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Social message of the Hebrew prophets

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" Social Message Of The Hebrew Prophets"

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INTRODUCTION

What is the meaning of the term " prophet" in the Old Testament literature? The term "prophet" coming from the Hebrew word "nabi" means essentially a mediator by speech between man and God. He is sometimes given other designations, such as " man of God," "servant of Jehovah," and "interpreter." But the fundamental content abides thru all of these. The prophets were the preachers of their day. They are the beating heart of the Old Testament. They spoke against the oppression and cruel treatment of the poor and advocated righteousness and social justice for all.

The prophet is always a man of his own time, and it is always with the conditions of his own day that he is vitally concerned.The things he speaks about are of importance to the people of his own age, wether they be things pertaining to the internal life and conduct of the people or things affecting their external fortunes. And when he speaks, he speaks does so with the intention of influencing his auditors. Oftimes the most powerful means of exerting the desired influence on the minds of his time is found in what he is able to reveal of the future. But wether he speaks of the

present of the future the direct and conscious object of the prophet is to influence the people of his own generation. And for this purpose the prophet reviews, not only the forces and tendencies operating in his own nation, but oftimes the forces , moral and national, operating in the great world outside. So we have the Hebrew prophets speaking of doom and judgement to other nations besides Israel, because of their sins and social injustice.

In this dissertatin we will deal largely with one phase of the message of the prophets- the social side of their teachings. Sociology is comparatively a new science. so it cannot well be maintained that any of the prophets had a social program as such. But they were men of practical insight and outlook, who stood together on the higher planes of reality. The Hebrew prophets were responsive to the special conditions and needs of their times and broadened with the course of events. It is only natural that they should mould their hopes into the form of the social institutions with which they were familiar. And we should keep always in mind in dealing with the social message of the prophets that the truthes that they proclaimed are not absolute.

Their truth, like all truth, was relative. There is no such thing as absolute social teaching. But the social ideals of the prophets were a rich contribution to their own age and a valuable legacy to our own. We would hardly expect them to have as advanced ideas about the proper relations between man and his fellows in the age in which they lived as attains in this modern age. So we will have to exercise care not to read into their message too much of modern thought. For example, the Hebrew prophets did not condemn slavery as an institution. They simply took it for granted as a part of the necessary evils of civilization and of society, or accepted slavery as they found it and tried to improve the relations between the slave and his master. They condemned oppression and cruelty, so when they found individual cases of such in slavery they condemned them, but not the institution itself.

We will try to analize the social situation found in the time of the Hebrew prophets the best we can from the data we have, and see how they met the social situation of their age. We might find it interesting to make some comparisons of the social situation of their age with our own, as we are still grappling with some of the problems they tried to solve.

The Preliterary Prophets

The preliterary prophets are the early prophets that did not commit their teachings to written form. What we know of them has come to us thru some other medium. So, oftimes, we have but scanty data from which to draw our conclusions. The sacred writers gathered what they could from tradition, and evidently many things that they thought was not important they left out. So the social message of many of the preliterary prophets is rather brief.

Samuel

The prophet Samuel has the distinction of being the first of the preliterary prophets. Some have sought to confer this honor upon Moses. He is worthy of the honor, and has made a large contribution to our special field. But to class Moses as the first preliterary prophet would misrepresent his tru historic position. He has the distinction of laying the foundation for Israel's national and religious life. So his traditional distinction from the prophets is justified.

The figure of Samuel stands out prominently in the prophetic narrative of the Old Testament. But it is rather difficult to determine accurately in what

his significance lay. He belonged to the period of Judges and was that last of that order. He had the misfortune of being the leader in Israel when things were of an azure hue bordering on opaqueness, The Ark was in the hands of the Enemies of Israel; Shiloh the national religious centre was burned. And the Philistines, stimulated by their past success, were pushing on to the conquest of the whole country. Civil strife and isolation of the different tribes unfortunately prevented united resistance against the foe. Hence, those of the south were soon completely crushed and not only disarmed and made tributary, but forced to serve in the Philistine ranks against their countrymen. Samuel led the people to see that in the face of such a foe as the Philistines a strong central government was needed. The people conceived of this being possible thru a king as the ruler. Samuel unfavorable to the idea at first, finally concented to the wishes of the people and gave them a king with Jehovah's sanction of his deed.

We do not assume that Samuel consciously had in mind any social program in his work as a prophet. This can hardly be said to be true of any of the Hebrew prophets, but a diligent student of the Bible cannot

help but see that Samuel made distinct contributions to the social order of his day. His principal contributions consisted in directing the energies of the people to the establishment of political unity and social security thru a military organization. This has been charactized as the first stage in the evolution of civil societies.

Samuel accomplished his task by methods that are familiar to the modern social reformer. He arroused public opinion by appealing to the better motives of the people. In an age when the world was ruled by primative force, Samuel taught the Israelites that spiritual power was more effective than material strength, and he sought to substitute the former for the latter. He did not completely acomplish his desired goal, but he made an indelable impression upon his people.

Samuel was a typical prophet and worthy to be classed ~~classed~~ as one of the greatest prophets of the preliterary group. As a preacher of righteousness, he denounced the superstitions of the age, and exalted the name of Jehovah; as a moral leader, he taught and exemplified the highest ideals of right living; as a social reformer he read accurately the signs of the time.

The Prophet Nathan

Nathan rightfully deserves the classification as successor to Samuel as prophet-statesman of Israel. His relations to the king were quite similar to those of Samuel to Saul. He seems to have been the chaplain of the court and the chief advisor of King David. His influence made him one of the most commanding figures of David's court.

He first appears on the scene in connection with the plans of David to build a temple to Jehovah, in which the ark can be kept. Nathan, at first, highly approved of the plan, as it seamed so unselfish and beautiful. But later, he had a vision from the Lord and changed his mind about David building the temple. It seems that the prophets given reason for his changed opinion was that David had been a man of war, and thus,was not quite the right person to build the temple. The real motive of the prophet was likely more significant than the one he gave. Nathan likely feared that it would decrease the vitality and value of worship to have it centralized at this time and accompanied with a rich liturgy. The results of later years proved th at his fears were well grounded, if this was his real motive for not wanting David to build the temple to Jehovah.

He knew the conditions in the nation, and knew that they were not ready for this step yet; so he advised the king to postpone the realization of his worthy project himself, and make preperations for his son to build the temple. David accepted the advice.

Nathan's most significant work was in the lofty ideals of social justice and personal morality that he impressed upon David and the people of Israel. The specific incident that gave him his opportunity grew out of David's sin in causing Uriah, one of his military officers, to be put to death in battle in order that he might secure his wife for his own lustful ends. This act was boldly and fearlessly denounced by Nathan and in such a tactful manner that the king pronounced his own condemnation and was greatly humiliated. The parable that Nathan used to accomplish his purpose was a masterpiece and has been preserved to furnish us with one of the most outstanding social incidents in the history of Hebrew prophecy. But in interpreting this incident we should seek to get the prophets view point as this throws light on the social standards of the age. We find upon investigation that the aspect of the offence that appealed to Nathan was not as we would expectp- personal immorality-,but social injustice.

This can easily be detected in the parable that he used. The question of personal immorality had not yet found a lodgement in Jewish consciousness, and it was not destined to develop in any great extent until the days of literary prophecy. But it is a fact of great interest and importance that we find thus early such a clear conception of social justice, especially between a king and his subject. This one incident is alone sufficient to place Nathan in the list of the important social prophets of Israel.

The Prophet Abijah

The despotism and tyranny of Solomon over his subjects called forth the voice of the prophet Abijah in aid of the oppressed and down trodden people of Israel. The king, surrounded by his sevile guard and brilliant court, felt too exalted to listen to either the advice or complaints of men of lowley estate. Even the priests were robbed of their real power and mission by royal seduction and flattery. In this cricis Abijah appeared, with the work of Samuel as a precedent to rebuke injustice and reestablish social order on a new basis.

As a means of improving the social and political conditions of the people, Abijah persuaded Jereboam,

a brave and ambitious youth of the tribe of Ephraim, to rebel against Solomon over the policy he had followed. The prophet exercised remarkable tact and skill in his method of telling Jereboam of his selection as the successor of Solomon. The prophet made it a point to meet Jereboam along the road. His first act which was planned as an impressive symbal was, to take from his own shoulders a new garment that he had provided for the purpose, which he rent in twelve pieces and handed ten of these to Jereboam with the words: " Take these ten pieces, for thus sayeth the Lord The God of Israel, ' behold, I will rend the kingdom out of the hand of Solomon, and will give ten tribes to thee." This prophecy was literally fulfilled when Rehoboam, Solomon's only son, became king of Israel and ten of the tribes revolted because of the foolish industral policy of Rehoboam and made Jereboam their king.

Abijah ranks next to Nathan in his social and moral influence. He was in the best sense of the term a social reformer. The two great events recorded of him are connected with social and political reform. To relieve oppression and injustice, when all else had failed, he advocated a division of the kingdom.

He seemed willing to rend the kingdom asunder rather than further jeopardize the religious and moral life of the Hebrews. When the new kingdom had been established , and its king had forsaken the principles that furnished the justification for the division, he lifted up his voice in protest, fortelling the calamity that was to come upon the disobedient king.

The Prophet Shemaiah

Turning now to the southern kingdom of Judah, we find Rehoboam after his elevation to the throne ready to attempt to recover the lost part of Solomon's kingdom. He mobalized a large army from the tribes of Judah and Benjamin, and was about ready to invade the kingdom of the north when the prophet Shemaiah appeared on the scene. He speaks as one with authority, " Ye shall not go up, nor fight against your bretheren, the children of Israel; return every man to his house; for this thing is from me." The effect of the prophet was remarkable. The expedition was abandoned and the army demobalized. This incident shows plainly the commanding influence of the Hebrew prophets.

The giving up of military ambition enabled Rehoboam to turn his efforts into another channel.So he gave himself to the development of the material

resources of his kingdom. Great prosperity came, but we are told that in the hour of Rehoboams prosperity he forsook the law of the Lord, and the king of Egypt came with a large army and invaded Judah greatly humiliating Rehoboam and reducing him to distress and fear. At this occasion Shemaiah again appeared, and declared the invasion by a foreign foe to be a punishment from Jehovah for the sins of the king and princes of Judah. They received at once the indictment and humbled themselves, and Jehovah accepted their penitence. The prophet was told to convey the message of deliverance. With this incident he passes from the pages of the sacred narative, but his social and political influence remained with the nation.

The Prophet Elijah

Elijah might be termed one of the major prophets of the preliterary period. He had a very active career in the time of Ahab's reign over Israel. The political situation had been practically a reign of terror for a number of year preceding the reign of Ahab. When he came to the throne he turned his attention and that of Israel to international trade and commercialism. The prophet Elijah saw in Ahab's policy a distinct peril to the religion and morals of the Israelites, because

it introduced the worship of Baal into Israel. Elijah was jealous for the name and worship of Jehovah. So he declared that Baal was not a god, but a mere shadow. He said, " Jehovah is God alone." Thus, with Elijah we have the monotheistic conviction clearly expressed which meant so much to the religious and social advancement of the Israelites.

Elijah figures quite prominently in the political and religious problems of his time, but there are indications in the record that he did not neglect the social phase of his work either. We find a good illustration of Elijah's social message in the story of Ahab and Naboth's vineyard. Ahab knew the tenacity with which an Israelite clung to his property, and the sanctity which attached to the ancestral inheritance, and hence, when Naboth refused to sell, he concluded that his plans for a beautiful private park were defeated. But his wife was from Tyre, where royal power was older and accustomed to move rough-shod over the rights of the "common herd." She sneered at his feeble grip, and proceeded to give him a concrete demonstration in the handling of the judiciary. But the judicial murder of Naboth called forth Elijah to face the king, a grim incarnation of justice and of the divine rights of

the people. Elijah voiced an outraged public opinion, and Ahab quailed before it. Ahab had collided with the primative land-system of Israel and the prophetic sense of justice, and it cost his dynasty the throne & and Jezebel her life.

Thus we see in Elijah a champion of the rights of the ordinary citizen, a foe to tyranny and misuse of political power, and a valiant pioneer in the long list of Hebrew prophets who through the ages fought to secure justice and freedom for the weak as well as the strong.

The Prophet Elisha

After the translation of Elijah, Elisha became a prominent figure in Israel for a period of nearly fifty years. His public ministry extended thru the reigns of Jehoram, Jehu, Jehoahaz, and Joash. His ascendency marks the return of the influence of the prophets over the kings of the country. He was a man of a more practical turn of mind than Elijah, and knew how to accomplish his ends. For example, he wanted to get rid of the worship of Baal in Israel, so he instigated the bloody revolution of Jehu and thus swept the house of Ahab from the throne and the worship of Baal from Isreal.

The social message of Elisha is largely confined to domestic experiences recorded of him, rather than in the incidents connected with his relations to the kings of Israel. One or two of these incidents will be sufficient as examples. In II Kings 4:1-7 we are told of a poor widow, who was in debt and was about to be forced to give up her two boys as slaves to pay the debt. She appealed to Elisha, and he had pity upon her. He worked a miracle with a pot of oil to pay the debt, and saved the poor mother's sons.

Another incident is found in the healing of Naaman, the great captain of the army of Ben-hadad, king of Syria. Naaman was afflicted with that terrible disease leprosy. He heard from a little captive maid of the Israelites that Elisha, the prophet of Jehovah could heal him. So he went to Elisha for aid. The prophet sent him to wash in the Jordan river, with the instruction that he was to dip seven times. This did not appeal to Naaman very much, as it was a severe blow to his pride. But he finaly obeyed the instructions of Elisha and was healed. He then wanted to pay Elisha for his healing, but the prophets firmly refused to accept a gift from the hand of Naaman.

But Gehazi, the servant of Elisha, did not possess the magnanimity of his master. He saw a chance to secure some of the gifts for himself that had been refused by Elisha. So he run in haste after the departed captain, and when he had overtaken him, by a false pretence secured a gift of money and garments. But this covetous act did not please Elisha, so he caused the leprosy of Naaman to cleave to Gehazi. Itthink this gives us an illustration from the social point of view to show that happiness can never come from covetousness. There are,also, in the secret process of acquiring what does not belong to us, the elements of disloyalty, hypocrisy and deceit. These social sins lie at the base of social disorder, and make the whole fabric of social life insecure. So Elisha was right in his attitude toward his servant Gehazi. He taught a good object lesson.

But the social message of Elisha like that of his predecessors was fragmentary and incomplete. however, he points the way for the eminent line of prophets that are to follow in the literary prophets of the eighthhcentury. One or two principles that the early prophets had tried to establish deserves mention before we pass on to the next period. The first principle is that the state is organised to promote the welfare

of the social groupand of each individual citizen. Rulers are the servants of the people and should be governed in all their public acts by the demands of the public welfare. No ruler, in order to gratify his personal ambition, has the right to use his power to deprive even the humblest of his subjects of freedom or their rightful possessions. Any tax required to promote the general welfare of the people may justly be imposed, and individual citizens are under obligation to abide by the decree of their properly appointed rulers. But any tax levied for the mere satisfaction of a ruler or a ruling class without regard to the welfare of the people is a crime. Furthermore, when rulers fail to promote the common welfare the citizens have the right to depose them and to take such measures as are necessary to protect the public interest. With the early Hebrew prophets in back of such principles as these, we can readily see that they were a great dynamic in the establishment of better social conditions and a true democracy.

The Literary Prophets

The literary prophets are the writing prophets. They wrote out their messages either before or after they were delivered, so more has been preserved of what they

had to say about the situations of their own age. The eighth century group are the most important from the social point of view, and in almost every other respect. We will now begin our study of this group, begining with the prophet Amos.

The Prophet Amos

Amos has the distinction of being the first of the ~~of the~~ literary prophets. He is called the shepherd-prophet of Tekoa, a villege six miles south of Bethlehem, and a bout twelve miles south of Jerusalem. He was a native of Judah, but was impelled to carry his message to Israel, where the crisis was more imminent. His ministry fell about 750 B. C. This was during the reign of Uzziah, King of Judah, and in the last decade of the reign of Jeroboam, King of Israel. He selected Bethel, one of the northern royal sanctuaries, as the seat of his activity, and boldly announced the down-fall of Israel and the end of King Jeroboam. Accused of treachery, he defended himself by asserting that it was Jehovah who had called him to deliver this message; that he was not a professional prophet, but had heard Jehovah's call, which he likens to the roar of a lion behind his back, while he was following the flock. He was forced to denounce the evil religious and social conditions in Israel.

That we might better understand the social situation in the time of Amos, it might be well to give a brief statement of the forty years transition between Elisha and Amos. We cannot do better than quote from Prof. George Adams Smith, who says," In the half-century between Elisha and Amos, Israel rose from one to another of the great stages of culture. Till the eighth century they had been but a kingdom of fighting husbandmen, under Jerobeam II in Northern Israel and Uzziah in Judah. City life was developed, and civilization, in the proper sense of the word, appeared. This step, from the agricultural stage to the mercantile and civil, was fraught with great danger. There were all the temptations of rapid wealth, all the dangers of an equally increasing poverty. The growth of comfort among the rulers meant the growth of thoughtlessness . Crime multiplied with refinement. The upper classes were lifted away from feeling the real woes of the people."

In the time of Amos there was a period of unparellelled prosperity in Israel. Tribute came in regularly each year from Syria and other dependences, perhaps even from Judah. Trade expanded, rich caravans passed over the highroads of commerce. Architecture flourished as in the time of Solomon, and noble dwellings for the

king and his courtiers were erected making the city beautiful and stately. But this prosperity enjoyed by Israel during the reign of Jeroboam was not shared equally by all classes. Progress in this case had been like a wedge driven into the middle of society, lifting the higher classes higher, and pushing the lower classes down. The independent middle class had been greatly weakened by the Syrian wars. And now was succumbing to bribery, unjust exactions and fraud of the rich. Even ordinary business was unfair. Cheating in weights and measures was notorious, and very imperfect goods were sold for standard quality. The higher classes were not only oppressive, but were given up to licentiousness and luxury. In view of such a social situation, where the fundamental principles of justice were continually violated, however peaceful everything might seem externally, there could not help but be a great deal of unrest and discontent. Others must have felt it as well as Amos, but he gives expression to his thoughts and feeling in no uncertain terms.

Amos tactfully begins his message with a condemnation of the surrounding nations of Israel for their injustice and cruelty. They were enemies to Israel, so this naturally wins for Amos a sympathetic audience.

In the Philistines and Phoenicians, Amos condemns the heartless slave-trade, in the Edomites, he condemns the pitiless and relentless hatred with which they had harrassed Israel and punished herewith the sword; in the Ammonites he condemns their unspeakable barbarity to women in a war for only the extension of territory; in the Moabites he condemns the insolent and pitiless habits of burning to ashes the bodies of their fallen foe. Thus, the world around Israel was a cruel world, which trampled remorselessly upon the fundamental sanctities of life and liberty and pity and respect for the dead. And to a man of Amos's religious temper and zeal it was only just that they in turn should be trampled beneath the iron heel of Assyria.

His audience had listened thus far with delight to the announcement of the doom of their neighbors. But now Amos turns and hurls his blows at Israel herself. He flays the unscrupulous judges for the condemnation of the innocent. He accuses them of selling even the righteous for money. Of course, this is to be understood in a judicial rather than a moral sense. The judge would deliver to the creditor as a slave the poor man who could not pay even for a pair of shoes, and try to

justify his decree by the Levitical Law. Then he condemned the rich for coveting the small possessions owned by the poor. He describes the rich as being so covetous that they can hardly wait until the feast days to begin their corrupt bargaining. They use small measures and increase the price, make the shekel great, and use false scales. And not being satisfied with this fraud, they sell the bad grain and inferior goods as standard quality. Thus, by this method the poor man became poorer, until he would either be compelled to sell himself to the rich to relieve his debts, or by the decree of the court he was turned over to the creditor, because of his inability to meet the financial obligations imposed upon him. So the courts were the servants of the wealthy class and aided them in their cruelty and oppression of the poor. Amos clearly saw that the perversion of this institution was one of the most fertile causes of the economic enslavement of the masses. So he pronounces doom upon those, who under the guise of authority and legality pervert the cause of justice.

Shameless immorality was a second charge made by Amos, and this was practiced in connection with the

religious rites.(Amos 2:8) G. A. Smith calls this a "riot of sin" the material of their revels is the miseries of the poor, it stage the house of God." This is a horrible and repulsive indictment, but it is one of the by-products of civilization that has manifested itself in every age when populations are crouded into thickly inhabited centers.

The corrupt practices that had developed in the cities caused Amos to warn the people to avoid even the religious centers. He bids them, " Seek not Bethel, nor enter into Gilgal, and pass not to Beer-sheba; for Gilgal shall surely go into captivity, and Bethel shall come to naught." The prophet adopts as his slogan, " Back to the country,"and thus shows his belief in the degenerating influences of city life upon society. He had seen idolatrous worship and immorality develop in the most religious centers, so he became convinced that a pure faith and a wholesome moral life were impossible under such conditions.

The prophet condemned wasteful luxury. He looked upon all evidences of conspicious luxury with disapproval, because he saw in it all the ill-gotten gain of a privileged class. He is moved to wrath by the ostentatious splendor of the rich, and dooms to

destruction their summer houses and their winter palaces, with their effeminate cushions and couches, because within them and beneath them are injustice and robbery of the poor. The men were not alone in their oppression. The women, too, were guilty, and against them Amos uses the most scornful words.(Amos 4:1-3) The naalogy is a rough one, but it expressed clearly a heardsman's conception of the rich and voluptuos women who trampled on the weaker and less fortunate, thoughtless of the rights of others. Amos declares that it is inevitable that such a civilization as that of Isarel must be destroyed, because it was a society founded upon injustice. He condemns the magnificent and elaborate worship of Jehovah thru sacrifices, and reaches out to the great truth that Jehovah is to be served thru right relationships of men. He affirms it in the great word that is the keynote of his prophecy; a permanent summons to every human society, and a rebuke to any religion that would serve God and forget man. " Let justice roll down as waters,

And righteousness as an ever-flowing stream."

The value of the message of the ancient Hebrew prophets is found in the fact that they dealt with

the ever-recurring aspects of individual and social life. Thus, the sermons of Amos are quite timely in many respects for our present age. They give many parallells to conditions in our own day of wealth, greed, selfishness, dishonesty, misrule, and injustice. So Amos's rugged word of doom is a good one for our modern age. For we too have a prosperity unequaled. We enjoy conditions that has enabled us to grow rich. The wealth and luxury of our modern cities would put the little splendor of Bethel and Samaria into the shade; and we too have not grieved for the oppression and injustice against the poor. We have "put far away the evil day" and have allowed among us those " that afflict the just, that take a bribe, and that turn aside the needy from the right." And sometimes our religion has deteriated into a form of worship that is concerned more with magnificence than with the thought of social justice for all.

But Amos would warn us that a nation's true wealth is in the well-being of the people, the happiness and contentment of their homes, the purity of their family life, the integrity of their character. If any nation or community comes to think otherwise, it will ~~inevitably find itself brought into collision with the~~

absolute righteousness of God, and borne down before it. Moral issues finally determine the course of history. So the message of Amos is vital for any age.

The Prophet Hosea

All that we are told directly as to the time when Hosea prophesied is the statement in the first verse of his book that the word of Jehovah came to him " in the days of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah, and in the days of Jeroboam the son of Joash, king of Israel." It is quite evident that his ministry did not extend over the combined reigns of all these kings; for, from the beginning of the reign of Uzziah to the beginning of that of Hezekiah, according to the chronology accepted by Biblical scholars now, there is a period of fifty two years, and Jeroboam came to his trown a few years before the accession of Uzziah.In all probability his ministry fell about B. C. 743 to 733. He was thus a youger contemporary of Amos whose activity seems to have been confined to the reign of Jeroboam.

The social evils chiefly dwelt upon by Amos were the injustice and luxury of the rich. We find the social situation in the time of Hosea slightly different.

Doubtless in the time of Hosea the luxury of the nobles was considerably deminished, but there is norreason to believe that there was any lightening of the burdens upon the people or any attempt to administer the laws with justice. Hosea gives less attention than Amos to the rich and their oppression of the poor. The situation in the time of Hosea shows that there was a deep seated corruption in society as a whole. The most elementary principles of morality are continually violated. The rulers who succeeded one another in rapid sussession were too insecure in their tenure of the throne to be able to put down the rude violence that inevitably arises in such troublous times. The nobles threw aside all pretense of social order. Thieves and robbers ravaged the land, and murder was common. But social impurity seems to have been the great sin of the day. The prophet repeadly makes mention of it. Two classes are singled out by Hosea as being worthy of special condemnation, the priest and the princes. The priest, he says, "Feed on the sin of my people, and set their heart in their iniquity," (Hos 4:8).And again we read, " The company of the priests murder in the way toward Shechem," (Hos6:9).The princes"remove the landmark." But their chief offense is their iniquity. (Hos 5:5-7)

Hosea alludes to a number of special instances or forms of iniquity that are not clear to us in their import, but doubtless the pople of his day understood his allusions. With these passages and others, we draw the conclusion that there was a general moral disintergration of the society of Israel in Hosea's time. So in the light of these conditions we can better understand his message.

At first Hosea echoed the stern, uncompromising message of doom announced by Amos. He dramatically proclaimed it in the names that he gave to his children. "Unpitied" and "Not-my-people" were strange names to give to a girl and boy; but they constantly reminded the people of Hosea's declaration that Jehovah had rejected his people because of their willful crimes.

Fortunately, Hosea has made plain the way in which the great change in his message came and in his interpretation of God's attitude towards his people. With breaking heart he tells how Gomer, the wife whom he loved and cheerished, proved faithless and fled from his home to lead a life of infamy. The tragedy of his domestic life revealed to the anguished prophet the deadly effect of social immorality on the home and on society. He realized that not only " they who sow to

the flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption," but that often the innocent, who love the sinner most suffer most the torturing consequences of sin. In the labratory of life Hosea discovered the social principles which make his prophecies in many ways the most original and revolutionary contribution to the philosophy of society that the Old Testament contains. He was Israel's great moral and social diagnostician because, as a result of his own painful experience, he learned to look upon life and human society through the eyes of love.

Hosea established a new precident in the peoples conception of the obligation of hunbands and wives. All the laws and customs of the ald Semetic world gave Hosea full authority to divorce and banish forever from his home and heart his disloyal wife, and he probably would, had he followed his first impulse. But a diviner impulse came to him and mastered his will. It was clearly the strong love that he still felt for the woman who had so cruelly wronged him. In later years he realized that this was, indeed, the voice of Jehovah within him, teaching him how Jehovah still loved Israel though she had played the harlot and had forsaken Him.

Hosea contends vehemently against the sins of his day. One of the worst sins of the age, as has been already indicated, was social immorality. The Canaanite cults had left a deep, foul stain upon Israel's social life . In luxurious Northern Israel social immorality was everywhere rampant. Even the public sanctuaries were scenes of gross licentiousness.

Hosea was undoubtedly led to analyse these sins and to denounce them unsparingly because the henious evil had laid its hands upon his own home and and made it desolate. He seems to have been the first man in history to combat boldly the double standard which places the entire burden of guilt upon the fallen woman and lets the man go free. He maintained that not the maidens and the wives but their fathers and brother -s were alone responsible.

Hosea is severe in his denunciations of injustice. There is to be vengeance for Jehu's bloody politics. Jehovah has a case at law against Israel," because there is no truth, nor goodness, nor knowledge of God in the land. There is nought but swearing and breaking of faith, and killing, and stealing, and committing adultry; they break out and blood touches blood. Therefore shall the land mourn." Hos 4:1-3.

priests and people arecalike corrupt, and punishment is in store for them. Upon the wicked princes shall wrath be poured out like water. It is Hosea that has given us our classic expression of social retribution -" They sow the wind, and they shall reap the whirlwind." Hos 8:7).

Hosea's solution of the social problem was simple. He taught that in a perfect social order men must first gain an intimate knowledge of the character and purpose of Jehovah, the Divine Lover of humanity. Hosea firmly believed that "only they who know can serve." He taught, therefore, that religious education is the first step toward any lasting reform of society. When men truly love God and their fellow mmen,Hosea believes that they will be faithful to all their social obligations. Thus Hosea proclaimed that real religion is the supreme motive power in all enduring social reform.

Hosea has a message for the 20th. centuty with its licentiousness and enticements to social impurity. While it is not so true to-day as in his time that religious rites encourage immoral conduct, except perhaps in some parts of India, yet there are things ~~in our modern life that have just that tendency.~~

Some of the amusements, dancing in particular, and many of the fashions of our time stimulate immorality. And the divorce problem to-day is far more acute in its serious results upon society than in the days of Hosea's struggle with the problem. We might benefit by his teachings along that line if we would apply them. The prophet denounces the incapable and irresponsible leadership of his day. We have a little of that to-day and it is working havoc with some of the most precious things of life. One of the most vital things of public life is that leadership is exercised by capable and efficent men in every sphere of human activity or professional life. The lack of leadership in such nations as China to-day is keeping the people in the ruts of the past centuries and preventing their higest political, moral, religious, and social development. So we can learn much from Hosea towards a solution of the problems of our own age.

The Prpphet Isaiah

Isaiah's call to the prophetic office came"in the year that King Uzziah died", i.e. 740 B. C. As he was then probably a young man, his birth may be placed at about 760 B. C. He was still active at the time of Sennacherib's invasion of Palestine, about 701 B. C.

We know very little of Isaiah's personal life. But from his writings it is deserable that he is essentially a man of Jerusalem, of the city. The early prophets including Samuel, Elijah, Elisha, Amos, and Hosea, performed their work in the Northern kingdom. But from the days of Isaiah onward history and prophecy alike were confined to the South, for Samaria came to an end as a political power while Isaiah was in full tide of his early career as a prophet.

The social conditions in the Southern Kingdom in the time of Isaiah were not essentiall different from those conditions in Israel that existed during the time of Amos and Hosea. Amos condemned especially the rapacity, injustice and luxury of the rich. Isaiah denounces these same evils. He condemns the princes as "rebellious and companions of thieves" . He says, " They crush my people and grind the face of the poor" They justify the wicked for a bribe, and rob the poor of my people of their right." Drunkness is prevelent. And the luxury of the wanton women is denounced. Hosea laid bare a deep-seated corruption of society as a whole. We judge from his book that social impurity was especially common in Israel. But this vice does not figure prominently in Isaiah's message to Judah.

But a general corruption of society is emphatically expressed by Isaiah. He says, " the people are laden with iniquity, a seed of evil doers"(Isa 1:4.) And " The whole head is sick and the whole heart faint. From the sole of the foot even unto the head there is no soundness in it " Isa 1: 5b-6a.)

The prosperity which was so marked in the North had also its parallell in Judah. But the lion's share of the benefits went into the hands of the military aristocracy, and the poor were little advantaged. Oppression, fraud, and injustice of the courts gave the wealth of the kingdom to the privileged classes. And the worst social iniquity, favoritism in the administration of justice, was shamefully common. The robbery of the widow and the orphan in the settlement of estates was a flagrant example of this. It was high time for some one to speak the summons to social righteousness, and Isaiah was the man for the hour with a message for the people.

Let us note briefly the most important social teachings of Isaiah. One of his most evident and constant demands was for social righteousness. He did not of course interfere with such institutions as slavery, as he considered them a part of the

the social order. But the evil to Isaiah's mind was that the strong and rich should take the advantage of their situation to oppress and exploit the weak and poor. He denounced the leaders and princes who ought to have been the protectors of the people, but who actually filled their houses with the spoils of the poor. He speaks again and again with scorn of the bribe-taker who sold justice and honor for money. He pronounces woe upon the land grabbers, who crowd out the small farmers. Luxury and debauchery upon which the ill-gotten gains were expended met with his stern condemnation. Isaiah not only preached righteousness and social justice for his own time and age, but the beeter days that were coming to Judah were to give special attention to these qualities.

Another important item in IsaiaH's teaching was his plea for political wisdom. This was founded in the religious belief that Jehovah was governing the affairs of men. His fundamental policy for Judah might be summed up in the words of Washingto- " Avoid entangling alliances." While he disapproved of alliances in general, he was especially opposed to the making of an alliance with Egypt. He constantly warned the pople, " Egypt helpeth in vain, and to no purpose."

One more element in the social teachings of Isaiah that stands out prominently is his vision of the ideal state, or, as it is generally designated, the Messianic reign. This conception of Isaiah was in a large measure social, as he was not thinking of a life after death or of a spiritual kingdom in the misdt of the common world of affairs. He believed in a God of justice. And he believed that that justice was to be established among men. He conceived of a prince from the House of David as the agent that Jehovah would use for His purpose. With the coming of the ideal king there was to be peace and domestic tranquility in the land. So Isaiah tried to lift the people to a higher plane of living by means of a great social ideal.

A great deal of his teachings has a value for our age, as the city is our great social problem, and Isaiah is the Old Testament specalist on that theme. The sins of the city, its volatile and vibrant life, its superficiality, its opulence, and its pride, all find place in his thought and speech. Of course, our modern city problems are more complex than the problems in the time of Isaiah. Iniquity which was then largely an individual matter is to-day organized and exploited for profit. But many of his principles are suggestive.

The Prophet Micah

Micah, like Amos, came from the country. His home was at Moresheth, one of the little villages on the outskirts of the old Philistine town of Gath. He was a young contemporary of Isaiah. His prophetic ministry begain in those days of excitement when the Northern Kingdom was sppeding to her doom. Apparently, the initial occasion of Micah's prophecy was the approach of the army of Sennacherib, which in 701 B. C. swept up through the western valleys of Judah, laying waste forty-six of its towns and villages and looting even Jerusalem itself. Micah's point of view is that of a countryman appalled by the crimes of the great city, who regards its corrupt life as a deadly menace to the peace and prosperity of the nation. His date was was probably from about 725 B. C. to 715 B. C.

Micah was a young contemporary of Isaiah, but the social situation appeared differently to Isaiah than it did to Micah. Isaiah saw the evils of his day, but did not regard them as inseparable from city life. He looked for a regenerated city. Micah felt that the rottenness of Hebrew life was due to its city development and nothing but a return to the simplicity of the early days, in his estimation would bring purity of life.

There was much to justify Micah's view in the matter. Solomon had turned the people from the simplicity of agriculture to organized commercialism of the city, with all the luxury, extravagance, and conse-quent extortion and heartlessness that characterize it. Jerusalem, like every other city that has become important, was filled with people desiring to become wealthy. And when money and what it can buy are the chief ends of life , naturally patriotism, generosity, and justice have to take a lower place. The exploiting of the poor and the sale of every kind of service isthe inevitable result. The merchant robs his customer, the employer drives his servants, the capitalist squeezes the last penny from the borrower, the judge sells his decisions, the priest bestows his consolation on the highest bidder, and the prophet speaks the word that will bring reward. Those who were in authority had the opportunity for these extortions and injustice, and they made use of their privileges without fail. Wealth flowed inevitably from the country to the city, for the men in the country had little chance against the organized greed of the political and commercial class in the cities. This was the situation in Judah that brought forth the message of doom from Micah.

Micah's text for his great social message is " They build up Zion with blood, and Jerusalem with iniquity. Micah 3:10.) He preaches agains the aristocracy of the city. He describes them as eating the flesh of the people, so terrible was the exploitation of the poor. Naturally, the oppression fell upon the weakest, so the women and children were deprived of their rights. Micah regarded all this evil as organized and deliberately planned. He declared that the sinners planned their iniquity upon their beds, and as soon a s morning came went out to put it into practice. With a Laconic stlye he sums up the venal leadership of his day as follows: " The heads judge for reward, and the priests teach for hire, and the prophets divine for money." (Micah 3:11). Micah looked for punishment upon all this evil. He describes Jehovah as a storm coming down to sweep away the iniquty. He gives an epitime of mah's duty in that famous passage so often quoted as the greatest in the Old Testament. Micah 6:6-8. To do justly, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with God was man's full duty as Micah saw it. This is a high water mark in the conception of religion in the Old Testament. He expresses clearly and profoundly the ethical and social character of religion. He emphasized right living and right relations with God.

Micah'did not claim to be a political economict or a scientific sociologist. He was hitting hard the evils of his age, and we may well profit by taking a few lessons from his teachings to-day. He saw that social injustice seated in the cities was destroying the life of the people. In our modern life we find a great deal of corruption in the large cities. We would not quite advocate Micah's remedy of destroying the city, but the evils need removing. Micah's policy of "back to the country" would relieve the conjestion in our cities to a large extent and nodoubt make the social conditions much better.

The Prophet Zephaniah

The ministry of Zephaniah fall somewhere in the reign of Josiah between 639 and 608 B. C., probably, close to 627 B. C. He was a native of Judah, and it is quite likely that his home was in Jerusalem itself. He is said to have been a descendent of royal blood, but this is uncertain.

Zepheniah gives little attention in his message to the things that were considered by the prophets, to be of prime importance, in the eighth century. But slight effort is made to bring about social reform. And ideals of personal integrity and social relations

are largely ignored. His message was an elemental one, that of impending judgment, and all else is made subordinate to this idea. But, incidentally, he gives us some of his social ideals, for after pronouncing judgment, he feels called upon to name some of the offences that had brought on the wrath of Jehovah.

He singles out the wickedness of the princess as one cause of judgment. He is uttering what he believes to be the voice of Jehovhs wrath when he says, " I will punish these princes, and the kings children, and all such as are clothed with strange apparel." He was doubtless thinking of the reign of Manasseh, when strange apparel led to the adoption of all the heathenish customs of Assyria, and the rejection of the moral and religious ideals of Judah.

He makes mention of the unscrupulous merchants who had acquired wealth and ease through unfair dealings and puts them on the punishment list. He shows that the civil and religious rulers are unworthy of trust. In describing the terrible state of affairs, he says, " Her judges are evening wolves, they gnaw not the bones till the morrow. Her prophets are light and treacherous persons. Her priests have polluted the sanctuary, they have done violence to the law." The judges are

guilty of appropriating property that they are asked to protect; the prophets are arragant boasters and superficial leaders; and the priest instead of guarding, profane the sanctuary, and thru ignorance misinterpret the law of God.

The last element in the social message of Zepheniah is new in Hebrew prophecy, but one of the most important factors in the socalizing process. He pronounces the most certain doom upon the man who is indifferent to public welfare. He declares that God will use the greatest diligence in searching out this class. "I will search Jerusalem with lights," is the language of Jehovah to the prophet. So there can be no escape for this class. Punishment is sure to come to those that say in their hearts, " Jehovah will not do good, neither will He do evil " Zeph 1:12.) This is a vivid word picture of the indifferent, who were developing infidelity out of listlessness. The good times of the reign of kning Josiah had caused many to fall away into selfish pleasure and idle obscurity.

Zepheniah has a message for our age. We have today the same mass of obscure, nameless persons, who oppose every movement of reform by their inertia, and are a drag upon all vital and progressive religion.

The great causes of God and humanity are not defeated by the hot assaults of the devil, but by the slow crushing, glacierlike mass of thousands and thousands of indifferent nobodies. G. A. Smith expresses this in a unique form when he says, " God's causes are never destroyed by being blown up, but by being sat upon."

The Prophet Jeremiah

The beginning of Jeremiah's prophetic activity is assigned to the year 626 B. C. And his ministry continued until after the fall of Jerusalem in 586. An involuntary exile in Egypt, he still addressed his countrymen. His home was Anathoth, three miles northeast of Jerusalem. He was apparently of priestly descent. He is closely associated with Zephaniah and assists him in rebuking the evils of his day.

The social and moral conditions in Judah were not essentially different in the time of Jeremiah from what they had been a century before. He does not lay so much stress upon the injustice and oppression of the rich as did Amos and Isaiah, nor does he dwell on the immorality of the people as much as Hosea did. But his condemnation of the general wickedness of his time is quite similar to theirs. He says, " The sin of Judah is written with a pen of iron, and with the point of a

diamond it is graven upon the tablet of their heart." It seems to him as he looks at the life of his people that there was not in all Jerusalem a good man, " that doeth justly, that seeketh truth." He lays special emphasis on the sin of deceit and falsehood. His own transparent sincerity of heart may have made this sin especially oppressive to him. He commends Josiah very highly for his justice and regard for the poor, but severely condemns Jehoiakim for his tyranny and luxury.

The social message of Jeremiah came in a period of decadence. He saw destruction coming upon the people, and he tried to do all he could to turn back the tide. He was very clear inhhis ideas concerning the requirements of the social relations. One of the prime demands, to his mind, was justice tempered with mercy between man and man. This is finely expressed in Jer. 9:23, where Jehovah says, " Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, or the mighty man in his might, or the rich man in his riches; but let him that glorieth glory in this, that he hath understanding and knoweth me, that I am Jehovah, who do kindness, and justice, and righteousness in the earth; for in these I delight, syeth Jeho Jehovah." Jeremiah offered the people deliverence from the impending catastrophe, if they would" thoroughly

execute justice between man and man," but they went their stubborn, reckless way without heed to his message.

Heremiah repeatedly accuses his people of murder, and shows that a man's life in his day was not safe, especially that of a poor man. And what seemed the terrible thing to Jeremiah was their lack of conscience in their crimes. The people shed innocent blood under the forms of law and did not feel any compunction for their violent proceedings. In Jer.2:34f. the prophet represents them as protesting their innocence when caught red-handed, and in 7:10 as even claiming the protection of Jehovah in their crimianl deeds.

Another great requirement in social matters, according to Jeremiah, is truth in the broad sense that includes trustworthiness. This is also pleasing to Jehovah. His eyes, therefore, according to Jer 5:3 look for it. But he sought it in Jerusalem in vain. In Jer. 7:28 he declares that "truth is perished." In this last passage he doubtless refers more particularly to the prevalence of falsehood, which he describes as vertibly epidemic among his people. He says, " They bend their tongue, as it were their bow, for falsehood; and they are grown strong in the land, but not for truth." 9(3)

So doom was the only thing that was left for such people.

Jeremiah has a message for the twentieth century which should warn any nation against the danger of not paying heed to her prophets. Had Israel listened to the pleading and warning voice of Jeremiah she might have been saved her humiliating experience of being taken into captivity. Jeremiah furnishes for us a concrete example of a true patriot who was willing to stand alone, or as one of a small and persecuted minority, and to strive against the passions and vices which weaken the national character and sap the nation's strength from within. It wasn't an esy task; yet it is is what the truest patriots have always done. They have been mocked and spurned; they have endured severe persecution and imprisonment; they have met the ignoble death of traitors. But time has vindicated them, and history has honored them as the saviours of their country. Of such was Jeremiah; and men of his type are always needed,whether in times of peace or war.

The Prophet Nahum

Nahum's message is dated about 607 B. C., or just before the fall of Nineveh. He know practically nothing concerning him personally. His book is a song of triumph over the impending fate of the tyrannical and cruel world-power Assyria which had caused such

suffering to Judah and many other nations. Nahum has nothing to say to his own people concerning their sins or their punishment, or their hope for the future, except the consolation that would come to them from the knowledge that one of their bitterest foes was to be destroyed. Theprophecy says, Dr. Davidson " is the voice of the human mind expressing its revolt against the spirit and deeds of the brutal foe of the human race, and might almost have come from the heart of any of the oppressed nationalities trodden under the foot of Assyria. It is the blood, the wiles and demonic witchcrafts, and the spirit of the wild beast that, in the name of mankind, the prophet appeals against." The feelings which animated the prophet to utter his message were only too well justified the Assyrians are themselves witnesses. The spade has unearthed numberless monuments from beneath the debris of ancient Nineveh and her sister-cities which fully prove the ferocity and ruthlessness upon which the empire was founded. Miles of sculpture have been found which picture the horrors of warfare, and many inscriptions boastfully recording details of inhuman cruelties to horrible to mention, revealing the treatement Assyria meeted out to her victims. And it was out of his

knowledge of the woes that Assyria had afflicted on others that Nahum mixed the colors of his picture of doom that was about to fall upon the guilty city.#

The message of Nahum has received a revived interest in these days when humanity has been outragedby Germany, the modern Assyria. We again read with thought and interest the message of Nahum which enforces the truth of the righteous judgement of God in all national and international affairs, and teaches the lesson of trust in Himaas "the Great Avenger." To qoute Kirkpatrick, " Nahum had a great principle an eternal truth to proclaim- the certain destruction of this world's kingdoms built on the foundation of force and fraud; the triumph of the kingdom of God reared on the foundation of truth and righteousness."

The Prophet Habakkuk

Habakkuk 's prophecy falls around 600 B. C. He can scarcely be credited with a distinct social message. The nearest he comes to a social message is found in his severe indictments against the Chaldeans. They are set forth in five strophes consisting of three verses, and each is introduced with a woe of condemnation.(1) Rapacity and plunder is the first sin mentioned by

the prophet and condemned. (2) In the second, he charges the Chaldeans with attempting to establish a permanent nation upon violence and cunning.(3) In the third, he condemns this wicked nation for attempting to build up its cities by murder and injustice. (4) In the fourth, he charges them with permitting and even encouraging intemperance and drunkness among their subjected nations. (5) In the fifth and last, he accuses them of idolatry and the worship of false gods. A nation guilty of such offences, Habakkuk concluded, could not stand, for" The Lord is in his holy temple; let all the earth keep silence before him" is the way he closes his message.

We ask, " Has Habakkuk a message for our day, or has his little book lost its potential value by age?" The external elements of his message are not so common now, but some of the other conditions of the prophet's age are common to -day. Evil in a different form is widespread, and there exists today the same impatience at the slow advance of the good. The extent of the various forms of social injustice have led some to question whether righteousness will ever prevail over the forces of evil. To such the message of Habakkuk comes with manifest force.Faith in the

integrity of the social order and patience to wait for God's readjustments are essential according to the message of Habakkuk, and this is a message of real need in our own age. The prophet's practical solution of the great problem of reconciling the moral government of the universe with the facts of evil and suffering is still a summons to faith and patience.

The Prophets of the Exile

With the beginning of the exile, we gradually recede from the teaching of social righteousness. Social justice is no longer the central theme of the prophet of God. Amos and Micah have not successors in this respect during the remainder of the prophetic period. The fall of the Jewish State caused the moral leaders to direct their attention to the personal responsibility of the individual rather than the collective group. Though these later prophets cannot be classed as great statesmen or social teachers, they were true to their prophetic ideals, and devoted themselves to the vital questions of their age. In doing this they attained true greatness, and performed for their race and mankind an inestimable service. We will now proceed to look into their message for social elements.

The Prophet Ezekiel

Ezekiel was of priestly descent. He was a young contemporary of Jeremiah, and probably, received some impressions from him. His ministry was largely to the exiles in Babylon. He was carried off to Babylon, with the first contingent of the exiles from Jerusalem, in the year 597, eleven years before the final destruction of the city and the complete overthrow of the State. Ezekiel began to prophesy five years after he was carried a captive into Babylon in 592 B. C., and his public ministry continued for 22 years.

Before taking up the social message of Ezekiel, it might be well to consider briefly the conditionsof the exiles in Babylon. The conditions were somewhat as follows: The captives were not reduced to slavery. And they were not harshly treated. Lands were assigned to them on which they built houses for themselves, and a considerable degree of civil and religious liberty was granted them. Though six or seven hundred miles from Jerusalem, they were able to hold some communication with those who were left behind. They were conscious of the plottings and schemings back home against the authority of Babylon, and Ezekiel recognized the folly of such proceedings.

A part of the social message of Ezekiel is given over to the indictment of Jerusalem for her sins. The first part of his prophecy describes the wickedness of the Holy City, and pronounces the impending doom that must follow such conduct. Unjust dealing, oppression of the stranger and dependent, lewdness, extortion, and unfair business dealings are some of the social sins charged up to the people of Jerusalem. Ezekiel this indictment with a specific charge against the classes responsible for this situation. He charges the popular prophets with a conspiracy to practice injustice; the priests are guilty of profanation, the princes have shed innocent blood for dishonest gain, and the "people of the land have used oppression, and exercised robbery.

Ezekiel's most emphatic message to his countrymen was directed to their personal relations. He taught thst every man should recognize every other as a brother, and all their relations ought to be based on the principle of brotherly love.

The Hebrews had been taught to think of themselves collectively; the individual had been absorbed in the nation, the tribe, thefamily. Things changed with the coming of the exile, responsibility became a personal matter, so the prophets drew up ethical codes.

Ezekiels attempt to draw up a code summarizing the personal practices of a just man might be stated as follows: 1" Restoreth to the debtor his pledge."

2 " Hath given his bread to the hungry, and hath covered the naked with a garment."

3."Hath withdrawn his hand from iniquity."

4." Hath executed true justice between man and man."

5."Hath not eaten upon the mountains, neither hath lifted up his eyes to the idols of the house of Israel."

6. " Hath not defiled his neighbors wife."

7. " Hath not come near to a woman in her impurity."

8. " Hath not oppressed any."

9. " Hath not taken ought by robbery."

10. " Hath not given forth upon interest, neither hath taken increase."

The comment of the prophet on the keeper of this code is that " he is just, and he shall surely live." If we knew all the conditions involved, we would decide this code was sufficent to transform society, if it was only lived in accordance to Ezekiel's view.

The Prophet Obadiah

We know nothing of Obadiah personally, and his message is the shortest book of the Old Testament, so we do not know so much of his message either. His date has been a bone of contention with biblical scholars, so it is doubtful just when heddelivered his message. From references found in the book, it seems highly probable that the author wrote soon after Jerusalem was destroyed, which would be not far from 586 B. C. This would make him a contemporary of Jeremiah. To the superficial reader, the book of Obadiah is scarely more than an expression of protest against Edom for rejoicing over the humiliation of Judah because of her fall at the hands of the Chaldeans, but the true Bible scholar will find a deeper meaning in this prophecy if he will seek the permanent values in the book.

We ask if Obediah had a social message, and must reply in the negative in so far as any conscious social aim is concerned. The prophet had no social program. His social message is in his assumption of a normal social order, and his terific attack on a nation that failed to maintain it. Obediah's protest and prediction show a statesman's discernment, and the fact that the prophecy.

of judgment was later to be fulfilled reveals a mind capable of foretelling the consequences of a national policy. We are not reading in too much into his prophecy, when we discover the essential elements for the welding together of different ethnic groups. He shows that unity must come up through mutial aid, toleration, and cooperation. This process could not be established between Judah and Edom, or between Judah and her neighbors. Thus, eternal conflict and inevitable destruction, as well as swiftly shifting supremacy, marked the progress of oriental history in the west. This is the social but unconscious message that is reflected from the brief vision of Obadiah.

The Prophet Deutro-Isaiah

The common view concerning the date of Deutro-Isaiah is that he was an exile in Babylonia and that he lived and wrote shortly before the fall of Babylon in the year 538 B. C.

The Jews were in exile. And in the midst of political turmoil and social degradation, the voice of this unknown prophet of deliverance was raised to encourage his people, and to assure them that freedom and larger service were to visit them. So Deutro-Isaiah has fittingly been termed the prophet of consolation.

The prpphet in his message shows the possibility of early deliverance and calls attention to the social conditions that resulted in the national disorganization and exile. The near approach of restoration demanded the awakening of the civic consciousness. These exiles could not assume political responsibility if they did not realize that their exile was the direct consequence of their practices of social injustice and and political corruption. So the prophet tells them that," Jehovah's hand is not shortened, that it cannot save; neither His ear heavy, that it cannot hear." Social crimes are, however, largely responsible for their seperation from God. He says, " But your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid His face from you, so He will not hear;"

Then he enumerates the social wrongs that had separated the people of Judah from God, and that had supplied the cause for delayed deliverance. The list of offences implies the existence of a social order and the presence at least of some of the institutions of civil society. There were courts, but the prophet says, " None sueth in righteousness and none pleadeth in truth. They trust in vanity and speak lies;"

The civic consciousness of the people needed to be aroused to a sense of justice and human sympathy. They needed"to loose the bonds of wickedness- to let the oppressed go free." What is the true spirit of philanthrophy? " Is it not to deal thy bread to the hungry, " says the prophet, " and that thou bring the poor that are cast out tomthy house? When thou seest the naked, that thou cover him, and that thou hide not thyself from thine own flesh? " This represen -ts the true spirit of service. Until this attitude of mind is attained, progress necessarialy must be slow. On the other hand, large promise is held out to this exiled people if they respond to this ideal. They must have given some response, for in a few months after the conquest of Babylon, Cyrus issues an edict which granted the Jewish exiles permission to return to Jerusalem, and in the spring of 537 B. C. they actually began the journey. With this important event another epoch in the history of the Hebrews came to a close, and the prpphecy of the future was to deal on the social side with new problems, where the social element was to be more completely submerged in the religious changes of the times.

The Prophets of The Restoration

With the prophets of the restoration we enter upon a new period in the history of Jewish prophecy. The chief work of the prophets in this period was to encourage the rebuilding of the temple and to revive the national spirit among the Jewish colonists.

The Prophet Zechariah

Internal evidence in the book of Zechariah fixes the date during which Zechariah was active as a prophet in the winter of 520 and 519 B. C. However, his visions may be more imaginary than real, so it is difficult to say if that was his real date.

The message of Zechariah is given in eight visions. With the exception of the sixth, we do not find a social note in any of these visions. The sixth vision, describing the winged volume, taught that guilt was personal. The dimensions of the roll was intended to convey the impression that it was easy to be seen, and thus symbolized the sure detection of the offender and the greatness of the offense. Theft and perjury were to be surely punished and the land was to be cleansed from evil doers. This is the vision of a reform in civic affairs. The public conscience was to be aroused, the guilt rested on the people because of indifference/

The whole community was to escape blame by seeking the personal offender, and inflicting upon him the full penalty of the law. The seventh vision is a continuation of the same line of argument or reasoning. And this lesson is still of great importance. To keep the community life quickened to the necessity of punishing the evil-doer is a constant problem. Community indifference has always been a handicap to social and moral progress.

The Prophet Malachi

Nothing is know about Malachi in regards to his personal life. The date of his ministry was about 450 B. C. His message came after a prophetic silence of more than sixty years.

Great changes took place in the social ideals of the people during the time when the prophets voices were not heard. Haggai and Zechariah had encouraged the rebuilding of the temple. But the tide of hope that they stimulated ebbed away, and with repeated crop failures and opposition from envious neighbors this little band of Jews yielded not only to disappointment and despair, but for the first time manifested a total indifference and contempt for their duties to God. So the social sins into which they fell were but

the logical consequences of their despair and mental dejection.

The prophet gives us some idea of the situation. He says, "Every man dealt treacherously with his brother." The old ideals had broken down, and with the loss of faith in Jehovah came the loss of faith in each other, as we would naturally expect. Perjury, adultry, dishonesty, and oppression of the dependent became the common practices among the people. Against these practices the prophet raises his voice, and pleads with his people to return unto the Lord. He analizes the cause of their poverty and disappointment. He tells them that they have robbed God by refusing to provide tithes and offerings. Social wrongs and misfortunes could not help but occur while the people were not in right relationship with God.

The social evil that received the most attention by Malachi was the problem of intermarriage of the Jews with alien women. He condemned this sinful practice unreservidly, and insisted on revising the lax divorce laws of his age. So he contributed much to the betterment of society in his age.

The Prophets of The Legalistic Period

The period into which we now enter has been termed the " age of legalism" because of the reforms of Nehamiah and Ezra, and the acceptance of the Levitical Law. The age of the prophet Joel may also be regarded as the introduction to the Grecian period of prophecy, the period that marked the close of the work of these great social reformers, moral and religious leaders.

The Prophet Joel

All that we know of Joel is found in the one sentence, awhich is as follows: " The word of the Lord came to Joel, the son of Pethuel." We have no definite indication of the date of his ministry, but it must have been about 400 B. C.

Joel likely prophesied at the close of an age of material prosperity. Probably a half century intervened between the reforms of Nehemiah and the adoption of the Law by the people. The rich and poor had become united. Many Jews, doubtless attracted by the social reforms and supremacy of the Law, returned to Judah. And the Jews were probably inspired with hope for national independence because of the weakness of the central government under Artaxerxes II (404-358). The only interference at this time seems to have come from their neighbors of Phoenicia, Philistia, and Edom.

Some have charged Joel with ignoring social and ethical elements in his prophecy. They try to show that he subordinated the moral instruction to a zeal for a message filled with hope-ful triumph of Judah over her heathen enemies. But this charge is hardly justifiable. Joel does deal in more general terms than most of the other ethical leaders of Israel. There is but one reference to any social sin of Judah, and that was in ridicule of the drunkards because their supply of new wine had been cut off thru the blight of grapes. But all the social sins of Judah may have been comprehended by the prophet in the word " repentance." That repentance was necessary, implied social wrongs and evil deeds. If he had any specific sin in mind, he does not reveal them in his brief message. But this fact alone would hardly justify us to draw the conclusion that he was wanting in ethical interest.

The Prophet Jonah

The date of Jonah probably falls somewere between 350 B. C. and 200 B. C. That would put him either at the closing years of the Persian or the earlier part of the Greek period.

The social element in the message of Jonah is almost a minus quanity. The unknown author doesnnot

seem to think it necessary to specify the particualr sins against which he was to protest at Nineveh, but the seriousness of the offences of the Ninevites is easy to detect in the urgency of his message, and the shortness of the time that was left to them in which to repent.

While the book is wanting in respect to the social offences which were common to the people of those times, it is not wanting in a larger note that comes close to the spirit of internationalism of our own age . In God's question propounded to Jonah, which he did not answer: " And should not I spare Nineveh, that great city, wherein are more than six score thousand persons that cannot descern between their right hand and their left hand; and also much cattle?" We have the great question of mercy that God holds out to man; it is the great unanswered question of the world. With this question the prophetic literature of Israel comes to a close.

The end

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