) does not in the least detract from their value. This situation is a perfectly normal one. It might happen in any day and age. A modern example of the same situation would be that of Emily Dickinson. During her lifetime but one or two of her poems were published and very

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1. Jeremiah, Chapter 31.
few found their way outside of her home. After her death
a niece and an intimate friend published them.

These gems of Jeremiah's are written either in the
form of a monologue\(^1\) or else in a strangely ingenious and
arresting colloquy with God. They give us some of the most
vital elements in Jeremiah's individuality and influence.

Let us turn to a consideration of the question of the
approximate time of their origin.

I am of the opinion that they belong to the reign of
Josiah rather than to the time of one of the later kings
and that they represent the spiritual struggle in Jeremiah's
heart before the time of his more public ministry under the
rule of Jehoiakim.

Of course it would have been possible for these "confes-
sions" to have all been the product of a given period in
the career of the prophet. On the other hand, they, of
course, might have originated at different times. As Jer-
emiah worked and spoke for Jehovah and the situation un-
folded itself more significantly before the prophet he might
well have written one of these personal, heart confessions
at a time. They may be looked upon as being scattered along
throughout his career arising at different intervals.

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Calkins is of the opinion that these passages came from a definite episode in the spiritual experience of Jeremiah. Skinner agrees with him on this point to the extent of stating that they have a certain psychological continuity. The two part company, however, upon the question of the period in which they were written.

Calkins believes that the period lies not at the beginning of Jeremiah's political activity but rather at the close of his struggle with Jehoiakim. He bases his assumption on the fact that then, and then only did the whole problem unfold itself in the mind of Jeremiah. At this late period in his life Jeremiah was more capable of such writing. "The years of Jehoiakim's misrule of Judah from 608 B.C. had been for Jeremiah crowded with outward events and with inward tumult." It was at this time, argues Calkins, that the whole moral problem unfolded itself before the prophet. The gravity of the situation caused him deep inner grief. Out of that deep inner grief grew the agony of the "confessionals."

I shall now turn to each one of these passages and look for definite clues to substantiate his point of view. In this discussion I shall quote the passages in their entirety, both for the sake of the particular purpose at hand and also

that we may have a common understanding and knowledge of
the passages and of the particular translations used.

The first of the "confessionals" is chapter XI: 18-23:

"I knew - for Jehovah had told me, and revealed to me what
they were doing:
But I - like an innocent lamb
That is led to the slaughter was I.
Yes, all unconscious was I
Of the plots they were plotting against me.

To ruin the tree with its sap,
From the land of the living to root me
And banish my name out of mind.
But Jehovah of Hosts, thou righteous Judge,
Who mind and heart dost prove,
Let me see Thy vengeance upon them,
For on Thee have I rolled my cause.
Therefore, thus saith Jehovah concerning the men of
Anathoth who seek thy life and threaten thee
with death at their hands, if thou preach in
the name of Jehovah:
Therefore saith Jehovah of Hosts,
Behold I will visit them sternly;
Their young men shall die by the sword,
Their sons and their daughters shall perish with hunger.
Not one of them shall be left;
For over the men of Anathoth
Calamity I will bring
In the year of their visitation."

The threat mentioned here on Jeremiah's life might
easily have been a reference to his persecution at the hands
of his fellowmen in Anathoth. It is very likely that he was
preaching to them concerning the central temple advocated by
the Deuteronomic code and for that reason met with their dis-
favor. It is not easy to be disowned by one's own family
and friends. In the bitterness of that experience Jeremiah

1. McFadyen, J. E., Jeremiah in Modern Speech, p. 5,6.
might have written this passage of deep resentment. Stephen dates this passage as coming near the end of Josiah's reign, which was 608 B.C.

Thou art in the right, O Yahwe,  
Should I dispute with Thee;  
Yet of matters of right  
Would I speak with Thee.  
Why is the way of the wicked so smooth,  
And all treacherous men at ease?  
Thou plantest them; they also strike root,  
Beget and bear fruit.  
Near art Thou in their mouth,  
But how far from their heart!  
But Thou, O Yahwe, hast known me,  
Hast tried how my heart is with Thee.  
Drag them forth like sheep to the shambles,  
For a day of slaughter devote them!

With footmen thou hast run and art weary,  
Then how wilt thou vie with horses?  
In a land of peace thou art not at ease,  
Then how wilt thou fare in Jordan's brake?  

This section came from the same period for it brings up the question of rectitude. This was most likely raised by reflection upon his recent bitter experience in Anathoth. While both Stephen and Calkins assign it to the early period Cornill believes that it came from a later period in Jeremiah's life.

The next great outpouring of the prophet's soul comes in chapter 15:10-21.

Woe is me, my mother, that thou hast borne me  
A man at strife with all the world!

Nor borrower nor lender am I;
And all men curse me!
Say, Lord, if I have not persisted
With Thee for the enemy's good
And pleaded with Thee in the evil day,
In the day of distress!

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Thou knowest it, Yahwe!
Remember, and visit me graciously.
Avenge Thyself on my persecutors,
And not in Thy long-suffering!
Know that for Thee I have borne reproach
From all who despise Thy words.

But to me is Thy word a delight,
   The joy of my heart;
For Thy name has been named upon me,
   O Yahwe of hosts.

With the merry crew I sat not rejoicing;
   Lonely I sat because of Thy hand:
   For with spleen Thou hast filled me.
Why is my grief perpetual?
   My wound mortal,
   That will not be healed?
Wilt Thou be to me like a winter brook,
   As waters that fail?

Therefore thus saith Yahwe:

If thou return, I will restore thee;
   Thou shalt stand before Me:
If pure thoughts thou utter, unmixed with base,
   Thou shalt be as My mouth.
These men shall come round to thee,
   But not thou to them.

I will make thee to this people
   A wall strong as brass:
They will fight, but shall not o'ercome thee;
   For I am with thee to save thee,
To deliver thee from the hand of the wicked,
   From the grip of the terrible.

It is rather impossible to date this section precisely. Stephen puts it in the first four years of Jehoiakim's rule while Calkins and several others place it at a later date. The latter believes it belongs near the first capture of Jerusalem which would be during the closing years of Jehoiakim's rather hectic rule.

The portion in chapter seventeen offers a bit of religious introspection. Verses nine and ten of this passage connect very nicely with verses fourteen to eighteen. Verse eleven is an isolated proverb while twelve and thirteen are most likely editorial insertions. The passage reads as follows:

Deep beyond sounding is the heart.  
And sick beyond cure.  
Who can know it?

I, Yahwe, search the heart,  
And try the reins;  
To give to a man as his ways,  
The fruit of his doings.

Heal me, Yahwe, that I may be healed;  
Save me that I may be saved;  
For Thou art my praise!

Lo! They are saying to me,  
'Where, then, is Yahwe's word?  
Let it but come!'

But I have not pressed for the evil days,  
Nor desired the day of woe:  
Thou knowest.  
What has come forth from my lips  
Lies plain before Thee.

Be not a terror to me,  
Thou, my trust in the evil day!
May my foes be put to shame, and not I:
May they be dismayed, and not I!
Bring on them the day of evil;
Destroy them with double destruction.  

It is easy to observe that the passage from chapter 18:
18-23 was composed after some conspiracy against the prophet's
life. According to Stephen this section most likely dates
from the reign of Jehoiakim.

'Come,,' they have said, 'Let us hatch
Against him a plot!
(For never shall Torah fail the priest,
Nor counsel the sage, nor word the prophet!)
Come, with the tongue we will smite him,
And carefully watch his words.'

Watch Thou them, O Yahwe!
And hear what my enemies say.
Should evil be rendered for good?
Think how I stood before Thee
To speak for their good,
To turn Thy wrath from them.
While they digged a pit to entrap me,
And snares did lay for my feet.

But Thou, O Yahwe, well knowest
All their designs for my death.
Let not their guilt be atoned for,
Nor their sin blotted out from Thy sight.
May they stumble and fall before Thee!
In the time of Thy wrath deal with them.  

In regard to the two passages in chapter twenty we may
say that they are two separate passages, probably written
at different times. The two passages are as follows:

Thou hast deceived me, Yahwe; and I was deceived:
     What stronger than I, and prevailedst.
I am a laughingstock all the day;
     All men deride me.

When'er I speak I am mocked;
     Of violence and wrong is my cry;
For Yahwe's word is to me a reproach
     And derision all day long.

If I said, 'I will seek to forget Him,
     And speak no more in His name,'
'Twas like glowing fire in my breast,
     Shut up in my bones.
I was weary with keeping it under;
     I could not hold out.

I hear the whisper of many:
     'Denounce! Ay, we'll denounce him!
All you who are friends of his bosom,
     Watch him askance.
He may haply be fooled, and give us the power
     To wreak our revenge.'

But Yahwe is on my side,
     A Hero of might.
Therefore my foes shall stumble,
     And shall not prevail.
Shamed shall they be that they acted amiss,
     With eternal, never-forgotten disgrace.

But, Yahwe of hosts, Thou righteous Searcher!
     Who seest the reins and the heart:
Let me see Thy vengeance upon them;
     For on Thee I roll my complaint.

Curs'd be the day I was born,
     The day when my mother bore me -
     Be it unblest!
Curs'd be the man who brought to my father
     The good news: 'A man-child is born' -
     Making him glad!

May that day be like the cities
     That God overthrew,
     And pitied them not!
May its morning hear the cry of distress,
     Its noon the shout of battle!
Because it slew me not in the womb,
     That my mother had been my grave,
     And her womb pregnant for ever.
Why came I forth from the womb
To see trouble and sorrow,
To consume my days in shame?¹

These two passages in chapter twenty are regarded by Calkins² as belonging to the period after the first captivity in 597 B.C. Stephen³ places them in the later part of Jehoiakim's reign, while Peake⁴ believes that they probably belong to the early period of Jehoiakim's reign. At any rate, it is pretty well agreed, Skinner⁵ says, that these passages in chapter twenty have a biographical connection with the night spent in the stocks which Jeremiah describes in the immediately preceding passage.

We may readily see from the preceding pages that there is very little agreement among scholars in regard to the dates of these various passages. No definite dates are included in the text itself and it is, therefore, by pure romancing that these scholars have come to their conclusions. I have given them here because they are all interesting and throw some light upon the situation.

¹ Skinner, John, Prophecy and Religion, pp. 207-208.
² Calkins, Jeremiah, the Prophet.
³ Stephen, Jeremiah, p. 42.
⁵ Skinner, Prophecy and Religion, p. 209.
There exists little evidence for or against any theory which attempts to date them. In my opinion, it is better that we at least draw a tentative conclusion and Skinner offers, what seems to me, the most likely theory.¹

It is his contention that all these passages come before Jeremiah had become a prominent actor on the stage of politics and therefore they probably fall into the middle period of his work. The passages by their nature, in Skinner's opinion, would fit into the middle years when the prophet's work was more limited in its reach than at a later date. Skinner would place them all during the last twelve years of Josiah's reign. The arguments he advances for this decision appeal to me to be very logical. They not only rest upon our knowledge of historical events but also take into consideration some sound psychological reasons. These passages reverberate with struggle. As I study what knowledge we have concerning Jeremiah's last days, I am of the opinion that he faced death courageously and with self-possession. He seems at the time of Zedekiah to be a man who has quieted his inward struggles and now maintains an inner calmness. Skinner, therefore, looks upon the "confessionals" as coming from the Gethsemane rather than the Calvary of Jeremiah's life.²

¹ Skinner, John, Prophecy and Religion, p. 209.
This reasoning seems most acceptable to me and I shall continue with that in mind always subject, of course, to possible change if increased knowledge on the subject should ever warrant it.
Chapter II

THE HISTORICAL BACKGROUNDS

When an artist produces a picture upon canvas the background forms an important part of the production. It serves to give setting and depth to the main object. In this word picture of Jeremiah's inner life, I believe it necessary to first include a faint outline of background. In doing this, I shall give a brief discussion of the social, political, and prophetic situations which existed in the time of Jeremiah and shall plant their roots into Hebrew history. Due to the fact that the political and social situations were so closely interwoven, I shall discuss the two together and then shall give a brief outline of the history of Hebrew prophecy.

While the Northern Kingdom was nearing its fall, Ahaz was on the throne in the South. He was a weak and irresolute leader. The people were forced to pay a heavy yearly tribute to the Assyrians which resulted in their own poverty.

Ahaz was succeeded by Hezekiah. This ruler made an attempt to purify the religious life of the people. It
should be noted that he worked in close cooperation with the prophet Isaiah. Egypt and Babylon attempted to get Hezekiah to see the advisability of revolt against Assyria. For a time Ahas looked upon the idea with disfavor but finally, due to the pressure of public opinion, he yielded. Assyria marched upon Jerusalem and besieged it. They departed as suddenly as they came and Hezekiah returned to his policy of vassalage to the Assyrians. The Assyrians then marched south and conquered Egypt.

Manasseh followed Hezekiah as ruler and he was king for approximately sixty years. This period was a dark one of reaction. Assyrian deities were introduced into Jerusalem and were even worshiped.

When Manasseh died he was succeeded by one of the noblest kings of the Hebrews, Josiah. Josiah came to the throne in 639 B.C. at the age of eight. The social and religious life of the people was at an extremely low level and when Josiah reached the age of eighteen he inaugurated some drastic reform measures. These measures rather followed along the prophetic ideas of reform. Hilkiah, a priest, found in the temple a Book of Laws. Josiah put these laws into effect. It was a great national revival of religion and constituted a great moment in the religious history of the people of Judah. Under these laws all the
local temples were abolished and the central temple at Jerusalem established.

At this time, Babylon and Egypt both decided to go against Assyria. Josiah decided to resist the advance of the Egyptians under Necho. As a result in 608 B.C. the famous battle of Megiddo was fought. Josiah, still a young and fine king was slain in battle. This event marked a turning point in the career of Jeremiah.

Jehoahaz, the second son of Josiah, ruled for three months before he was carried off into Egypt where he died. His elder brother, Jehoiakim was appointed king and ruled under Necho of Egypt. This man proved to be a selfish ruler and was against the prophetic movement. Jehoiakim and Jeremiah were constantly against each other. Probably it was this feud which brought to the surface some of Jeremiah's finest moral fiber.

Nineveh fell before the Babylonians and then Egypt was conquered. Judah was now subject to Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon.

After three years of loyalty to Babylon, Jehoiakim was persuaded by Necho to join Egypt in a revolt. This was in the year 597 B.C. Babylon at once invaded Judah. They fought a battle just outside of Jerusalem in which
Jehoiakim met his death. The Babylonians carried away the most influential inhabitants of Jerusalem but left the city standing.

Zedekiah now became the king. Nine years passed and then Zedekiah tried a revolt. This time the invasion of Jerusalem was swift and final. In 586 B.C., they captured and destroyed Jerusalem and carried most of the remaining people off into captivity.

The foregoing statements give one a bird's-eye view of the historical situation in its political and social aspects. I shall now deal briefly with the historical development of the prophetic mission up to the time of Jeremiah. This, I believe, will give us a firmer foundation upon which to work.

Dr. Skinner traces the development of Hebrew prophecy along two lines, namely: as a theocratic institution and then as a mode of divine revelation. For this treatment I am indebted to him for I shall follow his outline.¹

As a theocratic institution, the prophets had a recognized place and function among the Hebrew people for they served as a medium of communication between Yahweh and his people. As we look back over the history of the Hebrew people we see that it was Samuel, himself a prophet, who was

responsible for welding the nation into a political unity by the establishment of a monarchy. The prophets served as Yahweh's mouthpiece to the nations.

And then when we consider the history of prophecy as a mode of divine revelation, we may make the following statements. These statements are made here in a rather dogmatic manner for two reasons: first, they are well accepted among scholars; secondly, they are used in this paper merely as incidental background and therefore a more detailed study is not necessary.

At the lowest stage, ecstasy and inspiration were identified. The prophet delivered his messages directly as he received them from Jehovah without any personal comment. The prophet here was merely a human voice through which the Divine might speak to the people.

As time passed, the meaning of the vision passed into the prophet's thinking and we have the use of symbolic imagery. Jeremiah relies, we find, more explicitly than previous prophets, on the intuition. We do, however, find that Jeremiah apprehends the word of God in two forms. We see the survival of the ecstatic mode of impersonal and also the personal form which appeals directly to his consciousness and reason.
In studying the life of Jeremiah, we are particularly fortunate in that we have some fine source material. In the first place, we have the book of Jeremiah, which "does not so much teach religious truths as present a religious personality." We also have an accurate history of the political and economic situation of Jeremiah's time.

Jeremiah was a descendant of Abiathar, the priest who had been exiled from Jerusalem to a little town by the name of Anathoth. This exile took place under Solomon.

There is some difference of opinion concerning the exact date of Jeremiah's birth. Most scholars place the event around the year 650 B.C.

Hilkiah, Jeremiah's father, was a priest who lived in this same town of Anathoth. The village was very small and was situated about three miles from Jerusalem. We are led to believe that Jeremiah as a lad, was trained in the loftiest traditions of Israel's ancestral faith. Traces are also noticeable in his writings of a familiarity with the ideas of the older prophets, especially Hosea. The quietness and beauty of the surrounding country also influenced him during his formative years.

1. Skinner, John, Prophecy and Religions, p. 16.
2. Dumelow, J. R., Bible Commentary, p. 453.
Chapter III

JEREMIAH - HIS LIFE

I believe that before one makes a specific study of the part, one should first, for the sake of orientation, take a fleeting glimpse of the whole. It will therefore be my purpose in this chapter, to sketch very briefly the life of Jeremiah, in order that the reader may secure a slight insight into the work, problems and character of this great man of God.

A. B. Davidson says that "the prophetic ideas form but half of the teaching of the prophets; the greater half lies in their own life and personal relation to God."¹ This in a very unique sense is true concerning the prophet Jeremiah. His personal, religious life even overshadowed his public message to Israel.

Knopf calls Jeremiah "the greatest patriot, statesman and reformer of Judah."²

¹ Knudson, A. C., Beacon Lights of Prophecy, p. 165.
Jeremiah's call came early in his life. It is dated as belonging to the thirteenth year of Josiah's reign, which would be the year 626 B.C. This experience in Jeremiah's life is impressive because of its complete simplicity. It differs greatly from such well known experiences as the call of Isaiah or the conversion of the Apostle Paul. God and the young man, Jeremiah, are together talking quietly in an intimate way. "It is personal and a fit prelude to Jeremiah's conception of religion."\(^1\)

Jeremiah shrank back from the responsibility entailed in such a great task. It was only after Jehovah firmly convinced him that he was predestined for the prophetic office from birth, that we find Jeremiah accepting the call.

This year 626 B.C. was the year of the Scythian invasion. Judah could, of course, expect little help from the Assyrian Empire of which she was a province. This invasion seemed to be the end of the world and of course colored Jeremiah's first oracles. He thought surely that judgment had come.

These years of Jeremiah's early prophecy were years of prosperity and were for this reason not very attentive to

\(^1\) Hastings, J., The Greater Men and Women of the Bible.  
\(^2\) Jeremiah 1:6.
prophecies of doom. "The people considered their prosperity as a sanction of the gods."

"Jeremiah in his own city, it appears, had no success with his preaching and it brought him only persecution." This but commenced a ministry which was a life long martyrdom. Jeremiah not only had to stand persecution but he also had to stand alone against the world. His family, neighbors, the throngs of people, and the other prophets all turned against him.

Jeremiah's real persecution did not come under the reign of Josiah, but rather under Jehoiakim.

It so happened that his first prophecy concerning the Scythian invasion did not prove true. This was a severe blow to Jeremiah as well as to his rating as a prophet.

The new law book was discovered in 621 B.C. It is strange that Jeremiah did not have anything to do with this important event. We have no record of his even being consulted concerning the matter. We have no prophecies from Jeremiah during the years 621 B.C. to 608 B.C. Scholars differ in regard to Jeremiah's attitude towards these new laws.

Josiah was killed in battle with Pharaoh, Necho and his Egyptian army in 608 B.C. Thus ended the reign which has been characterized as sympathetic to religious activities. Jehoahaz followed his father as ruler. Necho was overthrown in 605 B.C. and Judah became tributary to Babylon. We now find gross worship of the Babylonian "Queen of Heaven" and other such idols. The country was becoming heathenistic and certainly was immoral in its practices. This situation was of course responsible for calling forth many of Jeremiah's prophecies. He also prophecied against the temple and as a result was forbidden to visit it for a number of years.

This did not stop Jeremiah's work, for a little later we find him giving such well known oracles as his one on marriage, etc.

When Jeremiah could no longer speak in the temple, he came before the people in a new way. He dictated his former prophecies and some new ones to Baruch, who wrote them down and then read them publicly in the temple to a great crowd on one of the festival days. The King heard of the roll and sent for it. When it was read to him he burnt the whole thing, piece by piece, in a very thorough way.

Jeremiah and Baruch went into temporary hiding and during this period Jeremiah once again dictated the book to
Baruch. This roll was saved curiously enough by the priests. It is now found in our present book of Jeremiah, roughly speaking, the first seven chapters.

Jeremiah continued with his prophecy of doom. Especially did he lay blame on the people and their king, Jehoiakim. Pashur, a priest, had Jeremiah beaten and put into the stocks until the next day. It was at this point, I believe, that Jeremiah was in the very depth of despair and anguish. This happened in the year 597 B.C.

It was under Zedekiah that Jeremiah formulated his political program with more definiteness than he had previously used. He told people to remain obedient to Babylon and wrote to those in exile to prepare for a long captivity.

In 594 B.C. his prophecies brought him into conflict with a false prophet by the name of Hananiah. The encounter between these two men was very dramatic and ended by Jeremiah prophecying death for Hananiah. From this point on there is a little point of hope in his vision and prophecies. "For the first time his message carries a message of positive hope."

In 587 B.C. Nebuchadnezzar's army came and it was during this siege that Jeremiah reached what was probably the climax.

of his martyrdom. It was at this point that Jeremiah was accused of attempted desertion and of treacherous conduct. For this offense Jeremiah was thrown into an old cistern, where he was in danger of sinking into the wet mud. From this situation he was rescued by one, Ebed-Melech. Taken from the dungeon, with the consent of the king, he was placed in an ordinary prison. During this stay in prison the king sought out Jeremiah for secret conferences.

A rather interesting event occurred during this period of Jeremiah's life. It was at this time that the prophet, not by words, but by action, brought one of the greatest messages of hope to his people. Jeremiah, in this time of extreme doubt, purchased a small plot of land outside of Jerusalem. Into this purchase went his own money. What could have helped to instill hope into the people's hearts more than this simple, dramatical act?

Jerusalem fell as Jeremiah had prophesied. Both the temple and the city were burned and everything of value was carried off. The Babylonians treated Jeremiah with the utmost respect and gave him his choice of leaving or remaining in Israel.

Gedaliah was appointed governor and settled just outside of Jerusalem. He was a friend of Jeremiah's family and therefore Jeremiah got along quite well for awhile. Gedaliah
was killed by Ishmael. Jeremiah warned the people against a retreat into Exile for, he said, they would be merely running away, and that all things they feared now would follow them into exile. They, however, decided to go into Egypt and he was compelled to go with them. Jeremiah never gave up and even though he was in exile, he continued whole-heartedly to influence the souls of his fellow-countrymen. Concerning the closing days of his life, we know nothing.

He was truly a man of courage, sincerity, steadfastness and honesty. A true prophet of God.
Chapter IV

JEREMIAH - A MAN OF CONFLICTS

It has already been alluded to that these famous "confessionals" grew out of the actual inner life of Jeremiah. They are precious gems, sparkling with the intimate nature of Jeremiah. Even on the surface one may readily see that they are written concerning a great inner struggle. They really bristle with unrest frantically groping for security.

We have also briefly outlined the historical background that called these passages forth. When we think of the political, social and religious systems prevalent and think of Jeremiah's character, call, and faith, we can immediately realize that there would inevitably be a clash between his own nature and the surrounding world which threatened to crush him and his work. He faces a task with almost insurmountable difficulties overwhelming him.

The prophet found himself in an almost insoluble situation. He must save the people he loved by preparing them for destruction. He could not be easy with them, for in that case, he would not be true to his God. A deafened and
immovable people against a merciful but steadfast God. Regardless of the man, conflicts were inevitable if the prophet was to remain true to both.

We recall from our knowledge of Jeremiah's call (chapter one of his book) that the prophet's very nature was one of retirement. We also mentioned previously that he loved with a deep and enduring love his people. Jeremiah was however, often called a traitor to his people because of his continued prophecies of doom. As we look at the situation today there is much evidence to show very definitely that he was a real patriot. He had his messages of doom from God and although it hurt him deeply to be forced to give them he was convinced that they must be delivered for the ultimate good of the people.

We thus have sketched into the picture the two sides, both immovable. How was Jeremiah, the humble, retiring man that he was, to help this situation at all?

As we look at Jeremiah, one might think that he was the last man on earth fit for this difficult job. It was he who must, however, "sing the swan song of Israel."1

In Jeremiah we find one of literature's best examples of the dual personality. One half was crying out for him to

retrace his steps while the other half was shouting at the same time for him to press forward with vigor. "This instability of temperament, amounting at times to almost inconsistency shows the play and counter play of the human and divine in the heart of the man."  

Jeremiah was so closely in touch with God through his prophetic office that often he considered the two synonymous.

The fact is well established that Jeremiah was shy of his duties. He felt inferior to this job but with that feeling of personal inferiority came a sense that with God he was very superior to the false prophets. Thus we find Jeremiah's inferiority complex overshadowed. Did he not over-look this shyness and speak out boldly even to kings?

Even with the supreme guidance from God, the revelations which Jeremiah made public did not come to him without much work, tears and even agony. Each one of his revelations came to this great prophet through real anguish and only when he paid a high moral price.

Robinson says that "moral and spiritual struggle is always between some thought of God concerning us, and that rival thought of ourselves which challenges His." It is

2. Robinson, T., History of Israel, p. 60.
always from such a struggle that truth comes to one. Jeremiah paid a great price for the truths which he brought forth and without that price we would never have had these precious truths from his lips. We therefore, see that these truths came to us through honest conscious mental activity. In these "confessional" passages we come into the very heart of the conflict.

Cornill states that Jeremiah is the psychologist among the prophets for he gives us our material in form of human experience. By studying him, we find that prophetic truths do not come in a flash to the prophet, but have rather a long psychological history which may be traced. "Jeremiah's experience is unique in that it comes out of a prior official relation to God which he had in virtue of his prophetic vocation."¹

It must be definitely stated that while he was in a direct contact with Jehovah, Jeremiah did not resign his own moral judgment or power of thinking. Gordon says that in Jeremiah during the period of his prophesying his prophetic "consciousness was not only complete and active but it was raised to a higher power and wider sweep."²

This opinion of Gordon's is backed up by the teachings of Jeremiah himself. 1

Jeremiah's experience in these passages is that of a conversation or dialogue with God where the prophet, with all his faculties alert, fully maintains his own individual consciousness and argues with God as he would with another fellow-man.

During these conversations with God, the prophet is always actively thinking and attempting to think along with God and come to a conclusion. While he thinks and talks, sometimes he acts as if he suspected the Divine integrity. He is always frank, even to the point of becoming almost antagonistic when he cannot distinctly see the Divine reasoning. He grapples with the problem until he can clearly see the solution.

The prophet not only doubts God but also himself. After he has passed through the very depth of doubt, dealing with each individual problem and finding its solution for himself then, and then only, is he able to emerge into the bright light of faith and assurance which he finally reaches and which serves as a great climatic note to his wanderings of doubt and gropings of fear and insecurity.

Honest doubt is never a fault, rather it is a worthwhile virtue which will lead one to the light and plant one's thoughts in solid ground. It is the perpetual and lazy doubter who must be condemned while nothing but admiration should be shown for the honest doubter.

Jeremiah's doubts took him down into the very depth of despair. The experience of these deeps served finally to make his description of the peaks of assurance which he finally reached even more beautiful and illuminating.

We turn now to a detailed description of the conflicts in Jeremiah's life and the questions which they brought out. In the "confessional passages" we actually hear Jeremiah bringing forth each question as he grapples with the conflicts. In life conflicts arise within when one sees a goal and yet cannot reach it because of barriers which may exist. The feeling of unrest becomes chronic because these inward desires are not being fulfilled. In the following pages I shall try to classify the conflicts in Jeremiah's life under their source desires.

These desires in Jeremiah's life, I believe, grow out of each other and run in a more or less continued stream. We take care of one and the next one comes to the surface. One great desire of his life seems to be that of a deep-seated wish for recognition of the work which he is carrying
on. This work of course was God's work. Under this hope for recognition I believe existed a desire for companionship. His utter loneliness, in my opinion, was what called forth a great deal of the material in his "confessions."

Then as we press further into the matter, I believe that we find planted deep in the prophet's heart a sincere and profound yearning for assurance. It appears to me, that he was often, in these passages, groping for some solid ground upon which he would be certain he might stand with security.
Chapter V

RECOGNITION

After carefully studying these "confessional" passages and their relation to the whole of Jeremiah's life I have come to the conclusion that the first great desire in the life and prophetic ministry of the great prophet, Jeremiah, was recognition. This must not be misunderstood. Jeremiah did not seek recognition for himself but rather for his God. In Jeremiah's mind, God and himself were so closely identified that one was wrapped up in the other. In the prophet's conception, if people did not listen and respect his prophecies it was not a discourtesy to himself but was a failure to obey God. This unique relationship which existed between Jeremiah and God must never be lost sight of in our study of these passages. It is of paramount importance in our apprehension of these passages.

We remember from a study of the conversion experience that Jeremiah himself was of a very retiring nature. God told him he had been appointed prophet among the nations and Jeremiah shyly answered, "Oh, Lord Jehovah! behold I know not how to speak; for I am a child." ¹ Jehovah answered

¹ Jeremiah 1:6.
him and touched his lips and from that time forward, Jerem­iah spoke for the Lord. When he spoke for the Lord he craved recognition not of himself but of his message.

In his commission Jeremiah was prepared for hardships. "I have this day set thee over the nations and over the kingdoms, to pluck up and to break down and to destroy and to overthrow, to build and to plant."¹ It is easy to com­prehend the fact that if this commission were carried out it would inevitably lead to hardships and persecution. Hu­man nature is so constructed that when the present institu­tions are disturbed, as for example: plucked up and broken down or destroyed or overthrown there is bound to be those who will cause a disturbance. Those whose lives have been so deeply rooted in the existing institutions that for selfish reasons if for none other, they cannot stand even to hear about changing them. I see no reason for us believing otherwise than that Jeremiah appreciated the implications of his commission and realized what was to come. With his new enthusiasm and with the warmth of his relationship with God, he rather minimized them and basked more in the glory of his new relationship and great responsibility to God. At that time he probably felt prepared for and equal to anything. It was undoubtedly not long before the bitter pangs of his hardships and persecutions were mercilessly

¹. Jeremiah 1:10.
biting at his heart and causing him great anguish. Anguish not only on his own account but anguish caused especially by the people's disrespect for God.

At this point we may clearly see in Jeremiah's nature the rather common Oriental characteristic of "shrinking from ridicule and sensitiveness to calumny."\(^1\) He looks about him and in the horror and pain of it all feels that God is trying him at his weakest point. He felt a sickening sense of the uselessness of it all. "Felt like a gentle lamb led to the slaughter\(^2\) among those people.

Time and time again we read of the people persecuting Jeremiah. He worked for recognition of his words from God but received nothing but persecution and ridicule. He grasped frantically for some bit of recognition but each time turned away unsatisfied. The note of persecution runs through the entire book. I need but mention a few typical instances to serve as illustrations of this point.

The feeling of ridicule, which of course is bitter to anyone trying his best to accomplish a task, comes out so plainly in these words as the prophet speaks beseechingly to Yahweh.

\(^{2}\) Jeremiah 11:19.
"I am become a laughingstock all the day, every one mocketh me."¹ He continues in this very speech to bring to Yahweh's attention the fact that as often as he speaks he is mocked.² He is a derision to everyone.

His enemies continually assail him with tongues.

Come, they have said, Let us hatch
Against him a plot!
Come, with the tongue we will smite him,
And carefully watch his words. ³

Not only his enemies but everyone is cursing him. He cries out in bitter complaint that "All men curse me."⁴

The persecution does not stop with cursing him but goes even to the limits of plotting to take his life.

In the first of his "confessions" we see mention of a plot to kill him:

But Yahweh made known, and I knew.
Their ill deeds I saw;
While I like a tame pet-lamb
That is led to the shambles
Knew not that for my undoing
They hatched a plot:
"Let us kill the tree in its sap, -
Cut him off from the land of the living,
That his name be remembered no more." ⁵

¹. Jeremiah 20:7.
³. Jeremiah 18:18
⁴. Jeremiah 15:10 b.
Again in the later years of his ministry we read of references to another plot on his life. This time from the "confessional" passage in the eighteenth chapter.

But thou, O Yahweh, well knowest
All their designs for my death. 1

The foregoing gives one an idea of the situation. Let us now study it a bit, that we may find some reasons for these men of his time persecuting him as they did.

First of all, they misconstrued Jeremiah's motives. It is very often in life we find the great gaps developing through a misunderstanding.

Jeremiah is considered today to be a great patriot in the true and broad sense of the term. In his day he was considered chief among traitors. The difficulty arises from the fact that the prophet's conception of patriotism and his dreams for the future of the nations were broad and long-sighted while his contemporaries looked only at the present day. The people of his time did not have the foresight to look ahead and see the outcome of their situation. They lived blindly from day to day while Jeremiah on the other hand lived in the present with his eye on the future. His horizons were far greater than those of the false prophets. Their eyes were blinded by the bright sun of present prosperity.

conditions and could not see the approaching storm. Herein lies much of their misunderstanding for their patriotism took care of the present day only and Jeremiah's was for the good of the nation in the long run.

Another cause of the persecution heaped upon Jeremiah was the fact that he continually prophesied violence, destruction and doom. The word came from God and he felt honor bound to deliver it to the people. The times were prosperous and the people could not see why they should be talked to concerning doom. They did not want to hear of it and therefore turned to the false prophets who gave them what they wanted. They of course attempted to belittle Jeremiah and thus rid themselves of his prophecies.

It is interesting to note again in this connection that by his commission he was assigned to prophecies of doom and that he remained true to that commission.

We have no actual knowledge as to Jeremiah's attitude towards the Deuteronomic code of Josiah's reign. It is rather difficult to believe that Jeremiah knew nothing about the famous code. Its doctrines pointed in the same direction as did Jeremiah's teachings. Many scholars are of the opinion that Jeremiah talked and worked for the Deuteronomic code whole-heartedly until the time when he saw evils in its administration. If this is so, we may well consider as at
least a possibility that Jeremiah's campaigning for this code was a cause of some of his persecution. Take, for example, the persecution he received in Anathoth. This may very likely have been the result of Jeremiah's speaking in favor of the central temple as advocated by the Deuteronomistic code. This of course is purely a theory but at any rate a very interesting and probably one.

Jeremiah was prepared for a ministry of hardships but when he actually found himself in the whirl of it he groped for more strength. Men were constantly persecuting him because of the nature of his message. We now turn to a consideration of the effect which all this had on the prophet. He could find no recognition for his work and message and this lack made, in my opinion, several important and lasting contributions to both his inner life and the nature of his message. It is in the "confessionals" that he bears these effects in their most intimate and deepest nature.

The lack of recognition for his work often left this man of God in a deep feeling of despondency. He could see nothing but disappointment about him. For example, let us consider those two passages 11:18-23 and 12:1-6 in which Jeremiah talks with God. In these passages we come into close contact with the very deep nature of Jeremiah's religion. We know that Jeremiah complained because God's word was not being heeded. If Jeremiah had never become an active
prophet he would not, I feel, have complained in such agony over the disappointments and sorrows that come normally to one in life, for he certainly would never have asked that his own load be lightened or that the people listen to a message that came only from him. When we read these protests which came from a despondent heart we must realize that they came out of the heart of one connected closely with God, a worker for righteousness. The despondency is not so much for himself as for his prophetic mission, which of course is his God.

Only a man like Jeremiah, who was so whole-heartedly dedicated to God, could ever experience such a depth of despair as did Jeremiah. In the clutch of that despair, he groped for recognition. It all seemed so futile, no one would even listen sympathetically, to say nothing of putting any confidence in his prophecies. As one studies the situation one almost prays with Jeremiah for some recognition of his cause.

Now let us go one step further in the analysis of these passages. We find that Jeremiah actually argued with Jehovah. To understand this rather unique procedure in prophecy we but need to view the facts in relation to the situation at that time. We know that due to Jeremiah's work and life, he was in close fellowship with God. We also know that things were going much against him and that he was
in a mood of despondency. In this mood he was grasping any-
thing. Probably one of the first and most likely tendencies
was to question God. He considered God as he would a fine
friend with whom he could talk over his problems. As he re-
lected on the situation it seems very natural for him to
raise the question of Jehovah's justice in dealing with hu-
mans.

In these arguments with God, Jeremiah brought before
Jehovah questions which arose directly out of his experiences,
questions which he had probably wrestled with alone and had
not been able to solve. The scope of Jeremiah's insight
was limited to the dark wall of the present situation which
rather overshadowed his thinking. He could not understand,
so he went with direct argument to God whose insight was
broader, who could see the situation as a whole; past, present
and future, and who was therefore a better judge of the en-
tire matter.

Jeremiah was prophesying doom for the nation, prophesy-
ing evil for the wicked and yet all about him the wicked
seemed to be enjoying the blessings of Jehovah. The ques-
tion, of course, really dealt with just what the blessings
of Jehovah were. In that period prosperity was considered
as one of the blessings. This fact of course detracted from
Jeremiah's standing as a prophet for he was continually
prophesying destruction while prosperity was an actuality.
This was the question which he brought before Jehovah.
Thou art in the right, O Yahweh,  
Should I dispute with Thee,  
Yet of matters of right  
Would I speak with Thee.  
Why is the way of the wicked so smooth  
And all the treacherous men at ease?

We see that he approached the question tactfully but at the same time very pointedly. "It is the first expression we have in Hebrew literature of the problem, why do the wicked prosper?" ¹

Jehovah answers:

With footmen thou hast run and art weary,  
Then how wilt thou vie with horses?  
In a land of peace thou art not at ease,  
Then how wilt thou fare in Jordan's break?"²

In this instance as in others concerning the same issue we find that no definite answer is advanced to solve the question.

We also find a temptation developing out of the fact that Jehovah's word received no recognition. Jeremiah was faithful, he put all his hope and trust in God. He spent his time and energy and sacrificed his popularity that he might prophesy to these people. On the other hand they were prosperous, happy and deaf to the message from God. Not only were they deaf to the message, but they were hostile

2. Jeremiah, 12:5.
to the messenger. The task seems hopeless. Jeremiah nat-
urally loved his people and nation and became so discouraged
that he thought it rather futile to make them see his point.
It was under this strain that he lost his temper. In these
"confessional" passages where we become so intimately ac-
quainted with Jeremiah we must admit that the man's temper
got the best of him occasionally. To overlook it would
be to give an incomplete picture. On one occasion he
prayed his foes might be destroyed.

May my foes be put to shame, and not I!
May they be dismayed, and not I!
Bring on them the day of evil;
Destroy them with double destruction. 1

This, it is true, shows a defect in his nature for he
certainly had not mastered the art of loving his enemies.
It must be remembered out of fairness to him that it was
Christ who taught and so nobly exemplified loving his enemies.
It was a teaching foreign to the Old Testament. It must
also be mentioned once again that he considered his enemies
as enemies of God and therefore we find at least the reason
if not the excuse for this wrath.

Then again in the eighteenth chapter, when Jeremiah
learns of the plot to take his life his heart is kindled into
wrath. This time even in more revengeful tones.

But Thou, O Yahweh, well knowest
All their designs for my death.
Let not their guilt be atoned for
Nor their sin blotted out from Thy sight
May they stumble and fall before Thee!
In the time of thy wrath deal with them. 1

What a prayer! Although it was not for himself but rather for God, I cannot help but feel that it detracts a little from his effectiveness.

We cannot, however, place too much blame upon the prophet's shoulders. His prayer, although it did fall below the ideal, we must agree was certainly human and rather natural under the circumstances. For example, it is a very few present day ministers who cannot think back a few years ago to the time when their prayers in all sincerity called for the defeat of our enemies in those hectic days of 1918. In the heat of the occasion those prayers were offered with fervor and sincerity. Today they are viewed with shame as far below the Christian ideal.

Behind Jeremiah's wrath was his distress at the evil which his enemies personified to him and his undying loyalty to the cause of Jehovah. The deed, it cannot be denied, was below the ideal. The circumstances, however, offer some excuse.

Thus I have attempted to show that out of the grasping

and longing for recognition of his work which was God's work, we find the prophet becoming despondent. As one of the means to rid himself of this discouragement he argued with the Lord concerning his justice. As another means of escape he lost his temper and cursed his fellow-countrymen.
Chapter VI

LONELINESS

Another deep-seated desire in Jeremiah's life which, I believe underlies these "confessional" passages as probably it did his entire life, is his longing for companionship and friendship. Loneliness, seems to me to have called forth part of these "confessionals." Listen to the prophet as he cries out in anguish of his loneliness.

Woe is me, my mother, that thou hast borne me
A man at strife with all the world!
Nor borrower nor lender am I
And all men curse me! 1

or again as he in soul stirring despondency curses the day of his birth.

Curs'd be the day I was born.
The day when my mother bore me -
Be it uncursed!
Curs'd be the man who brought to my father
The good news: "A man-child is born -
Making him glad!
May that day be like the cities
That God overthrew,
And pitied them not!
May its morning hear the cry of distress
Its noon the shout of battle!
Because it slew me not in the womb,

That my mother had been my grave,
And her womb pregnant forever.
Why came I forth from the womb
To see trouble and sorrow,
To consume my days in shame? 1

This intense feeling of loneliness to some extent was undoubtedly an outcome of his desire for recognition. It had also several other roots which we shall consider.

In the first place, Jeremiah was a tender man who loved the quietness of his home and ordinary life. We remember how reluctant he was in accepting his call and commission and also know how he longed for home and friends. We know Jeremiah to be a poet and as such was no different probably from other poets for he certainly had the poet's heart and love for the quiet beauties of nature. He had a craving for the lasting and deep satisfactions of domestic life. In his heart was a real tender spot for children and the happiness as well as the snug comforts of home.

These longings were going unsatisfied and the future did not look as if it would ever offer any satisfaction for them. He did not even have hope for a life beyond death to offset this one of solitude.

His love for the people was exceedingly deep and his insight into the future broad. He had a world view of

affairs and could see the inadvisability of a nation being self-centered as well as the inevitable results of such a nationalistic philosophy. His conception of true statesmanship was an outgrowth of his nature. It was, however, one of the factors responsible for his loneliness.

Smith throws a little light on this subject of Jeremiah's loneliness when he says that "Jeremiah may have been by temper raw and hasty with a natural capacity for provoking his fellows." 1

Not only his nature but his message and his loyalty to that message brought on this sense of loneliness.

The nature of his message of doom has been characterized previously and it is very easy to see how it was responsible for cutting Jeremiah off from intimate contact with many people. Such a message of doom as Jeremiah proclaimed was certainly not conducive to the forming of friendships or even peaceful acquaintances.

He is not speaking his own words. He is not saying to them what his heart is aching to say but is rather giving them what he is compelled to speak by the authoritative voice of his God.

As he sits by himself with no friends and away from all the merry-making (1), he in lonely sorrow, questions why these whom he loves cannot see that he is not doing them evil but rather good. He is not to blame for this message for it comes from Jehovah and hurts him as much as them. It is for their own good he gives it to them. He, who is one of them, has done everything in his power for them, even to the extent of pleading for them. Cannot they comprehend this and not hate the man who is the unwilling but obedient mouthpiece of their God?

His pleading fell upon deaf ears and cold hearts and his loneliness became deeper and more painful.

There were certain particular elements in his prophecy which we may point out as being specific reasons why people about him would not listen.

As has been mentioned his words were through and through a prophecy of doom. It must be mentioned here that it was not only a prophecy of doom to the nation but also to individuals. Jeremiah was not content to speak against national sins which could be shifted by one individual to another and thus find no one responsible. He also spoke against sins of the individuals.

Deep beyond sounding is the heart
And sick beyond cure!
Who can know it?

This direct recognition of the inwardness of sin in each individual did not add to the prophet's ability to make friends. Now every one must take the blame upon himself. There exists room for no shifting of responsibility. Every person was touched by his prophecies.

Never was a man of God condemned to such a difficult lot as was Jeremiah. Think of the things that happened to him! Any one of them was distasteful enough by itself to cause one to cry out in agony. Jeremiah had them all, and probably even more than I am going to mention. He had to hear them in the solitude of his great loneliness. I shall name a few hardships or events which came to him as a result of his work and life and which made this loneliness of his even more bleak.

In the first place, he was cut off from his own family, friends and fellow-townsmen. They all betrayed him, and what is more, stoned him out of Anathoth. A prophet with the nation against him could not even receive a little comfort and companionship from his own father and brothers. He could not even remain in the surroundings which spoke to him perhaps of happier and more carefree days. He could not walk the paths or haunt the spots loaded with pleasant
memories for he was stoned out of town.

The men of his profession, the other prophets, would not take him into their group. The false prophets could not understand his message of doom. They were jealous of him and not only refused him friendship but discredited his prophecies. They were living for the present and could not see into the future. Their low form of life kept them from comprehending the ideal of Jeremiah. "In the long run no man can have high visions and lead a low life." This was the difference between Jeremiah and the false prophets.

A man shut out from his family, town and professional group could not even find company in his religious circles for even the priests were against him.

In nationalistic circles he met with no greater success. A king spared his life only because he was afraid to do away with him. Another king sought his advice and then went away and refused to use it.

This man who loved children and a home could have no family because of the nature of his work. He, therefore, could share in neither the grief nor joys of home life.

Even the people of the nation whom he sincerely loved mobbed him for they believed him to be a traitor to his

country. As often as he spoke he was an object of derision of all who heard him. His listeners often mocked him.

When 'ere I speak I am mocked;  
Of violence and wrong is my cry,  
For Yahweh's word is to me a reproach  
And derision all day long. 1

In another place he tells us he was the laughingstock among his fellow country-men.

I am the laughingstock all the day,  
All men deride me. 2

Surely he was "man at strife with all the world," 3 and he knew the bitter heartache and loneliness of no friends. He writes, "all men cursed me." 4

The sense of loneliness which was Jeremiah's, sprang not only from his prophetic mission but also from the great and biting spiritual suffering which must have been his owing to his very intense sympathy with the people over whom he must proclaim the judgment of God. 5 To live among foreigners would of course breed loneliness but that loneliness would fade into the background when compared with the

2. Jeremiah 20:7  
3. Jeremiah 15:10  
loneliness that comes as a result of living among those you love and being kept away from them, due to the nature of one's work. Although the following passage does not come from the "confessions" I quote it to show the deep anguish that was Jeremiah's concerning the doom to the people and nation that he loved.

O the pain, the pain in my bosom,
The walls of my heart are athrob.
My heart is a tumult within me,
I cannot hold my peace;
For the sound of the trumpet I hear,
The dire and alarm of battle.
Ruin doth break upon ruin,
For all the land is laid waste,
My tents of a sudden are spoiled,
Yea, all in a moment my curtains.

Now we see Jeremiah torn between two goals and this tension is, I believe, responsible for the intensity of his loneliness.

His hope for his people becomes more and more despairing while at the same time his love for them was becoming deeper and deeper. This was his natural sympathies showing through. On the other hand was his hatred of evil and the present spectacle of sin existing all about him called for punishment. As he thought back to his call and commission the conviction that it was his duty to proclaim doom in Yahweh's name became even stronger.

Here we find the great struggle in Jeremiah’s life which is brought out in his "confessionals." Skinner goes so far as to say that "the central interest of the "confessionals" is the struggle in Jeremiah’s mind between fidelity to his prophetic call and the natural feelings and impulses of the heart."¹

The tension was great and Jeremiah must find some way to settle the struggle, for the loneliness and uncertainty were becoming unbearable.

There were few on earth from whom he could seek help and friendship. He was a man of God, commissioned by God to proclaim His word. There seems but one course open to him namely: turning to God for companionship and counsel. This course Jeremiah followed. For this reason we find in Jeremiah’s "confessionals" some heart-searching prayers which are of immense value not only from the fact that they throw great rays of light upon Jeremiah’s inner life but because they deepen the reader’s religious experience.

Wellhausen calls Jeremiah "the father of true prayer," He bases this title on the fact that Jeremiah’s prayers become for him the outpouring of the heart. He prayed for the Divine help in direct personal needs. His prayers were intimate conversations between himself and God.

These prayers of his indicate the degree of intimacy that existed between himself and God, the depth of fellowship, reality of a long acquaintance, and a familiar communion between himself and the heart of God. 1

That is just what Jeremiah needed, depth of fellowship, reality of acquaintance, familiar communion. He found the answer to his desire for friendship in his communion with God. In my mind, it seems that Jeremiah's prayer life went as deep as it did partly because he was driven that way. A one track mind has a tendency to be deep in that track. So it was with Jeremiah, he had no place else to turn for companionship save one. As he tasted the sweetness of that one companionship and its lasting satisfaction he developed it more and more until he reached the great depth of these "confessional" prayers. Of course one would not advocate a one track mind, but one may profitably consider the fact that for some of us our present day prayer life is shallow because of a multiplicity of interests which makes excess demands upon our time. If one is to be deep in his prayer life, he must spend time developing a companionship with God. Jeremiah's experience shows that it can be done to an amazing degree and also that the companionship is of the greatest comfort and profit to the individual.

In this prayer life of Jeremiah's we find what we may call the beginnings of a new religion. Previously prayer

had consisted only of petition but now for the first time in history we find this petitional element in prayer rather fading off into the background. In Jeremiah, prayer assumes its highest form namely: that of intimate spiritual communion with God.

These prayers were responsible for the finding of God in one's own individual experience and religion became a matter of personal and inner experiences. God became a friend to whom Jeremiah could take problems and from whom he received comfort.

Now Jeremiah has a friend whom he may trust. His friend is greater than any human and therefore the help which he receives from him may be greater. This friend brings great comfort to him. It is to him that Jeremiah takes his problems. It is this friend that gives to him the final answer to his problems.
Chapter VII
ASSURANCE

We have dealt with two great desires in Jeremiah's life, namely: that of recognition for Yahweh's word and the desire for friendship. We now come to what in my opinion, is the deepest and greatest urge of Jeremiah's life, this one rested under the other two. His whole life was steeped in it, namely: that of being certain of some solid rock of assurance.

As he was tossed about between his loyalty to his prophetic commission and call and his love for his fellow-men and hit by the lack of recognition of his work and the bitter loneliness that it brought to him, we may easily picture Jeremiah seeking assurance.

We catch glimpses of Jeremiah's sense of helplessness in the presence of the brute forces of life in these words of his:

Their ill deeds I saw,
While I like a tame pet-lamb
That is led to the shambles
Knew not that for my undoing
They hatched a plot.

This sense of bewilderment and unrest of struggle and
tension is responsible for his consideration of giving up his prophetic message that he might find peace and friends in his country. This idea offers him no peace for he is not at rest without loyalty to his call and commission. He cries

If I said, I will seek to forget Him,
And speak no more in His name,
'Twas like glowing fire in my breast,
Shut up in my bones.
I was weary with keeping it under;
I could not hold out.

The prophet finds himself exulting in receiving word from God which he would like to escape. Although he must speak of doom which is distasteful to him, he finds pleasure in being a prophet of God.

Jeremiah went further. He saw that he could have no peace lest he prophesy as Jehovah told him. He turned to himself and made an inward check to make sure that the words he was speaking really came from Jehovah. He wanted to make certain of the fact that the prophecies did not come from his own life. Time and time again we see echoes of this soul searching process, for example:

But Thou, O Yahweh hast known me,
Hast tried how my heart is with Thee.1

or this

Say, Lord, if I have not persisted
With Thee for the enemy's good;
And pleaded with Thee in the evil day,
In the day of distress. 2

Or again we find this passage:

But I have not pressed for the evil day
Thou knowest.
What has come forth from my lips
Lies plain before Thee. 1

Think how I stood before Thee
To speak for their good,
To turn Thy wrath from them. 2

And then in two different places we find this sentence;

For on thee have I rolled my cause. 3

These passages are good and abundant evidence of the fact that Jeremiah often tested his word that he might be certain it was the word of God. By them we see that he is continually calling Jehovah to witness the fact his words have not been unworthy of his calling.

These passages give us a glimpse into what were likely the darkest moments in the prophet's life. We see into the moments when the whole life is filled with the agonizing thought and suspicion that there is something in him which may be separating him from the peace and effectiveness that should be his through his unique relation to Jehovah. Perhaps something within him is keeping him from having a greater success in proclaiming Jehovah's prophetic words. It is a tragic moment in anyone's life when he fears that

perhaps his life is not fit to carry such a great word to
the people. This is the question which Jeremiah asks as
he is searching for assurance and peace.

He also speaks to Jehovah reminding him of his good
works and seeking assurance as a reward. For example in
chapter 17:14-18 he takes comfort in reminding Jehovah that
he has been a faithful, though unwilling, messenger.

Heal me, Yahweh, that I may be healed;
Save me that I may be saved;
For Thou art my praise!
So they are saying to me,
Where then is Yahweh's word?
Let it but come!
But I have not pressed for the evil day
Nor desired the day of woe!
Thou knowest
What has come forth from my lips
Lies plain before Thee.
Be not a terror to me,
Thou, my trust in the evil day. 1

We find a similar passage in which Jeremiah begs the
Lord to remember what he has suffered and not to forsake
him and to avenge him of his persecutors.

Thou knowest it, Yahweh!
Remember, and visit me graciously.
Avenge Thyself on my persecutors,
And not in thy long suffering
Know that for Thee I have borne reproach,
From all who despise Thy word. 2

It has been previously stated that these desires

2. Jeremiah 15:15.
developed one out of the other in more or less of a psychological stream. Jeremiah found no lasting assurance and peace by attempting to throw over his prophetic mission or by merely reminding Jehovah of his loyalty. It was in his prayer life that he truly found the goal of his quest and his final peace of mind.

Jeremiah's prayer life has been discussed. We find his prayers to consist of intimate conversation with Jehovah in which the prophet laid bare his whole inner life. He talked with God concerning the struggles in his life, the perplexities and temptations. The great point that must be mastered concerning these prayers of Jeremiah's is that he talked with God concerning all his important questions "with the sure confidence that he was heard and understood by the God to whom all things are naked and open."¹

Such heart-rending and trustful prayer contains in itself the assurance of its answer.

He prayed in great sincerity and trustfulness.

Heal me, Yahweh, that I may be healed!
Save me that I may be saved;
For Thou art my praise! ²

This is a deep prayer that his spirit and soul may be washed of every infirmity and selfish motive in order that

² Jeremiah 17:14.
he may be a true witness of God.

It was through Jeremiah's fellowship or prayer with God that he finally came to the wonderful assurance of God which he had been seeking. Listen to God's answer to Jeremiah's prayer:

If thou return, I will restore thee,
Thou shalt stand before Me:
If pure thoughts thou utter unmixed with base,
Thou shalt be as my mouth.
These men shall come round to thee,
But not thou to them.
I will make thee to this people
A wall strong as brass:
They will fight, but shall not o'ercome thee;
For I am with thee to save thee,
To deliver thee from the hand of the wicked
From the grip of the terrible.

"In this great answer Jeremiah comes to a clear consciousness of the answer which solves the problem of his personal relation to God." 2 This passage is the climax in Jeremiah's struggle. It marks a turning point in Jeremiah's life. He continues his work with new vigor and spirit and with a keen sense of inner peace and content.

One may see in this interesting development in Jeremiah's life that during this struggle the prophet almost forfeited his prophetic office because he came very close to losing the true spirit of that office. With this inner


victory Jeremiah knows that the condition of conquering the surroundings is in reality victory over one's self.

Jeremiah is now able to see that all wrong was not outside himself. With this deepening of his spiritual life came a broadening of insight. He was able to pick out some evils in his own make up as for example the querulous complaints he had been making against providence, or the impatience for verification of his prophetic messages. Another evil which was especially noticeable and with which we previously dealt with at length was his vindictive spirit towards his enemies. Jeremiah could now see that these things were cutting off his communion and fellowship with God and also making him unfit for service as a prophet.

Jeremiah learned that Jehovah expected much from him. This very fact is important in leading to Jeremiah's sense of peace and assurance. We know that it is often the person who seems the sternest and most exacting who is able to call forth from others the largest measure of devotion. It was the stern demands of God which came out in the fellowship between the two that steeled the soul of Jeremiah. ²

In this new and deeper relationship which existed between Jeremiah and Jehovah we must not think that the former

2. Calkins, R., Jeremiah the Prophet, p. 208.
lost his identity. He does, however, never lose the sense of his own insufficiency but time and time again he is brought back to the sufficiency of God. Robinson says that this very "consciousness of dependence is the prophet's strength to a unique degree."  

In this intimate fellowship with Jehovah and the individual response to the voice of God he discovered an earnest sense of that instinctive and universal sense of the divine in which he recognizes the permanent essence of religion."  

Jeremiah had reached his goal. He was truly a new man. His activities during the later periods of his life bear witness to the fact that he was at peace with the world. Again I make mention of the contention brought forth in the chapter on sources that this period in Jeremiah's life was the "Gethsemane experience" rather than the "Calvary experience" of his life.

Jeremiah repeatedly returns to the courage, loyalty, purity and trust of the true servant of God and we also find a definite tint of optimism which is shown through some of the prophecies during the later part of his ministry. He felt able to use this optimistic note because he now knew

that Jehovah was equal. In this consciousness of union with God, Jeremiah recognized the mainspring of all his endeavour and from it he derived his conviction of victory not withstanding apparent failure. ¹

¹ Butterwieser, p. 181.
Chapter VIII

CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE PROPHETIC THOUGHT

In a brief summary I shall attempt to point out the chief contributions of these "confessional" writings to prophetic thought and their relationship to their setting.

In the first place it is of paramount importance to note that these passages mark the transition between the great prophetic literature and the works of the psalmist. Prophecy not only culminated in Jeremiah but through his influence we find the beginnings of the Psalter.

In this connection I shall quote Dr. Davidson, who makes the following statement: "Prophecies last effort was to reveal itself in a life."\(^1\) This came to pass in the "confessionals" for in these passages the prophetic vocation became the center of a new and more intimately human relation to God. One cannot help but feel as he studies Jeremiah, that there is much of the Divine in him. As the student of Jeremiah works along through this great prophet's life, the characteristics of the Divine are continually showing up. One feels that Jeremiah, by virtue of the fact of his

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prophetic vocation is so close to God that he has absorbed much of the Divine. As one studies him, his own religious life is deepened for one can but bow in reverent meditation before a man of prayer like Jeremiah.

Paramount among the contributions of these passages is the fact that they bring us in close contact with the great prophet. The passages are from the very kernel of his utterances. There is nothing superficial about them, for they speak of the deepest in his life. When one goes really deep into a soul and stands before a bared heart that he might know it intimately, he cannot help but feel a deep reverence, and in that reverence be lifted to a higher plane. The good, the deep and great in another's life has the almost divine power of bringing forth from the lives it comes in contact with the good, the deep and great in them. Jeremiah's life in all its glory and richness is brought before us. We can but stand in reverence, as we look into the man's heart and inner life.

We must be careful lest we fall into the danger of seeing the prophet only in the light of these "confessionals." Jeremiah was truly an active man, his life was always full of activity. He was ever alert to new situations and had the important and valuable trait of being able to see not only the past and present, but the ability and insight to look into the future and interpret the present and past in
view of the future. It is for that reason that I included a chapter in this thesis on the life of Jeremiah, tracing its development up through one reign to the next, that we might see the great life in its entirety. When we appreciate the complete man, we are better fitted to view intelligently the parts of his life dealing with the "confessionals."

By a study of Jeremiah's life we were also able to see under the entire life the dominant currents or powers. We discovered that the prophet was torn by two immovable forces, a deafened and immovable people against a merciful but steadfast God. We also discovered that he was continually fighting within. One half of him was crying out for him to retrace his steps, while the rest was anxious that he press forward with his work for Jehovah. It was out of this tumult of despair and uncertainty that the "confessionals" developed. When we consider the struggles Jeremiah went through, both inwardly and in the world about him, we can but say in admiration, surely he was a great man of God. Jeremiah's personality and life are among the greatest of his contributions.

Sir George A. Smith uses these beautiful words in speaking of Jeremiah:

The personal piety which henceforth flourished in Israel as it had never flourished before, weaving its delicate tendrils about the ruins of the state,
the city and the altar, and (as the Psalms show) blooming behind the shelter of the Law like a garden of lilies within a fence of thorns, sprang from seeds in Jeremiah's own heart, and was watered by his tears, and the sweat of his spiritual agonies. 1

This piety referred to may be divided into several chief features. And under these headings or divisions I shall discuss the remaining contributions.

For the first time we find religion becoming primarily and essentially a matter of personal and inward experience of God. By studying Jeremiah's life it becomes rather evident, in my opinion, that the reason for this may be found in the desires which grew out of the conflicts in his life. We know that Jeremiah was cut off from friends and religious fellowship because of his prophecies of doom, his patriotism and his connection with the Deuteronomic code. It was, therefore, necessary that Jeremiah face the issues alone. As he was shut off from human fellowship it is very evident to see that he was continually more dependent upon fellowship with the Divine. That fellowship was his secret of victory. It is interesting in this connection to note that his victory was reached through defeat and hardship. Religion has throughout the ages given men the power to rise from defeat with calm eyes and turn that defeat into opportunity. Jeremiah's experience and life may well serve as a

tonic of courage to one who may be in the depth of despair and apparent defeat.

Along this line it should be noted that one of the important contributions of Jeremiah was his recognition of the inwardness of sin. Jeremiah was not only continually speaking to others concerning this subject but was also willing to apply it to his own life. Upon several occasions we have records of Jeremiah's soul searching activity. (Jeremiah 12:3a, Jeremiah 15:11.)

If I were to choose one contribution of Jeremiah's confessions as being of the greatest importance, I believe that I should suggest his original exercise of prayer, and its extremely great value. Up to this time, prayers had not gone much further than a mere petitional prayer. Jeremiah, however, through his intimate and continual fellowship with God was responsible for making prayer reach its highest form, namely: that of intimate spiritual communion with God. Prayer is such a universal craving in life that one who can make a contribution in that line certainly makes a contribution of significance. Wellhausen calls Jeremiah, "the father of true prayer."

Prayer for Jeremiah was what prayer should be for every person if it is to be a vital part of one's life. It was the real outpouring of the heart as he sought for Divine aid in
solving his personal needs. This prayer life was intimate conversation with Jehovah and because of the intensity of the experience it was the beginning of a new religion. By his profound prayer life, Jeremiah brought every thought and feeling into harmony with the will of God.

Another great contribution and element of the so-called piety is the steadfast faith of the prophet. Jeremiah depended totally upon Jehovah. This trust was the basis of his personal religion. When things were particularly dark, Jeremiah had his trust in Jehovah which continually pierced through dark clouds and gave light and strength. Jeremiah's very life and actions spoke always of his firm belief in the unerring righteousness of God. An excellent example is found in the fact that Jeremiah took most of his worldly goods to purchase a plot of land during the uncertain days preceding the fall of Jerusalem.

By his questioning nature Jeremiah brought out the speculative nature of religion and also the question of the wicked being treated better than the righteous. People were continually asking why the wicked should prosper and the righteous suffer. Jeremiah tells them they will be restored and the wicked punished.

As I read and studied these passages, I became so enthusiastic over the prophet that in concluding, I cannot
refrain from merely mentioning a few present-day values which I secured from my acquaintance with the passages and the man.

This prophet's life and teachings bring out very forcefully the Eternity of God. Truly an important lesson in any day, for civilization is constantly undergoing changes.

The value of self-examination was brought to mind by the vivid illustration in the "confessional" passages. This is especially important in the ministry, where one represents the church to a community. Often ministers, especially young men, become so engrossed in selfish motives that they find they are not representing the church but rather themselves.

The responsibility of the ministry is also well illustrated in this prophet and thus any minister who reads these passages cannot help feeling a greater responsibility in his work.

One's prayer life is of course deepened by contact with these famous heart-searching prayers of Jeremiah. Along with this deepened prayer life comes a broader spiritual insight.

It was through disappointment and loneliness that Ezekiel found greater fields opening up for him. His faith brought him through those dark nights to a brighter day. He learned that victory over the world is really victory over himself. This truly is an important lesson for us all.
Only when Jeremiah cleanses himself of all evil is he able to bring forth things that are noble and right. Only then is he able to act as an effective mouthpiece for God. What a value may be found in that statement! No one is able to bring forth the beautiful and good unless their souls are cleansed of the ugly and evil.

Jeremiah by his life and teachings has helped men throughout the ages to hold high the torch of clean deep living. He has given courage, depth and spirituality to many a soul-tossed life for his soul was once in the utter depth of conflict. He worked the way out and others find aid in his solution.
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