

## JEREMIAH

## THE STRUCTURE OF JEREMIAH

- A. Chs. 1-25: 14. Prophecies of Doom.  
 1—Ch. 1. The call of Jeremiah.  
 2—Chs. 2-6. Prophecies from the time of Josiah.  
 3—Chs. 7-20. Prophecies from the time of Jehoiakim.  
 4—Chs. 21-25: 14. Prophecies against kings and prophets.
- B. Chs. 25: 15-38; 46-51. Prophecies against the Nations.\*
- C. Chs. 26-33. Destruction and Restoration.
- D. Chs. 34-45. Jeremiah and the last days of Jerusalem.
- E. Ch. 52. An historical Appendix.

\* The order in the LXX irresistibly suggests that this was the original position of chapters 46-51. They are shown thus to bring out the similarity in structure between the first three sections of Jeremiah and 'Proto-Isaiah' and Ezekiel.

*The Neglected Prophet.*

IF the length of a prophet's writings were any criterion of the number of books that should be written about him, then Jeremiah would be the most neglected of all the prophets. Though scholars are now beginning to atone for past neglect, it still persists in the pulpit and Bible class. For this there are at least three strong reasons.

Though most of the prophets employ poetry, and "Deutero-Isaiah" shows more sustained poetic structure, Jeremiah is the greatest lyric poet of them all. Only Hosea is comparable with him. With many of them we feel that they are merely using poetic forms, but Jeremiah is a poet. It need hardly be stressed that great poetry often demands much closer study than does prose to extract its full meaning.

There was always a tendency for the prophet's life to become part of his message, but with the exception of Jonah this is nowhere so marked as in Jeremiah. Indeed, toward the end of his work his life to a large extent became his message. Where it has not been grasped that Jeremiah's life is in itself a revelation of God, both his life and his spoken message have been seen out of focus.

The present form of the book is peculiar, and demands more preliminary study than is normally the case, if the true background and flow of events are to be accurately grasped.

The many striking differences between the Hebrew text and the LXX afford grounds for thinking that Baruch, indubitably the book's chief editor, may have died, perhaps by violence, before he had completed his task.

### *The Compiling of the Book.*

A careful study of Jeremiah in English will probably reveal to most what is obvious in Hebrew, *viz.* that the contents may be divided into three groups: (i) Prophecies by Jeremiah in poetry; (ii) Prophecies by Jeremiah in prose; (iii) Stories about Jeremiah in prose.

The third is found mainly in chs. 34–45 (see structure of book), but is to be found also in chs. 1–25: 14 and chs. 26–33. There is no reasonable doubt that it is the work of Baruch, Jeremiah's companion and scribe (36: 4, etc.; 32: 12; 43: 3, 6; 45).

The second is found mainly in chs. 1–25: 14 but also in chs. 26–33. If compared carefully with the poetical prophecies, it gives the impression of being a report of Jeremiah's message rather than his actual words. Since it resembles the third group in style, it is reasonable to suppose that Baruch was responsible for these prose reports as well. Jeremiah's entirely undeserved reputation for prosiness is derived from these reports; prosiness is anyway relative and subjective. The fact that we have to do with an eye-witness condensation of some of Jeremiah's prophecies in no way affects their accuracy.

Ch. 36 tells us how the book began. It is impossible to know, and fruitless to guess, by how much the second roll (36: 32) was longer than the first (36: 2–4), but it is reasonable to suppose that it will have included the bulk of the poetical passages in the first two sections of the book and some of those in the third (see structure of book).

Later, perhaps in Egypt, Baruch will have woven his prose collection of Jeremiah's prophecies into this enlarged roll. He added also a few of the narrative stories he had written down about Jeremiah's sufferings.

It must be left an open question whether Baruch ever intended adding section D (chs. 34–45). It may well be that his friends were responsible for doing it after his death. This would help to explain the chronologically rather disjointed picture we have of Jeremiah. The historical chapters in the earlier sections of the book owe their present position to spiritual rather than chronological motives. Ch. 52 is a later historical appendix taken from II Kings—note 51: 64b.

### *Jeremiah the Young Man.*

The peculiar importance of Jeremiah's life makes it advisable to use it as a framework within which to study the book

as a whole. It so happens that the three kings under whom he prophesied, Josiah, Jehoiakim, and Zedekiah, coincide with the first three of the four periods of his prophetic activity.

Jeremiah was born of a priestly family (1: 1) in Anathoth, the modern Anata, a village about four miles to the north-east of Jerusalem, in the tribal portion of Benjamin.<sup>1</sup> The usual assumption is that he was a descendant of Abiathar (I Kings 2: 26). The banishment of his great ancestor did not necessarily imply that his descendants were barred from temple service in Jerusalem, and Hilkiah, his father, may well have officiated there as a priest. In any case, however, he was not Josiah's high priest (II Kings 22: 4)—the similarity in names will be accidental. The frequent suggestion that Jeremiah's father was priest of the village high place that will have been abolished by Josiah has little to commend it. Abiathar would not have been willing to serve at a village sanctuary, while a major sanctuary would not have been possible at that short distance from Jerusalem, nor would the expelled high priest have been allowed to found one.

Jeremiah never acted as priest, nor is there any evidence that he would have done so, had he not been called to be a prophet. The contrast between him and Ezekiel in this respect is remarkable (see ch. XIII).

Jeremiah will have been born about the year 645 B.C. toward the end of the reign of the evil king Manasseh. The way in which Jeremiah was steeped in the prophecies of his predecessors, especially Hosea, suggests that his home may have been one of those where the light of the persecuted prophetic tradition was kept alive in a dark age. The story of his call (ch. 1) suggests that he had been expecting it. His only protest was that he was too young (1: 6). On general grounds we may suppose him to have been between 18 and 20 at the time. The Hebrew word (*na'ar*) should not have been translated "child"; it means one who has not yet a recognized place in the community; while used of children, it refers more commonly to young unmarried men and to slaves, cf. R.S.V.

His call came in 627 B.C. (1: 2). If we compare Chron. with Kings, we see that Josiah's reformation began in the year before (II Chron. 34: 3), though it did not reach its height and become effective till 622 B.C. (II Kings 22: 3; II Chron. 34: 8). From the human standpoint, this will have been the impulse that finally prepared Jeremiah for his call.

In spite of frequent assertions to the contrary, there is no real evidence that Jeremiah helped in Josiah's reformation, and very little, if any, that he really sympathized with it. It is

<sup>1</sup> For an excellent description of the surroundings see G. A. Smith: Jeremiah, pp. 67-72.

true that his earliest prophecies are directed mainly against the idolatry that the reformation was to sweep away for the time being (2: 1-3; 5; 3: 19-4: 4; note that 3: 19 is the immediate sequel of 3: 5), but in a prophecy probably only a little later (3: 6-13) he recognizes that the reformation is merely outward and feigned (3: 10). That is why his remaining prophecies from the time of Josiah give a picture of unrelieved gloom.

In modern text-books 11: 1-8 are generally referred to Jeremiah's activity during the time of the reformation. 11: 3f do not fit in with the insistence of the modern scholar that the book found (II Kings 22: 8) was Deuteronomy, for Jeremiah is obviously referring to the covenant at Sinai, not to something done at the end of the wilderness journey. The natural interpretation of ch. 11 would place it in the reign of Jehoiakim, for the whole section seems to belong to his reign, the prophecies under Josiah ending with ch. 6. Still more important is it that 11: 1-14 is one of those prose reports of Jeremiah's sayings we have attributed with a high degree of probability to Baruch. There is no evidence, however, that Baruch was in touch with Jeremiah before the reign of Jehoiakim. It seems rather that once Jeremiah had convinced himself from the lack of changed lives (ch. 5) that the reformation was purely external, he dropped into the background, not wishing to embarrass a king he respected so highly (II Chron. 35: 25; Jer. 22: 15f). This would explain the lack of prophecies which can reasonably be attributed to the later years of Josiah.

It is instructive to note even in his early prophecy that deep sympathy and feeling that marks out Jeremiah, e.g. 4: 10, 19, and his feeling for nature, so rare in the Old Testament, e.g. 1: 11ff; 4: 25.

### *Jeremiah's Call (Ch. 1).*

We have already referred to the call itself, but the accompanying "visions" need closer attention. We use the inverted commas because it is virtually certain that God spoke to him through two things he will have seen many a time before.

His eye fell on a branch of *waker* (i.e. almond), which had already awakened to the first breath of the coming spring and burst into blossom although the other trees seemed still wrapped in their winter sleep. Then the voice of God told him that even so the purposes of God were on the verge of waking into fulfilment, for He was waking over them (see R.V. mg. for word-play). Much that follows in Jeremiah is only understandable as we grasp that he was dominated by the knowledge that the judgment of God would break forth in his own day. For rendering of ver. 11f see also N.E.B.

Then as he looked at the clouds, they seemed to take the

form of a huge, boiling cauldron leaning over from the north, ready to discharge its contents over Judah and Jerusalem. The stress does not lie primarily on the north, for the geography of Palestine demanded that invasion must come from the north, unless, indeed, it came from Egypt. Rather it is the supplementing of the former message by its stress that the instruments of God's doom were even then being prepared to be poured out as the hot anger of God over the land.

*The Northern Invader* (4: 5-31; 5: 15-19; 6: 1-8, 22-26).

This vivid prophetic portrayal of the fulfilment of 1: 13ff was probably lived through by Jeremiah in visions—see his personal anguish, 4: 19ff. Some have seen in them the Chaldeans, but for a long time the prevalent view has been that we have here the Scythians portrayed. We know that they shared in the convulsions that preceded the destruction of Nineveh in 612 B.C., but the Greek historian Herodotus is our only authority for the story that they swept down to the very frontier of Egypt, where the Pharaoh was glad to buy them off. Herodotus' account is, however, so vague and contains such demonstrable errors that it is probably best to ignore him. In any case some of the language is quite unsuited to the Scythians, so that those who hold this view have to assume that Jeremiah later worked over these poems adapting them to the Chaldeans. It is neither Scythian nor Chaldean that Jeremiah sees here. Just as 1: 13ff was silent as to what people should pour out of the cauldron of God's wrath, so here, when Jeremiah sees them, they are still unidentified. It is the sureness and terror of the doom that God reveals to His servant, not the identity of His executioners; that was to come later.

There is a progression in these visions. In 4: 5f the people are called to flee to the fenced cities, and especially to Jerusalem. The standard set up (ver. 6) is to act as a guide. But in 6: 1 the Benjamites are called on to flee from Jerusalem, to which they had previously fled for safety.

The reason for the change in attitude is caused by the prophet's realization of the moral corruption of Jerusalem (ch. 5). When it is grasped that this chapter must almost certainly be attributed to a time after 622 B.C., when Josiah's reform reached its height—note the lack of mention of idolatry in contrast to chs. 2 and 3, which are before the carrying through of the reform—we can begin to understand how superficial it had all been.

*Faithless Israel* (2: 1-4: 4).

In this section we have a number of short, passionate, poetic pleadings with Israel, forming a spiritual whole. Israel

normally includes the remnants of the Northern Kingdom with Judah. Here, as elsewhere when he pleads with the Northern tribes, it is not clear whether Jeremiah is addressing himself to those in exile or to those who had been left behind in their land now ruled for Assyria by the Samaritan settlers, though the latter is more usual.

This dual meaning of Israel has, however, been obscured by the insertion between 3: 5 and ver. 19 of an independent prophecy (3: 6-13) of slightly later date (see above) in which Israel is used exclusively of the Northern Kingdom in contrast to Judah. Its sense has been obscured by a wrong use of tense in A.V., R.V. In 3: 6 we should have the past instead of the perfect tense, *i.e.* "Hast thou seen what back-sliding Israel did? She went up . . . and there played the harlot." Jeremiah is referring to the closing days of the Northern Kingdom.

Ch. 3: 14-18 is an even later prophecy, perhaps from the time of Zedekiah, which is here inserted because of its spiritual suitability. The very important reference to the ark (3: 16) is dealt with below together with the passages in which Jeremiah gives his attitude toward ceremonial religion in general (see *The Vanity of Outward Religion*, p. 85).

For the correct understanding of this section it must be borne in mind that Jeremiah is referring to two apparently distinct things, which yet for the prophet are indistinguishable. Obviously the sin above all others that is being condemned is idolatry, but equally obviously much of it was not seen in that light by the people—note especially 2: 23, where the charge of idolatry is indignantly denied.

It would seem clear that from the time of the Judges on, checked by the good kings but not stamped out, the bulk of the people worshipped Jehovah in much the same way as they had seen the Canaanites worshipping their gods, the Baalim. In other words, they looked on Jehovah simply as their Baal. For the prophets, this was equivalent to worshipping Baal himself; they denied that it was Jehovah-worship at all. Along with this Baalized Jehovah-worship there was, of course, much worship of other gods as well. The important point is that unless we worship God as He wishes to be worshipped, He does not accept our worship at all. It is equivalent to the worship of other gods (see ch. V, p. 36ff.).

When Jeremiah convinces Israel of her sin, she merely says defiantly, "No hope; no! for I have loved strangers, and after them will I go" (2: 25).

*Increasing Obduracy* (6: 9-21).

It is likely there is a minor textual corruption in ver. 9, cf.

R.S.V., N.E.B.; it is Jeremiah who is commanded to glean the remnant of Judah as a vine, to go over the people once again to see whether there is any who will accept the will of God.

Vers. 10-11a is Jeremiah's protest. Note how he identifies himself with God, so that the message of God's fury has become a burden within him longing to be poured out. Ver. 11b begins God's answer—not "I will pour it out" (A.V.), but "Pour it out" (R.V., R.S.V.).

Note that already Jeremiah is striking the note we are to hear so frequently later, and is condemning the false prophets, cf. 4: 10 (referring to the false message of assurance from the false prophets); 5: 31; 6: 13.

For 6: 20 see below *The Vanity of Outward Religion*, p. 85.

The prophecies under Josiah end with a word of encouragement; in spite of apparent failure he had been doing the task allotted him. The people are compared with base metal (6: 28-30).

Chs. 1-6 of Jeremiah underline the need of reading the prophetic books along with the histories of the kings in Kings and Chronicles. Without them we are bound to get a one-sided view. In Kings and Chronicles Josiah's reformation seems to be a complete success, and it is difficult to understand the collapse after his death. From Jeremiah we see that it was but the last effort to shore up the doomed and collapsing house of Judah, and there was never any hope of success. It only, by delaying the final catastrophe, made it the greater when it came.

#### *Jeremiah and the Reign of Jehoiakim.*

The long list of chapters<sup>1</sup> in the footnote is only approximately correct. Shorter portions in 7-20 and 46-49: 33 may be from the time of Zedekiah, while portions of 30, 31 are probably from that of Jehoiakim. But these minor doubts cannot obscure the fact that the major part of Jeremiah's prophetic activity took place at this time. If what we have written above is at all correct, Jeremiah did not come prominently into the public eye so long as Josiah lived. No sooner had Jehoiakim settled himself firmly on the throne than Jeremiah stepped into the limelight and stayed there, the best-hated man in the kingdom. We cannot understand what happened without a study of the historical background.

#### *The Historical Background.*

The fulfilment of Isaiah's prophecies at the time of Sennacherib's invasion seems to have created a fanatical belief in the inviolability of Jerusalem; and there is every evidence that this was heightened by the reform of religion under Josiah. Huldah's prophecy (II Kings 22: 18-20) was doubtless subject to the general principle of Jer. 18: 7-10 (cf. p. 18), but as

<sup>1</sup> Chs. 7-20; 22: 1-19; 23: 9-40; 25, 26; 35, 36; 46-49: 33.

Judah's prosperity increased under wise rule, this will have become increasingly forgotten, and the threat of divine punishment (II Kings 22: 16f) will have faded away into the distant future; Isaiah's message of the remnant (see p. 49) had not been learnt.

When Nineveh fell in 612 B.C., the popular mind must have visualized the return of former glories. Only in this way can we explain Josiah's armed opposition to Pharaoh Necho's expedition in 609 (II Kings 23: 29). It was the height of madness, but we may be sure that the professional prophets of Jerusalem were as unanimous in favour of the king's action as Ahab's were, when he went up to Ramoth Gilead and perished (I Kings 22: 6).

It is probably impossible for us to realize how great a shock Josiah's death must have been to all but a handful of his subjects. The greater must have been the relief and the wonder when a few months later they found that Necho demanded no more than a king of his choice, Eliakim or Jehoiakim (II Kings 23: 34), and a heavy tribute. Once again the House of Jehovah had guaranteed the inviolability of Jerusalem.

*The Challenge* (Ch. 7: 1-15; 26: 1-19, 24).

Jeremiah, who had been repelled by the outwardness of Josiah's reformation, saw the position and its dangers so clearly that he decided that the people must face the truth at once. At the first suitable moment (26: 1) he announced in the entry of the court of the temple (7: 2; 26: 2) that unless there was a *moral* reformation the temple would be destroyed as was the sanctuary in Shiloh (presumably after Eli's death, I Sam, 4: 18), and the people would go into exile.

Ch. 7: 1-15 is a summary of his message, while 26: 1-19, though including the message, is mainly concerned with the results. For the people, Jeremiah's action was unpardonable, for he was undermining their chief confidence; in addition, there is nothing more dangerous than to attack popular religion. It hardly needs saying that they found natural leaders in the priests and sanctuary prophets (26: 7). When brought to trial before the princes, Jeremiah found men who probably had little love for the priests, and so received a fair trial. The evidence that saved him (26: 17ff) was the evidence of similar prophesying by Micaiah, *i.e.* Micah (3: 12). Though the evidence follows the verdict (26: 16) by a common artifice in Hebrew story-telling, it should be clear that it was in fact the cause of the verdict. The fickle crowd sided for the time being with the judges, but 26: 24 strongly suggests that the priests, secure in their knowledge of the royal attitude (26: 20-23), stirred up the people to lynch Jeremiah, and were only

foiled by Ahikam; or did they appeal to the king?

In A.V., R.V. 26: 20-23 is printed as though it were part of the elders' evidence. This is manifestly false. It is doubtful whether, on chronological grounds, we could even date it before Jeremiah's challenge. It is inserted to show the royal attitude to troublesome prophets, and the danger that Jeremiah ran by his bold challenge.

### *The Vanity of Outward Religion.*<sup>1</sup>

An immediate result of Jehoiakim's accession was the rapid re-emergence of evil practices Josiah had cleared away. The idolatry mentioned in 7: 16ff, cf. 44: 15-19, had simply gone underground. The grosser forms linked with Manasseh's state cultus had vanished, but the poison remained and so there was no use in Jeremiah's praying for them (7: 16; 11: 9-14; 14: 10ff; 15: 1). It is probable that 7: 31 is looking back to the time of Manasseh, for had human sacrifice actually been re-introduced, it is incredible that it would not have been mentioned in Kings. Human sacrifice was very rare in Bible lands at the time and so it was a deliberate syncretistic debasement of Jehovah worship. 7: 31 makes it clear that the children were offered to Jehovah ("... which I commanded not, neither came it into my mind") cf. also 19: 3-9. In 8: 7 Jeremiah uses a remarkable picture from nature to illustrate the unnatural conduct of Judah; it reminds us of Isaiah 1: 3, but is stronger.

It would seem, however, that in these early years of Jehoiakim's reign, Jeremiah's main concern was with the subtly false rather than the grossly false in religion. No prophet goes further in his rejection of all outward religion, but, in order to obtain a balanced interpretation we must not forget that Jeremiah knew for certain that the temple and all its ceremonial were doomed to destruction in a few years' time.

His most striking utterance on sacrifices is in 7: 21-26. He begins by mockingly calling on his hearers to break the fundamental laws of sacrifice (ver. 21). The "sacrifices" are the peace offerings, which were in large measure eaten by the worshippers; Jeremiah tells them to treat the burnt-offerings, where not even the sacrificing priest had a share (Lev. 1; 6: 8-11), in exactly the same way—Jehovah did not care. He had not put details of sacrifices first when He made known His will after the Exodus. In the fundamental covenant (Exod. 20-23) the Decalogue takes pride of place, and details of sacrificial ritual have only a few passing references, mainly the prohibition of certain Canaanite practices.

[In older critical works, this verse is used as a proof that the

<sup>1</sup> 3: 16; 6: 20; 7: 21-26; 8: 8f; 9: 25f; 11: 1-8; 14: 10-12.

Priestly Code is post-exilic, but since the Ras Shamra excavations the argument has been dropped. The English "concerning burnt-offerings" is too weak; the Hebrew should be translated "concerning details of . . .," cf. A.V. mg.]

The same thought is taken up in 11: 1-8. The popular concept was that the fundamental part of the covenant was sacrifice. Jeremiah insists that it is obedience (cf. I Sam. 15: 22).

In 14: 12 the formal fast is rejected and in 9: 25f the physical fact of circumcision. This passage points to the little-known fact that circumcision was not confined to Israel, or even to descendants of Abraham.<sup>1</sup> R.V., R.S.V. should be consulted here. "Circumcised in their uncircumcision" (R.V.) means there is no circumcised heart to match the circumcised body, cf. "circumcised but yet uncircumcised" (R.S.V.).

Jeremiah goes further still. In 3: 16 (probably from the reign of Zedekiah) he says that the vanished Ark will neither be missed nor made again (R.S.V.), because that which it symbolized, the Throne of Jehovah (ver. 17), will have become a reality in Jerusalem. He thus enunciates the principle that all outward helps to religion have purely a symbolic, not an objective, value.

Even the written Scriptures come under his condemnation (8: 8f, R.V., R.S.V.). The scribes and the wise men were rejecting the prophetic message ("the word of Jehovah" ver. 9) by appealing to the written Law of the Lord. But wherever blind or perverse interpretation of Scripture makes the reader insensible to the Word of the Lord, then the Scriptures have become a falsehood. They need the inner power of the Spirit for their right use as much as any other physical aspect of religion, otherwise they will only lead astray.

That Jeremiah was not objecting to the externals of religion as such may be seen by his commendation of Sabbath observance (as a proof of obedience!) in 17: 19-27, and his clear emphasis that there would be sacrifices after the restoration (17: 26; 31: 14; 33: 18).

### *Increasing Opposition.*

It is abundantly clear that Jeremiah was never forgiven his outspoken words in the temple. One sign of his increasing unpopularity is his use of symbolic actions intended to catch the eye of those whose ears were closed.

The first example is given in 13: 1-11, where the story of Jeremiah's fine linen girdle is told. There is, however, a

<sup>1</sup> For details see article Circumcision in HDB and ISBE. The excavations at Ras Shamra have shown that it was also a Canaanite custom. It was the Philistine who in and near Palestine was uncircumcised.

strong possibility that it was a visionary action. The round trip would be some 800 miles, and the story demands that he should have made it twice. If so, how obdurate had the people become! A less likely explanation is that he used a stream north of Anathoth with a similar name. In 13: 12-14 we find him gaining a hearing by the use of dark sayings. But the people were to be yet more hardened. As often, catastrophe (drought, 14: 1-6) turned people away from God rather than to Him. And so Jeremiah was told that *he* was to be his message; he was not to marry (16: 2); he was not to enter the house of mourning (16: 5), nor was he to share in the joy of the marriage feast (16: 8). Even if we make full allowance for lack of chronological order, we are compelled to accept that we are now drawing near to the end of Jeremiah's regular public utterances, though the command not to marry must have been earlier.

One last warning he would give. He collected leading personalities (19: 1) and carrying a jar (a woman's work!) he went at their head to the Valley of Hinnom through the streets of Jerusalem. The story leaves us to imagine the huge crowd that will have rapidly formed and followed. The solemn breaking of the jar (19: 10) spoke its message to those who stopped their ears to the message of doom. Further symbolic actions are recorded in chs. 35, 27 (note ver. 1 should read "In the beginning of the reign of Zedekiah," cf. ver. 3), 32; 43: 8-13.

### *Rejection.*

Jeremiah had to share the experience of so many that "a man's foes shall be they of his own household" (Matt. 10: 36). One of his most shattering experiences was to find that his own family (12: 6) was treacherously plotting his murder (11: 18-12: 6). The reason was injured family pride (11: 21). Ever since his address in the temple he was a marked man, and his aristocratic family resented sharing in his notoriety.

A couple of years later (18: 19-23) Jeremiah discovered a more widespread plot to kill him. The motives are not indicated, but they can easily be guessed.

After his solemn message of doom by the breaking of the jar (see above) Jeremiah repeated the gist of his message in the temple (19: 14f). Pashhur, the priest responsible for order within the sacred precincts (20: 1) arrested him, put him in the stocks and left him there all night (20: 2f). The failure of any to intervene must have been the final proof to Jeremiah of his friendlessness. Whether the smiting was a flogging or just a blow it was a supreme indignity for a man of aristocratic family, for whom death was better than a blow.

In the fourth year of Jehoiakim (25: 1; 36: 1-605 B.C.),

Nebuchadnezzar defeated Necho at Carchemish, and at one stroke became lord of the lands as far as the Egyptian frontier. Jehoiakim had to bow to a new lord (Dan. 1: 1; for the date see p. 142). God told Jeremiah to make one last appeal. Baruch, Jeremiah's friend and scribe (36: 4) took down a summary of Jeremiah's messages up to date, and awaited an opportunity to read them to the people. Jeremiah was debarred (36: 5, R.S.V.) from entering the temple, presumably as a sequel to 20: 1-6. A fast day the following year gave the desired opportunity (obviously ver. 8 anticipates ver. 9).

What the result with the people might have been, we cannot say, for the curiosity of the high officials of state caused them to intervene and they brought the matter before the king, who will have already been ill-disposed to the prophet, thanks to the biting condemnation of 22: 13-19. He dismissed the whole message of the roll contemptuously and would have arrested and executed Jeremiah. He and Baruch had to go underground, and it was probably only as the shadow of Nebuchadnezzar fell across the city, that Jeremiah could emerge again, vindicated as a prophet indeed (35: 1, 11).

### *Jeremiah and the False Prophets.*

It would be unfair to assume that the majority of the false prophets were deliberate deceivers, at least at first. But the moment the prophet became a professional, attached to a sanctuary, his bread and butter depended on his not offending unduly against popular opinion, and above all on his getting results. No delay like that of Jeremiah's (42: 7) would ever have been tolerated from a professional. How great the temptation could be, may be judged by the fact that Jeremiah must have been intellectually certain all through the critical time of waiting what God's word would finally be.

Just because the professional prophets were not mere deceivers, because adulterated truth is so hard to distinguish from unadulterated, because spirituality is so easily imitated, because book knowledge can so easily replace inspiration, the distinguishing of true from false prophets was never easy. One thing was clear to all: God would not speak with two different voices. The religious world is always tempted to be on the side of the big battalions, so when Jeremiah stood alone faced by the other prophets, he found the people against him, denouncing him as a deceiver or madman; at times he was tempted to doubt himself. He did not have that overpowering, monumental character that seems to have made Isaiah almost impervious to opposition.

Why Hilkiah inquired of Huldah about the book of the law is not clear (II Kings 22: 14); certainly Josiah had his pro-

fessional prophets (II Kings 23: 2). Perhaps the high priest knew them too well. Probably it was their reiterated prophecies of prosperity that first awoke Jeremiah to the problem involved (4: 10). He was soon to realize the amount of evil among the prophets (5: 30f), who were willing to sell themselves for money (6: 13).

As Jeremiah was increasingly rejected in the early years of Jehoiakim, he found the burden of standing out alone against the prophets growing ever greater (14: 13-18). Through it he learnt to understand the nature of true prophecy better. We may reasonably attribute the collection of prophecies against the false prophets to this period (23: 9-40). The opening passage stresses the terrible consequences, when the prophet plays false. The remainder shows how deeply Jeremiah had been led to understand the true nature of prophecy, an understanding of real importance for to-day.

A prophetic dream was no guarantee of truth, for the dream might be the expression of the prophet's own desires (vers. 16, 25ff), or his unconscious, to use the language of modern psychology. Equally the fact that the message might be true was no guarantee that the bearer had been entrusted with it; he might be simply borrowing from another (ver. 30). There were two signs of the true prophet: an outward—if his message were accepted, it would transform lives (ver. 22); and an inward—the prophet's knowledge that he had stood in God's council chamber (vers. 18, 22).

### *The Moulding of the Prophet.*

The dual pressure of rejection and of having to face the implications of his prophetic calling led to a spiritual development that can best be compared with that of Job's. The passages that picture it should be closely studied, *viz.* 8: 18-9: 2; 10: 23ff; 11: 18-12: 6; 15: 10-21; 18: 18-23; 20: 7-18.

Since chs. 1-20 represent approximately the enlarged roll (36: 32, see p. 78), we must assume that both the insertion of these personal passages, and their position in the prophecy, are the work of Jeremiah himself. When we realize that 20: 7-18 is the end and climax of the roll, we also realize that these passages are essential to an understanding of Jeremiah's message.

His inner burden began with Jeremiah's inability to dissociate himself from those to whom he brought God's message of doom (8: 18-9: 2; and already 4: 19ff). This identification of himself with his people is seen in 10: 23ff, where the prayer is for them as well as for himself. Jeremiah's attitude foreshadows our Lord's on Olivet (Luke 19: 41-44).

Jeremiah's spiritual sufferings grew greater when his

family tried to murder him (11: 18—12: 6). Quite apart from the enormity of their attempted action, which probably still lay within the power of the head of the family, the exclusion of a man from his family group was a blow worse than death itself, as may be seen from the violence of Jeremiah's reaction. The only consolation that God had for him was that much worse was to come (12: 5; the pride—A.V., swelling—of Jordan is the wild beast infested jungle that fringes the stream).<sup>1</sup>

Universal rejection and hatred broke Jeremiah down, and he turned to God in his fierce agony (15: 10—21; the LXX suggests strongly that the text of ver. 11 is corrupt, while there is no really satisfactory explanation for vers. 12—14). His agony carried him so far that he virtually blasphemed (ver. 18), almost comparing Jehovah to the broken cisterns he had equated the false gods with (2: 13). There is no sympathy apparent in God's answer; He shocked him to his senses by His call to conversion (ver. 19, if thou return, cf. Luke 22: 32), if he wished his prophetic ministry to continue.

The last straw for Jeremiah was his exclusion not merely from the society of his fellow-men (18: 18—23), but also from the temple (see above). He turned to God in even greater but fluctuating agony (20: 7—18). He accused God of deceiving or, better, enticing (mg.) him. The word stresses the simplicity of the one deceived; it is used in Exod. 22: 16 of the seducing of a girl. It is deliberately one of the ugliest words that he could have used. He accused God of having enticed him under false pretences into becoming a prophet, and then of having forced him to remain one. His cry to God ends with the wish that he had never been born (vers. 14—18, cf. Job 3).

So the curtain falls on the prophet, rejected by family and nation, his life in danger, excluded from the worship of the nation, and apparently cut off from his God. We do not know how God dealt with him in the years while he hid from Jehoiakim and the king's doom drew near; but before that doom fell, Jeremiah appeared again, fearless and unshakable. There is no evidence that he had come to understand the message of the Suffering Servant, and hence of his own sufferings; but he had learnt that it was as an individual that one had to come to God, and as an individual one had to be sustained by Him. In his spiritual agony we may see in Jeremiah a dim foreshadowing of our Lord.

### *Jeremiah in the Reign of Zedekiah.*<sup>2</sup>

The promises of restoration (30—33) are a collection of

<sup>1</sup> For a description see G. A. Smith: *A Historical Geography of the Holy Land*, p. 483f; N. Glueck: *The River Jordan*, p. 63.

<sup>2</sup> *Cfs.* 21; 22: 20—23; 8; 24; 27—34; 37—39; 49: 34—39; 50—51.

short prophecies, most of which are earlier; some, however, will be from this period. Note that many of them deal especially with the restoration of the North, *viz.* most of chs. 30, 31. The *approximate* order of the narrative sections is 24; 29; 27, 28; 21; 34: 1-7; 37: 3-10; 34: 8-22; 37: 11-21; 32, 33; 38: 1-28a; 39: 15-18; 38: 28b-39: 14.

It will be noted that apart from promises of restoration not many prophecies are attributed to Jeremiah. He had said all that needed saying, and the death of Jehoiakim and the exile of Jehoiachin had vindicated his message. All that was left for him was to rub in the grim moral as needed.

When the remnant in Jerusalem began to believe that the storm of judgment had passed them by because of their merits, they were told that on the contrary the exiles had been taken away to save them from the wrath to come (ch. 24, and cf. ch. XIII, p. 102). When false prophets promised the exiles a hope of speedy return, Jeremiah insisted that there was no hope until the fixed time of God's judgment had run its course (ch. 29).

Already when Nebuchadnezzar had scattered the army of Pharaoh Necho at Carchemish, Jeremiah had recognized in him and the Chaldeans the fulfilment of his earlier visions, and he had proclaimed him as the man of God's appointing against whom no one could stand (25: 9, 11). This conviction enabled him to stand against the attempts to form an anti-Babylonian conspiracy in the fourth year of Zedekiah (chs. 27, 28) and to deflect the weak king of Judah from it in spite of the assurances of the court prophets.

This conviction also explains his attitude during the final siege of Jerusalem. Zedekiah's rebellion was not only a breach of his oath (II Chron. 36: 13; Ezek. 17: 13-21), but also opposition to the ruler of God's choice. Submission was a sign of loyalty to Jehovah. No wonder that he was considered to be in the pay of the Chaldeans (37: 13; 38: 4).

A little-known incident is contained in 34: 8-22. Apparently when Nebuchadnezzar drew near Jerusalem, all Jewish slaves were freed. The motives were probably mixed, partly guilty conscience (ver. 13ff; Exod. 21: 2; Deut. 15: 12), partly the desire for extra fighters. With the withdrawal of the Chaldeans (37: 5, 11), the solemn covenant (ver. 18f) had been broken and the slaves enslaved once more. Jeremiah immediately showed the same burning zeal for social righteousness that marked out all the true prophets.

*The New Covenant* (31: 31-34).

Under Josiah Jeremiah evidently worked among the remnants of the northern tribes that were still in Palestine. After

Necho's triumph this area was again detached from Judah, and Jeremiah could no longer visit them. So in the time he was hiding from Jehoiakim he will have written down his message of hope in chs. 30, 31. After the fall of Jerusalem the collection, *The Book of Hope*, was enlarged to apply to the South as well.

The message of the new covenant could be proclaimed by him, because he had first experienced it himself. It would not need either laws written in stone or teachers to instruct men in it. Here was one who had been denounced by both priests and prophets, but though he had stood alone, he had yet been proved right. In his heart God had written His will.

All prophecy is of necessity partial (Heb. 1: 1) and so Jeremiah did not rise to the whole truth. God revealed to him that true religion cannot be external or bound to externals. What Jeremiah apparently did not grasp was the universalism we find in Isa. 19: 23ff, or at least not in this connexion. The new covenant can no more be linked to national origin than to any other externals. That a man is a physical descendant of Abraham means in itself nothing to God (Matt. 3: 9). But the fact that when the new covenant was ratified at Golgotha by the blood of the Lamb of God it was freed from every national limitation, does not mean that we must dismiss the nationalistic setting of Jer. 31 as meaningless or spiritualize it into thin air. Rom. 11: 26 shows that it has a yet future application to all Israel.

It is one thing to say that Jeremiah was not given to see what the new covenant would mean for the world, it is entirely another to say that by Israel and Judah he really meant the Church. So to understand Jer. 31: 23-40; 33: 14-26 is to make all sane Bible interpretation impossible. On the other hand, we must not fall into the opposite error of supposing that the new covenant will mean something else for "all Israel" than it does for the Church, that saved Israel will be saved in some other way than is the Church. God does not abolish physical Israel, but in saving it transcends it, just as He does not scrap this earth but renews it.

*The Messiah* (23: 5f; 30: 9, 21(?); 33: 14-26).

We refer to these Messianic passages not so much for their intrinsic importance as for the light they cast on prophetic interpretation generally.

There is little, if anything, in these passages that goes beyond the revelation given through earlier prophets. But their occurrence shows that Jeremiah fully shared the Messianic hopes of his predecessors. Why, then, do they play such a small part in his message, instead of being the focus of

future hopes as in Isa. 1-35? (The question presupposes not the prophet's free choice of message, but that the Spirit's message, in ways beyond our knowledge, shaped itself to the spiritual experience and understanding of the prophet.)

The most obvious reason is that it was the same motive as led Jeremiah to attack all externals in religion that distracted men from the inner truth. For the people the king was God's anointed, and therefore a pledge of His favour. Before the people could take comfort in the Righteous Branch, or Shoot (23: 5), they had to face the grim fact that the royal tree would have to be hewn down (36: 30; 22: 30; 39: 6; cf. Isa. 11: 1).

Relative silence in a book of the Bible on a matter already revealed does not imply either ignorance or dissent.

### *The Last Days of Jeremiah* (Chs. 40-45).

When Jerusalem fell at last, Jeremiah received his supreme vindication by God. He was the one man from among the whole people who was left completely and absolutely at liberty (40: 4f).

With the world before him, there must have been a strong temptation to go to Babylonia, where he would have received a warm welcome from the better elements taken there with Jehoiachin. What a shelter for his old age one like Daniel would have made for him! On the other hand he might have sought a shelter somewhere in a less devastated corner of his own land. But Jeremiah was bound to his own people. He had served them in good and evil times for forty years, and now he stayed with those that needed him most (40: 6); but from them he was to experience the final mockery.

Asked by the leaders of the people what they should do after the murder of Gedaliah (42: 1-6), he spent ten days in prayer before he knew for certain that the insistent voice of heart and mind was also the voice of God (42: 7-18)—no other answer would have been consistent with his earlier prophecies; but that did not free him from the obligation of seeking God's face. Note that in accordance with frequent Hebrew practice, the whole of Jeremiah's answer is put together, though 42: 19-22 is obviously Jeremiah's answer after he had been accused of lying and acting as Baruch's tool (43: 3).

Though the people accused him of lying and rejected his message, yet they dragged him with them into Egypt (43: 6). Though they were unwilling to believe the prophet, they could not do without him. That is the tragedy of Judah—and of many a religious man. He could not do without God, but he would not obey Him; he constantly reformed, yet ever hankered after his old idolatry (ch. 44).

In Isaiah we have the Church foreshadowed in the remnant; in Jeremiah we have the Church made possible by the

individual's living contact with the living God unbound by the ties of family, country or religion.

*Jeremiah's Prophecies against the Nations* (Chs. 46-51).

The bulk of these prophecies, chs. 46-49: 33—though 46: 13-28 may be later—come from the fourth year of Jehoiakim after the battle of Carchemish, or shortly after. As with the similar prophecies in Isaiah and Ezekiel their main purpose is to teach Israel, not the nations concerned. By stressing the extent of Nebuchadnezzar's power Jeremiah wants to teach Judah that God has given Judah to the Babylonian king as well. At the same time 27: 1-3, which depicts Jeremiah sending messages to the kings of the surrounding countries, makes it quite plausible that these oracles were sent to them too at a somewhat earlier date.

It seems impossible to justify the presence of the oracle against Damascus (49: 23-27), for Syria had lost its independent existence in the time of Isaiah. It has probably crept in from some earlier prophet. We do not know the reasons that motivated the somewhat later oracle against Elam (49: 34-39). That a prophecy against Babylon was not without personal risks to the prophet is shown by Jeremiah's use of two cyphers: *Sheshach* for Babylon (25: 26, 51: 41), and *Leb-qamai* for Chaldea (51: 1).

On the relationship of Jer. 49: 7-22 to Obad. 1-14 see ch. XII.