

THE BROKEN COVENANT IN JEREMIAH 11
A Dissertation of Limited Scope

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SUMMARY

The times of Jeremiah were characterized by the spirit of imperial expansionism. Assyria had just collapsed and Babylon was quickly filling the vacuum. On the other hand Jeremiah was proclaiming doom on the nation because breaking the covenant. Which covenant? The covenant made during the reforms of Josiah. Was it the Davidic covenant or the Sinai Covenant? This research answers these questions and concludes that it was the Sinai covenant that was broken in Jeremiah 11 and led to the deportation into exile.

- Chapter 1 outlines the challenge. The problem statement, the hypothesis and the purpose are outlined.
- Chapter 2 delves into the challenges and problems pertaining to the study of Jeremiah. These are the historicity of Jeremiah, the ideological Jeremiah and the authorship of the book of Jeremiah. The deuteronomistic influence and the theme of Jeremiah are also examined.
- Chapter 3 is a study of the origin and history of the covenant. Here the pentateuchal roots of the covenant are traced from the election of Abraham to the Sinai covenant.
- Chapter 5 is a survey of the political and religious context of Jeremiah to determine whether Jeremiah experienced the times prior to the deportation. In this chapter attention is paid to the deuteronomic reform, the covenant with David and the Davidic ideology. The challenge in this chapter is the date of when Jeremiah commenced his ministry. This is due to the fact that Jeremiah is not consulted when the book is discovered in the temple. The prophetess Huldah is consulted by Josiah the king.
- Chapter 6 is a focus on Jeremiah 11. The process of identifying which covenant was broken in Jeremiah 11 begins with the examination of the literary genre of the chapter. The Deuteronomistic influence is also taken into account. The three key Sinai phrases which point to the Sinai covenant are outlined in detail leading to the conclusion that Jeremiah pointed Israel to the fact that the impending disaster was a result of their violation of the Sinai covenant.

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CHAPTER 1

SCOPE AND METHODOLOGY

1.1 Introduction

In the book of Exodus Yahweh sets the children of Israel free from the Egyptian bondage for He is known as the deliverer of his people. In the book of Jeremiah Yahweh does not deliver out of the hands of the oppressor but “into” oppression. They are delivered out of Egypt because of the covenant and are deported into exile because of the same.

Even a casual reading of the Old Testament reveals that the covenant theme creates the context for the scholarly interpretation of the Old Testament. Metaphors, utterances, prophecies, blessings, and even wars take place within the context of relatedness that is embodied in the covenant theme. Nowhere in the Old Testament are the consequences of violating the covenant more dramatic than in the book of Jeremiah. The book of Jeremiah is the “climax of the ages” of the Old Testament. It is in this book that the prophet Jeremiah according to Stulman(1998:12) “participates in the anguish of God and in the death of Judah’s world.” In the book of Jeremiah the chosen race is punished for swinging like a pendulum between blessing and curse, between monotheistic Yahwism and pluralistic idolatry.

The covenant theme, which in the words of Brueggemann (1998:3) is the governing paradigm of the Old Testament, is the object of this research with special focus on the broken covenant of Jeremiah chapter 11. The Babylonian exile is one of the life changing experiences that the chosen race underwent. The question is why did it happen?

1.2 Problem Statement

The book of Jeremiah is a book of trouble. There is trouble in the person of the prophet and disaster in his message. Many of the prophets brought words of comfort to the Kings

of Judah during the times of crisis. Jeremiah's solution was unpalatable. His call to surrender to the enemy made him more of a traitor than a prophet. He seems to be colluding with the enemy. Israel knew that defeat by the heathen kings was equivalent to defeat by the heathen gods and ultimately the defeat of Yahweh. How could the prophet proclaim surrender as the will of God?

Diamond (1999:15) coins it more precisely when he says the, "The figure of Jeremiah remains troubled and troubling for the professional interpretive community." This research is a contribution to the resolution of the challenge that scholarship faces. The challenge of which covenant was broken in Jeremiah chapter 11. Since the covenant is used in different contexts of the Old Testament, of what significance is Jeremiah 11.

Jeremiah proclaims a broken covenant in the face of the royal temple ideology. This ideology is about the unbreakable Davidic covenant in which God made promises for the establishment of Jerusalem as the city that bears his name. Brueggemann (1998:4) mentions that the royal temple ideology of Jerusalem was anchored on the belief that the God of Israel had made irrevocable promises to the temple and to the monarch and because of that the covenant judgments would not be applicable to Jerusalem the seat of the monarch as well as the seat of Yahweh. The research will examine the tensions that existed between kings and prophets and also between prophets because of the varied understanding of the two covenants.

There is need, according to Brueggemann (1998:4) to determine the relationship between imperial politics and covenantal theology. At the end of Josiah's reform according to 2Kings 23:28-37, Pharaoh Neco the king of Egypt killed Josiah and made the kings of Judah his vassals. In 2Kings 24, there seems to be a power shift, the kings of Judah are no longer vassals of the Egyptians but of the Babylonians. The deportation from the political point of view is not a result of the broken covenant but the Babylonian spirit of expansionism. Another problem that needs resolution is whether Jeremiah 11 is a document aimed at maintaining cognitive consistency in the face of dissonance. This is the view implied by Perdue & Kovacs (1984:383). How does Judah respond to the crisis where reality disagrees with belief?

1.3 Hypothesis

Carroll (1986:267) may be right to say that Jeremiah 11 is a postexilic deuteronomic passage. However, it is neither a construction nor a rationalization of the deportation in order to protect the faith of Israel. It is postexilic in the sense that Judah understood in retrospect that the deportation was a result of their breaking of the Sinai covenant. This research endeavors to show that it is the Sinai covenant which was broken in Jeremiah 11, and not the immediate covenant of Josiah which he made during his reforms after the discovery of the book of the law, the book of Deuteronomy. Jeremiah's message was rejected due to the fact that the Kings tenaciously held to the royal temple ideology. The "brokenness" of the covenant in Jeremiah 11 is not synonymous with "termination." In Jeremiah 11 the covenant is broken but not terminated. The deportation is not vindictive but corrective because in Jeremiah 29:11-13 there is hope for repentant Israel.

1.4 Purpose

The research among many things will introduce to the reader the challenges and critical issues that a student of Jeremiah faces. The research also traces the development of the covenant concept from the election of Abraham to the prophetic era. The prophetic understanding and use of the covenant will be examined to establish Jeremiah's role and times within the prophetic tradition. In view of the fact that the social political climate impacts or influences prophetic utterances, the times of Jeremiah will be analyzed.

The research will establish which covenant was broken in Jeremiah 11. As Soggin (2001:62) says that "it is not clear whether it was the Sinaitic or the covenant in Josiah's reform which was broken." The research will also determine and identify what constitutes the breaking of a covenant.

1.5 The Approach

The historical-Biblical Method has been adopted as the appropriate method. Dederen (2000:94) defines it as, "The attempt to understand the meaning of biblical data using

methodological considerations arising from scripture alone.” This approach upholds the authority of Scripture. It operates on the basic presupposition which Dederen (2000:94) calls *Sola scriptura* meaning that the authority and unity of Scripture are such that Scripture is the final norm with regard to content and method of interpretation (Isa :20) This approach is contrary to the ‘Historical-Critical Method’ which attempts to verify the truthfulness and understand the meaning of biblical data on the basis of the principles and procedures of secular historical science (ibid). The challenge of the historicity of the prophet and his messages necessitates the use of this approach. The prophet Jeremiah is not a figment of the imagination. He is believed to have existed in history and prophesied to a historical community. The events he addressed happened within a historical context and through investigation some degree of accuracy can be achieved. The covenant, which Jeremiah preached is a biblical subject. It is through the covenant that Yahweh relates to Israel. Through the covenant Israel becomes the people of God and a holy nation. It is on the basis of the covenant that Jeremiah says, “Israel was holiness unto the Lord: and the fruits of his increase (2:3). He further says, “But this thing I commanded them saying ‘obey my voice and I will be your God and ye shall be my people, and walk in all the ways that I have commanded you that it may be well with you” (7:23). The historicity of Jeremiah and the theology of the covenant justifies the historical biblical approach.

1.6 Chapter Outline

The outline of the chapters is intended to give the reader a comprehensive overview of the challenges to the person of Jeremiah, his message and his work. Hence the research begins with the problems and trends in the study of Jeremiah. Under this, chapter issues of the historicity of Jeremiah, the editorial process and the deuteronomistic influence are dealt with. Chapter 3 deals with the origin and history of the covenant. The election of Abraham and his covenant with God is analyzed. The development of the covenant up to its ratification at Sinai is also examined in chapter 3. The prophetic use and understanding and of the covenant is scrutinized in chapter 4 so that Jeremiah is placed within the prophetic corpus. In chapter 5, the socio-political context of Jeremiah is examined with special attention to the deuteronomic reform, and the Davidic ideology to

show how the monarchy held on to the Davidic covenant and resisted Jeremiah's call to the Sinai covenant. Chapter 6 discusses the context of chapter 11 within the whole book of Jeremiah. The literary genre of the chapter is outlined. The chapter also identifies the broken covenant as the Sinai covenant not that of the Josianic reforms. The three phrases that are the identifying marks of the Sinai covenant are discussed in this chapter. Chapter 7 is of course a summary of the whole work.

CHAPTER 2

2.1 PROBLEMS AND TRENDS IN THE STUDY OF JEREMIAH

It is important to have a general overview of the problems and challenges that confront a student of the book of the Jeremiah. This will help the reader to appreciate and cautiously study the research. The book of Jeremiah portrays a powerful personality. It is a record of man who endured ridicule and even physical abuse to carry out his ministry in turbulent times both religiously and politically. The book of Jeremiah is a combination of the biography and the work of the prophet Jeremiah. Its context and time is that of the impending doom from the Babylonians. This chapter will focus on the challenges and problems that scholarship has and is encountering in trying to unravel the person and the work of the prophet.

In as much as there are problems and challenges in the study of Jeremiah, scholarship does not question the canonicity of the book of Jeremiah. The book occupies a legitimate and authoritative place in the Old Testament canon. Its removal would render the Old Testament puzzle incomplete and incomprehensible. Perdue (1984:1) summarizes the challenges that confront the student of the weeping prophet as “the date of Jeremiah’s call, his view and/or relation to the Deuteronomic reform, the prophet’s identification of the enemy from the north, the substantial textual differences between the MT and the LXX and most problematic the composition and development of the book into its present canonical form.” He further identifies two major approaches to the search of the historical Jeremiah. The first one is by liberal theology, the psychological-biological approach which argues that the book of Jeremiah contains significant amount of historically reliable material which allow us to reconstruct the life and theology of the prophet.¹ The

¹ Kovacs 1984. *A Prophet to the Nations (Essays in Jeremiah Studies)*. Indiana: Eisebrauns.

second approach that Perdue (1984: 1) identifies is the tradition-historical approach that is strongly influenced by Neo-Orthodoxy, this approach finds in the book of Jeremiah composite literary structures which are the product of tradition circles at work from the life time of the prophet well into post-exilic and even exilic periods. These are the two major approaches in the study of Jeremiah. This research does not regard them as “essential” but simply useful.

2.2 Formulation of the Problem.

According to Nichol (1976:565) the Hebrew name of Jeremiah is ‘Yirmeyah or Yirmeyahu’ which means Yahweh is exalted or Yahweh strikes.² The first question that demands an answer is whether Jeremiah existed or not. Did Jeremiah ever exist? Is the book of Jeremiah an ideological treatise projecting a constructed personality? Is it a book or a compilation of unrelated manuscripts?

2.3 Critical issues in the study of Jeremiah

2.3.1 The Historical Jeremiah

Any endeavor to interpret a major literary work like that of the book of Jeremiah must establish indisputable facts concerning the origin of such material. The origin of the material determines the literary tools to be used. Simply put, a wrong point of departure may lead to wrong conclusion. The historicity of Jeremiah has remained elusive to this day. Scholarship has grappled with the existence of the Jeremiah but there is no consensus of opinion or facts. There are those who believe that there was a historical

² 18:11,12 , Jeremiah’s name matched his mission. He was to announce the disaster from the North while exalting Yahweh.

Jeremiah. McKeating (1999:14) commenting on the historicity and existence of the prophet says there almost certainly was a real person called Jeremiah and that something can be known about him. Thompson (1980:95) subscribes to the same view saying, “He was born into a priestly family some three miles north-east of Jerusalem. His father was a certain Hilkiyah.³ Perdue (1984:31) mentions scholars like von Rad who do not question the existence of Jeremiah. They accept the biblical record that Jeremiah was a northern Israelite prophet hailing from the village of Anathoth. He was descended from the historical Abiathar exiled to Anathoth for supporting Adonijah.⁴

Perdue further cites some scholars like Bright who use internal evidence within the book of Jeremiah to affirm the historicity of the prophet. Brueggemann (1998:12) says that the only person of Jeremiah about which we can know anything is given us through an intentional construction.⁵To speak of Jeremiah is to refer to a constructed person of the prophet that is no doubt rooted in the actual reality and that equally without doubt is mediated and constructed for us in a particular way.

The school of thought that subscribes to the historical existence of Jeremiah is inclined to Scripture as the authoritative canon.

2.3.2 The Ideological Jeremiah

There is another school that does not support the notion of the historical Jeremiah. This school of thought does not take scripture literally but looks at the external factors that

³ 1:1

⁴ 1994. *The Collapse of History: Reconstructing Old Testament Theology*. Minneapolis: Fortress. Perdue discusses the paradigm shift in doing Old Testament theology from the dominant Historical Critical approach to Social Scientific, Feminist and other approaches etc. He gives practical examples of how each theologian approaches the book of Jeremiah.

⁵Ibid 31

impacted and shaped the form of the book of Jeremiah. Many scholars hold the view that there was no real person called Jeremiah. What we have is an ideological figure constructed for a purpose. One of the proponents of the ideological Jeremiah Robert P. Carroll (1981:9) says that the book of Jeremiah is partly a creation of many editing techniques. These techniques hint at the possibility that we may have better grounds for attempting to reconstruct the history of redaction than the life and the work of the prophet. He further says that the story of Jeremiah represents the construction of the traditionists during and possible of the exile and that in the story there is more of the development of thought than about the historical Jeremiah (Ibid).⁶ Curtis & Romer (1997:35) explicitly say Jeremiah did not exist before the exile. He is a post-exilic figure created by the deuteronomists.

It is clearly observable that Brueggemann is a strong proponent of the historical Jeremiah, while Robert P Carroll is of the school that works with the ideological or constructed Jeremiah. Both sides have generated volumes of material in support of their views. In the absence of sufficient empirical evidence, some scholars in dealing with the book of Jeremiah have come up with a rather neutral term “the Jeremiah tradition.” The historical existence of the person of Jeremiah still remains an unresolved challenge. On other hand there is sufficient evidence for one to conclude that Jeremiah was. He existed and ministered to real life situations. The events that form his social political context are historical real life situations. The kingdoms and nations that Jeremiah prophesied for or against existed historically. This will be reflected when I deal with the social political context in detail later in the research.

2.3.3 The Authorship of Jeremiah

The fact that the historical Jeremiah cannot be proved beyond reasonable doubt does indeed casts doubt on the issue of authorship. The arguments run parallel. Those who accept scripture as an authoritative canon do not hesitate to identify Jeremiah as the writer of the book that bears his name. Nichol (1976:565) describes Jeremiah as “the

⁶ Carroll disputes the historical existence of the prophet Jeremiah in his book from Chaos to Covenant.

prophet who encouraged reform under Josiah prior to and during the Babylonian captivity. He wrote the book bearing his name.⁷

2.3.4 Jeremiah and the Editorial Process

There is a scholarly understanding that the book of Jeremiah went through a long editorial and redactional process. These processes do not deny that most of the material was written by the prophet and his faithful ‘amanuensis’ and faithful disciple Baruch (Perdue 1994:31). Brueggemann (1998:11) who agrees that there is indeed core material cautions that the rather long editorial work has transformed and perhaps made beyond recovery the original work of the prophet. It should be noted that scholars who believe in the existence of core material are those who espouse the historical Jeremiah. He may be irrecoverable but he once existed. The issue of the authorship of Jeremiah is yet to be settled.

The prophet writings also pose a challenge. Within the Jeremiah tradition or the book of Jeremiah there arises the task of differentiating the actual words of the prophet from those of his secretary Baruch.⁸ Did the prophet dictate to Baruch or did the secretary write like a reporter who observed the activities of the prophet? Scholars like Brueggemann (1998:338) have come up with what they call the Baruch document. This is Jeremiah 36:1-45. This document features Baruch and is conventionally linked to him. McKeating (1994:13) though not precise does leave room for the possibility that not all that is contained in the book came from the prophet’s hand. He points out that what we know is that Baruch’s involvement in the preservation of Jeremiah’s work is that he wrote and rewrote with expansions the scroll of 604 BCE.

McKeating endorses the recognition that not all that is said about him in the book is necessarily true, and that not all the words that are ascribed to him are the ones he

⁷ Nichol is editor of the Seventh-day Adventist Commentary which takes the historical biblical approach to the book of Jeremiah.

⁸ Baruchi is first mentioned in Jeremiah 32:12 when the prophet is purchasing a field as a symbol of the restoration of Jerusalem.

necessarily uttered (Ibid)⁹ Scholars who deny the historical existence of Jeremiah do not accept the existence of Baruch. They are inclined as Carroll (1981:151) says to regard the figure of Baruch a deuteronomic creation in order to carry out certain elements in the tradition.

2.3.5 Deuteronomistic Influence

Literature is greatly influenced by the mindset or world view of the society that produces it. There is a working understanding that the book of Jeremiah indeed went through a long process. One school that is believed to have influenced the literary shape of the book of Jeremiah is the Deuteronomic school.¹⁰ The deuteronomist influence poses a serious challenge in the study of Jeremiah. Carroll (1981:13) who questions the historical Jeremiah defines deuteronomic history as “the history of Israel from the entry into Palestine to the release of the exiled King in Babylonian captivity. This is evident because of their language and theology. Scholars cite the evidence as seen in the following paragraph.

Commenting on Jeremiah and the Deuteronomists, Carroll, the main proponent of the ideologists says that it is plausible that at some stage the book of Jeremiah came into their keeping (the deuteronomists) and that they built it up in such a way as to make the prophet a spokesman for their school.¹¹ They produced according to Carroll an edition of Jeremiah to serve their own purposes in the exilic and post exilic struggles for power in the community.¹² Carroll builds his argument on the observation that throughout the biblical passages edited by the deuteronomists there is an awareness of impending doom or doom already experienced by the community. Such awareness is also found in the book of Jeremiah.¹³ This tallies with Brueggemann’s (1998:PX) observation that the deuteronomic ideology is Torah centered. And so understands the exilic crises of Israel

⁹ Ibid, 14

¹⁰ Deuteronomists are believed to approach scripture from the basis of the book of Deuteronomy. More especially chapter 28 where there are promises of blessings for obedience and curses for disobedience.

¹¹ Ibid, 14

¹² Ibid, 16

¹³ Ibid, 16

that dominates the book of Jeremiah as a consequence of Torah-disregard. He further notes that in deuteronomic thought all dimensions of Israel's common life is to be brought under the rubric of covenant obedience.¹⁴ The notion of the disregard of the Torah is quite evident in the book of Jeremiah itself. One of the sins of Judah for which disaster shall come in the gates is the disregard of the Sabbath. The Sabbath is the focal point of the Torah.¹⁵ The deuteronomic tone of the book of Jeremiah may be inherent in the message the prophet was proclaiming to the nation of Israel. His message was one of judgment because Israel has left her God and therefore may experience the curses of the book of Deuteronomy.

Though the degree to which the deuteronomic influence has tainted the book of Jeremiah cannot be fully comprehended, it is commonly understood that the present Jeremiah version is heavily deuteronomic. McKeating (1999:12) sums it up when he says that, "they (the deuteronomists) played some part is hardly to be disputed; at many points in the book their ideas and their language are very evident."

2.3.6 Literary Issues in Jeremiah

2.3.6.1 The Chronology of Chapters in Jeremiah

The literary problems in the book of Jeremiah have to do with the structure and chronology of the chapters. Thompson (1980:29) classifies the order as follows: chapter 1-25 divine judgment upon Judah and Jerusalem. Chapter 30-33, the book of consolation and chapter 46-51, oracles against the nations. According to Thompson chapter 26-29 and 34-45 do not reflect a chronological arrangement. Carroll (1981:29) makes the same observation that the chapters 26-29 and 34-45 which are narratives do not reflect any chronological arrangement. Thompson (1980:27) identifies part of the problem when he says this is partly because the book of Jeremiah unlike other Prophetic books is not a book in the modern sense but a collection of oracles and other material which have

¹⁴ Ibid, 4

¹⁵ Jeremiah 17:19-27 This passage combines the deuteronomic style of Jeremiah in relation to Sabbath keeping. Judah will be blessed if he keeps the Sabbath, but shall be cursed if the Sabbath is disregarded. The fire that will burn in the gates is none other than that of the enemy from the North.

passed through a long and complex history of transmissions. In my personal view, the book is logical because it presents the problems of Israel under the Sinai covenant. After the close of the Sinai dispensation as it were, Jeremiah proclaims consolation and hope through the new covenant in chapters 30-33.

2.3.6.2 The Masoretic Text and the Septuagint

As if to compound the structural challenges, the book of Jeremiah is found in two versions and that is the Masoretic Text (MT) and the Septuagint (LXX). Many scholars agree that indeed the book appears in two versions and they have taken that into account when doing research on the book of Jeremiah. McKeating (1999:12) like many others says that the Greek version is shorter and omits some formulae and titles. It is about one eighth short. The versions are in different arrangements and the oracles against the nations are in positions in the two versions. He adds to say the Greek version should be treated more accurate where there is a difference.¹⁶ The difference in the length of the versions may be attributed to the attitudes of the two interpretive communities. The Greeks compiled and interpreted scripture from a literary point of view. They were dealing with literature and not something sacred. On the other hand the Jewish community was interpreting a sacred document which governs their existence and national identity. They dealt with inspired literature.

On the accuracy of the versions Nichol (1976:568) says “a fragmentary Hebrew manuscript of Jeremiah found in Cave 4 at Qumran shows in its preserved portions a faithful agreement with the LXX in length and sequence of materials. Nichol on the collection of prophecies states that the evidence in Daniel 9:1, 2 reveals that the prophecies must have been collected after the exile. Daniel’s information on the length of the exile comes from the “books” containing the word of the Lord to the prophet Jeremiah.¹⁷ Carroll (1981:10) reasons that the difference in the two MT and LXX versions is the evidence for the redaction that the book has gone through.

¹⁶ Ibid 12

¹⁷ 1977. Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary: Isaiah to Malachi. Hagerstown. Review and Herald.

The fact that the book appears in two versions poses challenges of authenticity. At this stage research does not reveal any disparities and contradictions in the texts.

2.3.7 The Commencement of Jeremiah's Ministry

It has proved difficult to set the precise year when Jeremiah commenced his ministry. Brueggemann (1998:1) sets Jeremiah in a historical context characterized by aggressive political ambitions of the Assyrian and the Babylonian empires. According to him, Jeremiah began his ministry in the last part of the 7th century during the collapse of the Assyrian empire displaced by the Babylonians under Nebuchadnezzar. This is a period referred to as the Judean crisis in the context of the Babylonian imperial ambitions and expansionism.¹⁸ This is a period as observed by Brueggemann that the Judahite kings vacillated between Egypt and the Babylonians.¹⁹ Thompson (1980:50) is in agreement when he says Jeremiah commenced his ministry in a changing political climate. The Assyrian power was waning and Babylon was attaining dominance as a formidable nation.

2.3.7.1 The Date of Commencement

Based on Jeremiah 1:2 which states that “the word of the Lord came in the days of Josiah ben Amon King of Judah in the thirteenth year of his reign, Thomas concludes that this would be 627 BC.²⁰ Some regard the circumstances of the year 627 BC as having contributed to the call of Jeremiah. Eaton (1997:100) commenting on the events of that year says, ‘the last mighty King of the Assyrian Empire Ashurbanipal died about the year of the call of Jeremiah (627) so hints of change in the world order might have played a part in opening Jeremiah’s heart to the divine message.’

Many scholars do not dispute the historical political context of Jeremiah but doubt the date based on Jeremiah 1:2. Carroll (1981:59) refers to the date 627 BC as editorial

¹⁸ Ibid

¹⁹ Ibid

²⁰ Ibid

information. McKeating (1999:19) also has a dim view of the date 627BC. He says there is a possibility that the date given in Jeremiah 1:2 is wrong and that Jeremiah was not active as a prophet as early as this.

It should be a foregone conclusion that the two schools of thought, “the historical” and “the ideological” (in relation to the historicity of Jeremiah) cannot share a common date. The date of commencement would be more relevant to the historical approach and not to those who view Jeremiah as a constructed ideological figure.

2.3.8 The Theme of Jeremiah

Jeremiah’s ministry as discussed earlier on was during a dramatic political upheaval. Israel as a nation needed a redefinition as a people of God and their legitimacy in occupying Canaan. Would Yahweh deliver as He had done before or would He “deliver” them into the hand of the enemy? Which deliverance was appropriate and which one was anticipated? While a number of scholars have aligned Jeremiah with the covenant, some do recognize the fact that the prophet dwelt much on the ‘rejection motif.’ In Jeremiah 7:29, the prophet is told to perform a symbolic act of rejection. Commenting on the rejection motif, Raitt (1977:59) says ‘the endless repetition of this motif, lacking redundancy, indicates that the prophets were primarily concerned to convince the people that they had sinned grievously against God.’ He however, cautions that it would be going beyond the evidence to conclude that it was a dominant theme.²¹

2.3.8.1 The Call to Return

What message did the prophet bear in this period of anxiety and tension?

Thompson (1980:76) says Jeremiah has a profound concern with the covenant. He makes notable use of the Hebrew root ‘*swb*’, which occurs in the verb ‘*sub*,’ to turn. He goes on to say in many instances where Jeremiah makes use of the root....., the main emphasis seems to lie with the ideas of “return,” repent and turn back. Thompson concludes that in

²¹ Raitt, 61

many waysembodies the germ of Jeremiah's message.²² Nichol 1976:565) agrees with Thompson in the concept of returning in relation to the context of the impending doom. He says that 'Canaan was theirs by virtue of the covenant relationship to God and by their persistent violation of the covenant they violated their right to the land. Captivity was inevitable not as a retributive punishment but as a remedial discipline and it fell to Jeremiah to explain the reasons for the captivity and to co-operate with God's plan in the experience.'

2.3.9 Jeremiah and the Covenant.

Israel as a people of God expected a message of hope that Yahweh would act because He is the God of the covenant .Yahweh would deliver His people because Yahweh keeps His promises. The "will" of God in the theology of Israel did not include retribution through the heathen. Jeremiah's warnings were not accepted because they were contrary to the expectations. The prophet's warnings were received, in some instances with violent resistance. Jeremiah, despite this resistance was so committed to his calling that in chapter 9:1and 2 he says, "Oh that my head were waters and my eyes were fountains of tears that I might weep day and night for my people." In chapter 11:6-8 the prophet declares, "Hear ye the words of this covenant and do them."

2.3.9.1 Jeremiah and Sinaitic Covenant

Jeremiah's call was to return because Israel had drifted into the "near East" practices of idol worship. This return Brueggemann (1998:3) calls it a return to the Sinaitic covenant. He observes that when the events of 587BC are read in the light of the claims of the covenant the Babylonian invasions and deportation are understood as means of applying the harsh sanctions (covenant curses) already known and articulated in the Sinai tradition.

Bright also identifies Jeremiah's theme to be based on the Sinaitic covenant. In the book *The Collapse of History* he is quoted by Perdue saying "this Jeremiah proclaimed Yahweh's sovereignty over history and creation, announced the redemptive acts of the

²² Thompson, 80

God of the Exodus and called a sinful wayward Israel back to the covenant and Sinai.²³ Thompson (1980:61) further observes that “the covenant was Jeremiah’s point of departure as well as destiny.....Sinai was Jeremiah’s reference point.” In the words of Brueggemann (1998:3) the governing paradigm in the Jeremiah tradition is Israel’s covenant with Yahweh rooted in the memories and mandate of the Sinai tradition. He also agrees that that the destruction of Jerusalem wrought by Babylon is presented as a covenantal response of the God of Israel to Judah’s refusal to adhere to the covenantal requirements. The temple rituals and function were based on the covenant relationship. The breaking of the covenant meant the ultimate breaking of the temple as well. Raitt (1977:64) puts it succinctly when he says, ‘if the covenant has been broken by the people’s sin, it would be inconsistent to let them exploit God’s dispensation of mercy through the temple as though it had no relation whatsoever to the Exodus traditions. He goes on to say, ‘what started as the violation of the law led to the elimination of the temple.’²⁴ This will be discussed in detail in the later chapters.

2.3.9.2 Jeremiah and the Davidic Covenant

In as much as there is measurable consensus on the Sinaitic covenant there are scholars who maintain that the Sinaitic covenant was suspended by the Davidic covenant. Scholars who perceive Jeremiah as a revolutionary prophet say that Jeremiah led an uprising against the oppressive monarchy. Brueggemann (1998:6) defines the Royal Temple Ideology as the “claim that the God of Israel had made irrevocable promises to the temple and the monarchy had taken residency in Jerusalem and was for all times a guarantor of the Jerusalem establishment. When Jeremiah proclaimed surrender to the Babylonians as being God’s will he was viewed as being a false prophet trying to uproot the royal temple ideology and the Davidic covenant. The resistance to Jeremiah’s proclamation was based on the belief that “the royal temple apparatus was immune to covenant sanctions and God’s judgment.”²⁵

²³ Perdue in the book ‘The Collapse of History discusses Bright ‘s theology on the book of Jeremiah.

²⁴ Ibid, 65

²⁵ Brueggemann, 6

Summary of the Challenges

There are many challenges and problems in the study of Jeremiah. The very issues that Jeremiah wrestled with are themselves complex. Jeremiah spoke the truth of his times. His message though directed to Judah, included oracles against the nations which had an influence on Judah both politically and religiously. Jeremiah warned Judah of the foe from the North. This enemy from the North comes as retribution upon Judah for failing to keep the covenant. Much of what Jeremiah preached may not be directly applied to our context. We can however, deduce timeless principles that show us how Yahweh deals with His chosen people.

There are problems and challenges in the study of Jeremiah, problems that are literal, meaning that they actually exist in the text and structure of Jeremiah. Some of the challenges are a result of the 'time gap' between the researcher and the text. The existence of the prophet is one the serious challenges that scholarship has to grapple with. It cannot be proved that Jeremiah existed in person nor can it be conclusively denied that he ever existed.

CHAPTER 3

3. ORIGIN AND HISTORY OF THE COVENANT

Jeremiah's message of the broken covenant in chapter 11 of the book of the prophet Jeremiah has to be understood within a particular context, that of the development of the nationhood of Israel and the covenant concept. The entrance of sin created a chasm between man and his creator. The harmony that existed between God and man was now fractured. Man was under another influence that is naturally enmity to his creator. He was no longer one in will and purpose with his maker. The relationship was strained and God had to re-introduce and renegotiate his relationship with man. The relationship could be by agreement, not just a creator –creature bond. This relationship which has been termed the “covenant” has had a gradual development through out the Old Testament.

3.1 The Election of Abraham

One of the fundamental antecedents of the concept of the covenant is the “election” of Israel. Scholarship does actually recognize not only the necessity of the election but also the fact that the covenant has its tap root in the election motif. Nichol (1976:318) defines the Hebrew term “bachir” as chosen or elect. This is the election of Abraham and his descendants to be a special people unto himself above all the people that are above the earth (Deut 7:6). Israel is chosen to know God and to understand His ways and to be His witness to the nations of the earth (Isa 43:10). Nichol further says the term elect and election is not general but specific to Israel which has been designated in its messianic role as God's chosen messengers to convert the heathen.²⁶ Much as it was national chosenness, God chose “many in one”. He chose the seed of one man. He actually chose the nation in its seed form. He would plant and grow it.

The initial elective call of Abraham is found in Genesis 12:1-3. Alexander (2002:145) says this marks the beginning of a new stage in God's relationship with humanity and

²⁶ Ibid, 318

sets the agenda for the entire Abrahamic story and beyond. He further says the primary intention behind the call of Abraham is God's desire to bring blessing rather than curse upon the nations of the earth.²⁷ It was necessary for God to elect Abraham because fallen man does not seek to know God. God chose Abraham not because he was qualified but because he wanted to qualify him and qualify others through him. Dumbrell (2002:145) is correct when he says "we may rightly term the call of God to Abraham an elective call and remind ourselves that such a sovereign act of God conferred greatness rather than rewarding it.

This raises the question of qualification. On what basis is Abraham chosen? Are there any qualities in Abraham that appeal to God? Alexander (2002:265) states that the emphasis is not due to their righteousness or size, it rests on the fact that it was the Lord who chose Israel and not Israel who chose the Lord. The election is therefore not based on worthiness but rather unworthiness. Segal (1969:28) says God elected Israel because of the moral deterioration of general mankind dispersed all over the earth (Gen 11). The moral degeneration led to the election of a particular people in a particular land to serve as a model for the nations of the world and a source of blessing for all humanity.

It is true that privileges come with responsibilities. The election came with the responsibility of being a channel of blessing to others. Segal (1967:269) says the election is linked to the obligation to be a holy nation, hence because the Lord has called Israel to and promise to bless her abundantly, he has the responsibility of living up to her divine calling. The election motif is so fundamental to the relationship of God and his people and the covenant concept that Segal (1967:23) is not off the mark in his introduction when he says "the real theme of the Pentateuch is the selection of Israel from the nations and its consecration to the service of God and his laws in a divinely appointed land."

Obligation demands a response. To be obliged without mutual agreement is tantamount to slavery. Eichrodt (1961:50) makes a right observation when he says the example of the forefathers shows that election must have its response from the human side., an attitude of humble trust which must be maintained throughout severe testing.

²⁷ Ibid, 146

Obligation is not synonymous with coercion. It should be noted as Alexander (2002:273) says that “although the Lord chose Israelites to be his people, at no stage were they forced against their will to accept him as their God.” When Yahweh elects Israel it is an act of unmerited favor. The choosing is not the covenant. The covenant is resultative. When Israel accepts God’s proposal, then the two parties enter into a mutual agreement which stipulates the meaning of “belongingness.” That agreement embodying the definition of the relationship and the conditions is called the covenant. Therefore the consummation of the election and the positive response from the elect is called the covenant. The priests carried out the cult of the covenant, the prophets proclaimed the obligations of the covenant to Israel. Jeremiah was known as the weeping prophet because Israel violated the covenant and incurred the wrath of God (Jer 9:1-3).

3.2 The Inception of the Covenant

After establishing the foundational concept of the election, attention should now be focused on the covenant, its development and use. Throughout the Old Testament, the covenant serves as the basis of relationship between God and Israel. In order to get a comprehensive understanding the term covenant should be examined and understood in its different contexts of usage. Segal (1967:29) makes a correct observation when he says “the chief subject of the Pentateuch is the story of the covenant with the first of the patriarchs Abraham (Gen 15, 17) which was confirmed with his successors Isaac (Gen 26:3-4) and Jacob (Gen 28:13-14).”

The Hebrew word “berit” has been interpreted by many scholars. Dumbrell (2002:16) states that the task of determining the etymology of berit is made more difficult by the fact that there is no final consensus on the origin of the word. However, the derivation which has most recommended itself and probably ought to be adopted is that which takes meaning back to the middle Assyrian noun “biritu”, a word whose sense is bond or fetter. He further says this is the more probable since in the Old Testament “berit” when used in contexts where relationships are established or confirmed, seems to carry with it the note

of obligation.²⁸ Horn (1979:243) gives a similar interpretation of the word *berit* when he says *berit* means “agreement”, arrangement.” A term used in scripture of agreements between man and man and between God and man. Horn identifies two kinds of agreements. There are those between equals and those between Lord and vassal, conqueror and conquered, superior and inferior, the Lord or conqueror specified the conditions, privileges and responsibilities occurring to both parties and the vassal or subject nation submitted to the conditions imposed upon it (2Sam 3:21, 5:3).

The use of the word covenant in the Torah does not convey the concept of subjection. Indeed it should not because it is not based conquest but election. It may carry punitive consequences when the conditions are violated but that does not make Israel a vassal. Israel is a son (Hos 11:1). Despite the fact that the word is used in varying contexts, Horn (1979:243) is right when he says the term covenant describes the formal relationship that existed between God and Israel on the other hand. The covenant does not bring the relationship into existence. The relationship is the foundation of the binding agreement. Dumbrell (2002:19) makes an acceptable conclusion when he says in the ancient world the covenant was a device where existing relationships which time or circumstances or other factors have brought into being were given legal backing in the form of ceremony whose major thrust was that of solemn commitment.

In order to determine Jeremiah’s self-understanding and his understanding of the covenant, it is important to trace the development of the concept of the covenant. Eichrodt (1961:38) notes that the covenant knows not only of demand but also of a promise. You shall be my people and I will be your God. What are the landmarks of the process of becoming the people of God? What did it entail? Did Israel fully comprehend the bilateral and binding nature of the covenant? Did Israel understand that the wrath of God is inherent to the concept and formula of the covenant? What constitutes the breaking of the covenant? Did the prophets in general, including Jeremiah fully comprehend the consequences of violating the covenant obligations? It is important to begin with the root or genesis of the covenant concept. Though the word first appears in

²⁸ Ibid 16

Genesis 6:18-20 when God makes a covenant with Noah it has its foundation with the patriarch Abraham.

3.3 The Abrahamic Covenant

Under this rubric I wish to trace and analyze the understanding and response of the human partner to Yahweh's election and covenant beginning with the patriarch Abraham. Did the human partner understand the God of the covenant, the covenant itself and its obligation? I wish to discover what it is that was breakable within the covenant and whether the human partner understood the consequences of a broken covenant.

The elective call was unconditional and unobligatory. Abraham responded with belief and this was credited to him as righteousness (Gen 15:6). In this elective call there are no conditions because Abraham himself is the condition. The blessing is upon those who bless him and the curse is upon those who curse him.

It is evident from the historical setting that Abram later known as Abraham came from an idolatrous background. After responding to the elective call the first noticeable change in the behavior of Abraham is worship. Even if Yahweh does not explicitly offer himself as the God of Abraham, Abraham takes Yahweh as his God. His worship shifts from pluralistic idolatry to the monotheistic worship of this one God. When the Lord appeared to him at Shechem, he built an altar (Gen 12:7). He proceeded to Ai and built another altar. Abraham then went to Egypt because of the famine but on his return he went back to the altar at Ai and called upon the name of the Lord (Gen 13:4). The returning of the tithe in Genesis 14:20 is sign of Abraham's wholistic surrender of himself and his wealth to this one God.

The worship pattern of building alters on the part of Abraham reveals two things. The first is that Abraham recognizes the core of this relationship and that is "the Lord shall be his God and he shall be the Lord's possession." He would have no other gods apart from this god who has elected him. The second is that by building alters Abraham is marking

the land of Canaan as the land where only the God of Abraham shall be worshipped. Those who shall worship this God will share the blessing of Abraham and will be absorbed into the covenant community and may share the Lord's heritage. The curse would be upon those who reject the worship of the God of Abraham. From the onset the obligation of the worship of one God is implied in the behavior of Abraham. Where as God has not bound Abraham to any condition, Abraham through the erection of alters showed his allegiance to this one God.

3.3.1 Abraham and the Covenant

Before making my own deductions on the implications of the call of Abraham in Genesis 12, 15 and 17, I will look at the comments of other scholars on the subject.

In the elective call of Genesis 12, the word covenant does not appear but is first mentioned in Genesis 15:18, "On that day the Lord made a covenant with Abraham saying to your descendants I have given this land, from the river of Egypt as far as the great river the river Euphrates." In this context the covenant is given as an assurance in which God is committing himself to fulfill what he has promised. Commenting on the Abrahamic covenant of Genesis 15, Linington (2003:4) says, "The context of the word 'berith' again indicates the unilateral obligation on the part of God without any corresponding obligation being put on Abram. The context of berith is that God will give Abram and his descendants the land whose extent is specified in Genesis 15:18-21. Alexander (2002:146) concurs with Linington when he says in Genesis 15 God's promise to Abraham is unconditional. There is no indication that the fulfillment of the promise is dependent upon the actions of either Abraham or his descendants. God covenants unreservedly to fulfill his promise that Abraham and his descendants will possess the land of Canaan.

In Genesis 17 the covenant is repeated to Abraham. This time God introduces himself with a conditional statement "I am God Almighty; walk before me and be blameless"

(Gen 17:1). The covenant is then repeated in verse 7 with an emphasis on the core of the relationship, "And I will establish my covenant between me and you and your descendants after you throughout their generations for an everlasting covenant, 'to be God to you and to your descendants after you.' The kernel of the covenant is to be God to you and to your descendants after you.

The sign of this covenant is circumcision. Abraham is required to circumcise all the males in his family born in the house or bought with money. This condition is to make sure the covenant is in the flesh for an everlasting covenant (Gen 17:13).

Linington (2003:5) also notes the purpose of the covenant when she says, "In Genesis 17 Abram is renamed Abraham and with great verbosity the covenant is said to be established (heqim) not only between God and Abraham but also between Abraham's descendants forever (berith 'olam). The purpose of the covenant is stated as "to be God to you and your descendants after you." Rendtorff (1998:15) makes the same conclusion when he says, "Yahweh's being God to Israel is the substance of the covenant." Linington further observes that for first time in the covenant terminology an obligation is placed on the recipient. Abraham is required to circumcise all the males in his household and in future all males in his family must be circumcised on the eighth day as a sign (o'th) of the covenant (ibid). Abraham is now required to fulfill a condition of circumcision as a partner of God in the covenant. In order to safeguard the covenant, sanctions are introduced in Genesis 17:14, "but an uncircumcised male who is not circumcised in the flesh of the foreskin, that person shall be cut off from his people, he has broken my covenant." Alexander (2002:147) is right in his observation that where as the promissory covenant of Genesis 15 is unconditional, the establishment or ratification of the covenant of circumcision is dependant upon Abraham's continuing obedience to God.

While the election has no conditions it is my observation that conditions are inherent in the nature of a covenant. The very term "agreement" implies the absence of coercion but a willful and voluntary acceptance. This is indeed so because inherent in the covenant is also the freedom of choice. From the inception of the covenant there has always been the possibility of falling away or breaking the covenant. It should be understood that the

conditions spoken of were for the benefit of the human partner. Yahweh would indeed fulfill the promise to Abraham, but it rested upon Abraham to accept or reject. In other words Yahweh would bestow the blessings Abraham has to position himself in order to receive the blessing. Brueggemann (1997:419) summarizes the Abrahamic covenant as follows, “Israel as Yahweh’s covenant partner is expected to order its life in ways that are appropriate to the relationship.

3.4 The Sinaitic Covenant.

The Pentateuch shows a progressive development in the relationship between Yahweh and His people. In Genesis 12, Yahweh elects Abraham, and calls him out to a land that He would show him. He promises to bless him and make him a blessing to other nations. Abraham responds to this call by worshiping Yahweh. In Genesis 15, Yahweh enters into a covenant with Abraham. In this covenant God unilaterally and unconditionally obliges Himself to fulfill all that he has promised Abraham. Yahweh then reveals the future to Abraham in Genesis 15:13, “And God said to Abraham, know for certain that your descendants shall be strangers in a land that is not theirs, where they will be enslaved and oppressed for four hundred years.”

They went into refuge which later turned into bondage as a covenant people. It is on the basis of the covenant that Yahweh delivers His people as is stated in Exodus 3:7, 8a, “And the Lord said I have seen the affliction of My people who are in Egypt, and have given heed to their cry because of their taskmasters, for I am aware of their suffering, so I have come down to deliver them from the power of the Egyptians.” The phrase “my people” is on the strength of the covenant in Genesis 17. There is no mention of how Israel is to conduct herself before God delivers her from Egypt. It is from this deliverance that He brings them to Mt Sinai where the covenant is ratified (Ex 19:1, 2).

Brueggemann (1997:418) makes a transition from the Abrahamic covenant to the Sinaitic covenant in these words, “the covenant made with Abraham (and so with the Genesis

ancestors) is one of divine initiative that is unconditional and the covenant made at Sinai is one of human obligation. The obligation is to love Yahweh. This is the first commandment, “You shall love the Lord your God” (Deut 6:5). This we saw in the life of Abraham when he binds himself to the worship of this one God through the erection of alters.

Through the deliverance of Israel from Egypt the loyalty of God was made evident. It is the deliverance from Israel that sets the stage for the encounter at Sinai where the meaning and responsibility of being God’s people is defined and ratified in the Sinaitic covenant. Alexander (2002:176) introduces the Sinaitic covenant by saying, “A formalizing of Israel’s relationship through a special agreement takes place soon after their divine rescue from Egypt. This agreement sets out how the people should live in order to be a holy nation. He continues to say after the Egyptian bondage the people must now pay allegiance to a new sovereign. Obedience to the covenant lies at the heart of the covenant relationship (Ibid.177) The liberation from Egypt does not only show the faithfulness of Yahweh but it also gives Him authority to regulate the life of the nation that bears His name. He declares, “You yourselves have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles wings and brought you to myself, now then if you will indeed obey my voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be My possession among all the peoples for the earth is mine (Ex 19:4,5). This text is emphatic on the conditionality of being God’s people or possession.

What makes them God’s people among all the nations according to Eichrodt (1961: 187) is the worship of this God that marks them from all other nations. In Exodus 20:3, 4, the first commandment says, “You shall have no other gods before me. You shall not make yourself an idol or any likeness of what is in heaven above or the earth beneath or in the water under the earth. This should also be understood with a background knowledge of the Egyptian worship of numerous gods. Israel has just come out of a nation that worships gods likened in many images. Furthermore there has been no voice of the prophet to proclaim the God of Abraham except oral transmission in the families.

It is true that many of those that left Egypt did not have a clear understanding of the nature of this God who has broken the yoke of bondage that they had carried for four generations. At Mt Sinai through Moses the deliverer, the people are given the law which governs this relationship. Alexander (2002: 178) is very precise when he says, “Sole allegiance is the heart of this covenant relationship. It is the foundation upon which everything else rests. There is a strong prohibition of the worship of images that were worshipped by the Egyptians where they came from and the Canaanites the land they would occupy. Alexander (2002:179) says the use of images would distort the nature of God. Ancient images were understood to be the place where a god would manifest himself. In Exodus the emphasis is on God’s self -disclosure through signs and wonders, theophanies and verbal communications.

Rendtorff (1998:52) introduces the commandment requirement saying, “Since Israel has become God’s people one of the Deuteronomy themes is the requirement that Israel keeps God’s commandments. This is linked with the covenant formula several times and in different kinds e.g. Deuteronomy 27:9, “Today you have become the people of God, you shall listen to the voice of Yahweh your God and keep his commandments and statutes that I am commanding you today. The requirement of keeping commandments was in total contrast to the gods of their oppressors. Maybe because of the numerous deities it was not possible to keep the commandments of the gods as they would be too many. Moreover the gods would have different moral standards which may be even conflicting and would confuse the people.

3.4.1 Israel sealed as God’s People

From the ratification of the relationship through the Sinai covenant by the giving of the Ten commandments, the obligation of worshipping one God is always kept before Israel. This was the mark of God on his people. Dumbrell (1984:91) says, “Covenant loyalty is specified in the Ten commandments (the Decalogue) in form of the life goals which must be implemented if the covenant experience is to be enjoyed and maintained. The divine

commitment will be unvaried and unvariable but Israel's experience of divine blessing within the national life will depend upon the measure by which the divine will expressed through law is realized in her national experience." The prophet Jeremiah understood that Israel's nationhood and security lay in her obedience to the covenant. In chapter 23 he says, "But this is what I commanded them saying, obey my voice and I will be your God and you will be My people and you will walk in all the way which I commanded you, that it may be well with you."

This is the voice that came to Abraham and called him and set him apart. This is the voice that throughout the generations the prophets would say the voice of the Lord came unto me (Isaiah 6:8; Jeremiah 2:1; Ezekiel 6:1). Rendtorff (1998:55) observes that in Jeremiah 11:14 the covenant formula follows the demand "listen to My voice and do all that I command you." The prophet Jeremiah as well as the other prophets understood who they were prophesying to, that Israel was a chosen race, a people of God guided and guarded by their covenantal relationship. Dumbrell (1984:98) describes Israel as an entity over which God ruled, a fact which she must not forget whatever subsequent course her political form took.

3.4.2 The Pledge

On the day the covenant was ratified, Israel also pledged to obey God's voice. This was after the book of the covenant had been read by Moses as stated in Exodus 24:7,8 where it says, "The he took the book of the covenant and read it in the hearing of the people; and they said, All that the Lord has spoken we will do and we will be obedient. So Moses took the rest of the blood and sprinkled it on the people and said behold the blood of the covenant which the Lord has made with you according to these words. Israel as a nation was now sealed as God's people who would listen and obey his commandments. They also understood the reverse side of this belongingness and outlined in the book of Deuteronomy chapter 28. Israel would be punished with curses if they fail to conform to the standards that govern and regulate the life of a chosen people.

3.5 Covenant Amplification in Deuteronomy.

From the ratification of the covenant at Sinai, the threat of disobedience loomed over Israel. There is sole commitment on the part of Yahweh, but the human partner Israel may not be loyal to her deliverer. The entrance into Canaan would pose a big challenge. Canaan was inhabited by nations that worshipped a myriad of gods mostly which appealed to the lower passions. These gods also had resemblances with the Egyptian gods. The temptation for Israel would be to break the covenant and worship the foreign gods. The Old Testament does testify to numerous instances of such nature even before they entered the Promised land. The book of Deuteronomy prepares the chosen people for the conquest of Canaan and the conquest of the Canaanite deities. Segal (1967:79) states that it was Israel's first task to conquer the land destroy utterly its idolatrous and vicious inhabitants who defiled it by their abominations and eradicate all forms of heathenism.

The worship of heathen gods posed a serious threat to the worship of Yahweh the God of the covenant. The book of Deuteronomy is full of admonitions against the worship of heathen deities. Alexander (2002:257) observes that Moses' frequent exhortations to love the Lord suggest that this was likely to prove difficult for the Israelites. Their ability to love stands in marked contrast to that of the Lord. Dumbrell (1984:114) concurs when he says in the plain of Moab and thus recorded in the book of Deuteronomy the covenant was not only renewed but expounded in the interests of the expression of a total national commitment in a promised land soon to be entered.

This renewal of the commitment was necessitated by the fact that it was not those who saw Egypt that would possess the land. The rebellion at Jordan earned Israel forty years of wandering in the desert. When the spies gave a report of the land they had spied, the people grumbled and wept desiring to go back to Egypt (Numbers 14:1-4). Then God responded to them saying to them, "As I live, says the Lord, just as you have spoken in my hearing , so I will surely do to you; your corpses shall fall in the wilderness even your numbered men from twenty years upward who have grumbled against me. According to the number of days which you spied out the land, forty days for everyday which you

spied out the land you shall bear your guilt a year, even forty years you shall know my opposition (Numbers 14:28, 29, 34).

The fathers who were eye witnesses of the deliverance from Egypt and the Sinai encounter had fallen in the wilderness. Horn (1979:283) sums it up well when he says, “The purpose of the book of Deuteronomy is to inspire an intelligent loyalty to God through a review of this providential guidance in times past and through an exposition of the holy precepts. The theme of Deuteronomy is monotheism and obedience to God. The watch word for Israel in the Promised land is “Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God is one God (Deuteronomy 6:4). There is also emphasis to love the Lord, “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and all your soul and all your strength (Deuteronomy 6:5). The blessings and curses given in chapter 28 are then a logical conclusion to the relationship especially when understood from the background of God’s saving acts to Israel. The survival of Israel was dependent on their loyalty to God. Hence loyalty to the covenant was the theme of every prophetic message. A broken covenant meant a broken nation.

CHAPTER 4

4. Prophetic Understanding and Use of the Covenant

After the establishment of the kingship institution in the book of 1 Samuel 8, 10, the office of the prophet became a necessity to watch over Israel and guard against infidelity. Further more Israel would be tempted to enter into alliances with heathen nations that would woo them to worship their deities. Dumbrell (1984:138) couldn't be more right when he says prophecy was a covenant office in the sense that its rationale lay in the need for the construction of such an office because of Israel's potential infidelity. The prophets expounded the covenant, its blessings and curses to Israel and her kings. Fear God and keep His commandments, their voices echoed throughout the generations. The prophets of the Old Testament pointed to the covenant in many instances. They defined the covenant to the people and urged obedience to it. The constant proclamation of the covenant was necessitated by the fact that it was made with the forefathers. The new generations depended on the prophets to know what it meant to be a chosen people and to worship one God.

The prophet Jeremiah gives an overview of the message of the prophets. In chapter 25:3-6, he counts himself among the prophets of Israel. In verse 3, Jeremiah reminds Israel that he has spoken to them for twenty three years beginning with the thirteenth year of Josiah son of Amon king of Judah. He accuses Judah of not heeding the messages even if he has spoken to them again and again.

Jeremiah is one of the many prophets that God sent to Judah. "And the Lord sent to you all His servants the prophets again and again, but you have not listened or inclined your ear to hear." This shows that the chief medium of communication between God and the chosen people were the prophets. Jeremiah mentions the work of the prophets to put himself within context. This implies that he was aware that he was treading where the other men had trod. However, what is important is the core or theme of the prophetic utterances. In verse 5, Jeremiah talks of 'dwelling in the land which the Lord has given to

you and your fore fathers forever and ever.’ This is covenant language in that the promise of land is one of the covenant obligations on the part of Yahweh. Within verse 5 is the theme of the prophets. Commenting on the phrase “turn ye” Nichol (1976:445) says this appeal for repentance, conversion, and obedience expressly sets forth the message of the true prophet.” Further more in verse 6 Jeremiah explicitly mentions the theme of the prophets when he says, “Do not go after other gods to serve them and do not provoke me to anger with the work of your hands and I will do you no harm.”

The worship of heathen gods was a direct violation of the covenant relationship. This is reflected in Exodus 20:2-5 where the worshipping of other deities is forbidden country. This is also the watch word for Israel as seen in Deuteronomy 6:4 where it says, “Hear O Israel! The Lord is our God the Lord is one God. Jeremiah’s reference to other prophets shows that his self-understanding was in the context of the prophetic ministry. A brief overview of the covenantal understanding of the other prophets like Isaiah, Ezekiel and Daniel will reveal harmony with Jeremiah 25:3-6.

4.1 Isaiah and the Covenant.

The prophet Isaiah uses the term covenant in number of instances but I will limit the research to just a few to get a glimpse of his understanding. An introduction of the prophet is appropriate so that his writings are understood in context. The Bible introduces Isaiah as the son of Amoz (1:1) Horn (1979:527) introduces him as the son of Amoz who came to the prophetic office toward the close of the reign of Uzziah c.790-739 BC. His contemporaries were Hosea in the Northern Kingdom and Micah in the Southern kingdom of Judah. Like any other prophet Isaiah attempted to hold Judah steady and loyal to God during the turbulent years in which the northern kingdom of Israel was dissolved. And finally fell in the 723/722 and through the repeated invasions of Judah in the years that followed.

In Chapter 24:5, 6, the prophet says, “The earth is polluted by its inhabitants, for they transgressed the laws, violated statutes, broke the everlasting covenant, therefore a curse devours the earth and those who live in it are held guilty. Therefore the inhabitants of the

earth are burned and few men are left.” Since this passage appears in proto-Isaiah (as some scholars believe) it can be deduced that it was pointing to the fall of Jerusalem and ultimately to the violation of the Sinaitic covenant. The reference to the broken laws and ordinances is covenant language. Isaiah understood and used the covenant in reference to its obligations. Linington (2003:3) commenting on Isaiah 24 says, “On the other hand I also think there are allusions to the ancient vassal treaties as the covenant curses set down in Deuteronomy 28 and Leviticus 26.

In Chapter 42:6, Isaiah is aware of the messianic role of Israel. She has to bear the testimony of the salvation works of her God. Once more Isaiah is consistent with the responsibilities of the election and covenant. As Abraham was a blessing to the nations, Israel is also a covenant to the people and a light to the nations. Commenting on Israel’s being a light to the nations, McKenzie (1968:144) says, “The character of Israel’s rule over the nations we have already seen, it consists in Israel’s position as a mediator of faith.” The prophet Isaiah like the other prophets bore the burden of turning Israel to her God. He also beckoned the nation of Israel to turn to God and announce the consequences of rebellion.

4.2 Ezekiel and the Covenant Concept.

Ezekiel is one of the major prophets of the Old Testament who proclaimed to Judah in captivity. Horn (1979:353) introduces Ezekiel as a priest the son of Buzi born in Judah but transported to Babylon with the group that went into captivity with Jehoiachin in 597 BC. In chapter 1:1 he says, “Now it came about in the thirtieth year on the fifth day of the fourth month while I was by the river Chebar among the exiles, the heavens were opened and I saw visions of God.” Ezekiel’s assignment was with the exiles. The deportation into exile was not an act of extermination. God was not wiping the nation of Israel from the face of the earth. He was not even terminating the covenant. By sending them into exile, God was allowing Israel to experience life without His protection. They needed prophets like Ezekiel who would define the meaning of the exile.

Ezekiel 16:4-8, describes how God had pity on Israel from birth. The implication is that Israel had no future but God elected her and gave her life. When Israel is grown up God enters into a covenant with her. Linington (2003:12) says, “The first occurrence of the word *berith* in (16:8) comes in the context of the story of God’s love for Jerusalem that is in the allegory of the Lord finding her as a new born baby abandoned after birth, that he took pity on and rescued from sure death.” She further says a solemn promise of Yahweh is the basic meaning of the word, the result of this *berith* is that Judah is now Yahweh’s possession and that a reciprocal relationship is certainly implied (*ibid*). The preview of the process and obligations of the election and the covenant is to show the exiles that God has kept the promise which He swore to their fore fathers. They were in exile because of their unfaithfulness to the covenant. In many of the writings of the prophets whether explicit or by implication the prophets reminded Israel that she was bound to God by the covenant. We can see that the covenant is not only the theme of the Pentateuch but the prophets as well.

In chapter 17:13, Ezekiel used the term covenant horizontally as well as vertically. The word is used when Zedekiah broke the covenant with the king of Babylon and chose Pharaoh. That is a man to man agreement. Ezekiel then moves to the covenant between Yahweh and His people. He proclaims the wrath of God because of the broken covenant. He seems to imply that a broken covenant has punitive consequences regardless of the parties involved, man to man or God and man.

The use of the term covenant in Ezekiel shows that the prophet was well versed with the Israel’s covenantal relatedness with God. The use of the term covenant in Ezekiel has Deuteronomic overtones. It has the blessing and curse conditions.

4.3 Daniel and the Covenant

The prophet Daniel who lived in exile also uses the term covenant. In chapter 9:1 he says, “In the first year of his reign I Daniel observed in the books the number of years which was revealed as the word of the Lord to the prophet Jeremiah for the completion of the desolations of Jerusalem namely seventy years.” Daniel’s reference to Jeremiah implies

that he had the books of the prophet. That being the case then it means Daniel understood the exile from the Jeremianic perspective. According to Jeremiah Judah was in captivity because of the broken covenant.

In verse 4 Daniel praises God as covenant keeper and lover of those that keep His commandments. Since there are two parties to the agreement, Daniel is accepting and confessing the failures of his people. He likewise also admits that his people, the chosen race is in exile because of the broken covenant. The heavy covenant language signifies that Daniel is one of the prophets who fall in the category of Jeremiah 25:4. Prophets like Daniel understood the covenant in retrospect. It was the covenant that gave them reason for the exile. The same covenant determined the end of the exile.

Therefore I would not be off the mark to affirm that the theme of prophetic proclamations was the worship of one God and obedience to the covenant.

4.4 Hosea and the Covenant Concept

Hosea is the first of the Minor Prophets. Horn (1979:510) introduces him as the last prophet whose ministry was devoted to the northern kingdom of Israel. He bore the message during the reigns of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah kings of Judah, and Jeroboam II, the last strong king of the northern kingdom (Hosea 1:1) beginning some years prior to 753 BC and continuing until sometime after 729 BC. Like any other prophet, Hosea had a message for his times and as a watchman of Yahweh he struggled to keep the chosen people to stay faithful to their God. Horn further observes that Hosea ministered during the decline of the northern kingdom and his message was the final appeal to of God to the ten tribes before the kingdom crumbled and the majority of its people were taken into permanent captivity by the Assyrians.

He rebuked the apostasy often referred to as whoredom or “adultery” which had taken the form of Baal worship (chapters 1:2; 6:10; 9:1) (ibid 511). Hosea’s condemnation of Baal worship portrays that he was familiar with the covenant obligations. Israel’s alliances with nations sometimes dulled her senses such that often times she lost her identity as a

chosen people whose life should be regulated by the covenant requirements. It should also be remembered that the word covenant was the same term used in agreements with other nations. The temptation to lean on the human arm and human covenantal obligations would sometimes overwhelm Israel. Dumbrell (1984:169) notes that, “Verses 2-13 of chapter 2 specifically contains an indictment directed toward Israel’s breach covenant, with the operation of typical curses of Deuteronomy 28 being envisaged.” He continues to say at Hosea 8:1 the association of “my covenant” with my laws show clear acquaintance (if that were in doubt) with Sinai.

Even though Hosea did not turn the tide of Israel’s apostasy, he faithfully warned the nation of the perils of a broken covenant. The covenant made with the forefathers and ratified at Sinai. Through the covenant God had become the shield of Abram as promised in Genesis 15:1 and ultimately the shield of Israel. A broken covenant would be synonymous to the removal of the shield hence exposing her to the surrounding enemies.

Dumbrell (1984: 170) sums up the gist of Hosea when he says, “In all Hosea is a book thoroughly covenant based, ringing with appeals founded upon God’s love for Israel and indicating countless ways in which this love had been demonstrated but pointing also to the lack of corresponding response from Israel. The metaphor of marriage explicitly sets the tone of the book and highlights of the broken covenant. As noted earlier in the introduction to the prophets and the covenant, indeed the office of the Israelite prophecy was to a large degree a result of the Sinai covenant as promised in Deuteronomy 18:15. God raised a prophet would interpret the meaning and warn Israel against rebellion. The prophets were well acquainted with not only the covenant but its obligations and process of development. The prophet Jeremiah is right when he says the prophets sent to Israel proclaimed “turn ye” (25:5).

Summary to the Prophetic Use of the Covenant

The prophetic understanding and use of the covenant shows that Jeremiah's own use and understanding of the covenant was but a continuity of the prophetic tradition. He does not proclaim a strange gospel. He maintains the theme that runs through the Pentateuch right through the prophets and kings. The prophets, Isaiah, Ezekiel, Daniel and Hosea, in their prophetic utterances do make direct reference to Israel's infidelity to the covenant.

Isaiah speaks of the violation of the covenant (24:5, 6). Ezekiel's ministry to the exiles proves that Jeremiah was authentic. Ezekiel is like a court of appeal that says to Israel, "The judge who sentenced you to exile was right. You are guilty of violating the covenant. Daniel's reference to Jeremiah in chapter 9: 1, is another pointer the prophetic call of Jeremiah and that he, Jeremiah correctly applied the sanctions of the covenant. The worship of idols is at the core of Israel's apostasy. This is the sin against which the prophets labored. Jeremiah addresses Israel in chapter 11 with the right message at the right time, that which they have known from their forefathers. He is not a lone and discordant voice.

Having surveyed, traced and analyzed the development of the covenant concept, I will pay detailed attention to the book in question, the book of Jeremiah. How did Jeremiah apply the term covenant and what factors influenced his understanding. The research will then climax in Jeremiah's broken covenant in chapter 11.

CHAPTER 5

5 The Social Political Context of Jeremiah

In view of the fact that the social context has a bearing on an individual's understanding of issues that surround him or her, it would be appropriate to begin by scrutinizing Jeremiah's social political climate so as to determine his horizon of understanding. Did Jeremiah proclaim disaster in response to the trend of events? Did he proclaim doom as a result of a broken covenant or was he a political opportunist?

Many scholars do observe that the times of the prophet Jeremiah were characterized by bloody political ambitions. There was enthroning and dethroning of rulers and potentates. Villancourt (1980:19) puts it right when he says although a prophet is a man of God, he is very much part of his contemporary scene and preaches a message reflecting a knowledge of the historic situations in which his hearers actually engaged in. Thompson (1980:10) agrees with this view concerning the times when he says, "Anyone who attempts to read the book without knowing something of the times will be more bewildered than ever."

Even though Israel was a chosen nation, its form of governance was similar to that of the surrounding nations. Like the other nations Israel was a kingdom with a king who cherished a spirit of expansionism. It had a military and maintained and expanded its borders by military prowess. Israel had to resist her enemies by military resistance or treaties. If that failed, she would be subjected as a vassal like any other nation and would pay taxes to the suzerain.

Of particular interest are the times beginning with the reign of Josiah. Villancourt (1980:20) states that, "The events surrounding and leading to the decline of Assyria the rise of the Neo-Babylonian Empire dominate the period. By the time Josiah acceded the throne in 640, the lands of the fertile crescent had been under the control of Assyria for about a century." He further observes that Nabopolasar (626-605) defeated the Assyrians

after the death of Assurbanapal. The fall of Niniveh in 612 by Nabopolasar and Cyaxares of the Medes marked the end of Assyria. Brueggemann (1988:1) agrees by saying the last days of the 7th century, the time of Jeremiah witnessed the abrupt collapse of the Assyrian empire and its immediate replacement by the Babylonians under the leadership of Nebuchadnezzar. The Judean crisis must therefore be understood in the context of Babylonian imperial expansionism. In the absence of Assyrian oppression, Judah enjoyed some independence under Josiah. This was short lived as Neco II killed Josiah at Megiddo (2Kings 23:29, 30). Villancourt (1980:20) sums it up by saying the Assyrian domination gave opportunity to pagan cults and the temple itself was given to the practices of cultic worship. Even the practice of human sacrifice seems to have crept into the cult in Jerusalem. The institution of Yahwism was rocked to its foundations.

The attack on the chosen people was on both fronts, military as well a religious. However, it was not the military threat that would destroy Israel but the departure from the covenant obligations. In fact Israel as nation interpreted these calamities from the curse or blessing paradigm. Brueggemann (1988:2) also points out that it is possible to understand and explain the events of around 587 in terms of realpolitik that is in terms of political tensions states and the overriding military and imperial power of Babylon.

It is during these times that Jeremiah comes on the scene. He could have been influenced by the warring nations. A closer look at Josiah's reforms could and should shed light on the prophets' understanding and interpretation of these eventful times.

5.1 Jeremiah and the Deuteronomic Reform.

The deuteronomic reform is actually the reforms carried out by Josiah king of Judah in 622 B.C. The paramount question is did Jeremiah participate in the reforms? If he did, what was his contribution and reaction? How did the reforms influence his understanding of the covenant?

The political independence gained by Judah from the Assyrians brought freedom in the religious worship of Judah. Being a vassal meant loss of the national cult as well. When a nation was defeated by another, the defeat implied that the deities of that nation had failed to protect it. In many instances the suzerain nation would also introduce its national cult. The vassal would then be politically as well as religiously subjected and subdued.

When Josiah came to power in 640, he saw it his assignment to repair the temple and ultimately restore Yahwism. The reforms of Josiah are recorded in 2 Kings 22-23 and 2 Chronicles 34-35. The reforms had a gradual beginning in that initially, Josiah appears to have only wanted to repair the temple. Mordecai (1988:293) comments that, "The physical restoration of the temple underscores the piety of Josiah because it was the primary duty of the Ancient Near Eastern monarchs to care and to maintain the temple of the gods. Villancourt (1980:27) says, "Regardless of what else Josiah may have accomplished, the praise lavished upon him in Kings and Chronicles is mostly attributed to the ardor he demonstrated in the course of national religious reform." He also notes the differences in the accounts of Kings and Chronicles presentation of events. He however points out the agreement on the year of the discovery of the scroll of the law in the eighteenth year of Josiah's reign (Ibid 8).

Villancourt further observes that, "A more widely accepted view places the reform as does 2 Chronicles at an earlier date since the discovery of the scroll was made while the repairs of the temple, presumably an aspect of the reform were already underway." Nicholson (1973:2) commenting on Josiah's reforms says, "What Josiah is remembered for in the Old Testament, however, is the reform he carried out on the basis of the book of the law found in the temple in the eighteenth year of his reign." Nicholson further note that there is no disagreement among the scholars on the identity of the 'book of the law.' The book was the book of Deuteronomy with the exception of a few chapters. Josiah's centralizing of the cult in Jerusalem is a reflection of the demands of the book of Deuteronomy. The act of Josiah was in agreement with the covenant concept. The kings knew that the calamities that befell the kingdom whether internal or external, military and otherwise were a result of departure from the covenant stipulations and obligations. There

is no other book in the Old Testament that serves as a code of conduct for the chosen people as the book of Deuteronomy.

Horn (1979:623) commenting of the fears of the young king says, “The message of the scroll, when read to the young king made a deep impression upon him. Convinced that his forefathers had not lived according to the divine ordinances, he feared that the curses pronounced by Moses would fall upon him and the kingdom and consequently sent certain officials to the prophetess Huldah for advice. The mention of the curses pronounced by Moses point to no other book apart from the book of Deuteronomy.

Another scholar who lends his voice to the identity of Deuteronomy is Thompson (1980:18) when he says, “There is good reason to think that this book was the form of the book of Deuteronomy, or of the covenant law, since a number of Josiah’s actions are consistent with the requirements of the Deuteronomy e.g. the rejection of idolatry (Deut 13), and the operation of the death penalty for idolaters and Josiah’s concern about the curses that might fall upon the nation.” He provides further details of the nature of the reforms stating that after the discovery of the law in 62 B.C. Josiah must have concerned himself with the purging of foreign cults of all kinds both in the Jerusalem temple and further afield. The evidences of Assyrian religion, notably the bronze alter were removed (2 Kgs 17:12-16). The heathen foreign cults and practices of solar and astral cults largely of Mesopotamian origin (2Kgs 23:4-5, 11-12), the native pagan cults some introduced by Manasseh were removed (Ibid.19)

The reforms of Josiah were elaborate. From the nature of the reforms and the comments of scholars, there is no doubt that these reforms were Deuteronomic not form the redaction point of view but that they were based on the book of Deuteronomy. This then meant the revival of the of the Sinai Covenant obligations.

It can clearly be observed that the covenant demanded the worship of Yahweh only. No matter how deep they went into apostasy, the chosen people knew that idol worship was the most prohibited practice in the covenant relationship. It is not a surprise the reforms, in fact any reforms, were directed at the elimination of idol worship and any other cult

that made them serve other gods. The only meaningful way of returning to Yahweh was the observation of the core of the covenant, 'I will be your God and You shall be my people.' In all this fervent religious activity, where was Jeremiah? Had he already received his call? Was he active in ministry or he was a mere youth?

5.2 The Date of Jeremiah's Call.

The name of Jeremiah is not mentioned through out the reforms. When the king seeks for the voice of a prophet, he consults Huldah the prophetess (2 Kgs 22:14-16). Perdue and Kovacs pose a serious question saying, "Jeremiah began his ministry in 627; the reforms of Josiah took place in 622. In the face of such significant undertaking , what was the reaction of the young prophet? Thompson (1980: 22) is quick to say, "A man like Jeremiah saw through the sham of external conformity without inward change and as the years went by, he became disillusioned."

The question of Jeremiah's participation in the reforms is a highly debated issue. The controversy centers on the date of his call to the prophetic office. It is compounded by the non appearance of his name in relation to the reforms. He is not consulted. The prophet Jeremiah himself does not refer to the reforms in his utterances. Holladay (1972: 1) says Jeremiah would have been a boy of five years at the time of Josiah's reforms, a reform (so the consensus) triggered by the discovery of an early form of Deuteronomy." Holladay states his reason for the above conclusion saying, "I take that the thirteenth year of Josiah (1:5) is the date of his birth not the beginning of his career. The theological burden of (1:5) suggests that Yahweh's action through Jeremiah began in the womb" (ibid). He further concludes that if his birth date is 627, then the puzzle of why we find in the book no clear judgment for or against Josiah's reform in 622 is clear. It simply means Jeremiah's proclamations lie in the future" (ibid). Whitley (1984:3) raise the same challenge that there is no direct reference to the reforms of Josiah in the Jeremiah traditions based on the Deuteronomic law code. The only possible exception is 11:1-17 a prose judgment oracle which condemns the people for being unfaithful to the covenant, possibly in its Deuteronomic form.

Many scholars do allude to the consultation of Huldah the prophetess instead of Jeremiah as an indication that he was not yet active during the reforms. The dispute that he was already born is a mild one. It is also notable from the era of Josiah that the kings that followed failed to stem the tide. Judah continued to decline until she went into exile. The reforms of Josiah would certainly have great influence on the prophet Jeremiah whether he was already active or not. It is therefore of paramount importance the timing of Josiah's reforms and the call of Jeremiah be established.

Having looked at the opposing views on the call of Jeremiah, I now pay attention to those that advocate Jeremiah's participation in the reforms. Harrison (1969:802) says that Jeremiah must have been reared in the traditions of the Torah as is evident in the earliest poems in which he shows an understanding of the election and covenant concepts of the Mosaic age. He further states that, "His call came in 626 B.C. in the thirteenth year of Josiah's reign perhaps the year of the death of Ushurbanipal, the last of the greatest Assyrian rulers" (ibid). Where as scholars like Holladay and Carroll doubt the date of 627 as the time of Jeremiah's call, Freeman (1968:237) is straight forward when he says, "The prophet Jeremiah received his call and commission in the thirteenth year of Josiah according to 1:2 and 25:3." He further says he alone Jeremiah stood in an effort to stem the tide and turn Judah from her sins. He warned that these would lead to destruction at the hands of the Babylonians (ibid). Thompson (1980:10) says, "If the date at which Jeremiah commenced his ministry was the thirteenth year of Josiah (1:6), i.e. 627 BC when he was a mere lad of 16 to 18 years, his birth may be set towards the end of the reign of notorious Manasseh. He further supports the date of 627 when he says, "Assyria's power began to wane after the death of Ashurbanipal in 627 BC the year in which Jeremiah began his career as a prophet."

If Jeremiah was 16 to 18 years (according to Thompson) when he received his call, then he must have been about 23 years when the book of the law was discovered in 622. This was an age mature enough to participate in the reforms and to grasp the meaning of the book of the law which was the basis of the religious revival. It is not known whether it was Jeremiah's first time to come across the Deuteronomic book of the law. It is possible

that since he was of priestly heritage, Jeremiah was well versed with the covenant obligations.

Though some scholars are cautious in their identity of the date of commencement as 627, they do agree that this is the most acceptable. Dumbrell (1984:170) says, "If we accept Jeremiah 1:2 to refer to the beginning of his ministry (and not to his birth though this is equally probable), then Jeremiah began to preach in 627 in the priestly center of Anathoth, his birth place, the town to which Abiathar, the final survival of the house of Eli, had been exiled under Solomon" (1Kgs 2:26). Among the many who support 627 is Nichol (1977:344) who puts it straight forward saying, "Jeremiah's call to the prophetic office came in 627/626 BC, the thirteenth year of Josiah's reign."

There is ample evidence that even if Jeremiah does not seem to say anything about the reforms, he certainly must have been an eye witness. In 2 Kings 22:3-7, 8-10, Josiah the king sends Shaphan his scribe to the house of the Lord to Hilkiah the priest. This signals the commencement of the repairs of the temple. As the working progresses, Hilkiah the priest discovers the book of the law. This book as cited before is supposed to be the book of Deuteronomy. Hilkiah then reports the discovery to Shaphan the scribe who informs the king and ultimately reads the scroll to the king. In verse 12, the king sends Hilkiah the priest, Ahikam the son of Shaphan, Achbor the son of Micaiah, Shaphan the scribe and Asaiah the king's servant to go and enquire of the Lord. The name of Shaphan also appears in Jeremiah 26:24. After Jeremiah has prophesied in the temple courts telling all the cities of Judah to repent lest the Lord brings calamity (v.3). There is a plot to kill Jeremiah. However, the prophet's life is saved by Ahikam the son of Shaphan. The phrase the "son of Ahikam" appears in 2 Kings 22:12 when the king commands them to enquire of the Lord. It is highly possible that this is the same Ahikam who saved the life of the prophet. Commenting on Jeremiah 26:24, Thompson (1980:328) says, "Fortunately for Jeremiah, he had the friendly support of men like Ahikam Ben Shaphan. Shaphan was the scribe of Josiah's reform (2Kgs 22:3-14). Jeremiah seems to have had good relations with this family."

The information compiled from the sources on the reforms of Josiah and the call of Jeremiah does show that Jeremiah 'experienced' the reforms. I use the word experience because there is no record of his verbal or none verbal contribution to the reforms. It matters not whether he was already active or a mere youth, the evidence shows that he was there. The consultation of Huldah the prophetess in 2 Kings 22: 14, may not be an indication of his absence, it may mean that though Jeremiah was there, his call to the prophetic office was not yet confirmed in the royal court or the public eye. It would not be erroneous to assume that the reforms impacted his ministry for better or for worse, meaning whether he accepted or rejected the reforms. This influence, however, was not his initial experience with Deuteronomism. Of course some scholars are inclined to the notion that says the reforms were deuteronomic from the redactional point of view.

Looking into the person of Jeremiah and his up bringing reveals that even if he did not experience the reforms, Jeremiah would have had reasonable understanding of what was expected of the chosen people. This he would have gained from his family descent. White (1992:3) gives us an insight into Jeremiah's background when he says, "Anathoth was the site of an ancient shrine dedicated to the Anath, the northern Syrian goddess of war, revered in Israel as 'the queen of heaven'...." Growing up surrounded by such idolatry, could have led the young prophet to enquire what the will of God was in contrast to the worship of the goddess. White explains further what actually transpired in Anathoth in terms of worship, he points out that the priests of Anath served its famous hill and prospered under Manasseh. Their worship combined Canaanite rites combined with those associated with Abraham and Moses. The traditional faith of the patriarchs was mingled with ideas from ancient native idolatry and with acknowledgement of the Canaanite fertility gods or spirits, the 'Baals.' Born of a Levite family, himself a priest and maintained by priests' due portion (Jer 37:12) Jeremiah grew up in this confusing syncretistic atmosphere (ibid.3).

Jeremiah himself might have longed to institute reforms after experiencing such dualism and apostasy by the chosen people. He could have been prevented by the fact that the kingdoms were theocracies. It was the king who was the custodian of the national faith.

The traditions that surrounded Jeremiah gave him a correct understanding of the history of God's people. Lundbom (1999:107) when he says, "We see in the call of Jeremiah clear and unmistakable appropriations of traditions of Moses. The vision Jeremiah had before the budding almond tree (1:11-12) recalls Moses' vision at the burning bush (Ex 3:2-6) Jeremiah's protestations about not being able to speak (1:6) have a parallel in the demur that Moses made to God about not being able to speak (Ex 4:10-17). These similarities in the call of Moses and Jeremiah shows that Jeremiah's ministry was being shaped even before the Josianic reforms. He further says, "But when Jeremiah reports that Yahweh intends to put his words into Jeremiah's mouth (1:9) a promise made earlier to Moses at the time he was called, we are looking at more than a simple case of role modeling. Jeremiah has understood himself to be the 'prophet like Moses' promised in Deuteronomy 18:18."

It would be a narrowing of Jeremiah's scope of understanding to say he was deuteronomic from the redactor point of view. I would say Jeremiah was "pentateuchal." His childhood environment implies an understanding of the covenant concept from the roots and not just by the discovery of the book of the law. To conclude this discourse on the relationship between the reforms of Josiah and Jeremiah, I would say the reforms served as a confirmation of Jeremiah's call and mission when he saw how low Israel had sunk into idolatry. The discovery of the book gave him a deep conviction of his Mosaic self understanding.

5.3 Jeremiah and the Davidic Ideology

Jeremiah is known as the weeping prophet. In chapter 9:1, 2 he says, "Oh that my head were waters, and my eyes a fountain of tears, that I might weep day and night for the slain of the daughter of my people. O that I had in the desert A wayfarers lodging place; That I might leave my people, and go from them! For all of them are adulterers, an assembly of treacherous men." This cry of Jeremiah is twofold. He weeps because of the impending doom which could be averted if the nation was faithful to the covenant obligation. He also weeps from a sense of helplessness, that these people have rejected

the warning and there is nothing except watch them experience the wrath of God. Jeremiah's weeping is echoed by Christ in Matthew 23:37-38 which says, "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, who kills the prophets and those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, the way a chicken gathers her children under her wings and you were unwilling. Behold your house is left to you desolate! In this instance Jeremiah is the type of Christ.

Jeremiah was a prophet of the Mosaic covenant. The resistance from the Monarchy was partly because of the "Davidic Covenant." It is important to understand the Davidic covenant in order to understand why Jeremiah was rather a 'dissonance' to the nation as he made his proclamations.

5.4 The Covenant with David

After the rejection of King Saul, God through the prophet Samuel anointed David to the throne. In 2 Samuel 7:8-17, God makes a covenant with David. In v. 8 God says, "Now therefore, thus you shall say to my servant David, 'Thus says the Lord of hosts, "I took you from pasture, from following the sheep, that you should be a ruler over my people Israel.'" The language is clearly covenant language. The phrase 'I took you from the pasture' is equivalent to election. God chose David. In v.9 there is a promise of a great name like the promise made to Abraham in Genesis 2:2, "And I will make you a great nation, and I will bless you, And make your name great; And so you shall be a blessing." In v. 10, God pledges to appoint a place for his people Israel where they will live in peace and prosperity. This is a reflection of Genesis 12:1 where God tells Abraham that He will give him land. The covenant formula is followed in the covenant with David. The core of this covenant is in verse 16, "And your house and your kingdom shall endure before me forever; your throne shall be established forever."

This covenant is repeated in the Davidic songs in Psalm 89:3-4, 28-36. In verses 3-4 the song says, I have made a covenant with My chosen; I have sworn to David My servant, I will establish your seed forever, And build your throne to all generations. The key word

is not the covenant as such but the “the covenant is forever.” This word is repeatedly used in verses 35-37, Once I have sworn my holiness; I will not lie to David. His descendants shall endure ‘forever and his throne as the sun before Me. It shall be established forever like the moon, And the witness in the sky is faithful.’ The word forever is prominent in the Davidic covenant.

The promise is the perpetuation of the dynasty. While the prophets emphasized the Sinai covenant, the Monarchy clung to the Davidic covenant as a shield of hope against total annihilation. The kings understood ‘forever’ to mean immunity from devastation regardless of their disobedience. They believed God would protect the throne as He promised David. Scholars commenting on the Davidic covenant also outline the emphasis on God binding himself to fulfill the Davidic covenant. Perdue & Kovacs (1994:88) comments to say, “The covenant with David in 2 Samuel 7 (cf. Psalm 89), assuming the Ancient Near East form of royal grant, was viewed as Yahweh’s unquestioned promise of dynastic rule and thus was at odds with the conditional covenant with Moses that based relationship of the people with Yahweh on their obedience to the moral and legal responsibilities. Perdue further observes that, “Closely related to the theology of Jerusalem (Zion) as the cosmic mountain, the habitation of Yahweh and thus the center of the cosmos that secures reality against the threats and chaos in historical and mythic incarnations” (see Ps 46; 48; 76) (ibid 88). Jerusalem known as the city of David was also referred to as the city of the great king. The reference was to Yahweh because David was just a steward in the city state. The real king was Yahweh.

Robinson (1993:186) says, “It is to this covenant that Israel attached its hope even in the midst of hopeless conditions and thereby was able to survive all crises in its history. Members of the future generations invoked God to fulfill the hesed He promised David” (cf. 1Kgs 8:23; Ps 89:24; 130:7...). He also notes that the chosen people according to this promise believed that it was impossible to destroy the Davidic kingdom forever (ibid). Eaton (2003:319) makes the same observation when he says, “We hear of the covenant the Lord made with David his (chosen one), binding himself to establish the

dynasty forever; and repeatedly the words for commitment and constancy ring out, hesed, and emuna, ‘faithful love’ and faithfulness’”

The corrupt kings assumed that the Davidic covenant would make them immune to the judgments resulting from the broken covenant. God made sure there was some one on the throne of David but this meant ‘even after devastating calamities.’ He would do it even if the kingdom had been reduced to ruins. Eaton (2003:320) is precise when he says, “Punishment will be there for the kings who did not keep their side of the obligation, the Lord’s commandments.

It is this belief in the immunity of the kingdom that made the kings resist the warning of the prophets. The prophets believed in the prosperity of the kingdom through the fulfillment of the covenant requirements. On the other hand the kings of Israel enjoyed a sense of security from the Davidic covenant. It was the Davidic covenant that led the kings to kill the prophets who proclaimed the messages of doom. A classic example is the life of Jeremiah himself. In chapter 20:1-2, Jeremiah was beaten and put in stocks by Pashur the priest. This is because he prophesied things that were against the house of the Lord. In chapter 26:24, the prophet Jeremiah is saved from the priests and prophets who wanted to put him to death. He is saved by Ahikam the son of Shaphan the king’s scribe. He also suffered at the hand of Zedekiah the king, “Now at that time the army of the king of Babylon was besieging Jerusalem, and Jeremiah the prophet was shut up in the court of the guard which was in the house of the king of Judah, because Zedekiah the king had shut him up, saying “Why do you prophesy saying, “Thus says the Lord, “Behold, I am about to give this city into the hand of the king of Babylon, and he will take it...” Jehoiakim went to the extent of burning the whole scroll (Jer 36:21-24). These persecutions were a result of misunderstanding the Davidic covenant.

It is now apparent that there was another covenant that the kings used to defend themselves from the seeming attacks by the prophets of the Sinai covenant. Jeremiah who had a Mosaic self-understanding (Lundbom 1999:108) dealt with kings who were more

'Davidic' than 'Sinaitic,' hence the tensions with the Davidic prophets who proclaimed peace in the face of disaster. Jeremiah rebukes them in 6:14; 14:13.

The tensions and false sense of security benumbed the kings and the nation to the Sinai covenant obligations. Kings clung to the Davidic promise as a guarantee of protection from the foe from the North. Jeremiah's message of surrender to the enemy as a means of survival was rejected and brought him persecution from the temple priests. His message of the broken covenant in chapter 11 was heresy in the light of the 'David-Zion' dynasty.

CHAPTER 6

THE BROKEN COVENANT IN JEREMIAH 11

6.1 Introductory Summary

In the previous chapters I have traced the development of the covenant concept in the Pentateuch. God's act of electing of Abraham has been outlined. Abraham is elected not because he is great but God confers greatness on him. I have shown how God enters into a covenant relationship with Abraham after he has responded positively to the election. When Yahweh enters into a covenant with Abraham, Abraham begins to worship Yahweh. He becomes the God of Abraham. Abraham becomes a worshipper of this one God who called him into a relationship and that is the beginning of monotheism in the life of Abraham and ultimately in the life of the chosen people. The election is that of Abraham and his seed, likewise the covenant is with the seed as well. The research has shown the core of the covenant, "You shall be My people and I will be your God." It has also shown the obligation of Israel to the Sinai covenant and the role of the prophets in keeping the chosen people faithful to the covenant obligations and Jeremiah being one of the most vehement covenant preachers.

The research has shown the development of the Davidic covenant. It has compared it with the Sinai covenant in an attempt to show how the kings and rulers hoped to avert God's judgments on their idolatrous behavior by clinging to the Davidic covenant.

The research will climax in the identity of the covenant which was broken in Jeremiah 11 and what act or acts constitute the breaking of a covenant. Was the breaking of the covenant in chapter 11 the climax of the Old Testament ages? Israel had been breaking

the covenant in many instances before, what was the magnitude of the chapter 11? To unravel the meaning of chapter 11 I will rely on commentaries.

6.2 The Context of Chapter 11 in the Book of Jeremiah

It is important to determine the context of chapter 11 within the book of Jeremiah. Scholars are agreed that this passage appears in the section that deals with Divine Judgment upon Judah and Jerusalem. This judgment has its case in the violation of the covenant. Stulman (2005:14) calls this section ‘Dismantling of Judah’s idolatrous world (1-25).

6.3 Poetry and Prose in Jeremiah

The question of the literary genre of Jeremiah has attracted a lot of debate. One of the contributing factors to this impasse is the notion that the book of Jeremiah is not a book per se but a compilation by groups and individuals of various interests and motives. What complicates the matter is the unresolved issue of the historicity of Jeremiah. Scholars are divided on the person of Jeremiah. There is no ‘sure word’ according to their interpretation of Jeremiah 1:1-5. While there are many who subscribe to the historical existence of Jeremiah, there are also those who are totally opposed. They say Jeremiah is a projection of the Deuteronomists who have used his name to serve their interests in rationalizing the Babylonian exile. They have used Jeremiah justify the deportation trying to show that it was not Yahweh who failed to protect His people Israel but that Israel was taken into captivity because of her unfaithfulness.

Perdue & Kovacs (1984: 14) say, “By far the most complicated and controversial issue in Jeremiah studies involves the analysis of the literary composition and development of the book.... The contents of the book includes four different types of literary material: poetic oracles, prose sermons, first person narratives and third person narratives.” He further notes that interrelated questions which surface from the different assessments of these materials involve the question of the relationship of the prose and poetry, distinguishing

between the actual words of Jeremiah and those placed in his mouth by redactors and tradents, the reconstruction of the first (and second) scroll of Baruch and the transmission, growth and the final composition of the book (ibid). Lundbom (1999:34) also notes that, “Since the beginning of the present century, scholars have spent considerable time describing the literary character of the prose sermons (the so called ‘C’ material) in Jeremiah.”

One of the major contributing factors to the failure of scholarship to classify the literary genre is the fragmentary approach to the study of the book. Many scholars have deconstructed the book to such small particles that many fail to see the bigger picture. One of the few classifications that has remained thematic is that of Mowinckel, done almost a century ago. Perdue (1984:14) outlines Mowinckel’s delineation of the material into four sources ABCD. Source A is a collection of metrical oracles which compose Jeremiah 1-25. B is prose narrative found in 26-45, C is made of prose speeches that reflect a Deuteronomy style of theology located throughout 1-45. The fourth and final source is D which is comprised of oracles about the future which were collected in chapters 30-31. There has not been a major departure from the work of Mowinckel. Many scholars whose work is much later have largely built on his work.

Stulman (2005:11) comments saying, “In the first half of the book poetry is predominant although it is interspersed with prose sermons. In the second half of the book the landscape is governed by biographical prose, albeit spotted with poems.” Lundbom (1999:44) describes the structure of Jeremiah 1-25 pointing out that chapters 1 and 25 provide the functional framework to Jeremiah 1-25 the so called the “first scroll.” Chapter one is the introduction to the book. It presents the major themes in cryptic and anticipatory terms. Chapter 25 brings closure to the book by poignantly announcing the fulfillment of Yahweh’s word in devastating effects not only on Judah but on all nations.

My area of interest is the first half of the book, Jeremiah 1-25. This is the section that deals with the broken covenant and its consequences. Stulman (2005:14) breaks it down as follows:

- Judah's new place among nations (1:1-19)
- Judah's departure from Yahweh the basis of Guilty and Penalty of Death (2:1-6:30)
- Dismantling the Temple (7: 1-10:25)
- Dismantling the Covenant (11: 1-17:27)
- Dismantling Insider privileges (18:1-20:18)
- Dismantling the Monarchy (21:1-24:10)

The conclusion is the fulfillment of God's plan for Judah 25:1-38.

6.4 The Literary Genre of Jeremiah 11

The literary genre of chapter 11 is that of prose. Even if there is much debate on the poetry and prose issue, many scholars agree that chapter 11 is prose. Stulman (2005:113) says that, "Chapters 11-17 constitute the third major section of Jeremiah. Like other literary units in Jeremiah 1-25, it is introduced by a prose sermon that exhibits many common features (11: 1-17). The prose sermon begins with the formulaic rubric, "The word that came from Yahweh to Jeremiah,".....Brueggemann also identifies it as a prose passage and highly stylized statement of covenant theology.

That it is prose does not resolve all the debate around it. Indeed it is prose material but whose prose is it? Thompson (1980: 341) brings the issue to the surface when he says, "The prose material in chapter 11 raises the question of authorship. Was this authentically from Jeremiah? Or was it a free composition of the late editors, perhaps the so called Deuteronomic editors, who either made authentic material which stems from Jeremiah or even wrote the prose material themselves in an endeavor to capture the spirit of Jeremiah's preaching in a later day? This leads to the question of how deuteronomic chapter 11 is.

6.5 Deuteronomistic influence in Jeremiah 11

The term deuteronomic is used in two strands. There are those who say the passage is deuteronomic because it is but the covenant and its curses. They conclude that it is based

on the book of Deuteronomy. The other camp sees Deuteronomism in the passage from the redaction point of view. They say that the editors wrote the material and constructed the person of Jeremiah as their spokesman. In his argument, Nicholson (1973:107) says, "Here Jeremiah is commissioned to proclaim the covenant law, 'the terms' of the covenant given to Israel's ancestors through Moses after the Exodus from Egypt. The fact that it exemplifies so pronouncedly such a favorite theme of the Deuteronomic literature, is itself evidence that this passage, like 7: 1-15 is as it now stands, a Deuteronomic composition. Some of the arguments forwarded in favor of Deuteronomism are because of the notion that the passage is a rational document that seeks to justify the exile. Nicholson explains it this way saying, "The purpose of the Deuteronomic editors in composing the such a sermon was probably twofold. First working after the catastrophe which befell Judah in 587 B.C., they sought to explain why the disaster came about; as in the history of their nation in Deuteronomy to 2 Kings, so here they taught that it was God's judgment upon their nation's failure to obey the divine law given to Israel's ancestors after the exodus and constantly proclaimed anew as in this instant by the prophet Jeremiah....In my understanding, the passage is Deuteronomic because it is based on the book of Deuteronomy. It is a climatic fulfillment of the Moses' proclamations. I agree with Thompson (1980:342) who says, "Might he (Jeremiah) not have inherited , as did the deuteronomists the prose style of the age. And might Jeremiah not have used the same literary forms in his prose as the Deuteronomic authors since they were both children of an age?" He also notes that, "It would be beyond doubt that the very things the Deuteronomists hoped to achieve in their writings namely to explain the calamity that befell Judah and to give hope in the hour of despair were strongly characteristic of Jeremiah's preaching."

As mention in the previous chapter, the reforms of Josiah after the discovery of the book or parts of the book of Deuteronomy could have influenced Jeremiah's style preaching. The reform simply reinforced the convictions from his priestly upbringing in Anathoth. His 'Mosaic' self-of understanding certainly impacted his style of ministry making it heavily deuteronomic.

6.6 The Satire on Idolatry

The broken covenant of Jeremiah chapter 11 is preceded by the Satire on Idolatry in chapter 10. This is a poetic oracle which according to Stulman's structure is about the dismantling of the temple. Many scholars agree that this is indeed a poetic satire on idolatry. Nicholson (1973:100) says, "This passage is one of the most scathing and sarcastic attacks on idolatry in the Old Testament. It is paralleled only by Isaiah 44 because of the striking similarities between it and this chapter." Broadt (1982:85) concurs saying, "Chapter 10 can be divided into two major poems: first vv. 1-16 mocks idol worship and extols the majesty of Yahweh; the second vv. 17-25 sings lamentations over the coming of the foe from the north. Another dimension is added by Brueggemann (1988:98) who mentions that this text of Jeremiah of Jeremiah 10 is organized as a litany of contrasts between the true God and the false gods. These gods are described by the Hebrew word "hebel" (vv. 3, 8, 15; cf 2:5) which means vapor, nothingness, vanity.

Much as there is agreement that this poetic passage is an attack on idolatry, there is division on the question of its source. There is doubt on whether the prophet Jeremiah is the speaker. One of those who does not attribute the article to Jeremiah is Carroll (1986:254) who says, "Commentators agreed that the poem does not come from Jeremiah though a few dissenting voices attribute it or parts of it to Jeremiah (e.g Weisser, Overholt, Mergalio, Thompson). The ethos of this poem is so different from that of the rest of the book that it is difficult to see how Jeremiah could have uttered it." One of the proponents cited by Carroll, in support of the text being Jeremianic is Thompson. In response Thompson (1980:325) argues his point beginning with the obvious similarities saying, "Because of the striking similarities with Isaiah 40:18-20; 41:7, 44:9-20 and 46:5-7 it has sometimes been regarded as a post-exilic addition to the book of Jeremiah." He further says, "It is not difficult to envisage Jeremiah giving such utterance to such ideas as find expression in 10:1-16. He had witnessed at first hand the evil consequences of the Canaanite influence in the religious practice of many in Judah, and with his own strong awareness of the reality of Yahweh, Israel's covenant God, every idol seems to be an empty sham and insult to Yahweh,"(ibid 326).

I agree with Thompson in view of the fact that Jeremiah was reared in the experience of the Assyrian pollution during which there was rampant idolatry. Jeremiah was an enemy of idolatry. His self understanding of being Mosaic and his belief in covenantal monotheism would make him a natural enemy of idol worship. Could have actually been his response or contribution to the Josiah's reforms. Stulman (2005:107) says, "Jeremiah 10:1-16 is a hymn in which Yahweh is exalted and praised as the true God. When this text is read in context it addresses pressing concerns that lie behind chapters 7-9: who is in control? What can one trust? Which god is truly effective in a world coming apart; Yahweh or the gods of the nations? It lauds the power and wisdom of Yahweh while making the impotence (hebel in 10:3, 8, 15) and falsehood (sefer in 10:14) of foreign god. In my opinion verse 2 and 3 are the key of the passage. In these verses Israel is admonished not to learn the way of the nations because the customs of the people are a delusion. Learning from the nations would upset the equilibrium because the nations were to learn from Israel and be absorbed into the covenant relationship. Genesis 12:3, God speaks to Abraham saying, "And I will bless those who bless you, And the one who curses you I will curse. And in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed." Isaiah is more explicit when in defining the messianic role of Israel. In chapter 56:6,7 he says, "Also the foreigner who joins himself to the Lord to minister to Him, and to love the name of the Lord. To be His servants, everyone who keeps himself from profaning the Sabbath, And hold fast my covenant; Even those I will bring to my holy mountain, and make them joyful in My house of prayer. Their burnt offerings and their sacrifices will be acceptable on My alter. For My will be called a house of prayer for all peoples. Hence the single most defeating factor in Israel's covenantal relationship would be were nothing else but idolatry. The rest of the passages are a description of the deities. Stulman (2005:107) makes a structure of the temple liturgy which is outlined as follows:

1. Prophetic Charge to hear the word of Yahweh (v.1)
2. Impotence of Foreign Deities (vv. 3,5)
3. Praise to Yahweh, "King of the Nations" (vv.6-7)
4. Impotence of the Foreign Deities (vv.8-9)
5. Praise to Yahweh, "The everlasting King" (v.10)
6. Impotence of Foreign Deities (v.11)

7. Praise of Yahweh the Creator (vv.12-13)
8. Impotence of Foreign Deities (vv.14-15)
9. Concluding Praise to Yahweh (v.16)

This temple liturgy which Lundbom referred to as “the dismantling of the temple” is a fitting immediate context of Jeremiah 11. It is fitting in the sense that the temple was the heart of the covenant people. Its dismantling meant the demise of the nation and the departure of the ‘Ichabod,’ or the glory of God which was a shield. Historically, any nation that attacked Israel knew that as long as the temple stood, the heart beat of the nation was still intact. Nations that subjected the chosen people made sure that the temple was not left unpolluted.

6.7 The Verdict in Jeremiah 11

Jeremiah 11 is the chapter of the verdict and sentencing of the rebellious nation. In this chapter Yahweh sentences Israel to exile because they have not heeded the words of the covenant. This is not the first time that Israel disobeys the terms of the covenant but there has been no punishment as grievous as the evil God promises to bring upon the nation (11:11).

In the book of Jeremiah there is a formula of judgment that the prophet is instructed to apply to Jerusalem and over the other nations. In Jeremiah 1:10 God says, “See I have appointed you this day over the nations and over the kingdoms, To pluck up and to break down, To destroy and to overthrow, To build and to plant.” After the satire on idolatry in chapter 10 in which the temple is dismantled, then Judah is plucked up by the foe from the north. The plucking takes place because God has abandoned Israel. The glory ‘Ichabod’ is departed and God cannot dwell in the temple polluted by idols. Is has learned the way of the nations (10:2-3).

The temple was the heart of the nation because that is where the Ark of the covenant was kept. This ark contained the terms of the covenant and symbolized the presence of God. In the ark according to the 1Kings 8:9, “There was nothing except the two tablets of stone

which Moses put there at Horeb, where the Lord made a covenant with the sons of when they came out of the land of Egypt.”

Even though Jerusalem was surrounded by walls, the real fortress was the Temple. This is reflected in the prayer of Solomon, “When Thy people Israel are defeated by the enemy, because they have sinned against Thee, if they turn to Thee again and confess Thy name and pray and make supplication to Thee in this house, then hear Thou in heaven and forgive the sin of Thy people Israel and bring them back to the land which Thou didst give their fathers. In my opinion the defense is no more because the house of god has been polluted. The idols that inhabit God’s dwelling place are of wood, the work of hands and cannot defend Israel. Israel is plucked up, broken down and overthrown. This does not mean the extermination or extinction of the nation of Israel. It is not a death sentence but that of exile. There is a rebuilding in the book of consolation (30-33), a new covenant is made after Israel has learned her lesson.

The sentence meted out in chapter 11 is so severe that it provokes anger. There is a plot to kill the prophet. (11: 18-19). Jeremiah himself laments in the confessions saying, “For each time I speak, I cry aloud; I proclaim violence and destruction, Because for me the word of the Lord has resulted in reproach and derision all day long” (20:8).

6.8 Identifying the Broken Covenant

Scholarship does not have consensus on the authenticity of Jeremiah 11. There are those who do not hesitate to identify the covenant of Jeremiah 11 as the Sinai covenant. Perdue (1999:61) comments on what influenced Jeremiah’s theology saying, “Like Hosea upon whom the prophet was dependent the prophet grounded his preaching in theological traditions derived from the older, Israelite complex of Exodus, Covenant at Sinai, and conquest and not from the Southern traditions of Judah centered in the promise to David and Zion as the city of God.”

He further says, Israel and Judah both had been unfaithful to the election and covenant traditions and subsequently were placed under the threat of divine judgment” (ibid: 62). The divine judgment passed in chapter 11 is a result of the violation of the Sinai

stipulations and not the Davidic covenant of the everlasting Davidic dynasty. This Perdue (1999:108) asserts when he says, “Jeremiah’s theology is grounded in the pre-monarchical traditions of exodus and covenant and not in the David-Zion traditions of Judah.”

Feinberg (1982:96) remarks saying, “Surprisingly much discussion has gone on among expositors as to which covenant is meant in verse 3, whether the one made with the nation at Sinai or the one promulgated by Josiah. Yet the account in 2King 22-23 makes it clear that the godly king was not introducing a new covenant but only calling for a reaffirmation of the old Mosaic covenant as did other prophets aside from Jeremiah.”

Since there is substantial evidence pointing to the notion that Jeremiah experienced the reforms of Josiah, it would not be strange for some to conclude that Jeremiah 11 has to do with Josiah’s covenant. However, the fact that a catalyst to the reforms was the book of the law of Moses, namely the book of Deuteronomy, is ground enough to assert that the broken covenant of Jeremiah 11 is the Sinai covenant. Commenting on 11:1-5, Brueggemann (1988:104) says, “These verses are an initial summons to the prophet to articulate the covenant and its demands. There is no hint of what covenant, but the following verses make it clear that it is the covenant of Sinai with its Torah demands. He further says, “The community was summoned to listen but did not listen..... Yahweh reminds Jeremiah that the old generation of Sinai and wilderness was judged for disobedience.”

One of the identifying marks of the Sinai covenant in Jeremiah is the phrase mentioned earlier on, “Obey My voice.” After He had delivered them from Egypt, they were to listen to no other voice except that of Yahweh. This would guard them against being lured into the worship of the gods of the peoples who inhabited the land they were to possess. Brueggemann (1988:106) sums it up when he says, “The entire unit of Jer 11:1-17 is a meditation of Deut 6:4. This people must listen. When Israel does not listen, it rejects the one who summons it, violates its identity, and it must be destroyed.”

Not all scholars are of the view that the covenant in Jeremiah 11 is the Sinai covenant.

On a general note scholars like Domeris (1999:248) view Jeremiah as a stunt of the monists when he says, “The figure of Jeremiah becomes the rallying point around which

The most frequent use of the phrase ‘I brought them out of the land of Egypt’ is found in the Pentateuch. It is normally used when God introduces himself to His people Israel. It is used for the identity of the true God as well as a prohibition against the ideology of the monists is allowed to gather. Scarce wonder then that the so called historical Jeremiah is such an enigma.” Holladay (1988:349) points out that, “Every commentator gives extensive treatment of vv. 1-14, because it has appeared to offer clues to the attitude of Jeremiah toward Deuteronomy and/or the Deuteronomic reform....” He further says, “Thus it has seemed plausible to many to view the phrase ‘this covenant’ (vv [2] 3, 6, 8) as reference to the covenant concluded by Josiah at the time of the reform stimulated by the discovery of Deuteronomy in 622 (so most, including Duhm, Cornill, Giesebrecht, Condamin, Eissfeldt and Bright); on the other hand, a minority (including Volz and Rudolph....have insisted that the phrase simply refers to the Sinai covenant (compare v. 4)” (ibid).

It should however be pointed out that the reform of Josiah was based on the discovered book of Deuteronomy. This book was not introducing a covenant but expounded the already existing Sinai covenant. Jeremiah could not have emphasized the secondary (Josiah’s covenant) in disregard of the primary (Sinai covenant). He could have treated the Josiah reform as a step towards obedience to the Sinai covenant.

In the identification of the covenant broken in Jeremiah, I wish to study three key phrases used by Jeremiah. They point to the covenant that was broken in chapter 11. The phrases, found in 11:3,4, are as follows; (a) I brought them out of the land of Egypt; (b) obey or listen to My voice; (c) you shall be My people and I will be your God.

6.8.1 I brought them out of the land of Egypt

idol worship. In Exodus 20:2-3, God says, “I am the Lord your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. You shall have no other gods before me.” These are the first of the ‘ten words’ (the commandments) which make the core terms of the covenant at Sinai. They are to worship no other God except the God deliverance. This introductory statement becomes the badge of distinction and watch word in the Sinaitic covenant relationship. Wherever it appears it points to the covenant at Sinai. Jeremiah

uses it to point to the covenant which Israel has broken. In Leviticus God pronounces the blessings He will pour on the people if they walk in obedience. In verses 12 and 13 He says, "I will also walk among you and be your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt so that you should not be their slaves, and I broke the bars of your yoke and made you walk erect." Jeremiah uses the phrase in 11:3-4 to pointing to the God of deliverance who entered into a covenant with Israel at Sinai.

In Deuteronomy we find the most frequent use of the phrase, but I will only cite a few. The passage under discussion is said to be Deuteronomic. The following texts give insight to the legitimacy of that reference. I must quickly qualify it by saying it is Deuteronomic in that it is based on the book of Deuteronomy or it follows the style of the book. In Deuteronomy 4:19, God warns Israel that they should guard against being attracted by the Sun and Moon and the host of heaven to worship them. In verse 20 Moses says, "But the Lord has taken you and brought you out of the iron furnace, from Egypt, to be a people for His own possession, as of today." That is a repeat of the introduction where God enters into a covenant with Israel at Sinai after delivering them from the land of Egypt. In 29:25, the phrase is used in direct reference to the covenant. It states, "Then men shall say because they forsook the covenant of Lord, the God of their fathers which He made with them when he brought them out of the land of Egypt." Deuteronomy makes use of the phrase to urge fidelity to the covenant.

One of the interesting uses of the phrase is found in 1 Kings 12: 26-28. The scenario here is the division of the kingdom after the demise of Solomon. We find the deception of Jeroboam the son of Nebat when Israel rebelled from the house of David. He feared that he would lose control if they continued worshipping at the Jerusalem Temple and so he made two golden calves. Knowing very well that Israel would only worship the God of deliverance, he made this pronouncement, "Behold your god O Israel, who brought you up from the land of Egypt." From this use of the phrase by Jeroboam I can safely conclude that it is used in Jeremiah 11:4 to refer to the Sinai covenant which obliged Israel to worship the God who delivered them from the land of Egypt. When Jeremiah says they have broken the covenant, he means the Sinai covenant.

6.8.2 Obey My Voice

The second phrase that Jeremiah employs in chapter 11 is “obey My voice.” This is another major indicator of the Sinai covenant. The call to obey God is intrinsic to the covenant relationship. If Israel obeys the voice of God, they would be careful to observe the covenant obligations. The prophets were messengers who bore the word or voice of God. Hence the formula “The word of the Lord which came to ...” This formula is used in the introduction of Jeremiah 11. In verse 4, Judah is urged to listen to the voice of God and then they will be His people and He will be there God. It is repeated in verse 7 when God reminds Israel that their fathers walked in stubbornness even after being repeatedly warned to obey the voice of the Lord.

The phrase ‘obey My voice’ is a foundational statement at Sinai before Yahweh speaks the ten words of the covenant. Exodus 19:5 says, “Now then, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be My own possession among all the peoples for the earth is Mine. Israel is again reminded to obey the voice of Yahweh in Exodus 23: 21-22. In Deuteronomy 27:10, obedience is one of the virtues Israel is urged to observe after crossing the Jordan into the land of the promise. Jeremiah himself uses the phrase several times in his build up to chapter 11 (3:13, 25; 7:23; 9:13; 11:7). This is another unmistakable landmark that points to the Sinai covenant in the many instances it is used.

6.8.3 You shall be My People

The heart or the nucleus of the Sinai covenant relationship is encoded in the phrase ‘You shall be My people and I will be your God.’ From its first use in Genesis 17:7 when God makes a covenant with Abraham where He says, “To be God to you and to your descendants,” Israel is known as God’s own possession. When Yahweh sets Israel from Egyptian bondage He is delivering His own people. The regulations and authority that Yahweh exercises over Israel are done in the spirit of possession. They are His people and He is their God (Ex 5:1; 10:13; 19:5; 1Kgs 8:16; Isa 5:13; Hos 4:6). Jeremiah uses this phrase to show that it is the Sinai covenant that has been violated.

6.8.4 What Constitutes a Broken Covenant?

The covenant is broken, but what act in the behavior of the chosen people constitutes a broken covenant? The answer lies in Jeremiah 11:4, “They have turned back to the iniquities of their ancestors who refused to hear My words, and they have gone after the other gods to serve them; the house of Israel and the house of Judah have broken My covenant, which I made with their fathers.” The reference to their fathers may not be to the reforms of Josiah because of the time period. It should, however, be noted that 11:2 uses the present tense, “Hear the words of this covenant.” This could partly refer to the Josianic reforms but in the sense of continuity because the reforms with Josiah were a revival of the covenant made with their fathers and that is the Sinai covenant.

The iniquity of their fathers was the violation of the first commandment of the covenant, “You shall have no other gods before me” (Ex 20:3). Throughout the history of the chosen people, idolatry was one sin that struck at the root of their covenant relationship with God. They worshipped Baal, the male deity of the Canaanites and the Phoenicians (1Kgs 18:19-21; 2 Kgs 10:21-28; Jer 7:9; 9:14; 11:13, 17; Hos 11:2). They also worshipped Ashtaroth the god of the Philistines and the Zidonians (1 Sam 12:10; 1Kgs 11:5). Solomon the wise king went after Ashtaroth.

Jeremiah 11:10-13 is the testimony in the case against Israel. They have broken the covenant because they have gone after other gods. Yahweh is no longer the shield as promised to Abraham in Genesis 15:1. Their defender has become the enemy because they have joined the camp of His enemies, the idols. Thompson (1980:344) sums it well when he says, “That then Jeremiah was to declare. Judah needed to be called to the historic Sinai event when God promised to supply the material and spiritual needs of the people in their infancy as a nation in return for their undivided worship and obedience.” That was the way of life. The way of disobedience was the way of death. Both ways were embodied in the Sinai covenant.

CHAPTER 7

The social-political arena prior to the deportation was one of social as well as religious confusion. While the kings prepared to defend the nation through military power, Jeremiah called for obedience to the covenant and surrender to the enemy. Which covenant? After looking at the challenges of studying Jeremiah and tracing the development of the covenant from the Pentateuch to the Prophets this research has concluded that it is the breaking of the Sinai covenant that led to the deportation.

7.1 The Axis of the Relationship

It is clearly observable that from the election of the patriarch Abraham the covenant is the axis on which the relationship between Yahweh and Israel rotates. Prosperity and welfare, protection from the invading enemy and chastisement by disease or calamity all find their motif in the covenant relationship. The covenant theme is indeed the governing paradigm of the Old Testament as Brueggemann (1998:3) observes.

7.2 Jeremiah's Covenant Roots

It should be noted that studying Jeremiah poses serious challenges beginning with the person of the prophet even before dealing with his message. No wonder Diamond (1999:15) says, "The figure of Jeremiah remains troubled and troubling for the professional interpretive community."

Much as there are seemingly insurmountable challenges in the study of Jeremiah, the prophet's message has its intertextual roots in the Pentateuch and prophetic tradition. This gives legitimacy to the prophet's message and call to covenant obligations. His use of the covenant reflects his traditional understanding of the covenant and the word of Yahweh that addresses his times. This implies that Jeremiah knew Yahweh's dealings with his people and their unfaithfulness to the covenant. He was well versed with attempted revivals like that of Josiah, an attempt to call Israel (the chosen people) to covenant obedience.

7.3 The Broken Covenant

The broken covenant of Jeremiah chapter 11 is the Sinai covenant. It is not the covenant made by Josiah during the reforms after the discovery of the book. Jeremiah 11 is neither a rationalization nor a construction to protect the faith of Israel. There are those who understood Jeremiah 11 before the deportation and those who only got the meaning chapter 11 in exile or after the exile. The passage may be post-exilic in that the majority understood it in exile.

The question that needs further research is whether Israel experienced the purging that Yahweh intended, or whether they sunk deeper into idolatry and worshipped Marduk the Babylonian deity. Which group was the true remnant, those who were taken into exile or those who remained in Jerusalem? Is exile Yahweh's modus operandi when it comes correcting the waywardness of His people?

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