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The covenant idea in Jeremiah

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BOSTON UNIVERSITY

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THESIS

THE COVENANT IDEA IN JEREMIAH

by

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#

CHRONOLOGICAL ARRANGEMENT OF THE BOOK OF JEREMIAH

- 1- Earliest: c. 2-6; 13:1-11; and portion of c. 31 which deals with the return of Ephraim.
- 2-Following 621 B. C.: 11:1-8; 11:18 to 12:6.
- 3-To Jehoiakim: 7:1 to 8:3; 8:4 to 9:1; 20:7-13; 22:10-12 perhaps 2:14-17.
- 4- Following Carchemish: c. 25; 13:20-27; and some of the prophecies on foreign nations.
- 5- After Jehoiakim's rebellion: 12:7-17; 15:10-21.
The following probably belong to the reign of Jehoiakim but there is nothing to fix them there definitely:
9:2-22; 10:17-24; 11:9-17; 13:15-17; 18:13-20; 22:13-19.
- 6- From the brief reign of Jehoiachin: 13:18-19; 22:24-27.
- 7- To the beginning of the reign of Zedekiah: 22:28-30; c. 24.
- 8- 596-595 B. C. -Letter to the exiles in c. 29.
594-593 B. C. - c. 27 and 28.
- 9- The curse of 20:14-18 may come from the close of Zedekiah's reign.
- 10-23:1-8 is probably from Zedekiah's time.
- 11-After Jerusalem's fall: 31:27-34.
- 12-Doubtful passages: 9:23-26; 13:12-14; 14:1 to 15:9; 16:1 to 17:18; 18:1-12; 21:11-14; 22:1-5; 6-9, 20-23; 23:9-32.
13. Chapters 32-52, scattered over the period following 604 B.C., we cannot tell in what order.

CHRONOLOGICAL TABLE[#]

B.C.

639. Accession of Josiah.

626. Call of Jeremiah.

621. Discovery of Deuteronomy; Josiah's reformation.

609. Accession of Jehoaahaz (only three months).

608. Accession of Jehoiakim.

604. Victory of Nebuchadrezzar over Egypt at Carchemish.

597. Accession of Jehoiachin.

597. First siege of Jerusalem and deportation of
Jewish exiles.

596. Accession of Zedekiah.

586. Destruction of Jerusalem by the Chaldeans, and
second deportation of Jewish exiles.

Driver, ILOT, p. 232.

INTRODUCTION

The underlying motive for the writing of a thesis on this subject is a religious interest in the fundamental problem of religious thought, namely: the relation of God to man. Speaking broadly, my aim is to get some insight into the nature of this relationship.

In Old Testament times, even as now, this relationship of God to man was the common interest and concern of religious people. I have chosen to consider the problem from the Old Testament standpoint for two reasons. First of all, the Old Testament writers, especially the Hebrew prophets, were experts on religion. They have given us the world's richest and finest religious literature. It is true that the New Testament supersedes the Old in the purity and adequacy of the teachings of Jesus. But the New Testament is a book of action more than thought. For philosophy and theology, which is our direct interest here, we find the Old Testament more suggestive. Secondly, I consider what light the Old Testament shows on this subject to be valid for today. God's manner of dealing with men may change in detail, or by reason of man's inconstancy, but never in its broader currents nor from a change of His own policy.--- So our subject is timely.

The idea of a covenant is our central subject for a very simple and good reason. It was in terms of a covenant that the Israelites conceived the relation between God and man. They thought of an agreement between God and Israel which they called by the Hebrew word "berith" (bērîth), which is best translated in English as "covenant". This idea is so fundamental in their thought that Old Testament religion is commonly known as "covenant religion".

Jeremiah has been singled out for special attention also for a valid reason: that he is supreme among the prophets in his interest and contribution to this problem of the relation of man to God. He is known as the prophet of personal piety. So the specific purpose of this study may be stated perhaps in this way: to become thoroughly familiar with the covenant idea of religion as expressed or implied in the life and writings of Jeremiah.

The general method of our work shall be the thorough study of the sources in Jeremiah himself and of other writings relevant to the point. We begin with no issue and work toward no particular conclusions. The thesis does not aim to prove a point, but rather to instruct and inspire the writer, if not the readers. The

study is, by nature, not the expression of the writer's own ideas so much as his interpretation of age-old truths. Nevertheless, there is a good share of creative speculation, the most important point of which is the author's extreme emphasis on the psychological development of Jeremiah's inner life, which is believed to be the major influence leading to the prophet's crowning covenant idea. A balance between originality and the recognition of Old Testament scholars has been the ideal pursued.

The table of contents indicates the method of development and organization. We try first to understand the meaning of the covenant idea in general. Then, as a background, we consider briefly its rôle in Old Testament history. In Jeremiah himself the subject presents itself as a drama of conflict between the so-called Old Covenant and the New Covenant. This development and contrast is our special interest.

The thesis ends with a discussion of the spiritual note which first stimulated it into existence. I refer to Jeremiah's great passage of the New Covenant in 31:31-34. It has been said by many to be the greatest utterance in the Old Testament. I have copied the words herewith from the King James version of our Bible.

Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that
I will make a new covenant with the house of

Israel, and with the house of Judah: not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt; which my covenant they brake, although I was a husband unto them, saith the Lord: But this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; After those days, saith the Lord, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people. And they shall teach no more every man his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord: for they shall all know me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them, saith the Lord; for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.

Prof. A. S. Peake makes this comment: ¹ "We cannot easily overestimate the significance of Jeremiah's doctrine of the New Covenant. It is the supreme achievement of Israel's religion...."

And Prof. W. Robertson Smith has said: ² "God's

1- Peake, CB, p. 46.

2- Quoted by Binns, WC, p. 239.

word, not in a book, but in the heart and mouth of his servants, is the ultimate ideal as well as the first postulate of prophetic theology."

CHAPTER 1

GENERAL MEANING OF "COVENANT"

History of the Covenant Idea

There has been a theory advanced that the covenant idea is comparatively late. ¹ There was really no covenant between God and Abraham and no covenant at Sinai with the nation Israel. Rather, Jehovah was a tribal God, bound by natural, not ethical, ties.

The majority of opinion discredits such a theory, however. W. Robertson Smith has put the accepted view of the history of the covenant idea in these words: ²

The idea has its foundation in pre-historic times, and indeed the prophets do not regard the conception as an innovation. In fact, a nation like Israel is not a natural unity like a clan, and Jehovah as the national God was, from the time of Moses downward, no mere natural clan God, but the god of a confederation, so that here the idea of a covenant religion is entirely justified.

The Word "Covenant".

The Hebrew word for covenant is ברית , or "berith". This word is used almost three hundred times in the Old Testament. It means, loosely, a bond, pact, or compact. The word is probably the same as the Assyrian

1- ISBE, p. 727f.

2- Ibid, p. 727.

"birîtu", which has the common meaning "fetter", but also means "covenant". In English the word covenant means any agreement or contract and implies mutual obligations and promises.

There are two shades of meaning which a study of the word in Hebrew shows it to have.³ Usually it is used to signify any mutual agreement between two or more parties. Yet it also is used to signify more of a command, or an obligation imposed by a superior. The word "bond" best approximates the various usages of "berith", for the term is used not only where two parties reciprocally bind themselves, but where one party imposes a bond upon the other, or where a party assumes a bond upon himself. In this paper, we shall use the word in both meanings, indiscriminately, for the religious significance is the same in both cases.

It is very important to note at once the two phases of any covenant; namely: the idea of it and the form in which the idea is expressed. It is the idea we are seeking to discover in this chapter. The form of various covenants, in words, will be considered later.

There appear to me to be three possible interpretations of the idea of the covenant as we find it in history. First of all, there is the theory that in

primitive times the covenant was used to signify kinship. According to Smith, in his monumental work, The Religion⁵
of the Semites, among those primitive people agreements were based on blood relationship. He says:

Primarily the covenant is not a special engagement to this or that particular effect, but a bond of truth and life-fellowship to all the effects for which kinsmen are permanently bound together.

A second view of covenant is that it serves as an instrument for conditional imprecations, or potential punishment for breach of agreement.⁶ This interpretation is also devolved from Semitic times. The Hebrew word "berith" is a form of the verb meaning "to cut": therefore, to cut a covenant. This peculiar form is generally derived from the old Semitic ceremony mentioned in Gen. 15 and Jer. 34:18, where the victim of sacrifice is cut in twain and the parties pass between the pieces. This rite was a symbolic form of imprecation, as if those who swore to each other prayed that, if they proved unfaithful, they might similarly be cut in pieces.

The third meaning of the covenant idea is that of a relationship of identity of aims and interests, involving mutual promises and obligations. This interpre-

5- Smith, LRS, p. 315f.

6- Ibid, p. 480f.

tation seems to fit the facts of Old Testament history and will be the meaning understood in this paper.

In modern life a covenant, in the sense of contract, has no necessary religious implications. But in antiquity no important transaction was carried on without religious sanctions. We may note some exceptional uses of the word covenant in reference to secular affairs. It may originally have meant an agreement between two clans for the promotion of peace and safety, a kind of mutual assistance pact (II Sam. 3:12-13). It might have been an agreement to fulfill common obligations to a third party (II Kings 11:17). But because of the ancients' system of religious sanctions, the word covenant readily assumed a religious significance. In the covenant of kinship the religious element was necessarily present, because the god was kindred to the clan and especially interested in the clan. It was the same in later history. Generally speaking, duties, obligations, or services required of his subjects or servants by a sovereign, suzerain, or feudal lord could be the subject of a covenant because they were imposed by a superior under certain conditions. This is the key to the prevailing use of the word covenant in the Bible, which was naturally religious, as setting forth the relations between God

and his people.

So covenants between God and man arose from the idea of covenants between men. In a very broad sense this idea of a covenant between God and man may be phrased thus:⁷

A free, moral Being, having power to dispose of the world to whom he will, and to select among men whom he wills for his ends, standing above men and the world, but entering graciously into their history, and initiating consciously great movements that are to govern all the future.

In one important aspect the covenant between God and man was different: in it God was always superior and always took the initiative. To some extent, however, varying in different degrees, such a covenant was mutual agreement.

God, with his commands, makes certain promises conditional on human obedience. We may accept the following as a good definition of a religious covenant:⁸ "a declaration by God to his intelligent creatures of the grace which he intends to show them, and of the allegiance which he expects at their hands." Another writer has expressed the broad sweep of the covenant idea when he says:⁹

In great measure all religious ceremonial and worship is the expression of a covenant relationship

7-

8- Candlish, ET, p. 23.

9- Brown, ERE, v. 4, p. 208.

between men and gods. For the worship paid, men expect the god to perform duties toward them, and this worship also tends to confirm that relationship.

In antiquity the sacrificial meal was a symbol and a confirmation of fellowship and mutual social obligations. So it is probable that sacrifice was the material basis of all the covenants between Jehovah and Israel in the Old Testament (Gen. 15:8f.; Exo. 24:4f.; Psa. 50:5; Jer. 34:18).

In summary, the essential condition of a covenant is mutual understanding and obligation. The essence of it is promise. This promise may or may not be conditional. In religious covenants the promise of God is answered by at least an implied acceptance and promise of obedience by man. Thus, in the Old Testament, religion was the observance of this kind of covenant with Jehovah. To be estranged from God was to forsake, forget, break, transgress, or profane the covenant. Fulfilling the duties of practical life as well as the obligations of worship was called "keeping the covenant" (Psa. 103:18; Isa. 56:4).

We have been considering the covenant as an idea; we may now consider it from the standpoint of form, as

expressed in words, in laws, or in a code. This phase of a covenant adds nothing new to its essence. It is merely an explicit statement of an implicit covenant idea. In the next chapter we shall study the most important explicit expressions of the covenant idea in the Old Testament.

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For the sake of information and reference I have here set down the three arguments of Candlish affirming the point that "covenant" is more than a mere figure of speech and has validity as an important part of Old Testament theology:

1- The word is used so frequently and sanctioned by Jesus and the Apostles that we cannot call it only a figure of speech.

2- It is connected with the idea of the Kingdom of God:

a- By covenant Israel was made a kingdom of Priests (Exo. 19:3-6).

3- The word denotes, not merely nor most frequently, commercial bargains, but bonds of love, tenderness, and brotherhood.

10- Candlish, ET, p. 66f.

Chapter II.

COVENANTS IN THE OLD TESTAMENT, EXCEPTING IN JEREMIAH.

Not all of the three hundred times the word covenant is used in the Old Testament are worth our study here. Let it suffice us to make an outline of the minor covenants and consider them no further.

1- Covenants among men:

Abraham and Abimelech Gen. 21:27.

Isaac and Abimelech Gen. 26:28.

Jacob and Laban Gen. 31:44

Israel and the Gibeonites Josh. 9:6f.

Jonathan and David I Sam. 18:3.

Ahab and Ben-hadad I Kings 20:34.

Jehoiada and the rulers I Kings 11:4.

David and the Elders I Chron. 11:3.

Zedekiah and Nebuchadrezzar Ezek. 17:15-16.

Marriage covenants Mal. 2:14; Prov. 2:17.

2- Covenants between God and man:

With Joshua and Israel (Joshua 24:25, E), an ordinance or constitutional agreement to serve Yahweh only.

With Jehoiada and the people (II Kings 11:17; II Chron. 23:3), a constitutional agreement to be the people of Yahweh.

With Hezekiah and the people (II Chron. 29:10), a constitutional agreement to reform the worship.

With Josiah and the people (II Kings 23:3), a constitutional agreement to obey the book of the covenant.

With Ezra and the people (Ezra 10:3), a constitutional agreement to put away foreign wives and obey the law.

The Major Covenants of the Old Testament.

The major covenants between God and man will have to be considered more carefully. These fall easily into two groups.

The first is a group of four covenants which are important because they have to do with the idea of Israel as the chosen people of Jehovah.

- 1- God's covenant with Abraham (and Isaac and Jacob) (Gen. 15:18; 17:2-21; Exo. 2:24; 6:4-5; Lev. 26:42; II Kings 13:23; I Chron. 16:15; Neh. 9:8; Jer. 34:18; Psa. 105:8-10).

Jehovah promises Israel, through Abraham, the inalienable right to the land of Canaan. In return, Israel is to keep the covenant by this sign: the circumcision of all her male children.

One theory has it that the covenant idea was comparatively late. There was no covenant of God with Abraham nor with Moses at Sinai. Rather he was their tribal God, bound by natural ties, not by the ethical ties of a covenant. The major-

1- Smith, LRS, p. 319f.

ity of opinion is strongly against this theory, however, and holds that there was a very considerable conception of the ethical character of Jehovah in the early history of Israel. In the words of W. Robertson Smith in his Religion of the Semites, p. 729:

The idea (covenant) has its foundation in pre-historic times, and indeed the prophets do not regard the conception as an innovation. In fact, a nation like Israel is not a natural unity like a clan, and Jehovah as the national God was from the time of Moses downward, no mere natural, clan god, but the god of a confederation, so that here the idea of a covenant religion is entirely justified.

2. God's covenant with Noah (Gen. 9:9-17).

Jehovah promises that never again shall the earth be destroyed by a flood. The sign of His promise is the rainbow set above the clouds. Apparently this promise is unconditional.

3. God's covenant with David (Psa. 89:4, 29, 34, 39; 132:12; Jer. 33:21; cf. 11 Sam. 7 and 1 Chr. 17).

This is a divine promise to the seed of David of an everlasting kingdom, the relation of sonship, and the superintendence of the temple (cf. Psa. 2). This, too, appears to be an unconditional promise.

4. God's covenant with Phinehas, a Levite (Num. 25: 12-13; Neh. 13:29; Mal. 2:4,8; Exo. 32:29; Deut. 10:8; 18:5).

Here is an unconditional promise of Yahweh establishing a perpetual priesthood in the House of Levi.

The second group of the major covenants is important because the provisions here are contained or summarized in the "laws" which were at various times promulgated in Israel. That is, the covenant actually is a code of laws. There are two reasons to be given for this legal conception of the covenant.² First, a covenant was not merely a theoretical conception, but was concretely an actual engagement made upon explicit conditions, and these conditions as dictated by Yahweh were the obligations or rules of his service. Secondly, and conversely, the covenant was the only form in which a law could be fashioned and sanctioned in Israel.

It is through the Deuteronomic writers that this conception of the covenant of law and precept has gained widest currency. But even back in the days of Moses the legal conception was not lacking. We notice it in the famous covenant with Israel at Mt. Sinai, which is the first of the two we shall take up. This covenant is expressed in Exo. 19:3b-6 and 20:1-17. The other one is the agreement with Israel found in Deuteronomy c. 12-26. This last was probably written c.650 B.C.

2- McCurdy, ERK, p. 287f.

but placed in the mouth of Moses as being delivered on the plains of Moab (Dt. 29:1). This verse, (Dt. 29:1), clearly distinguishes this covenant from the one at Sinai (or Horeb).

The covenant at Sinai is referred to in other passages, namely: Exo. 24:7-8 (E); 34:10, 27, 28 (J); 31:16 (P); Lev. 2:13 (P); Lev. 24:8; 26:9, 15, 25, 44, 45; Dt. 4:13. This covenant was a divine constitution given to Israel with promises on condition of obedience and penalties for disobedience, in the form of tablets of the covenant (Dt. 9:9, 11, 15), inscribed with the ten words, placed in the ark of the covenant (Num. 10:33; I Sam. 4:3-5); set forth in "words of the covenant" (Ex. 34:38; Dt. 28:69, 29:8; II Kings 23:3; Jer. 11:2-8); and written in the "Book of the Covenant" (Ex. 24:7; II Kings 23:2, 21.)

The covenant at Sinai was renewed in the seventh century B.C. in the form of a pseudepigraph of Moses on the plains of Moab. It is really a renewal, in the legal light of its century, of the earlier covenant, with detailed and special emphasis on blessings and curses, and frequently referred to in the Old Testament: II Chr. 34:32; Psa. 25:10; 44:18; 50:5, 16; 74:20; 78:10, 37; 103:18; 106:45; 111:5, 9; Isa. 56:4, 6; Jer. 1:2, 3, 6, 8, 10; 14:21; 22:9; 31:32; Ezek. 16:8, 59, 60, 44:7; Dan. 9:4; 11:28, 30, 32; Hos. 6:7; 8:1; Zc. 9:11; 11:10.

Relation of the covenant at Horeb to the Decalogue.

As we have stated before, the legal form of the covenant was an early development. The covenant in idea became the

law of the people in actual expression. So the Ten Commandments, given by God to Moses at Sinai, was the law that concretely expressed the covenant at Sinai. These commandments (Exo. 20:1-17) were the declaration of the Deity, His obligations upon Israel in return for His promises.

Relation of the Covenant Idea to the Central Prophetic Idea:
viz. Law to Experience.

The development of the covenant idea down through Old Testament times can best be described as a formal bond becoming a living union.

From the very first the covenant idea was clothed in commandments or bodies of precept (Gen. 17:3f.; Exo. 20-23). On the other hand, the essence of prophetic influence was experience. Covenant religion was legal, emphasizing obedience to external law. Prophetic religion was experimental, emphasizing obedience to an inner voice. So there was a relationship of conflict. Especially when the covenant law became priestly in its nature did the prophets tend to purge it, simplify it, and individualize it. (Micah 6:8).

This development led naturally and directly to the New Covenant of Jeremiah, of which we shall speak later. In the course of prophetic history the primary conception of the covenant as a body of precepts had gradually given way to its interpretation as a living bond of union between Yahweh and his people. The New Covenant (Jer. 31:31-34) was the consummation of this prophetic conception.

Relation of the Covenant Idea to Deuteronomy

John Skinner says that the aim of Deuteronomy was "to secure the continuance and prosperity of the Jewish State by an effort to bring the national life into harmony with those moral³ and religious conditions on which the favor of Yahweh depended.

Consequently, covenant became the very essence of the Book of Deuteronomy. Here the legal expression of the covenant idea gained widest currency. The idea of a compact of mutual rights and obligations had been implicit from the covenant with Abraham, but now became explicit and fully developed.

The Covenant Idea in P, the Priestly Code

The conception of the covenant as a gracious act on the part of God, by which he binds himself to a certain course of action in reference to Israel and the world, implying the bestowal of blessings and the revelation of his will, becomes dominant in the Priestly Code. The covenant is there carried back to Abraham and Noah.

3- Skinner, PR, p. 93.

Chapter III.

THE OLD COVENANT IDEA IN JEREMIAH

Before the Deuteronomic Reform of 621 B.C.

Jeremiah was aware that the contemporary religion was a covenant religion. In 626 B. C., when Jeremiah began his ministry, the people were living under the Old Covenant, though, of course, they never thought of it as that. We shall here begin to use this term "Old Covenant" to designate the total legalistic conception of covenant, that is the laws of God given to man, to be obeyed by man in return for God's favor to Israel as a chosen people. This designation is in contrast to what we shall call later the New Covenant, the "heart covenant" of Jeremiah himself (31:31-34).

What was Jeremiah's attitude toward the Old Covenant? It may be said that for the first five years the prophet was comparatively little concerned with it. It was the reform of the year 621 B.C. that first focused his attention closely upon the covenant idea. Before that year we may note only one important consideration, namely: the Old Covenant was not a satisfactory covenant. That is, the Old Covenant was being broken. It was not a bond that was effectively holding man in fellowship with God. The Hebrew people were forsaking their obligations and promises under it.

Jeremiah was aware from the first of his people's

apostasy. Even before 621 B.C., in chapters 2 to 6, we have several observations of their turn from Jehovah. He puts into the mouth of the Lord such words as these: (American Translation)

"They have forsaken me, the fountain of living water, to hew for themselves cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water." (2:13)

Jeremiah says there is not even one righteous man in Jerusalem (5:1); from prophet to priest each one deals in falsehood (6:13), and even those who handle the Law care nothing about the Lord (2:8). Apparently, the people do lip-service to Jehovah, and say "As the Lord lives," but their vow is false to their real selves (5:2). Though they offer burnt-offerings and sacrifices, these are not pleasing to Jehovah (6:20).

The whole section from 2:1 to 4:4 deals with Israel's apostasy. It is perfectly plain that Jeremiah was deeply aware of the failure of the contemporary religious life. If it was based on the Old Covenant, then the Old Covenant must also be a failure and needs to be replaced by something better. I think the prophet had already the germ of the New Covenant in his mind and heart when he voiced such utterances as these: (American Translation)

"Your guilt stands ingrained in my sight." (2:22)

"Why do you change your course with so light a heart?"
(2:36)

"Remove the foreskin of your heart." (4:4)

The revival of the Old Covenant in the Deuteronomic Reform of 621 B.C.

In the eighteenth year of the reign of King Josiah, that is in 621 B. C., a momentous discovery took place. While workmen were repairing the temple of Jerusalem, a law book was found among the ruins. The story is told in II Kings 22-23:25. This law book purported to be the words of Moses to the Jews in the wilderness days, but now we believe it to have been written by unknown religious leaders during the reign of Manasseh, about 650 B.C. perhaps. Today we may read the contents of that discovered book in the legislative kernel of the Book of Deuteronomy, i.e. chapters 12 to 26.

This book of laws became the programme of a radical reform of public worship throughout Judah. The king was dismayed when he realized the disparity between what was commanded in that book and what the people were doing round about him. The whole of Judah was gripped in the tenacles of idolatry and polytheism. Alters to foreign gods, of Canaan, Assyria, and Egypt, dotted every high hill and incense was burned under every green tree. Children were being sacrificed to Moloch, the King God of Canaan. On the housetops and on the street corners there were shrines to the host of heaven.

Polytheism was not the only sin. The orthodox religion had become an elaborate but empty formality. The forms and expressions of worship were an end in themselves and no longer

represented a godly inner life. In chapters 7 to 9 there are many passages illustrating Jeremiah's condemnation of this externality.

The inevitable companion of empty formalism is unethical daily life. Judah had more than her share of that. The people had forgotten their duty to moral law. Jeremiah could not find one just or honest man in all Jerusalem. (5:1)

In national convention at Jerusalem, King Josiah and the heads of the people entered into a solemn pledge to make the new law book the basis of public religion and to extirpate everything inconsistent with it. With iconoclastic zeal and Cromwellian directness the reform was executed. Two main objectives were immediately accomplished: the abolition of the bamah, or high places, and the centralization of worship at Jerusalem. The Temple at the holy city was cleansed of all idolatrous emblems, the sacred prostitutes were forthright evicted, and the temple precincts were swept clean of the whole crew of diviners, astrologers, and wizards. The reform then spread to all the outlying townships. Holy places were wrecked and their priests were stripped of office. The people were denied the right to sacrifice to Jehovah anywhere but Jerusalem.

We must here try to understand the attitude of Jeremiah toward the reform. That question is one of the most difficult in the study of the prophet, and one on which scholars disagree. We must analyse the reform in all its parts,

then analyze the prophet's character, try to fit the two together, and draw our own conclusions.

The prophet's writings constitute the one source for direct data on the question. The problem would be easy if Jeremiah had said what he thought of the reform, and Deuteronomy on which it was based, but he does not say. Therefore, we shall have to consider first the probabilities of how Jeremiah would be apt to feel about it and then look at the two short passages that give his own words on the matter (11:1-8; 8:8).

It seems probable that Jeremiah would have agreed to the aim of Deuteronomy, which we have expressed before thus: ¹ "to secure the continuance and prosperity of the Jewish State by an effort to bring the national life into harmony with those moral and religious conditions on which the favour of Yahweh depended." Jeremiah's keen mind and sensitive spirit must have been painfully conscious of the need for reform (2:1-4:4; 4:19-21; 5:1, 25-29), and this reform certainly seemed to attack at the right place. Polytheism spread with each new shrine, so the shrines had to be abolished before a spiritual unity was possible. Deuteronomy also attacked the unethical daily practices of the people, and there again Jeremiah could lend his support. Finally, the prophet must have been willing, at first, to tolerate the priestly and legal nature of the Deuteronomic covenant, as necessary to the circumstances, in light of the Deuteronomic claim that these were merely means to the end of purser spiritual life.

In other words, Deuteronomy had many hortatory passages urging obedience from the heart within, not from the law without. Deuteronomy insisted on circumcision of the heart (10:16; 30:6; cf. Jer. 4:4).

These probabilities are strengthened by two facts that we have from the scriptures. We know that the reform had prophetic sanction through Huldah, the prophetess (II Kings 22:14-20). We know also that the families of Hilkiah, the priest, and Shaphan, the scribe, remained friendly and loyal to the prophet, an attitude that could hardly have developed if Jeremiah had early opposed them in the reform.

The passage in chapter eleven, verses 1 to 8, is one of the two possible references to Deuteronomy. Verses 1 to 5 call down a curse on the man who will not observe a certain covenant. They read: (American Translation)

"The word that came to Jeremiah from the Lord:
Hear the words of this covenant, and declare them to the men of Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, saying to them, 'Thus says the Lord, the God of Israel: cursed be the man who heeds not the words of this covenant, which I enjoined upon your fathers on the day that I brought them out of that iron furnace, the land of Egypt, saying, 'Listen to my voice, and do just as I command you! So shall you be my people, and I will be

your God," in confirmation of the oath which I swore to your fathers, when I promised to give them a land flowing with milk and honey, as it is to this day.*

It has been commonly assumed that Jeremiah here refers to the Deuteronomic covenant, and so the passage has been quoted as evidence of Jeremiah's support of the reform. But the reference to "this covenant" is far from clear. A thorough and detailed analysis of these arguments are not at all essential to the purpose of this paper. Our concern is to discover Jeremiah's attitude. I believe that the passage refers to the reform of 621 B.C. and indicates a favorable attitude toward it, and that this is true regardless of which covenant is meant by the term "this covenant".

There are three possible references: the law book itself in the form of a covenant, the covenant at Sinai, and the covenant that Josiah and the people made at Jerusalem after the book was found. John Skinner says that the original Deuteronomy did not give itself out as the basis of a covenant made in the days of Moses, (Deut. 29:1 is a later addition) and that it knew of only ^{one} Mosaic covenant, the one made at Horeb, the basis of which was the Decalogue. ² It seems to me that the words of Deut. 26:17-19 are sufficiently couched in covenant terms to justify calling the section "The Book of the Covenant." Jeremiah's phraseology in 11:4, where he sums

up the covenant idea, is not a quotation from Deuteronomy, but neither does it quote the Sinaitic covenant.

Dr. Davidson has supported the view that the Sinaitic covenant is referred to,³ and Welch agrees with him.⁴ This would mean that Jeremiah is referring simply to the general idea of covenant as the fundamental principle of Old Testament religion. This view seems improbable because in v. 6 Jeremiah says, "Hear the words of this covenant". The abstract reference will not fit this specific instance. Jeremiah would not be announcing a covenant with which the people were already familiar.

The argument of Welch is that the words in v. 8, "which they did not observe" makes the Sinaitic covenant necessary because they could not refer to a covenant that was being preached for the first time. Yet there is no reason why the section should not have been written after the prophet had actually started to preach the reform, say several months or a year, long enough for an affirmation of their disobedience to be grounded in fact.

Even if the reference is to the Sinaitic covenant, I cannot see that that implies Jeremiah's opposition to Deuteronomy. The passage must have been occasioned by the reform. The probabilities have all pointed to the suggestion that at first Jeremiah judged Deuteronomy in its best light. Nothing could be more natural than for him to see in it a return to the religion of their fathers and thus couch his support of it in terms

3- Hastings, DB, Vol. II, p. 570.

4- Welch, JHTHW, p. 95.

of the basic covenant on which that religion had its stand.

The third solution is one proposed by the German scholar, Erbt, and accepted by John Skinner. They say the reference is to the National Covenant, ratified by Josiah in Jerusalem. They omit verses 4 and 5 as a later Deuteronomic amplification. On this view also, our original thesis is sustained: Jeremiah at first supported Deuteronomy.

The second passage possibly referring to Deuteronomy is 8:8.

How can you say, 'We are wise,
And the law of the Lord is with us?'
When lo, the lying pen of the scribes
Has turned it into a lie!

Following Prof. Marti, in 1889, most scholars have affirmed that this verse shows Jeremiah's opposition to Deuteronomy. The verse may mean that Deuteronomy was originally written false, but more probably means that the original law was so overlaid by scribes as to lose all its ethical value. This interpretation does not alter the view that the prophet supported Deuteronomy at first. For 8:8 is a later writing than 11:1-8; the prophet's attitude has changed. Moreover, at the time of writing 8:8, Jeremiah has had time to see the effect of the law on the inner life of Judah and it is that which he had in mind as he wrote the verse--
The verse may not even refer to Deuteronomy, though this is the minority view. Prof. Peake says: "It is more probable that

5- Peake, CB, p. 160.

he is referring to regulations, now no longer extant, which had been concocted by the scribes as Divine ordinances; possibly falsified copies of the Torah had been put in circulation."

We know that the reform caused much hardship to the priests of all shrines except Jerusalem. So at Anathoth, Jeremiah's home town, the priests were bitter opponents of any reformer. When we read in 11:18-23, so closely following 11:1-8, of the attempt on Jeremiah's life by the men of Anathoth, we see here another reason for believing that the prophet preached the reform. That must have been their complaint against him. The famous passage formulating the problem of evil (12:1-6) seems to have grown out of the Anathoth experience.

Our conclusion is that Jeremiah at first supported Deuteronomy. Both the general situation and the scriptural sources lead to that view. Those who say Jeremiah never favored Deuteronomy base their arguments more on the essential differences between prophetic and priestly outlooks than on the exegesis of any particular text.

Results of the Reform and Jeremiah's Change of Attitude.

In brief, the Deuteronomic reform was outwardly a success and inwardly a failure. It destroyed idols but not idolatry; it changed habits but not hearts. It reformed worship, but it did not reform the spirit of the worshipper. On this fact hinged the whole burden of Jeremiah's ministry following the first short period of support. Out of the disillusionment of

his soul there rose a heart-felt need for the ultimate remedy for sin. When the law failed him he was started toward his crowning vision that has never failed -- the New Covenant.

The outward success and inward failure of the reform was inherent in the nature of Deuteronomy itself. The book, Ch. 12 to 26, contains some of the most spiritual teachings to be found in the Old Testament, but also much matter dealing with ceremony and ritual. The former was the special interest of the prophet. Unfortunately the latter became the sole interest of the people. It has always been easier to conform to a ritual than to live according to moral principles. The fault is not peculiar to the Hebrews.

The ritualistic part of the reform of Josiah was a thorough success. The requirements permitted an external and arbitrary enforcement which could bring about conformity. The method of centralization was effective as a method. You may read in II Kings 23:4-25 the story of the extermination of all worship alien to Jehovah.

But the motive of the reform was purer loyalty to Jehovah, and at that point the reform failed. The killing of an animal had always been a religious act, but now it was made invalid as such except at Jerusalem. So a vital act of everyday became secular and lost divine sanction. The very success of the centralization movement virtually destroyed the right of private religious judgment, because the priests at Jerusa-

lem became the supreme dictators and unrivalled authorities on public worship. God's revelation to man had heretofore been recognized as coming through the living channels of men and women. Now revelation became identified with a specific writing, and the conviction grew that revelation had there reached its highest level. People had only to turn to the book. Some writer has said that Deuteronomy and Pharisaism were born the same day.

Had the people obeyed the whole of Deuteronomy it would have been an actual spiritual reform. But all the commands could not receive equal obedience. Where they were definite, specific, and objective they were obeyed with enthusiasm. But where they touched matters of spirit and motive obedience was not so easy. As a result the more spiritual features were neglected.

Two reactions to the reform are equally important: on the other hand that of Jeremiah, who soon saw the vital failure of the reform; on the other hand that of the mass of the people who could not see it as a failure because they didn't look beneath its external success. The people clung to their ritualistic obedience, first as the easiest obedience, second as the more important obedience, third as the only necessary obedience, and fourth as a defense for other disobediences. That is the psychological progression of the human mind.

Jeremiah had the clearer vision that made him a lead-

er. He saw beneath the surface success. Deuteronomy seemed to him at first to be simply the programme of a great and beneficent reform. Now its defects became apparent; Its superficiality, its inability to cope with ethical and moral dangers, its inability to lift the spirit of men from idolatry and superstition to creative living. Later he was to detect a worse evil in the new-born attitude of self-righteousness. He saw that the door was opened to a new class of professional religionists, the scribes, in whose hands religion was divorced from its essence, the inner disposition of the heart.

Here then was the conflict that defined the burden of his future ministry. We must now turn to a study of the lone stand of Jeremiah against his nation. Our special interest will be in his personal character, as illuminated particularly in his Confessions, in order to reveal how the covenant idea grew from one seedling in the garden of his soul to the queenliest flower of all prophetic thought. For the covenant was the issue that went to the roots of mission and message; what kind of covenant must it be? As John Skinner says: "Jeremiah began to suspect the inherent impotence of the legal method of dealing with national sin."

Chapter IV

THE BACKGROUND OF THE NEW COVENANT IDEA IN THE PERSONAL LIFE AND MINISTRY OF THE PROPHET

The historical dates of our subject in this chapter are about 620 to 586 B.C., all but the first six years of Jeremiah's long ministry. The New Covenant passage was written at the very end, after the fall of Jerusalem. #

Jeremiah was well aware that the covenant idea was the basis of the Hebrew religion. He used the word "berith" (berith) time and time again as we have seen. It is my opinion that he realized that the fundamental issue of life, religion, and his ministry was the relationship of God to man, which the Hebrews called by the word covenant. This was his problem. It became his central concern. It became the nucleus around which all his experiences centered, both the goal and the standard of his life.

From the earlier days of his ministry he had been concerned with it. He had repeatedly emphasized the importance of "knowing God" (2:8; 4:22). He had already attempted to spiritualize the legal requirement of circumcision (4:4).

The prophet had accepted Deuteronomy at first because it seemed the right covenant idea. It was based on voluntary obedience and it contained high spiritual exhortation. So the background had been up to 620 when the real result of the reform dawned upon his consciousness. Now his problem was not

See Chronology, p. 4.

solved, but it had broken out again. The Deuteronomic covenant had proved a failure. As Longacre so finely puts it: ¹

The voluntary obedience to which Deuteronomy, following Hosea, had applied the term "covenant", inevitably tended to become formal and mechanical. This tendency reacted on the popular conception of the covenant, transforming it into a sort of commercial transaction pitifully unlike the rich, spiritual response contemplated in the book of Deuteronomy.

Jeremiah knew the connection between God and man was not right, and, as a scientist in the spiritual realm, his task was to make it right. It is of paramount importance for us to understand his task as he himself understood it. Just where did the difficulty lie? Why did people sin? A study of the scriptural sources will reveal the heart of the matter.

"It is because my people are stupid, and know me not;

They are sottish children, and have no understanding;

They have skill to do evil, but know not how to do good. (4:22)

These are only the poor folk, who are without sense;

For they know not the way of the Lord. (5:4)

1-Longacre, PS, p, 101.

"And me they know not," is the oracle of
the Lord. (9:3)

"And me they refuse to know," is the oracle
of the Lord. (9:6)

These utterances reveal the root of the trouble:
the people lacked not only a will to do right, but a knowledge
of what the right should be. It was the same problem that
Hosea faced: to get the people to "know the Lord," and by that
phrase a Hebrew meant "to understand God's will and strive to
do it."

Just here we recall this very significant fact: the
people considered themselves reformed. Compared to the years
before, the period following 621 B.C. was an era of obedience
to Jehovah. We have seen that the people welcomed reform. They
were zealous in their obedience of Deuteronomy. But we have
seen also that while the idea was magnificent, they had not re-
sponded to the whole of it. So Jeremiah was not calling them
back to standards which they had knowingly forsaken. He was
rather condemning the results of efforts the people had made to
conform to divine standards as they understood them. They had
listened eagerly to priest and prophet, but Jeremiah condemned
priest, prophet, and people together (5:30-31). Jeremiah had
to oppose, not so much downright wickedness, but a goodness
that was superficial and incomplete, and a divine covenant that
had popular sanction. Although the people had the book itself,
Jeremiah charged them with ignorance of the truth (7:4). Even

those who called God "Father" were not spared (3:4). As for the professional "false" prophets and priests, no man ever was more slashing in his attack on them than Jeremiah (5:30f; 6:13f and 8:10f; 23:9-40).

All these passages are evidences of the prophet's keen diagnosis of the real difficulty. He saw that the old covenant had failed to inform the mind of man and purify his spirit. It did no more than set down in writing what was the will of Jehovah. But salvation had to come from a knowledge of God himself, a personal knowledge, which was more than a knowledge of his will. It had to be a knowledge which was not only a possession, but a possessor, that furnished its own power for guiding a man according to its standard. Such a knowledge the prophet epitomized in a passage which, for beauty and vision of truth, is rarely matched in the literature of the world: (9:23-24)

Let not the wise man boast of his wisdom,
Neither let the strong man boast of his strength,
Let not the rich man boast of his riches,
But if one would boast, let him boast of this,
That he hath understanding, and that he knoweth me,
That I am Jehovah who doeth kindness;
Justice and righteousness in the earth:
For in these do I delight, saith Jehovah.
2
As Longacre has said:

The novel and difficult task which confronted

Jeremiah was that of reaching down to the hearts of men to purify their motives. He must appeal from an obedience which performed to an obedience which aspired---- from a covenant regarded as a contract to a covenant regarded as a band of love.

It is a great aid to the study of prophecy to understand that the prophet himself is a fit subject for psychological scrutiny. There is always the man behind the message, and the message cannot be understood except in the light of the experiences of the man. We know too little about many of the prophets to study their lives, but not so Jeremiah. We know comparatively much about his life and character, for which we are exceedingly grateful, because the personal experiences in his case were tremendously significant in moulding his message. This is particularly so in regard to the covenant idea.

Before we consider specific experiences, let us remember to keep ever before us the fact of conflict. Throughout his entire ministry, Jeremiah stood alone against his nation, a single voice of doom against a religion divinely sanctioned and universally believed satisfactory for salvation. This was the rôle he played and the destiny he endured. It must be held in mind as we observe how he wondered and wrought, prayed and preached, lived and died for the sake of his people.

There are certain passages in Jeremiah which may be called his confessions, for they are as pages from the prophet's spiritual biography, spontaneous and intimate utterances from the recesses of the man's soul (12:1-6; 15:10-21; 17:9f., 14-18; 18:18-23; 20:7-12, 14-18). They were probably written down by Baruch, the prophet's secretary, during the mellowing period from 620-608 B.C. It was during that period that Jeremiah was engaged in conflicts with individuals or small groups. The persecution alluded to in ch. 18 and 20, suggests a small audience of friends, and also enemies who are not quite sure of his stand and who try by crafty devices to entangle him or get some charge against him. The prophet has not yet become prominent in politics. These are not the struggles to characterize those later years when he was at open war with the hierarchy and the court. The calm and self-possession with which he faced death, outrage, and imprisonment under Jehoiakim and Zedekiah, give the impression of one who has already emerged victorious from the inward struggles with himself.

The confessions exhibit a spiritual conflict that is the key to Jeremiah's inner life and the key also to his development of the covenant idea. That conflict was a struggle between fidelity to his prophetic commission and the natural feelings and impulses of his heart. We have already noted that his loyalty to his commission set him against his people. That commission was to preach a message of doom. His nature constantly rebelled against it. Let us notice how this conflict expresses

3- Skinner, PR, p. 209.

itself in each of the passages.

All the passages are here set out in full, to serve as a guide to our further study of them. They indicate the whole gamut of thought and emotion through which Jeremiah was brought to his New Covenant, the bond of love. #

The Prophet's Expostulation: (12:1-4)

Thou must be in the right, O Lord,
If I take issue with thee;
Yet would I lay my case before thee:
Why does the way of the wicked prosper?
Why do all the faithless live in comfort?
Thou plantest them, and they take root;
They grow, and they bring forth fruit;
Near art thou in their mouths,
But far from their thoughts.
Yet thou, O Lord, knowest me,
Thou seest me, and testest my mind toward thee.
Pull them out like sheep from the shambles,
And devote them to the day of slaughter:
How long must the land mourn,
And the grass of all the field wither?
Through the wickedness of those who dwell in it
Beast and bird are swept away;
For they say, "God is blind to our ways."

These are quotations from the translation employed by
Skinner, PR.

The Lord's Reply: (12:5-6)

*If you have raced with men on foot, and they
have beaten you,

How will you compete with horses?

And if you take to flight in a safe land,

How will you do in the jungle of Jordan?

For even your brothers, those of your father's
household--

Even they have played you false,

Even they are in full cry after you;

Trust them not, though they speak fair words
to you:*

A General Complaint and Prayer (15:10-18)

Woe is me, my mother! that you bore me

As a man of strife and a man of contention to
all the earth!

I have neither lent nor borrowed,

Yet all of them curse me.

So be it, O Lord, if I have failed to
entreat thee,

Or to plead with thee for the good of
my enemies,

In their time of trouble and trial!⁴

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Thou knowest, O Lord!

- Ibid, p. 204 v. 12 is untranslatable; v. 13, 14 are out
of context.

Think of me, and visit me;
Avenge me on my persecutors,
Through thy forbearance put me not off.
Know that for thy sake I have borne reproach
From those who despise thy words.
As for me, thy word is my joy and delight;
For I bear thy name, O Lord, God of Hosts!
I sat not in the company of the sportive,
Nor made merry with them;
Under thy mighty power I sat alone,
For thou didst fill me with indignation.
Why is my pain unceasing, my wound

incurable

Refusing to be healed?

Wilt thou really be to me like a

treacherous brook,

Like waters that are not sure?

The Divine Answer (15:19-21)

Therefore thus says the Lord:

"If you turn, I will restore you,
And you shall stand in my presence;
And if you bring forth what is precious,
without anything base,
You shall be my mouthpiece.

They may turn to you,

But you shall not turn to them.

And I will make you toward this people

A fortified wall of bronze;

They may fight against you,

But they shall not overcome you;

For I am with you to help you,

And to deliver you, "is the oracle

of the Lord.

"I will deliver you from the land

of the wicked,

And will redeem you from the clutch

of the cruel."

Jehovah, the Searcher of Hearts (17:9-10)

The heart is treacherous above all

things and desperately sick--

Who can understand it?

"I the Lord am a searcher of the

heart,

A tester of the conscience;

That I may give to every man accord-

ing to his ways,

According to the fruit of his doings."

A Prayer for Healing and Succor (17:14-18)

Heal me, O Lord, that I may be healed;

Save me, that I may be saved;

For thou art my praise.

Lo! they keep saying to me,

'Where is the word of the Lord?

Pray, let it come!'

Yet I never urged thee to bring trouble

upon them,

Nor longed for the fatal day--

Thou knowest!

That which came out of my lips was open

before thee.

Be not a terror to me,

Thou who art my refuge on the day

of trouble!

Let them be put to shame that per-

secute me;

But let me not be put to shame;

Let them be confounded,

But let me not be confounded;

Bring upon them the day of trouble,

With double destruction destroy them!

A Conspiracy against the Prophet's Life (18:18-23)

Then said they,

"Come and let us hatch a plot against

Jeremiah,

For instruction shall not pass from

the priest,

Nor counsel from the wise, nor the

word from the prophet;

Come and let us smite him for his

speech,

And let us pay no more heed to any

of his words!

Pay thou heed to me, O Lord;

And listen to my plea!

Shall evil be repaid for good,

That they have dug a pit for my life?

Remember how I stood before thee

To intercede in their favor,

To avert thy wrath from them!

Therefore, give up their children to

famine,

And hand them over to the sword;

Let their wives become childless widows,

And their men be slain by pestilence,

And their young men smitten by the

sword in battle!

Let a cry be heard from their houses,

When of a sudden thou bringest a troop

of raiders against them;

For they have dug a pit to catch me,
And have hidden snares for my feet.
But thou, O Lord, knowest
All their deadly scheme against me;
Therefore pardon not their guilt,
Nor blot out their sin from thy
sight;

Let them be laid prostrate before thee,
Deal with them in thy time of anger!

The Prophetic Impulse (20:7-12)

Thou hast duped me, O Lord, and I
let myself be duped!

Thou hast been too strong for me,
and hast prevailed.

I have become a laughing-stock all
day long,

Everyone mocks me.

As often as I speak, I must cry out,
I must call, "Violence and spoil!"

For the word of the Lord has become
to me

A reproach and a derision all day long.

If I say, "I will not think of it,
Nor speak any more in his name,"

It is in my heart like a burning fire,

Shut up in my bones;

I am worn out with holding it in--

I cannot endure it.

For I hear the whispering of many,

Terror all around.

"Denounce him! let us denounce him!"

Say all my intimate friends, who watch
for my tripping;

"Perhaps he will be duped, and we shall
prevail over him,

And shall take our revenge on him."

But the Lord is with me as a dreaded
warrior,

Therefore my persecutors shall stumble,
and shall not prevail,

They shall be put to bitter shame,

Because they have not succeeded,

To everlasting confusion, which shall
not be forgotten.

O Lord of Hosts, thou who testest the
right,

Who searchest the heart and the
conscience

Let me see thy vengeance on them,

For to thee have I confided my cause.

Jeremiah Curses His Day (20:14-18)

Cursed by the day on which I was born,

The day on which my mother bore me--

Let it not be blessed!

Cursed by the man who brought the

good news to my father,

"A son is born to you"--

Wishing him much joy!

Let that man be like the cities

Which the Lord overthrew without

mercy;

Let him hear a cry in the morning;

And an alarm at noon;

Because he did not let me die in the

womb,

That my mother might have been my

grave,

And her womb have remained pregnant

forever!

Why came I out of the womb, to see

trouble and sorrow,

That my days might be spent in shame?

Crouther T. Gordon has written a book on Jeremiah and has
entitled it The Rebel Prophet. We find there this

⁵
sentence: "The man who in that day could rebel against the

venerated code of religion was rebel of the deepest dye." These self-revealing passages called Jeremiah's confessions are filled with that rebellious spirit. Men of a more passive and contented piety sometimes breathe a "rebel sigh". But here is a nervous, inquiring personality that advances to the discovery of religious problems that other men were content not to probe. Take for instance the problem of evil. Men before him must have observed the facts: the prosperity of the wicked and the hardships of the good. But the facts had aroused no speculative reactions. Here was the first man, at least among the Hebrews, who, having seen the perplexities involved, dared to wrestle with them. Such facts didn't seem to Jeremiah to be consistent with a just God. His spirit rebelled against a complacent evasion of the problem. Instead, he threw down a challenge to Providence (12:1-2) that is staggering in its boldness, even today. Think what it must have been then!

Jeremiah did not solve the problem of evil but he did get an answer from God (12:5-6). That answer showed that Jehovah knew his trials. With that knowledge there came the conviction that God would stand by him in his troubles. The rebellious spirit showed its greatness when it recognized that as an answer which saved the situation. Underlying the rebel spirit was that deeper trust, a faith in the unerring righteousness of Jehovah.

His faith did not triumph without being sorely tested. There were times when his heart gave way to despondency and

loneliness (15:10-16:18). All men cursed him. He says that he bore reproach for the Lord's sake. He could not join in company with the merry-makers. This isolation and lack of friends must have hurt Jeremiah deeply, for he was by nature a sociable person. We may judge that by his frequent mixing in public life, though he played alone, by his intimate association with Baruch, by his pathetic reference to his intimate friends (20:10), and by the latent sorrow behind his words in 16:9: "Behold, I am banishing from this place... the sound of mirth and the sound of gladness, the voice of the bridegroom and the voice of the bride."

Jeremiah loved his friends and all his people. We can scarcely comprehend the depth of his inconsolable grief when we read the passage 8:18-9:1. "O that my head were waters and my eyes a fountain of tears, that I might weep day and night for the slain of the daughter of my people." Notice the depth of his passion when he contemplates the coming doom: "O my soul, my soul! I writhe in anguish! O the agony of my heart! My heart beats wildly within me, I cannot keep it silent!" (4:19) Once and again the impulse to pray for his people had risen in his heart (18:20; 15:11) to be checked by the stern command of duty, 'Pray not thou for this people neither lift up cry or prayer on their behalf, and do not intercede with me; for I will not hear thee' (7:16; cf. 14:11f., 11:14).

There was one element of the conflict in his soul: love and desire for friends on the one side versus his duty to preach destruction on the other. To the latter force he remained steadfast. There came home to him with impelling power the inexorableness of the divine justice (5:9, 29; 11:15; 13:22-23; 17:1; 18:13f.) So he continued to preach "violence and spoil". In the prevailing spirit of indifference and impenitence, the more he did this, the more he set the people against him.

There was in him also the conflict between the desire to quit his ministry and the prophetic impulse that carried him on. He was the one prophet in Judah, so far as we know, with a message of doom. A whole army of professional priests and prophets were soothing the people into smug complacency (23:16-29). His own message was a failure. Indeed, he more and more realized that his message found no response anywhere except in his own heart. With greater truth than Elijah he could have said: "I, even I only, am left, and they seek my life to take it away" (I Kings 19:10,14). Such an extreme test of faith it must have been! Suppose a modern minister had not even one hearer. We can forgive his feeling that he was victimized (20:7), his doubt of Jehovah (15:18), and his impulse to quit (20:9). But he cannot escape the prophetic impulse! "It is in my heart like a burning fire, shut up in my bones; I am worn out with holding it in-- I cannot endure it." (20:9) To it he was held true, so that he took delight in reproach for the sake of Jehovah (15:16).

To the degree that he remained true he gained in fellowship with God, but lost in the fellowship of this world.

Jeremiah was saved because of his great trust in God. In all these conflicts, with his own nature and all the world on the other side, he remained true. The result was that he became the discoverer of the soul as the true seat of religion. The result was that he bridged the gap from prophet to psalmist, and from prophet to saint. The result was that he gave the world the New Covenant, an idea which Jesus himself could not improve, but incarnated in his life. These were the results of his faith, but what were its causes?

The secret of the cause is to be found in his own communion with God. He was a man who took things to the Lord in prayer. Every experience and every problem became the subject of the communion between the prophet and his God. The confessions are all spoken to the Lord or with the Lord. We have studied in this chapter the psychological forces that were forcing Jeremiah to the idea and practice of individual communion. They may be summed up as follows:

1. The deep affectionateness of his nature that found no human outlet.
2. The isolation in which his mission involved him.
3. The weakness and infirmity of his "flesh" which needed constant renewals of the Divine refreshment.

4. His harsh treatment by the people he loved.

I have said that the New Covenant was the outgrowth of Jeremiah's own communion with God. That communion, we have seen, was intimate and unceasing. How may we account for such a close fellowship? George Adam Smith suggests three reasons.⁷ First of all, the hopelessness of his time and life quenched ecstatic visions of a transcendent God. Jeremiah added nothing to the conception of God as transcendent, partly because his needs were for an immanent God. Secondly, the prophet's nature was responsive to a Divine Being who would be familiar, not beyond reach. The particular quality of Jeremiah's imagination was not soaring but profoundly introspective. Third, and most important of all, Jeremiah had intimate communion with God, not only because he needed him and turned to him, but because of the way he turned to him. Jeremiah veritably grappled and wrestled with God in prayer. He was original above all the prophets in the exercise of prayer. Jeremiah's interest was whole-heartedly and pre-dominantly in the welfare of his fellow men. "Jeremiah dwells not so much upon the attributes of God on which faith rests, as upon the effects of faith in man."⁸ With this interest, he had to know God himself; first God had to become real to him. With a combination of trust and daring, he literally talked it out with the Supreme Spirit. (Note all the Confession passages are in this spirit and follow this method.) "The personal piety of later Israel was watered

7- Smith, J, p. 352f.

8- Ibid, p. 353.

by his tears and the sweat of his spiritual agonies." He met every problem with prayer: a prayer for healing (17:14), prayer for help (17:18), and prayers for vindication and vengeance that we have already noted. In each case he laid his soul bare before the Lord. Such prayer carries within itself the assurance of its answer. So it was in Jeremiah's case. Every self-examination and every hour in prayer resulted in a stronger demand upon his services for Jehovah. With each prayer, experience, the bond that clasped him with God, grew stronger. Finally, the prophet comes to a clear consciousness of the answer to the central problem of his life: man's personal relation to God--the covenant idea.

Therefore thus says the Lord:

"If you turn, I will restore you,
And you shall stand in my presence;
And if you bring forth what is precious,
without anything base,
You shall be my mouthpiece.
They may turn to you,
But you shall not turn to them.
And I will make you toward this people
A fortified wall of bronze;
They may fight against you,
But they shall not overcome you;
For I am with you to help you,

And to deliver you," is the oracle.

of the Lord.

This illumination may be considered a turning point in the prophet's life. Why? Because now for the first time, as far as we can judge, Jeremiah realized that only the pure in heart can see God. He realizes that in his own case. "In the presence of God he recognizes that there is something unworthy and ignoble in those human feelings to which he has given such free and fearless expression--his querulous complaints against providence, his impatience for the verification of his predictions, and especially his vindictive spirit toward his enemies." It was the idea of repentance that dawned upon him, not national repentance, but individual. God's favor is conditioned: "if you turn", "if you bring forth what is precious", were the words of Jehovah.

With that assurance came the supreme trust in God. I believe that now Jeremiah's faith was strong enough to go ahead and preach his secret of individual communion to the people. He trusted God because he had tested God. Just as important he could go ahead now because he knew that Jehovah had tested him in turn.

Why his message of individual communion took the covenant form and expressed itself as "The New Covenant" is the subject of our next division.

10- Skinner, PR, p. 214f.

11- Ibid, p. 214.

The Political and Religious Situation

There were three broad reasons for the growing idea of individualism in Jeremiah's prophecy. First, there was the failure of the Deuteronomic reform, which made him doubt the efficacy of national and legal methods. Second, there was the prophet's own inner struggle and development. This, I have tried to point out, was the most impelling force. Third, there was the political fall of the nation in 586 B.C. This factor is discussed last for a two-fold reason: it came last in point of time, and it was the immediate occasion which defined the message of individualism in covenant form. It is highly probable however, that the covenant form would have been adopted anyway, as the most natural and understandable figure to use.

Let us briefly recall the historical situation. Judah was a small kingdom lying directly between the two greatest powers of the ancient world: Egypt on the southwest, and Assyria to the north and east. Her political fortunes followed her favor with which ever power was in the ascendancy. During the last quarter of the seventh century B. C., a new power was rising in the Mesopotamian valley: Babylon. This kingdom struggled with Assyria for the control of the East and finally won out in 612 B. C., at the fall of Nineveh. Up to this time, the reign of Josiah in Judah (639-608) had been comparatively peaceful. But now Egypt started on an Eastern campaign to try to gather up some of the spoils before Babylon grabbed them all. King

Josiah foolishly tried to stop the southern foe, and was killed at the battle of Megidde in 608 (II Chron. 35:20-23; II Kings 23:29). Judah then passed definitely under Egyptian sway.

Jehoahaz, the Judæan successor to the throne, was not acceptable to the Pharaoh, so after three months he was carried into exile and Jehoiakim, another son of Josiah, was made king of Judah. His was a luxurious and self-indulgent reign, that started Judah on the decline.

It was only three years, however, before the Babylonian armies, under Nebuchadrezzar, swept south and defeated the Egyptians at Carchemish (605 B.C.). Judah was then required to pay tribute to her new master. After a few years, Jehoiakim rebelled and stopped payments. By the year 597 Babylon was in no mood to dally, and started south, aiming at Egypt but intending to take care of Judah on the way. Jehoiakim died while Nebuchadrezzar was outside the city gates. The blow fell on his son, Jehoiachin, who succeeded him, and who, after three months resistance, gave up the city. He and about five thousand Jews, constituting the flower of the nation, were carried away in exile. This has been called the first Babylonian captivity (597 B.C.)

Judah was destined to struggle along as a political entity for eleven more years, though she never recovered from this first blow that took away her best citizens. Babylon chose Zedekiah, another son of Josiah, to occupy the throne as vassal-king. This man was of an indecisive nature and was quite dom-

inated by the Egyptian party in Jerusalem (Jer.37:3-17; 38:4,5, 14-16, 24-26). He was constantly beset by delegates from neighboring states urging revolt against Babylon. About 588 B.C., he capitulated and joined the revolt, thereby sealing the fate of the city and nation. Nebuchadrezzar again came against the city, took it, carried Zedekiah and a host of captives away with him, and, as a final stroke, utterly demolished the city itself (Jer. 21,34, 37-39). Many of the Jews who remained later fled to Egypt, dragging Jeremiah with them (ch. 40-43).

In Old Testament times, religion and politics were inseparable. It, therefore, behooves us to consider the religious situation that paralleled these political events. Our discussion will naturally center around Jeremiah. He, like all the prophets, conceived of religion in national terms. It was inevitable that he would be deeply concerned with national affairs. Moreover, both his gifts and his aims drew him into public life. He seemed fore-ordained for leadership. Consequently he became a man with whom the public leaders were compelled to reckon. His influence was operative in both court and temple life.

It is important to remember that the public life of Jeremiah concurred with the inner struggle and development that we have discussed in the previous section. We are only discussing them separatively; actually they interacted upon each other. It is true that the confessions preceded the open political conflicts of Jeremiah's life, but these same conflicts played

their part in molding the prophet's inner life. So they contributed to the growing New Covenant idea; it is in that capacity that we wish to study them.

Jeremiah had always taken a stand on national policies. Consider first his ministry with its central message of doom. This was essentially a religious message: it came from Jehovah and it described what Jehovah was going to do. But its significance was national and political in every respect. The victim was to be the nation. The king and the people were to be destroyed. Also the agent of destruction was to be a political power. Jeremiah looked upon Babylon as the tool of Jehovah, doing his will. He even pictured the form of Jehovah among the soldiers of the Babylonian army, fighting against his own people (21:5-6). It was God's will that Jerusalem fall; that was why Jeremiah was so sure of his prediction.

It is instructive here to note the contrast between the prophet and his great predecessor of a century before, Isaiah. Isaiah had preached the inviolability of Jerusalem, even while the Assyrian army was at her gates. His faith had been vindicated. But Jeremiah was not unaware of the possibility that circumstances had changed since Isaiah's day. First of all, there was Nebuchadrezzar as their opponent; he was a man whom Jeremiah had observed and found capable of getting what he wanted. Second, there was an important change in regard to the so-called "remnant", that is the minority group in Judah who re-

mained faithful to Jehovah and were to be the seed of the Messianic age. Isaiah's faith was based on his conviction that a just God would not destroy the city which contained these loyal believers. Now the significant change in Jeremiah's day was the disappearance of even this loyal group. To Jeremiah there was no remnant except himself; there were no true and honest men in Jerusalem. Therefore the city was not worth saving. Though he wept mightily for its passing, he was convinced of the Divine justice that destroyed..... Jeremiah knew God too well to believe that he would be bound to save the city by precedent.

This message of the destruction of the nation made Jeremiah unpopular from the very beginning as we have seen. The opposition to him was particularly keen from the two political parties in Jerusalem (18:18; 20:1-2; 26:11f; 29; 24-28; 36:23-26; 37:11-21). There had long been in Jerusalem a party in favor of alliance with Egypt. Jeremiah early saw the futility of such an alliance and attacked it with vigor (2:36). The other party was in the majority. Their policy was exclusive nationalism, minding their own affairs. This policy was based on their belief that Judah was a chosen favorite of Jehovah and could not be injured. The party was led by the priests and the false prophets and was supported by the weight of public opinion..... The opposition of these parties made necessary the rôle of lone star for Jeremiah. He was

driven by them to his individualistic position.

These conflicts on the political front were waged for years before the actual attack on the city in or about the year 588 B.C. The persecution that he met before this time, ruthless as it was, was fired to greater zeal by the crowning act of radicalism that issued now from that rebellious prophet. With Nebuchadrezzar's army outside the gates, Jeremiah advocated surrender! From the beginning of Zedekiah's reign he had advocated voluntary submission to Babylon (27:1-22; 28:1-17). And the letter to the exiles written about 590 B.C. indicates that he believed the interests of true religion would not suffer under Nebuchadrezzar (29:1-23). But Jeremiah went much further than this. Not only did he advise the king, but now, with the crisis imminent, he counselled private citizens to save their lives by deserting individually.

"See, I set before you the way of life and the way of death. He that remains in this city shall die by sword or famine or pestilence; and he who goes out and deserts to the Chaldeans who are besieging you shall live and have his life for a prey." (21:8-9; 38:2).

It is no wonder that the heads of the city denounced as worthy of death this man who thus 'weakened the bands of the men of war that remain in the city, and of all the people' (38:4).

It is difficult to understand how he escaped death (cf. 26:20-23), unless he had friends who were not only willing, but always ready and able to help him. There may have been some at the court (38:7-10); but most were connected with the temple (26:24; 35:4; 36:10; 40:9).....

We are now ready to consider the direct effect that all these events had upon the covenant idea in the mind of Jeremiah.

There must have been an increased confidence in his own relation to God that followed as a psychological result of the vindication of his prophecies of doom. Let us elaborate that point. Throughout his life, Jeremiah had stood alone against his nation. To have all other leaders against one may easily shake one's faith in one's position. Is God really with me, though others flee? is a fearful question in a time like that. Jeremiah was not immune to doubt as we have seen, and we must not forget how much the sacrifice of his stand was increased because of his affectionate, loving nature. He took no delight in opposing his people. How would he react, then, to the events that had taken place? He had predicted doom, and doom had come. Jerusalem lay in ruins. He had warned against alliance with Egypt, and that alliance had proved disastrous. He had said resistance was useless, and so it had proved to be. He had urged submission to Babylon, and it looked now as if that would have been a wiser course. In short,

the idealist was proved to be the most practical over all his enemies. The psychological result of that vindication cannot be over-emphasized. It clinched forever his assurance that his own relationship to God had been right. He knew Jehovah! He had stood on one ground: his faith in the communion he held with God. That communion had not given him a wrong message. Now he felt he could trust it absolutely and in all its fulness. The time was now come when a message of hope welled up in his heart. If he had heard God rightly when he commanded a message of doom, surely now he was hearing rightly when the impulse came to preach salvation. He would share with his people the secret he had learned: the right relationship to God!

Before we take up this new message itself, let us see first how it was prompted by two other factors that are very important. One was the fall of the nation. Perhaps it is difficult to realize how complete was the destruction of Judah. What had been before a political state was now simply nothing, as if it had never been. The city was razed to the ground and there were no other cities. Jerusalem was the nation, politically speaking. The palace was gone. The temple was gone. King, nobles, courtiers, prophets, and priests were no more, as far as state sanction was concerned.

But the people themselves lived on. They had no external ties that held them together. This made internal ties all the stronger, and more keenly felt. Nothing, as long as life

was left, could destroy the deep human desire to be something in the world. If they failed at external things, they must succeed at internal things. In short, the Jews spontaneously chose the realm of the inner life. Every race must preserve itself by working together for some great cause. The Hebrews chose religion as the answer to this need for self-preservation. Their interests became ecclesiastical rather than national. The state became a church, with a high priest instead of a king. Living in Babylon, Egypt, or anywhere else they could preserve unity in this common field.

It may be said that the Jews in 586 made religion their business and set out to become experts in it. Though this development was mostly unconscious, it was nevertheless admirable. To Jeremiah, who died before he saw the development in practice but who must have known by intuition that it would take place--to Jeremiah it must have been a joyful thing to contemplate. But immediately upon realizing it, there must have come some sobering thoughts. Were the Jewish people worthy to be experts in religion? and what was his own responsibility in this new era?

All his life, Jeremiah had been preaching that the people did not know the Lord. Had not the popular religion of Judah been an abomination to Jehovah? Would this political crisis, the destruction of their national existence, change their religious views? Would they know the Lord and follow him any

better now? Jeremiah could not have said with certainty. The old way would not do. He had seen the national covenant fail. Now the whole system of national religion was on the heap. There was no temple in which to worship Jehovah in the old way. These facts and factors all lead to one conclusion, which must have been clear to Jeremiah, namely: if the Jews were to be a religious people they needed a new and different basis for their religion. The legal basis would not do.

The other fact was Jeremiah's relation to the whole situation. His position was paradoxical. He no longer had any official status as a prophet yet he felt the people needed prophecy. We have seen in the preceding paragraphs the truth of the latter part of that paradox: the people needed a new religion and therefore religious leaders, or prophets. Now we must examine the first part of the paradox: Jeremiah's lost status.

Jeremiah, the same as Amos, Hosea, Isaiah, and Micah, had an official position in the unwritten religious organization of the Hebrew state. Prophecy was an institution, with a recognized position and function, just as much as the kingship was an institution. The function of the prophet was to be the medium between God and people. He was Jehovah's mouthpiece. The words of Jehovah were passed by him to the people. Note that the prophet received for the people as a nation, not for an individual. His message was always to Israel or Judah as a corporate entity. He spoke always in national terms, appealing

to a national conscience and laboring for a national conversion. It is now evident that this conception of the prophetic office could not survive the downfall of the Jewish state, which had supplied the conditions necessary to that conception. So, in 586, when the nation was abolished the vocation of prophecy ought to have followed it.

But this leaves out another conception and function of prophecy. This function may be called the spiritual, in contrast to the official.¹² While Jeremiah must have felt the impending loss of his official status with some concern, it nevertheless only impelled him the more to seek a deeper foundation for his prophetic services. There had been, in the past, a progressive spiritualizing of the conception of prophecy. This is manifested in the decreasing dependence on visions. In the early days the prophet had only visionary forms for his revelations. (Num. 24:3,4,15, 16 and I Kings 22:15f). He would announce what he had seen or heard in a vision, with his conscious mental powers playing no essential part in the process. Revelation was thus first confined. But it grew broader as the prophets began to consider the meanings of their words. The first bit of interpretation became the nucleus for a comprehensive view of God, the world, and man. More simply put, the prophet began to reflect upon what he saw and heard, and consider its significance and value. So all that comes home to him with convincing certainty as a result of his creative

12- For excellent treatment of the conception of prophecy see Skinner, PR, p. 215f.

speculation is as truly the word of God as the content of the vision itself. "The clearest illustration of this phase of prophecy is seen in Isaiah, whose inaugural vision gave the first impulse to his life's thought and activity, and yet was not published till several years after his work began."¹³.....

This development may be correctly seen as from the ecstatic to the intuitive elements in experience. Jeremiah differs from the rest of the prophets in that he relies more explicitly than they on the intuition (using the word in its broadest and best sense). In his condemnation of the false prophets of his day he denies the revelational value of a vision in itself, if it is not "from the mouth of the Lord" (23:9-40). He finds the ultimate criterion of inspiration rather in a personal knowledge of Jehovah which he has and they have not. What was more natural than that he turn for the fountain-source of his prophetic activities to the communion with Jehovah which had been his one refuge and strength through all his life of struggle. This personal relation to God was enough justification to continue his prophetic work even after the fall of the State.

It seems to me that Jeremiah felt responsible to lead the people into a new religion. He must have reflected often on how little constructive quality there was in his teachings. It was all "violence and spoil" (20:8). That part was over now. He had been their true prophet, even if unaccepted and unpopu-

lar, for forty years. Could he not now say something to warm their hearts? He felt their need; he felt his responsibility. What did he offer, then? The answer is in three words: the New Covenant-- the bond of love that held him to his God, the secret that he had learned in the fires of experience. It was more than an utterance, that he gave; it was the very life he had lived.

Chapter V.

THE NEW COVENANT

We come now to the climax of our study -- the prophecy of the New Covenant in chapter 31, verses 31 to 34. We have shown that Jeremiah did not discover it suddenly. On the contrary, it came at the end of a long hard road. We have traced the development. For the passage itself, let us set down first a word for word transcription of it from the American Translation of the Old Testament:

"Behold, days are coming," is the oracle of the Lord, "when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah, not like the covenant which I made with their fathers on the day that I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt -- that covenant of mine which they broke, so that I had to reject them -- but this is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days," is the oracle of the Lord: "I will put my law within them, and will write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. And they shall teach no more every one his neighbor, and every one his brother, saying, 'Know the Lord'; for all of them shall know me, from the least of them to the greatest

of them," is the oracle of the Lord; "for I will pardon their guilt, and their sin will I remember no more."

Authenticity

Whether Jeremiah wrote the passage has been energetically disputed, pro and con. # We must digress from the spiritual story of the covenant idea at this point, and devote the first part of the chapter to the question of the authorship of the passage. If Jeremiah wrote it, then the passage is seen in the light of its context, and as the climax of his life and teachings. If Jeremiah did not write it, we have the shallow ideal of a post-exilic legalist, devoid of originality, historical, or religious value. The words are there, whoever the author, but do not say that the words are all that matter. For instance, the words "I came that you might have abundant life"---- may have been uttered by Jesus Christ or by any one of millions of men. The words are the same, but, oh, the difference in meaning and value!

On this question of authenticity, I shall be confined to the arguments of the great scholars, because they have so comprehensively covered the subject. Originality is possible only in one's choice of the more convincing side. It does seem to me that the Jeremianic author-

Chapters 30 and 31 are a series of disconnected and critically doubtful utterances.

ship is established beyond reasonable doubt if we can show that the ideas are so intimately related to the structure of Jeremiah's thinking as to make it highly improbable that they were expressed by any other than he. The correlate of this is to show that the authorship by a post-exilic legalist is highly improbable. Let us begin with the latter objective first.

Though many writers have argued for making the passage a later, legalistic supplement, none has been more thorough in his reasons than the German scholar, Professor Duhm. Regarding his case as the strongest against the Jeremianic origin, let us consider it carefully, and in detail.¹

The German scholar exercises the following line of reasoning in his argument against Jeremiah as the author of the passage.¹ If Jeremiah were the author, the words would set forth the contrast between the prophetic and the Deuteronomic conceptions of religion. But they imply no such contrast, says Duhm; they betray no consciousness of the need for a higher kind of religion. If there had been that consciousness in the mind of the author, he would have spoken of a new "Tora" rather than of a new "Berith"--a new law rather than a new covenant. Why? Because the law was the immediate content of religious faith. Therefore if Jeremiah had written it, he would have spoken in the prophetic tradition and would

1- Four excellent treatments of Duhm's position;
Smith, J, p. 375f.
Peake, CB, v. 2, pp. 101-108.
Moulton, E. (Apr. 1906)
Skinner, PR, pp. 330-332.

have spoken a new law which by virtue of its essentially different character and content would be better fitted than the old to be written on the heart. Since nothing is said of this, Duhm concludes (a) that Jeremiah did not write the passage; and (b) that the unknown author is thinking of the old law, with all its ritual and ceremony; and when he speaks of it as written in the inward part he means simply that every Jew will know it by heart, and not at second-hand through the instruction of professional teachers. He points out that Deuteronomy goes as far as that (Deut. 6:6-8; 30:11f.).

Against this position there has been a veritable barrage of modern attack, not, however, without due regard to Professor Duhm's eminence as an Old Testament scholar. Point by point, reasons have been presented against the idea of a later writing by a priest or one in the Deuteronomic line, and, as a corollary, for the Jeremianic origin. I shall set down in outline form the arguments of the two cases I believe to be most convincing, and which seem to me to establish the Jeremianic authorship beyond reasonable doubt.

²
Moulton's case - in opposition to the theory of authorship by "P", writer of the priestly code:

- 1- Cornill has shown that P never uses the word

- 2- Moulton, E. (Apr. 1906)

covenant in relation to Sinai, only to the Abrahamic covenant. But the reference in 31:32 is plainly to Sinai.

- 2- A divine covenant was considered by the priests to be everlasting (Lev. 26:44-45), so they would not think of a new covenant as essential for a restored Israel.
- 3- The language in c. 31 in regard to the Old Covenant is from the verb "to cut" a covenant. In all the writings of P this form is not found once. Only the verb "to establish" is used by the priestly writers in this connection.

Arguments against Deuteronomistic authorship:

- 4- Whenever Deuteronomists use the term covenant they refer to the Sinaitic contract (Deut. 4:13). They identified covenant with the Decalogue. The criticism of the Old Covenant, implied in c. 31, could not, therefore, have come from a Deuteronomist. Being in the priestly tradition, he would not have criticized the Decalogue. (But it would be natural for Jeremiah to criticize the Decalogue, not the law itself but its inherent inability to lift people to its obedience.)

Skinner's case

- 1- What reason would a legalist have for speaking of a new covenant any more than a new law?
- 2- Committing to memory is only a human exercise, whereas what is promised in the text is a divine operation on the hearts of men.
- 3- Learning by memory, for every Jew, would make instructors in religion the more necessary. This is inconsistent with verse 34a of the text.
- 4- The antithesis really implied in the language (verses 33a and 34a) is between an external law, in a book or on stone tablets, and "the dictates of the inward moral sense informed by true knowledge of God."⁴
- 5- To ask, as Duhm does, why God did not make the first covenant perfect, is to forget the historical view of religion. (It posits the problem of evil, which has never been solved.)
- 6- On the contention that prophetic authorship calls for a new law, which is lacking -- Skinner says this objection is met by an understanding of the sense in which Jeremiah (and perhaps the prophets generally) used the word "tora."⁵

3- Skinner, PR, pp. 330 to 332.
 4- Ibid, p. 331.
 5- Ibid, p. 332.

To Jeremiah the true Tora of Yahweh is not Deuteronomy nor any written code, nor priestly oracle, nor prophetic message, but something which has been partly expressed in all these ways and yet transcends them all -- the revelation of the essential ethical will of God.

So Jeremiah naturally felt no occasion to proclaim any new law.

Duhm's second contention is that the passage has no religious value. It seems to me that Moulton has successfully bettered him, point for point, in that argument.⁶

1- Duhm - says there is nothing creative in the passage.

Moulton - If you remember that God's finger, that wrote on the tablets of stone, is now to write on the human heart, is that not creative and prophetic? (see II Cor. 3.)

2- Duhm - says Jeremiah does not suggest a way to achieve the New Covenant.

Moulton - In the rest of his prophecy he does. His whole life is the way. Only if the passage is cut off by itself is this objection vital.

3- Duhm - says the phrase in v. 34 "all shall know me" is referring to a priestly Paradise of

6- Moulton, E. (Apr. 1906)

Jewish prosperity.

Moulton- This phrase is a common one, and, through all the prophets, has a deeply moral connotation.....

The great scholar, George Adam Smith, has also summed up the arguments against Duhm's position in a fine way. They are here set forth as additional material to supplement the testimony of the other cases favoring
7
Jeremiah.

1. Other cases of close criticism show Professor Duhm to be unduly apprehensive of later editions and additions.
2. Covenant was the familiar, natural word for Jeremiah to use.
3. It connoted love, not law, to Jeremiah.
4. Tora, or law, need not be confined to codes, as Duhm does, but may mean God's revelation and instruction.
5. "In the heart" means more than money when studied in contrast to the Old Covenant.
6. Phrasing is consistent with other Jeremianic passages and ideas (24:7; 9:24).....

We may now turn to the second main objective

7- Smith, J, p. 375f.

in our proof of the Jeremianic origin of the prophecy: the showing that the covenant idea is so intimately related to Jeremiah's thinking as to make it highly improbable that any other than he could have expressed the passage.

This objective is so nearly identical with the subject of this whole paper that it would seem to be established already. Throughout our study we have been concerned with the covenant idea. Certainly it was not only intimately connected with Jeremiah's writings, but, as we have tried to show, was the very heart center of his life. Suffice us here to outline the covenant idea in his entire prophecy.

Chapters 2-6-The marriage bond, and the

conception of a yoke (2:20; 5:5) both have affinity with the covenant idea.

11:1-8 Here Jeremiah recognizes the covenant as the expression of a religious bond (whatever he thought of Deuteronomy).

11:9-10 Reference to breaking of Yahweh's covenant.

20:8-9 Similar to 11:9-10.

14:21 An appeal to remember the covenant.

34:13 Clear reference to the Mosaic covenant.

32:40; 33:20, 21, 25; 50:5 These all are references

to the New Covenant, but are of very doubtful originality.

This may seem a slender line of actual uses of "berith" on which to ground Jeremiah's intimate concern with the covenant idea. But the question hinges not so much on proof-texts as on general affinities in thought between Jeremiah and the covenant idea. Besides being the psychological complex of his whole personal life, we may note these affinities to the covenant idea in his writings.

1. "I will be a God to them, and they shall be to me a people." (11:4; 7:23; 24:7; 31:33.) (30:22; 31:1; 32:38 are of doubtful origin.)

This phrase which Jeremiah uses is the standard, historical expression of the essence of the covenant idea.

2. Representation of the land of Canaan as a gift to the nation (7:7; 17:4; 24:10; 25:5).

3. Constant reference to the obligation of obedience--listening to the words of Jehovah--suggest the covenant idea of obligation.....

The foregoing discussion established the point that the conception of religion as a covenant occupied a real place in the theology of Jeremiah. From this it is but a step to the New Covenant.

A word ought to be said about the date of the passage. Every consideration points to a date at the very end of the prophet's ministry. The phrase in v.32, now generally translated "that covenant of mine which they broke, so that I had to reject them", must refer to the exile. So the prophecy probably comes from those few months with Gedaliah in Jerusalem, just after the fall of the city in 586 B. C.

The Nature of the New Covenant.

Our total study has been in reality an anticipation of the New Covenant. We have thus arrived at the passage itself with little to say that has not been already implied. Our remaining task is to put these implications into words, and, in the end, evaluate the significance of this crowning prophecy. We shall begin with exegesis.

"Behold, days are coming....."

Jeremiah, like all the prophets, looked forward to a Golden Age, when the kingdom of God would be established on earth. So he did not contemplate this new covenant as a part of the existing order, but as a future covenant.

Jeremiah related his idea of the New Covenant to the Messianic covenant, as will be seen in 33:14-16, and also to the Davidic covenant, as seen in 33:19-26.

He assured the people that both these covenants would be carried out. But these are the only indications of Jeremiah's messianic thought, except for a vague reference in 17:22f. His view of the future was not grand and impressive; there was no king and no elements of apocalypticism. The new covenant involved, rather, a change of mind and a turn of heart in each individual. Jeremiah had his own life to testify how difficult such a change was, so he knew this new covenant must be far off in the future.

"When I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah, not like the covenant which I made with their fathers....."

These words indicate both similarities to and differences with the Old Covenant. The old and the new are alike in three respects.

1. Both are initiated by God: "I will make...."
2. Both are in covenant form (the very same words are used further on: "I will be their God, and they shall be my people.")
3. Both are addressed to the nation: "the house of Israel and the house of Judah."

The first likeness requires no comment. As for the second, there seem to be very good reasons for carrying over the

covenant form. It was the natural form because it was in use and known to the people. Throughout Old Testament times it was considered the basis of religion. Moreover, this new relationship to God, which Jeremiah was voicing, was actually and intrinsically a kind of covenant. It was a bond of love. Not only was it properly called a covenant, but would not the idea be better received by calling it a "new" covenant? It might shine by the contrast to the "old" covenant, which had proved such a failure. Finally, I believe Jeremiah carried over the covenant form because of its national connotation, because he could not give up thinking of religion in national terms. He had grown up with that conception; it was the only way he could conceive a religious community. He could not abandon the idea of Israel as a moral personality.

The historical significance of the new covenant idea is involved in the phrases "not like the covenant which I made with their fathers..... which they broke, so that I had to reject them". The historical significance of the prophecy may be summed up as dissolution and restoration. The exile was the dissolution of the old covenant (Jer. 31:32). In it, Israel's national existence

and all her institutions, sacred and civil, were dissolved. On the basis of the Old Covenant, Jehovah said of her, "She is not my people, neither am I hers."

(Hos. 1:9; 2:2.) But Jeremiah saw, and history is now proving, that the divorce from God is really only apparent and temporary (cf. Isa. 40:1; 49:14f.; 50:1f.; 51:6f.).

The relation between Israel and Jehovah will be renewed: "I will say unto them which were not my people, 'Thou art my people'; and they shall say 'Thou art my God'" (Hos. 2:23; 1:10). Israel shall be restored by a new covenant!

"I will put my law within them, and will write it on their hearts....."

Here is the real secret key of the New Covenant. The essence of the prophecy is here. It is the discovery that religion is an inward thing, that God is in man, that the issues of life are from the heart, that the human spirit is the supreme value in the eyes of God!

Notice that Jeremiah does not do away with the law (which he probably thought of as the Decalogue). But instead of God's law being on tablets of stone, or in a book like Deuteronomy, God will write it on the

human heart! Here is the profound difference between the Old and the New Covenants. The first was a contract of law; the last is a bond of love!

To sense the full meaning of this rich utterance we must know what Jeremiah meant by the word "hearts". Quoting from Lofthouse:¹⁰ "When the Hebrew said "heart", he did not think of the emotions, but of the thought, the purpose, the will, the whole mind of man." To Jeremiah, having God's law in your heart meant this spiritual illumination of the whole mind and conscience, and the doing of the will of God from a spontaneous impulse of the renewed personality. That was what it meant "to know the Lord". Jeremiah was sure, because that was how he had known the Lord. He knew he was giving no new law. Instead he was giving the power to keep the law by putting it within the human heart. So, as one scholar has said,¹¹ the novelty of the new covenant (besides its reference to the future) lay in its subjective reality. Its terms are realized in their deepest sense. It is in this view only that its promises are better.

Under this covenant, grace, not law, is the foundation of fellowship. God comes to man, loving and giving not required.¹²

10-Lofthouse, J, p. 90.

11- Hastings, DB, Vol. II, 509f.

12- See Binns, WC, p. liii.

"And they shall teach no more every one his neighbor, **and every one his brother**, saying, 'Know the Lord'; for all of them shall know me, from the least of them to the greatest of them....."

This is an assertion that religion is individual. Jeremiah says that this new relationship will be between Jehovah and each individual Israelite. The prophet had learned in his own life that God was with him, regardless of the fate of the nation. Individuality is a natural corollary of inwardness. When the law of God is in the heart then it becomes interpreted by the mind and spirit of the man that harbors it. As his personality is unique, so is his bond with God.

Jeremiah meant that in the future, in daily intercourse, the common people would "know" God personally and intuitively, with a knowledge that not only ascertains his will but has the power to do it.

Involved in the attribute of individuality is the attribute of availability. Notice that Jeremiah says all of them shall know the Lord. The condition is not sex, race, or position, but rather the inclination of the heart. Jeremiah's personal experiences with God had revealed to him what the contemporary leaders of religion could not see. God cares not for external differences in keeping the law. So, although the new covenant is

a future covenant it may be established at any time the individual chooses to turn to God.

"For I will pardon their guilt, and their sin will I remember no more.".....

This clause is placed at the end of the prophecy, indicating that the whole relationship is based on forgiveness by Jehovah. We said before that the new covenant is founded on grace. God comes to man first, not man to God. It is God's grace, God's mercy, God's forgiveness which is constantly held out to us waiting for us to accept it. Such constant love calls out a spirit of gratitude that in time creates in man an attitude of repentance. True repentance is the step that man must take. By these two steps is the reconciliation with God established. We may deduce, also, that the relation, if once broken, can always be renewed, since God's grace and forgiveness are continuously extended to us, ready for us to accept.

The repentance Jeremiah had in mind was no superficial attitude. Of the nature of the repentance of the individual, George Adam Smith has this to say:

Forgiveness is not easily granted by God, nor cheaply gained by men; God has not only set our

13-Smith, J, p. 363f.

sins before His face, but carries them on his heart. And therefore, in view both of the just wrath of the Most High, and of His suffering love, only repentance can avail, the repentance which is not the facile mood offered by many in atonement for their sins, but arduous, rigorous, and deeply sincere in its anguish. All of which carries our prophet, six centuries before Christ came, very far into the fellowship of his sufferings.

This conception of the need for repentance grew also out of Jeremiah's own personal experiences. Jeremiah himself had broken the Old Covenant and he realized his need of a new relation to God. We have observed his tendencies toward introspection and critical self-examination. We have seen that the turning point in his prophetic career, as related in 15:19-21, came when the Lord promised to be with him, on the condition that Jeremiah turn to Jehovah and "speak nothing base". He saw himself clearly then. He saw that he had narrowly escaped losing the spirit of true prophecy, saw that he also had need of God's forgiveness, saw finally that he was not exempt from the duty of repentance for his sins.

This last clause on forgiveness probably grew out of Jeremiah's simple and beautiful story of

the potter and the clay, related in 18:1-4. As he watched the man at work, Jeremiah regarded "not the power of the potter, but the fate of the clay." Many prophets had seen God as the Supreme Potter, and man helpless in his hands. Jeremiah saw further. Though sovereignty of God was the clearer implication, there was a strong suggestion of the love of God. When the clay was hard to manage, the potter did not reject it. Instead he made it "into another vessel, as seemed good to the potter to make it.* There dawned upon Jeremiah, there in the potter's work-shop, one of man's greatest insights: failure is neither final nor irretrievable. The Supreme Potter is not only in control of his clay, but is interested in seeing something good made out of it. He is not only a powerful Judge, but a loving Father. Here was a new conception of God, which was later ratified by the New Testament, and has never yet been surpassed.....

Evaluation

It seems to me that the prophecy of the New Covenant is the highest point of Old Testament revelation for four reasons.

First, it is a proclamation of the very essence of religion. Inwardness and individuality are only one aspect of the perfect religion, but they are a fundamental aspect. They affirm the infinite value of a human

14-Longacre, PS, p. 129.

personality, and its capacity for spiritual growth to perfection through communion with the Father of spirits. This communion is religion. As Skinner so finely puts it: ¹⁵

In this individual response to the voice of God he discovered an earnest of that instinctive and universal sense of the divine in which he recognized the permanent essence of religion.

Longacre says that here, for the first time, true religion is clearly expressed as: ¹⁶

- 1- The concern of the individual far more intimately than the concern of the nation as such.
- 2- As depending ultimately on perfect harmony with the will of God.
- 3- As attainable, not by any outward conformity, but only in a spirit and a life. "Man thinks God's thoughts and delights in doing God's will."

Second, the idea of a covenant with its mutual obligations and promises seems to have great religious value, for this reason. If God is obligated to man, and to an individual man, is that not the hope of the world? According to the new covenant idea, God is obligated not by a contract, but by a bond of love. His love is so great, and his goodness is so great, that, having created

15- Skinner, PR, p. 219.

16- Longacre, PS, p. 117.

man, he will never forsake him. As the great Potter, he will never reject his clay! God will not break his covenant of love with us.

We have seen that Jeremiah's mission amounted to giving the people a new and truer conception of God. The people, and the prophet with them, were products of their time. And, in the Old Testament days, Jehovah was more a God of stern justice than a God of love. The limitations of Jeremiah, in the light of later ideals, may all be traced to a single root: that is, an incomplete possession by the spirit of love. The new covenant, with its content of divine forgiveness, was a step higher in the progressive revelation of the Supreme Being. The all-seeing, all-righteous judge of the Old Testament became the loving Father of the New Testament. This prophecy was the link between.

May we close our study with the observation that this man and his message anticipated the spirit of Jesus Christ. The Man of Galilee came to earth six hundred years later. He showed himself to be the greatest prophet of all time. His path and Jeremiah's ran strangely parallel. Both came under popular condemnation for predicting the destruction of the temple; both were hated by official religion. Both taught with great

clearness the forgiving love of God.

Of special interest is Jesus' evaluation of the New Covenant. You will remember that the Master, at the Last Supper, used these words: "This is my blood of the New Covenant." (Matt. 26:28; Mark 14:24; Luke 22:20.) Note that Jesus held the Last Supper just after the Passover. The latter was the official symbol of the Old Covenant. We might conclude that the former was to symbolize the New Covenant. Indeed, most scholars refer those words to Jeremiah's prophecy.

The New Testament was originally called the Book of the New Covenant, and should be called that now.¹⁷ Its central figure could not improve on the idea that Jeremiah had. His mission was to incarnate it with his life, and with his death. Jeremiah could not see the way of the cross. Jesus went to the cross and thus became the living medium of the revelation of the prophecy. As Gordon says, speaking of the crucifixion:¹⁸

If in his teaching the man of Nazareth had claimed to fulfill the law, then still more in the crowning climax of His life He gave to the noblest prophecy of the ancient world its fullest and richest embodiment.

17-Jefferson, CIJ, p. 110f.

18-Gordon, RP, p. 247.

So, in different ways, both Jeremiah and Jesus proclaimed and exemplified the "new covenant" of spiritual and individual devotion to God's will. That is the lesson for us, in the words of one great Old Testament scholar: 19

The familiar term "New Testament" (better New Covenant*) should stand not only for the heritage bequeathed the world by Jeremiah, not only as a precious treasure from the lips of Jesus, but as an epitome of the ideal that will never be realized until it is seen and sought by every Christian.

DIGEST OF THE THESIS

The aim of this paper has been to become thoroughly familiar with the covenant idea of religion as expressed or implied in the life and writings of the Hebrew prophet, Jeremiah (Ministry, 626-586 B.C.)

We defined a religious covenant to be a relationship between God and another party, either a social group or an individual. It is a relationship of identity of aims and interests, involving mutual promises and obligations. God promises protection and blessings; man promises obedience, faith, and loyalty. Both are obligated.

This was the covenant idea of religion that prevailed in Jeremiah's time. But the idea had been legalized. The covenant idea found expression in laws, especially the Decalogue and the Deuteronomic writings, and the people thought of the law as the covenant between Jehovah and Israel.

This legal covenant (that we called the Old Covenant) was a failure from the prophetic standpoint. Jeremiah preached, throughout his life, a message of doom, because of the people's sins. They did not "know the Lord."

So Jeremiah welcomed, at first, the reform that was occasioned by the finding of Deuteronomy in

the year 621 B.C. It was a book of laws, calling the people to a purer worship of Jehovah by (1) the abolition of all worship to foreign gods, and (2) centralization of Jehovah worship in Jerusalem.

In a short time Jeremiah saw that the Deuteronomic reform was essentially a failure, because, although it was externally obeyed, it did not change the motives of men, nor purify their minds and spirits. His withdrawal of support and continued prophecy of doom made Jeremiah extremely unpopular among the people he knew. He was driven, more and more, to a lone stand. So he was drawn, more and more, toward companionship with God.

Jeremiah virtually wrestled with God in meditation and prayer. The essential conflict of his life, between fidelity to his prophetic mission and the natural impulses of his social nature, was always waged in communion with God. When the human side was strongest he committed the sins of bitter self-pity, doubt of Jehovah's care, impatience to have his predictions verified, and a deep desire for vengeance against his enemies. In spite of these sins, the prophetic impulse kept emerging victorious and ultimately triumphed.

This psychological conflict and development

in Jeremiah's inner life was the most important single factor in the growth of the covenant idea in his prophecy, for these reasons:

1- He felt that he himself was being tested. That is, he began to feel that the new relationship to God that Israel needed would have to be discovered by himself.

2- As he was driven away from human friends, he was drawn toward God.

3- He found that God would stay with him, though others deserted.

4- He discovered his own need for repentance, and intuitively caught the idea of God as a loving Potter who will not reject his clay.

The political fall of the nation in 586 B.C. had important bearing on the covenant idea. It proved Jeremiah to be right in his predictions. That gave him great confidence in his own relationship to God. It clinched the proof that legal, national religion had failed. It deprived Jeremiah of any official status as a prophet, and so compelled him to search deeper for grounds upon which to continue his vocation.

The consummation of these developments: political, social, psychological, and religious was the

prophecy of the New Covenant, the authenticity of which we took pains to prove. Jeremiah knew that people needed a new relationship to God. His own relationship had been tested and found good. He had lived it, so now he proclaimed it. That relationship was a covenant of love between himself and God. Like the Old Covenant, it was initiated by God, and was expressed in the traditional form. It marked a distinct advance over the Old Covenant, however, in these ways:

1. It was inward. It was not a contract of law, forcing obedience to written rules, but a spiritual affinity with God as a personality. We are to "know the Lord" because his spirit is in our hearts. This kind of knowledge carries its own power of obedience.

2. It was individual. Though expressed in national terms, it is essentially God's covenant with every individual Israelite.

3. It was based on God's forgiveness. Such forgiveness and love calls forth, finally, a spirit of repentance which makes the relationship possible.

The New Covenant seems to me to be one of the greatest utterances of the whole Bible, and the high point of Old Testament theology (if seen in the light of its background and development) because it either

states or implies the following spiritual values.

1- It discovers the true seat of religion: the individual soul.

2- It discovers the true essence of religion: the inner disposition of the "heart" (in the Hebrew sense of the word).

3- It reveals that the object of supreme value in the world is human personality.

4- It reveals the individual to be the ultimate concern of God.

5- It reveals God, not only as a righteous judge, but as a forgiving and loving Father.

6- It reveals that revelation and inspiration are not confined to the pages of a book, nor to tablets of stone, nor to ecstatic visions -- but rather that the definition of these things is the spiritual illumination of the whole mind and conscience by contact with the Father of Spirits.

7- This idea of God being obligated because of his great love and goodness is the final hope of the world.

Jesus ratified the New Covenant. He could not improve the idea. He incarnated it in life. By his life and death he became the human mediator of the prophecy.--

The New Covenant is a future covenant and will be completely realized when we all, and individually, follow in the path of Jeremiah and Jesus.

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