

TO KNOW AND NOT TO KNOW YHWH: JEREMIAH'S
UNDERSTANDING AND ITS RELEVANCE FOR THE
CHURCH IN DR CONGO

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DECLARATION

Except where explicitly indicated to the contrary, this study is the original work of the author and it has not been submitted in any form to any other institution.



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THE SUPERVISOR'S APPROVAL

As the candidate's supervisor, I have approved this thesis for submission.

Signed: *G. O. West.* Name: PROF G. WEST. Date: 27/2/03

To

Salomon, Corneil, Basia, Penina, Toyana, Hwenzabo,
Lebisabo, Anique, Pascal, Noella, Matoya, Mama Bakwegi,
Timoteo, Kimareki....

Your assassination reminds me that our Christianity is
still far from being a life-changing religion. I MISS YOU
ALL!

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ABSTRACT

This thesis consists of a detailed exegetical and contextual study of passages that contain the term "to know YHWH" in the book of Jeremiah. The goal of the thesis was to define the meaning of the term "to know YHWH" as Jeremiah understood it and to find out its relevance for the Church in DR Congo.

The study demonstrates that the life of Judah as a nation was conditioned by the knowledge of YHWH. According to Jeremiah, to know YHWH is to recognize covenantal traditions as normative and to accept to follow them for a harmonious relationship with YHWH and with one another in the society. These covenantal traditions were rooted in YHWH's mighty acts of liberation of Israel in history, in YHWH's prerogative as the sole God of Israel, and in the necessity for Israel to establish a just society as witness of YHWH's justice, righteousness and steadfast love. Jeremiah demonstrates that it is the abandonment of this knowledge that caused the disintegration of Judah as a nation. This abandonment of the knowledge of YHWH is manifested in two areas. The first is the area of social justice (4:19-22; 5:1-6; 9:1-8; 9:22-23; 22:13-19). Several passages in Jeremiah link the lack of the knowledge of YHWH with the perversion of justice in terms of not encouraging the oppressed, not defending the cause of the fatherless, not pleading the cause of the widow, and not maintaining justice in the court. This lack of social justice is also manifested in terms of falsehood, adultery, abuse of human speech and the abuse of power by those who possess it. The second is the area of idolatry (2:4-13). The prophet Jeremiah accuses the people of Judah (Israel) of not having called upon YHWH during their time of need. Instead, they chose to go after foreign nations and their idols. In this way, they broke the covenant with YHWH and brought judgment upon the nation.

For Jeremiah, the blame of the failure to know YHWH is to be placed upon the entire nation, but particularly upon two groups of people: religious and political leaders. These two groups worked for their own interest and failed to maintain a society according to the requirements set in the covenant. YHWH responded to this failure in two different ways (24:4-7; 31:31-34): he punished his people by sending them into exile, and promised to restore them. This restoration will consist of bringing Israelites back to their land, of making a new covenant with them, and of

giving them a new heart that will enable them to fully know him.

I used my Congolese context to understand the meaning of some passages in Jeremiah where I could not agree (or where I was not sure) with other scholars' interpretation. At the same time, the book of Jeremiah helped me to realize that it is because our Congolese Christianity (or our knowledge of YHWH) is still superficial that it has not yet been able to help us build a coherent and unified nation. This is why, the DR Congo has collapsed in spite of its claim to have the largest Roman Catholic community in the continent, the world's most influential francophone Protestant movement and the continent's biggest independent Churches.

This researcher argues that the crisis in DR Congo may find a solution if the Church reorganizes her ministries and views her mission as the implementation of Jesus' mission for the world: the announcement of the coming of the Kingdom of God with its vision of the new heaven and new earth. This vision of new earth and new heaven would lead the Church to a new understanding of our salvation in Christ as a constant restoration of our relationship with God, with one another and a new understanding of our life and ministry as responsible citizens, striving to reconcile every aspect of our life as individuals and community with Christ. In this way, the work of the Holy Spirit in the life of each Christian would not be understood only in terms of leading us to heaven but also as the power that enables us to transform our society now and here.

RESUME

Cette thèse est une étude exégétique et contextuelle détaillée des passages qui contiennent le terme "connaître YHWH" dans le livre de Jérémie. L'objectif de la recherche était de définir le sens du terme "connaître YHWH" selon Jérémie et de montrer la pertinence de cette connaissance pour l'église en RD Congo.

L'étude a montré que la vie de Judah comme nation était conditionnée par la connaissance de YHWH. Selon le prophète Jérémie, connaître YHWH signifie reconnaître les traditions de l'alliance comme normatives et accepter de les suivre pour une relation harmonieuse avec YHWH et avec les autres membres de la communauté. L'essence de ces traditions de l'alliance se trouve dans l'intervention de YHWH dans l'histoire pour libérer son peuple, dans la nécessité de reconnaître les prérogatives de YHWH comme le seul Dieu d'Israël, et aussi dans la nécessité de maintenir une société qui témoigne du caractère de YHWH dans la justice, la droiture et la bienveillance. Jérémie démontre que c'est l'abandon de cette connaissance qui est à la base de la désintégration de Judah comme nation. Cet abandon se manifeste dans deux domaines précis: premièrement, dans le manque de la justice sociale (4:19-22; 5:1-6; 9:1-8; 9:22-23; 22:13-19). Beaucoup de passages dans Jérémie associent le manque de la connaissance de YHWH avec la perversion de la justice sociale en termes de manque d'encouragement et de protection aux opprimés, aux orphelins et aux veuves; au manque du maintien de la justice dans le tribunal et de la persistance du mensonge, de l'adultère, de l'abus de parole et du pouvoir. Deuxièmement, dans l'idolâtrie (2:4-13). Le prophète Jérémie accuse le peuple d'Israël de n'avoir pas invoqué YHWH pendant le temps de la crise nationale, mais plutôt d'avoir choisi d'aller vers les nations étrangères et leurs idoles. En agissant ainsi, ils ont rompu l'alliance avec YHWH et ont attiré le jugement sur la nation.

Pour Jérémie, la nation toute entière est responsable de cette situation; mais le prophète accuse en particulier deux groupes des gens: les leaders religieux et politiques. Ceux-ci, en choisissant de servir leurs propres intérêts, ont manqué de diriger la nation selon les exigences de l'alliance. A ce refus de le connaître, YHWH réagit de deux façons différentes (24:4-7; 31:31-34): il punit son peuple en l'envoyant en exil, et promet ensuite de le restaurer. Cette restauration consistera à ramener les enfants

d'Israël dans leur pays, à établir une nouvelle alliance avec eux et à leur donner un nouveau coeur qui les aidera à mieux connaître (obéir à) YHWH, leur Dieu.

Tout au long de mon interprétation, je me suis servi de mon contexte congolais pour comprendre certains passages difficiles dans Jérémie concernant la connaissance de YHWH, plus particulièrement là où je n'étais pas d'accord avec l'interprétation de certains érudits. En même temps, le livre de Jérémie m'a aidé à découvrir que c'est parce que le Christianisme (ou bien notre connaissance de YHWH) au Congo est encore superficiel qu'il ne nous a pas, jusqu'ici, aidés à construire une nation cohérente et unie. C'est pour cette raison que la RD Congo s'est effondré malgré sa revendication de posséder la communauté catholique romaine la plus large du continent, la communauté protestante la plus influente de toute l'Afrique francophone, et le plus grand nombre d'églises indépendantes du continent.

Mon argument est que la crise en RD Congo peut trouver une solution si l'église réorganise ses ministères et perçoit sa mission comme l'accomplissement de la mission de Jésus Christ sur terre: l'annonce de la venue du Royaume de Dieu avec sa vision d'un nouveau ciel et d'une nouvelle terre. Cette vision aiderait l'église à comprendre le salut en Christ comme une constante restauration de notre relation avec Dieu, avec le voisin, et il nous aiderait à vivre notre vie et à accomplir notre tâche comme citoyens responsables, faisant de notre mieux pour reconcilier tous les aspects de notre vie individuelle et communautaire avec Christ. De cette façon, le travail du Saint Esprit dans la vie de Chrétiens ne sera pas seulement compris en terme de préparatifs pour aller au ciel, mais aussi et surtout comme une force qui nous aiderait à transformer notre société ici et maintenant.

ABBREVIATIONS

AB	Anchor Bible
BA	Biblical Archeologist
BASOR	Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research
BDB	F. Brown, S.R. Driver and C.A. Briggs, Hebrew and English Lexicon
BHS	Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia
BJRL	Bulletin of the John Rylands University Literature of Manchester
BR	Biblical Research
CBQ	Catholic Biblical Quarterly
CBQMS	Catholic Biblical Quarterly—Monograph Series
CNS	Conférence Nationale Souveraine
DSP	Division Spéciale Présidentielle
ECZ	Eglise du Christ au Zaire
ECC	Eglise du Christ au Congo
EvQ	Evangelical Quarterly
FAZ	Forces Armées Zairoises
IB	Interpreter's Bible
ICC	International Critical Commentary
IDB	Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible
Int	Interpretation
ISBE	International Standard Bible Encyclopedia
JB	Jerusalem Bible
JBL	Journal of Biblical Literature
JETS	Journal of the Evangelical Theological Studies
JTS	Journal of Theological Studies
LB	Living Bible
LXX	Septuagint
MT	Masoretic Text
NIDOTTE	New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis
NRSV	New Revised Standard Version
OTL	Old Testament Library
RSV	Revised Standard Version
SNIP	Service National d'Intelligence
TDOTT	Theological Dictionary of Old Testament Theology
Tg	Targum
TynBul	Tyndale Bulletin
VT	Vetus Testamentum
ZAW	Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Statement of the Problem

"To Know YHWH" is one of the key themes for understanding the Hebrew prophets and their theology. A reference to word statistics shows that the verb יָדַע (to know) occurs 1058 times in the Old Testament Bible and two hundred and fifty one times in the Major Prophets only.¹ The prophet Jeremiah uses it seventy seven times. From these statistics, it is possible to argue that the verb יָדַע is one of the most used terms in the book, coming next in frequency only to the lexeme שׁוּב which appears 111 times. But frequency of occurrence alone could not necessarily contribute to the greatness of this theme. What is more striking is that a reading of the book of Jeremiah reveals that whenever the prophet uses the verb יָדַע (either in affirmative or in negative form) with יְהוָה as its object, he does so to shed light on one of the following situations: to demonstrate the failure of the people of Judah to know YHWH; what the people of Judah should have done to prove that they have an adequate knowledge of YHWH; the consequence for the nation of not knowing YHWH; what YHWH will do in the future to help his people to truly know him.

Therefore, it is possible to argue that, in the book of Jeremiah, the formula יָדַע אֶת־יְהוָה or לֹא־יָדַע אֶת־יְהוָה is primarily found in theologically significant statements. Some examples of such usage are a statement made in the series of accusations against the kings of Judah (Jer. 22:2-23:6). In

¹ Terence E. Fretheim, "יָדַע," in *NIDOTTE*, 2:409-444.

this passage, the prophet accuses Jehoiachim in particular of extravagance at the expense of righteousness and social justice. Jeremiah reminds him of his father Josiah: "he judged the cause of the poor and the needy; then it was well. *Is not this to know me? Says YHWH*" (Jer. 22:16). In the same way, four other classes of leaders, namely the priests, the legal authorities, the rulers and the prophets are also accused of not knowing YHWH, and consequently being the cause of the disaster to come on the nation (4:22; 5:4,5; 8:7; 9:2,5). The theme of the "knowledge of YHWH" is also present in the oracle accusing the people of Israel of idolatry in Jer. 2:9. It is likewise present in another important oracle announcing salvation after the people have suffered God's judgment (31:34 cf. 24:7). In this last case, knowledge of YHWH is even described as the basis upon which the new covenant or the new relationship will be built between YHWH and his people.

With these few examples, it is possible to conclude that the theme of the knowledge of YHWH in Jeremiah serves as the basis upon which the life of Judah depends as a society or a nation. This is very important if one considers the historical context during which Jeremiah exercised his ministry. Quoting M. Moorehead, Campbell Morgan describes the atmosphere in Judah during the time of Jeremiah in the following words:

It was Jeremiah's lot to prophecy at a time when all things in Judah were rushing down to the final and mournful catastrophe; when political excitement was at its height; when the worst passions swayed the various parties, and the most fatal counsels prevailed. It was his to stand in the way over which his nation was rushing headlong to destruction; to make an heroic effort to arrest it, and to turn it back; and to fail, and be compelled to step to one side and see his own

people, whom he loved with tenderness of a woman, plunge over the precipice into the wide, weltering ruin.²

The quotation leaves us with a question: What was the cause of this catastrophic situation in Judah? Jeremiah's answer would be that it was because the people of Judah had departed from YHWH, their God. Or in terms of this thesis, it was because there was no knowledge of YHWH in the nation. This recalls Hosea chapter 4 verse 6, which states that the reason for the destruction of the nation is the lack of the knowledge of YHWH.

However, despite the wide recognition of the significance of this term, the sense in which "to know or not to know YHWH" is used in Jeremiah has not always been clearly defined. Jeremiah himself does not elaborate on the meaning of *יָדַע*. In fact, nowhere in the book do we find long developments of what authentic knowledge of YHWH is. The prophet intervenes punctually to accuse the people of not knowing YHWH only when a specific practice in the society does not demonstrate faithfulness to the covenant. But the book also shows that the kings, the prophets, the priests and the people of Judah were being mistaken by thinking that they knew YHWH, yet, at the same time, Jeremiah was showing them that they did not know Him. Thus, the book of Jeremiah shows a (an implicit) misunderstanding or confusion in the understanding of the knowledge of God between the prophet on one side and both the people and the leaders of Judah on other side. Therefore, this work is primarily concerned with the problem of defining the senses of the concept *יָדַע אֶת־יְהוָה* in its occurrences.

² Campbell G. Morgan, *Studies in the Prophecy of Jeremiah* (London: Fleming A. Revell Co., 1931), 10.

Significance of this Study

The message of Jeremiah is as important for us today as it was for his nation. As Elmer A. Martens recognizes, "the book holds up mirror to any and every society."³ In Africa, we are now accustomed to speaking of a shift in Christianity's center of gravity from the northern continents to the South, with Africa having pride of place in this shift.⁴ The number of Christians in Africa South of Sahara was estimated at 393.3 million in the year 2000⁵ out of a total population of 590 million.⁶ These statistics give the impression that Africa South of Sahara is on its way to becoming a Christian continent,⁷ a continent where the majority of the people "know YHWH," with the implication that this part of the continent will clearly reflect

³Elmer A. Martens, *Jeremiah*. Believers Church Bible Commentary (Scottsdale, Pennsylvania: Herald Press, 1986), 15.

⁴Kwame Bediako, *Christianity in Africa: The Renewal of a Non-Western Religion* (Edinburg: Edinburg University Press, 1995), 3.

⁵Zablon Nthamburi, *The African Church at the Crossroads: Strategy for Indigenization* (Nairobi: Uzima Press, 1991), 74.

⁶Donald L. Sparks, "Economic Trends in Africa South of the Sahara, 2000," in *Africa South of the Sahara 2001* (London: Europa Publication, 2000), 11.

⁷Jesse N.K. Mugambi, "Problems and Promises of the Churches in Africa," in Jesse N.K. Mugambi (ed.), *The Church and the Future in Africa: Problems and Promises* (Nairobi: All Africa Conference of Churches, 1997), 43. He also quotes David Barret who predicted that by the end of the twentieth century Africa would be the most Christian continent in the world.

Christian values. Yet, the present situation in most African countries can lead one to conclude that amongst the nations of the world, Africa is synonymous with all kinds of disorder, be it political, social, and economic. Jesse N.K. Mugambi actually laments the fact that,

the contemporary Africa continues to be, perhaps, the most "religious" continent in the world, and yet its peoples remain the most abused of all history. How could it be that people who continue to call God most reverently are the ones whom God seems to neglect most vehemently? Could it be that "irreligion" is the key to success, and that religion is the key to backwardness?⁸

According to Mugambi, and rightly so, the high number of Christians in Africa should mean that Africa is a blessed continent, a place where the majority of people live in peace with God and with one another because they know YHWH. Unfortunately, what we are experiencing in most of our countries is just the opposite. My perception is that African Christianity has not yet been able to sustain the African continent, to give it a new direction of peace, progress and hope for a better continent. My argument is that this situation is due to the fact that our knowledge of YHWH is not (yet) adequate, or that this knowledge is simply superficial. In other words, it is possible that, in most cases, we might be mistaken that in Africa we know God, yet we really do not know him. This point makes a similarity between our African situation and that of Judah during the time of Jeremiah. African theologians should think about this apparent contradiction between African Christianity and the present African situation and ask if we really know YHWH

⁸ Mugambi, "Problems and Promises," 41. See also J. N.K. Mugambi, *From Liberation to Reconstruction: African Christian Theology After the Cold War* (Nairobi: East African Educational Publishers, 1995), especially chapter 10.

as Jeremiah understood it. If we are being mistaken like the people of Judah and their leaders, what then is the way ahead for a reform in our Christianity? These questions have in fact been another main motivation for undertaking the present research. In other words, an understanding of what it means to know God in the book of Jeremiah can help us understand the present contradiction between the high number of Christians in Africa and the backwardness of our continent.⁹

For this thesis, I shall narrow down my focus about Africa and analyze the texts in Jeremiah against the background of the situation in my own country, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DR Congo). In our continent and worldwide, this country was known for dictatorship and corruption under the late Joseph Désiré Mobutu¹⁰. But since 1996, the country is at war. This war is of two kinds in DR Congo: international and local. At the international level, at least seven nations and several factions of rebels have been fighting in what is now referred to as the "first African war;" but at the local level, many ethnic groups are in war against one another. According to a United Nations' report, at least three million people have lost their lives since 1998 in DR Congo.

In the Eastern part of the country (where I come from), hundreds of villages have disappeared and many churches are

⁹ It is not my intention to argue that the only cause of the backwardness of Africa is an "inadequate" Christianity, but I think that in terms of social transformation for peace, justice, and loving-kindness, Africa as a "Christian continent" should have been far different than what it is now.

¹⁰ He later on rejected the Christian names (Joseph Désiré) and came to be known as Mobutu Sese Seko Kuku Ngbendu Waza Banga.

being burnt down during ethnic clashes, which are still going on. At least 60,000 people have lost their lives between August 1998 and June 2002.¹¹ We have refugees both inside and outside the country. In January 2001, our small home in Bunia had to give shelter up to sixty-five refugees fleeing from different villages in our area. Yet, at least 90 percent of the people in my area claim to be Christians.¹² How can a Christian kill his fellow Christian, simply because the two belong to different tribes? What is the impact of Christianity in our area? How do people in my area understand the Gospel? Or how well do our people "know God?" These are some of the questions I hope to address in this study. The study will also seek to demonstrate that the present total disintegration of DR Congo is the result of the church's failure to know YHWH/Christ, as Jeremiah understands it. My claim here is that the DR Congo as a society has fallen to pieces mainly because of internal causes. All external causes have affected the nation because it was already terribly weakened from inside by corruption, social injustice, ethnic division, moral breakdown, etc. The conclusion is that Christianity has not helped us to build a coherent and strong nation. My assumption in this thesis is that Christianity can be a key factor for development, progress, peace, internal coherence, and reconciliation in my country and even in Africa as a whole. According to the Scriptures, to be in Christ means to become a new creation

¹¹ See Amnesty International, "UN Must Take Urgent Steps to Prevent Genocide," available from <Allafrica.com/stories/200210170156.html>.

¹² In Ituri province, it is estimated that about 2% of the population are Muslims, while at least 95% would claim to belong to one Christian Church in the area.

(II Cor 5:17), with a transformed mind (Rom 12:1-3), with a new vision for spiritual, social, and economic life (Matt 5-7). This is actually what Jeremiah calls "to know YHWH." In this way, to know YHWH in Jeremiah was not intended for preparing someone for going to heaven but for living a harmonious life in his community, for building a just and coherent society. Therefore, this thesis will seek to understand why this transformation has not taken place, despite the high number of Christians in DR Congo.

Assumptions

A comprehensive study of the term "to know YHWH" in Jeremiah must take into account several issues in the book which continue to be discussed by modern scholars. Leo G. Perdue rightly states: "the history of biblical criticism, including its advances and insights as well as its shortcomings, is clearly mirrored in Jeremiah studies."¹³ Among the many difficult issues in the book, the following two are of particular interest for me because they have a direct bearing on several problems in the life and the message of the prophet, and on the estimate of the nature and effectiveness of Jeremiah's prophetic career as well as its length. These two issues are the relation of the historical prophet to the redactional process, and the date of the beginning of Jeremiah's prophecy.

¹³Leo G. Perdue, "Jeremiah in Modern Research: Approaches and Issues," in Leo G. Perdue and Brian W. Kovacks (eds.), *A Prophet to the Nations: Essays in Jeremiah Studies* (Winona Lake, Indiana: Eisenbrauns, 1984), 1.

Most of modern critics have rightly distinguished between two types of literary genres in the book of Jeremiah, poetry and prose. They have also aptly noticed three types of material labeled type A, B and C. Type A materials contain the prophet's oracles, recorded in poetic form; type B materials contain prose narratives, essentially biographical and historical in character, and written with references to Jeremiah in the third person; and type C materials contain speeches and discourses in prose form.

For some of these critics, the existence of two different literary genres is a proof of at least two different sources of the book. Some think that only the poetic texts should be considered as the authentic words of Jeremiah.¹⁴ Bernhard Duhm goes as far as to argue that only a small number of verses, in poetic form, within the present book, namely two hundred and eighty, are authentic to the

¹⁴ T. R. Hobbs, "Some Remarks on the Composition and Structure of the Book of Jeremiah," in Perdue and Kovacks (eds.), *A Prophet to the Nations*, 179. Hobbs also refers to Duhm who saw nothing in common between the real Jeremiah and the prose, and to S. Mowinckel who regarded the prose as having weakened, watered down and completely distorted the real Jeremiah. See also Robert P. Carroll, *From Chaos to Covenant: Prophecy in the Book of Jeremiah* (New York: Crossroad, 1981), 11. Carroll reasserts Duhm's position by writing that "the difficulties encountered by biblical scholars in determining which elements are primary and which secondary may be modified by attending to the poetic sections as primary, with some poetic additions, and the rest as secondary." John Bright, "The Date of the Prose Sermons," in Perdue and Kovacs (eds.), *A Prophet to the Nations*, 194. He refers to H.G. May who maintains that the prose of Jeremiah is not the work of a school but of a single hand, that of the Biographer, who is not Baruch but somebody else who lived not earlier than the first half of the 5th century. May argues that it is that Biographer who gave us the book of Jeremiah in much of its present form.

prophet.¹⁵ The only prose Duham would allow to Jeremiah is his letter to the exiles in chapter 29. S. Mowinckel supports Duham and concludes that the complex character of the book is due to its having passed through a long process of editorial compilation and redaction.¹⁶ Wienfried Thiel also accepts this view but adds that even these authentic words of the prophet have been subjected to a thorough Deuteronomistic editing.¹⁷

William L. Holladay, rejects the theory that prose and poetry came from different sources, and argues that prose passages are based on poetic prototypes which served as the inspiration for the larger and more expanded prose.¹⁸

¹⁵ T.R. Hobbs, "Some Remarks on the Composition and Structure of the Book of Jeremiah," in Perdue and Kovacs, *A Prophet to the Nations*, 175. His argument is that Baruch, the scribe and Jeremiah's friend wrote two hundred and twenty verses while the remainder, some eight hundred, were written by a succession of editors and glossators who continually added to the original words of the prophet throughout the long history of transmission up to the second century B.C.

¹⁶ J.A. Thompson, *The Book of Jeremiah* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1980), 35.

¹⁷ Thompson, *The Book of Jeremiah*, 121. Scholars who hold to this view think that the original text of Jeremiah has been modified in order to serve the exilic community by presenting the people with a choice to accept or reject the divine word. A.S. Peake ("Jeremiah," in Walter F. Adeney [ed.], *Jeremiah and Lamentations: Introduction, Revised Version with Notes, Map and Index* [NY: Jack, 1910], 51) is of different opinion. For him, the differences in style are an evidence of the versatility of the prophet and they cannot be used to demonstrate a difference of sources.

¹⁸ Thompson, *The Book of Jeremiah*, 180. Some of the examples cited by Holladay are 22:19 which is repeated in prose form in 1:15; 17:19-27; and 5:31 which is repeated in 14:14; 23:25-6; 27:10ff.; 29:9, 21, etc.

From a different point of view stands the so-called "traditio-historical school" mainly composed of Scandinavian scholars.¹⁹ Members of this school totally reject the classic literary critical approach to Old Testament literature. Their argument is that it is not possible to come to a sound result in terms of "sources" in the area of the growth of literature. For them, it is through the book, directly or indirectly, that the prophet speaks to us, either through his own words, or those of his disciples. Their conclusion is that it is impossible to determine which one is involved.²⁰ Furthermore, the same school thinks that the date for the final stage in the composition of the book of Jeremiah must have been the exilic or immediate post-exilic period, and the bearers of these tradition complexes must have been a particular group of Jeremiah's own disciples who had definite affinities with the Deuteronomists.²¹

Though it is not possible to discuss here all the views concerning the composition of the book of Jeremiah,²² one can notice that the discussion above shows two tendencies among scholars concerning the critical issues in the book. At one extreme, there are those who think that the book of Jeremiah is largely a reconstruction of the Deuteronomic theologians; and at the other extreme, those who credit as historically reliable much of the material in

¹⁹ Hobbs, "Some Remarks on the Composition," 180.

²⁰ Hobbs, "Some Remarks on the Composition," 180-81.

²¹ Hobbs, "Some Remarks on the Composition," 181.

²² Good discussions concerning the composition of the book of Jeremiah are found in Perdue and Kovacs (eds.), *A Prophet to the Nations*, 175-281.

Jeremiah. The general perspective assumed in this research is that:

(1) The critical problems concerning the relation of the person of Jeremiah to the book of Jeremiah are notoriously difficult and there seems to be no great progress on the question in current scholarship.²³ To my knowledge, nobody has been able to find a convincing solution to the issue of the distinction between the genuine words of Jeremiah (*ipsissima verba jeremiae*) and non-genuine Jeremianic additions,²⁴ though the general consensus of scholars now points to the fact that most of the verses (not all) in chapters 1-25 are probably from Jeremiah himself.²⁵

²³ Walter Brueggemann, "The Book of Jeremiah: Portrait of the Prophet," in *Interpretation*, 37/2(1983) 130. For recent scholarship, see Peter C. Craigie, Page H. Kelly and Joel F. Drinkard, *Jeremiah 1-25* (Dallas: Word Books, 1991), xxxi-xxxvii. See also R. P. Carroll, *Jeremiah: Old Testament Guides* (Sheffield, JSOT Press, 1989), 31. He argues that "we really do know nothing about the origins and formation of the books in the Hebrew Bible. The nescience holds good for the book of Jeremiah also. Now scholars are never satisfied with confessions of ignorance and, in the absence of firm information, seek to construct theories or develop analogies from known sources.... All such constructions are inevitably theoretical and hypothetical...." I will respond to this view in my interpretation.

²⁴ William L. Holladay who has spent a lot of time trying to identify *ipsissima verba jeremiae* keeps modifying his theories. See for example his book: *Jeremiah 1: A Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Jeremiah chapters 1-25* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986), especially note no 19 on page 3.

²⁵ More recently, Walter Brueggemann (*Texts that Linger, Words that Explode* [Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000], 45-57) has attempted to demonstrate the crucial role played by Baruch in the transformation of Jeremiah's message from an "innocent" rhetoric to a political concrete situation. His argument is that the families of Shaphan, who was the great public defender of Jeremiah and Neraiah, whose

(2) The well-nigh total chronological and topical disarray in the book of Jeremiah seems to strongly argue against any well planned editing and composition, and therefore against theories that reduce the book of Jeremiah solely to a reconstruction of the Deuteronomic theologians.²⁶

(3) It is possible that, according to chapters 36, 25:13, 30:2, and 51:60, prophecies that were delivered in the first instance orally were later recorded in writing. This does not deny the fact that in the process of recording the authentic words of the prophet, there might have been some profound arrangement and editing of the material or even redactional additions.

(4) There is a relationship between the prose sermons and Deuteronomy. But this does not drive us to the conclusion that they are the work of the exilic Deuteronomists and that we must, therefore, regard them as the more or less distorted picture of Jeremiah that these Deuteronomists have chosen to give us. On the contrary, this researcher thinks after John Bright that, "while there is profound resemblance between the Jeremiah prose and

sons Baruch and Seraiah figure in the scrolls of Jeremiah were influential scribal families, and that these families (particularly Baruch himself) might have been the ones behind the canonizing process and the shape of the book of Jeremiah as we have it today. His seems to be a good argument, but Brueggemann needs more proof in order to show, for example, how Baruch continued with the transformation of the ministry of Jeremiah. It also needs to be proved whether Baruch himself was a historical or fictitious figure. On this last issue, Brueggemann seems to be less consistent, and it seems to me that this lack of consistency shakes his whole argument.

²⁶ Bright, "The Date of the Prose Sermon," in Perdue and Kovacs (eds.), *A Prophet to the Nations*, 199-200. He

Deuteronomy, there are also differences almost as marked as the similarities."²⁷ This leads me to the conclusion that the prose of Jeremiah is a style in its own right, very close to Deuteronomy but by no means a slavish imitation or copy of it.²⁸

Concerning the beginning of Jeremiah's prophecy, the consensus of scholars dates the birth of Jeremiah at about 646 BC, and his call to ministry in the thirteenth year of king Josiah's reign (1:2; 25:3).²⁹ According to C. F. Whitley, this is the date accepted in the standard commentaries and introductions.³⁰ But he himself does not agree with the date and thinks that Jeremiah 1:2 must be rejected as editorial. His main argument is that apart from this reference to the prophet's call, there is no record of

strongly argued that "no editor in his right mind would have perpetrated such disorder."

²⁷ Bright, "The Date of the Prose Sermon," in Perdue and Kovacs (eds.), *A Prophet to the Nations*, 204.

²⁸ Bright, "The Date of the Prose Sermon," in Perdue and Kovacs (eds.), *A Prophet to the Nations*, 204. This aspect will be analyzed in chapter four.

²⁹ The following are some supporters of this view: John Bright, *Jeremiah: Introduction, Translation, and Notes* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company, 1965), xxix; Charles L. Feinburg, *Jeremiah: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1982), 26; A. Weiser, *Introduction to the Old Testament*. London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1961, 209; H.H. Rowley, "The Early Prophecies of Jeremiah in Their Setting," in *BJRL* 45(1962) 198-234; J. A. Thompson, *The Book of Jeremiah* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1980), 50-59.

³⁰ C.F. Whitley, "The Date of Jeremiah's Call," in Perdue and Kovacs, *A Prophet to the Nations*, 73. See also William Holladay, "The Years of Jeremiah's Preaching," In *Interpretation* 37(1983) 146. Holladay agrees with Whitley in

Jeremiah uttering a prophecy in a definite year of Josiah's reign.³¹ He also quotes Friedrich Horst³² who places the prophet's call after the battle of Megiddo, H.G. May who thinks that Jeremiah could not have began his career until the reign of Jehoiachim, and C.A. Simpson who argues that Jeremiah could not have entered on his task before 608 BC.³³

A third opinion is that the thirteenth year is a scribal error for the twenty-third year. If this is accepted, Jeremiah's preaching began in 617/6 BC, about the time Nabopolossar began his attack on Assyria and Babylonian power was growing. According to J.A. Thompson, such textual confusions are possible, but there is no textual support for the proposal.³⁴

In this research, I adopt the view that 646 BC is the probable date of Jeremiah's birth and the thirteenth year of Josiah's reign is the date of the prophet's call to the ministry. There are three important elements that support this view: (1) the two chronological references, where it is explicitly stated that the word of YHWH came to Jeremiah in the thirteenth year of the reign of Josiah (1:2; 25:3); (2) the specific reference in 3:6-14 to a message from Josiah's

that most scholars have opted for this date (see his footnote no 4).

³¹ C.F. Whitley, "The Date of Jeremiah's Call," in Perdue and Kovacks, *A Prophet to the Nations*, 73.

³² Friedrich Horst, "Die Anfänge des Propheten Jeremiah." ZAW 41/1(1923) 94-153.

³³ Whitley, "The Date of Jeremiah's Call," in Leo Perdue and Brian W. Kovacks, *A Prophet to the Nations*, 73. See also William Holladay, (*Jeremiah 1*), But Holladay recognizes that the majority of scholars do not agree with him.

³⁴ J.A. Thompson, *The Book of Jeremiah*, 52.

day; and (3) the presumption in 2:18 that Assyria was still in existence, which no longer obtained in Jehoiakim's day.³⁵

As to the silence of the prophet about Josiah's reform, Gerhard von Rad thinks that the prophet's attitude at the time of the reforms was at least one of goodwill, "all the more so since this was the king of whom he was later to speak in more than usually appreciative terms (Jer. 22.15)."³⁶ Though it is wise not to be dogmatic about this particular issue, I would differ with von Rad and argue in the following two ways: Firstly, Jeremiah's early preaching came from days before Josiah's reforms had begun. At that time, Jeremiah would have had much to accuse the people about in the cultic, moral, and political realms. Moreover, the fact that reversion to former practices took place so rapidly in Judah after Josiah's death indicates that these practices existed under cover even during the reforms themselves. This might be an indication that Josiah's reforms were shallow. When evil becomes a system in a government, profound changes take time especially when some corrupt members of the government and other powerful and influential people in the nation are not willing to change the system which favors them. We know this in most of our countries in Africa, where most of the members of the government are not ready for changes even though they hypocritically show to the president/king that they are behind him for change. Probably this is what might have happened in Judah and, therefore, it is possible that the

³⁵So also, Thompson, *The Book of Jeremiah*, 54.

³⁵ Thompson, *The Book of Jeremiah*, 54.

³⁶ Gerhard von Rad, *The Message of the Prophets* (London: SCM Press, 1968), 166.

prophet could have realized it. In this way, Jeremiah would not have been very excited to speak about the reforms, though one could rather expect him to denounce such hypocrisy.

Secondly, a reading of 2 Kings 23:4-20 demonstrates that Josiah's cultic reform might have been a bloody campaign, full of brutality and vandalism. We do not know exactly how Passover feasts were celebrated during the time before the reform. But it seems that they were celebrated in the homes or in the villages. Both home and village contexts would fit well with the economic situation of the poor people in Judah. With the reform, everybody was forced to make a pilgrimage to Jerusalem from distant areas. In such a situation, we need to bear in mind that pilgrimage could not have been an easy matter for the poor; still for the aged, the infirm and the sick it could simply have been an impossibility with the implication that many people would not have been able to participate. If this reading is right, it might be possible that Josiah's reform was a controversial issue in the society. However, it seems to me that the king's motivation might have been right, but that the way the reforms themselves were carried out was questionable. Moreover, we know almost nothing about what exactly happened after the Passover described in detail in 2 Chron. 35:7-18. Nowhere in the Bible do we read that another national Passover was celebrated after the one initiated by Josiah. Might this mean that the effort of the reform died out shortly after the celebration of the first one? In every way, one might argue that the reform did not have a strong impact as to end the structural evil system in Judah. This is why the country was finally destroyed in 586 BC as a punishment of YHWH because the people refused "to know Him."

In this case, Jeremiah's silence concerning the reform could also be justified.

Methodology

The methodological approach adopted in this thesis is multifaceted. As I will show in the discussion that follows, this complexity comes from the fact that my interpretation is a combination of several methods:

I will first of all make use of the historico-grammatical method. There are four particular reasons for this: (1) My investigation is about a nation, a society, a culture, and a people during a particular period of time in history. (2) The text of Jeremiah will be read against the specific concrete situation of my country (see also below). In this way, the resources of my Congolese cultural, religious, historical, social, and political life experience will be used as complementary to conventional critical tools of biblical exegesis. Thus, it will be important for my interpretation to locate the biblical text historically, since it is the historical concrete situation of Judah, as described in Jeremiah, that will shed light on the concrete historical, social, economic, religious and political situation of my Congolese people. (3) The primary concern of my interpretation is about hearing Jeremiah speak to real-life situations of the people of Judah; about what my people, living in a particular context, will find meaningful in Jeremiah; and finally, about how, our own situation in DR Congo might help us to make sense out of this ancient text. (4) The text of this investigation is literature and a literary/grammatical approach to it will assist me to

understand its message better. For this, I will need to carefully consider the style, idiomatic expressions, rhetorical rules, characterizations, parallelism, etc.

The study will also consist of a detailed exegetical analysis of all passages in which ידע has יהוה as its object in the book of Jeremiah, in order to clarify the theological meanings of the concept ידע את־יהוה or לא־ידע את־יהוה.

I will examine the relationship between the knowledge of YHWH and social justice, knowledge of YHWH and idolatry, knowledge of YHWH and true glorification, and finally knowledge of YHWH and the new covenant. Lastly, I will also examine the consequence of the lack of knowledge of YHWH for individuals and for the nation as a whole in the book of Jeremiah.

The interpretation of each passage will start with an analysis of literary and historical context as well as structure, genre, and source of each passage that I am analyzing in the light of modern scholarship and my own assumptions. As I have already stated, the goal of this analysis is to locate the Biblical text in its socio-historical context before attempting any exegesis.

I noticed that most of the passages of my inquiry (except two: 31:31-34; 24:1-10) are poetry, and that poetry appeals more to the imagination by thinking in pictures or images. It also contains various devices such as parallelism, imagery and metaphors. My understanding is that the use of these devices is carefully designed to play upon the imagination of the community. In this way, they have a social function and must be dealt with in the exegesis.

Since the texts of my exegesis will focus on a specific period of time in the history of Judah, some other Biblical materials that will shed light on the texts chosen for this

study will also be considered. These other materials will be of two kinds: the ones that Jeremiah would have known, such as the Decalogue, and the others that are known to the interpreter but not to the prophet. These would include the New Testament passages as well. This is part of my African hermeneutics that refuses to make an artificial barrier between the Old and New Testament. My experience is that in Africa, when we read the Bible, most ordinary people consider it as a whole and not as two parts of the same word of God. It is only in the seminaries and Bible colleges that we learn about the differences between the Old and New Testaments; that the first was written in Hebrew and Aramaic, while the other in Greek.

My exegesis will be guided by my African perspective in general and my Congolese perspective in particular. For this, I will need to use a contextual approach, which recognizes the role of the ancient world in shaping the text of Jeremiah and the role of my Congolese context in conditioning the way I read, hear, understand, and apply the text of Jeremiah to my situation.³⁷ As I have already said, my exegesis will be a permanent conversation between Jeremiah's social, religious, economic and political context with my own context, be it social, religious, economic or political. Four fundamental questions will guide this

³⁷ Justin Ukpong will call this kind of interpretation "inculturation hermeneutics." For the moment, I will restrain myself from using this term and leave this debate for the last chapter in my thesis. For Ukpong's inculturation theory, see Justin S. Ukpong, "Development in Biblical Interpretation in Africa," in Gerald O. West and Musa W. Dube (eds.), *The Bible in Africa: Transaction, Trajectory and Trends* (Leiden: Brill, 2000), 11-28; See also Justin Ukpong, "The Parable of the Shrewd Manager (Luke 16:1-13): An Essay in Inculturation Biblical Hermeneutic," In *Semeia* 73(1995) 189-210.

interpretation: (1) What is the meaning of this text?³⁸ (2) What does this text tell me for my context? Or which meanings does this particular text "generate" for my context?³⁹ (3) How do my religious, socio-economic and political contexts help me to understand this text?⁴⁰ (4) What are the implications of this understanding for the church in DR Congo? These four questions will be asked at the same time and throughout my interpretation. This will also mean that I will not need a particular chapter in which the results of my interpretation would be applied to my Congolese context (as most interpretations do), since the whole interpretation process will be a permanent interaction between my context and Jeremiah's context. This will be one of the originalities of the present study and its difference with most Jeremianic studies.

³⁸ My claim here is that unless the modern interpreter allows the text to speak out of its original situation, it will be difficult for him/her to apply it to his/her modern context. While I recognize that it will not be possible to recover the exact original meaning of a text because of the gaps between the modern interpreter and the ancient text, I also think that it will not help to make the text say whatever the modern interpreter wants to let it say in a kind of capricious interpretation whereby the biblical text is used as a pretext, and forced to justify the interpreter's point of view.

³⁹ My argument is that there is one particular (original) meaning intended by the author of a particular text to a particular audience. But this original meaning "generates" other meanings to the modern interpreter, as s/he approaches the text in his/her particular context.

⁴⁰ This process can also be changed. This will mean that the interpreter can begin the hermeneutical process by analyzing his/her situation, listening to the questions raised within it, and then coming to the text with the question: "What does God say through the Bible concerning this particular problem in my context?"

My interpretation will also embody an intuitive and somewhat autobiographical reading of the text. In one way or another, my reading of Jeremiah will be the reading of my own (story) history and my own experience as an African, and a Congolese who grew up in Africa, in DR Congo, under a particular regime, had all his training in Africa, and feels the joy and the pain that will characterize this interpretation as it reveals the real life situation of my people, which is actually my own situation.⁴¹

My study is limited to the passages that are clearly related to Judah as a community since my intention is to investigate the impact of the knowledge or the lack of the knowledge of YHWH in that society. For this reason, I have left out three passages which would otherwise be included in this interpretation. One of them is too general and is not related to a specific action in the community (8:4-7); the other two (10:23-25; 16:19-21) are related to other nations than Judah.

In this interpretation, I will be sensitive to gender issues in the use of different pronouns and words. However, since I am working directly with the Hebrew text,⁴² all words (and pronouns) directly taken from the Hebrew Bible will be

⁴¹ One would read with interest different articles on autobiographical Biblical Criticism in *Semeia* 72 (1995). Three particular articles in this volume were helpful for my autobiographical interpretation of Jeremiah: Donald A. Hagner, "Writing a Commentary on Matthew: Self-Conscious Ruminations of an Evangelical," pp.51-72; Mikael C. Parsons, "Hand in Hand: Autobiographical Reflections on Luke 15," pp.125-152; Tina Pippin, "A Good Apocalypse Is Hard to Find: Crossing the Apocalyptic Borders of Mark 13," pp.153-171.

⁴² The Hebrew text used for this thesis is K. Elliger and W. Rudolph, *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia* (referred to in the text as BHS) (Stuttgart 1967-1977), more specifically the 1990 edition.

rendered as it is in the Masoretic Text, especially in my translation of different passages. For example, pronouns "He or Him," will be kept for YHWH, not because God is a man (or a woman) but because this name is used with masculine pronouns in the Masoretic Text.

Let me conclude this section by stating that this methodological guideline is only a general overview of what I have in mind. It is a general map that will guide the driver in his journey. But, once engaged, the journey has its own surprises, excitements, fears as well as many question marks. This is legitimate especially when the road is somehow new for the driver. The caution: "drive with care" is consequently more than justifiable. Therefore, at the end of this work, in the last chapter, I will need to come back to my discoveries, to look back again at my driving map from the other side of the journey, to reflect on what has happened during this driving adventure, and give some advice on how to drive in the future. Therefore, in chapter seven, I will revisit my methodology in more detail and analytical depth.

General Content of the Thesis

Apart from this chapter, which includes the significance of the study, the assumptions and the methodology, the study consists of six related chapters and a conclusion. Chapter two analyses the relationship between knowledge of God and social justice. This is the longest chapter because it puts together four important texts (4:19-22; 5:1-6; 9:1-8 and 22:13-19) in which the term **ידע את־יהוה** or **לא־ידע את־יהוה** is used in relationship with social justice in Judah as a community.

The chapter has five sections, the first four consisting of the interpretation of the four texts, and the last one containing the summary of the meaning of the term **ידע את־יהוה** in these passages, and also a summary of its relevance for the Congolese Church.

Chapter three examines the relationship between **ידע את־יהוה** or **לאִידע את־יהוה** and idolatry in Jer. 2:4-13. This passage sheds light on a particular situation: how and why a privileged relationship between YHWH and Israel slowly but surely got corrupted, to the point of reaching the breaking point. As in the previous chapter, this one also ends with a summary of the findings concerning the definition of **ידע את־יהוה** in the passage with its relevance for the Church in DR Congo.

Chapter four is constituted by the interpretation of Jer.9:22-23, and examines the relationship between **ידע את־יהוה** and the ground for true glorification for individuals and for any nation. There are three particular elements which are connected with the notion of grandeur in this passage: knowledge, wisdom, and power. The interpretation will also demonstrate that, though many scholars reject this passage as non-Jeremianic, a good analysis can provide enough evidence that Jer. 9:22-23 is a very important text, which summarizes the dominant practice in Judah during the period of the prophet Jeremiah. A section summarizing all the findings concerning the definition of the term **ידע את־יהוה** with its relevance for the Church in DR Congo will conclude this chapter as well.

The fifth chapter, entitled "To know YHWH and the New Covenant" explores the use and the meaning of the term **ידע את־יהוה** in a new context: the exile. The people of Judah have been punished because of their lack of the knowledge of

YHWH. But YHWH promises to initiate a new relationship with them after the judgment. The passage will also seek to demonstrate that for the Congolese Church, the understanding of these two texts (24:4-7; 31:31-34) is very important as they help us to see how we should live as the people of the New Covenant.

Chapter six is a summary of the four preceding chapters. It spells out how the term **יָדַע אֶת־יְהוָה** or **לֹא־יָדַע אֶת־יְהוָה** is used in different contexts in the book of Jeremiah according to the eight passages analyzed. The chapter is divided into three sections: (1) the use, (2) the development and (3) the meaning of **יָדַע אֶת־יְהוָה** in Jeremiah.

Chapter seven, entitled "Locating my hermeneutics: an evaluation and some recommendations," reflects on my hermeneutics as applied in this study. These hermeneutics differ from the dominant western hermeneutics and point toward a new way of doing exegetical works in the wide context of African hermeneutics. The chapter will demonstrate that it is not possible, for the present time, to parcel African Biblical hermeneutics into compartments since they are not yet clearly defined. But the good news is that many scholars are seriously engaged in that process of clarifying the situation in terms of showing the way towards a new approach of interpreting the Bible in Africa. My own interpretation, as shown in this work, will be located in this new effort of African Biblical interpretation.

A general conclusion (chapter eight) ends this thesis. In this conclusion, the researcher summarizes his work and articulates challenges facing the Church in Congo.

CHAPTER 2

KNOWLEDGE OF YHWH AND SOCIAL JUSTICE

This chapter analyses the relationship between "knowledge of YHWH" and social justice in the book of Jeremiah. Out of eight passages in which the term ידע את־יהוה occurs and which have been selected for this study, four (i.e. fifty percent) are associated with social life in Judah (4:19-22; 5:1-6; 9:1-8; 22:13-19). This is an important observation for the thesis because one could expect more occurrences of this term in the cultic rather than social life. As stated in the introduction, the focus of the thesis is on the understanding and the definition of the term ידע את־יהוה in its theological and socio-historical context. The definition will be drawn from the analysis of the term ידע את־יהוה in its occurrences. This analysis will be done from a specific perspective: both the biblical context and my Congolese context. In other words, and as stated in the introduction, four specific questions will guide the interpretation of each passage throughout this study: What is the meaning of ידע את־יהוה in this text? What does this particular text tell me about my Congolese context? How can my Congolese context help me to understand this text? What are the implications of this understanding for the Church in DR Congo?

The chapter will be divided into five sections. In the first four sections, I will deal with the interpretation of the four passages in which the term ידע את־יהוה occurs. The last section will be a summary of all the findings in which the term ידע את־יהוה as related to the four passages will be fully treated in the context of the Old Testament, the

Ancient Near Eastern background, and my Congolese context. It is only in this last part that different pieces of definitions of the knowledge of YHWH in relation to social justice as found here and there in the four texts will be put together for a clearer understanding.

Jeremiah's Agony on Judah's Judgment (4:19-22)

Translation

- 19 *My anguish, my anguish! I agonize!*
O, the walls of my heart!
My heart is groaning within me,
I cannot keep silence.
You have heard the sound of the trumpet,
O, my Soul, the sound of war!
- 20 *Disaster upon disaster is announced*
The whole land is devastated
Suddenly my tents are devastated
In a moment my curtains!
- 21 *How long must I see the standard,*
And hear the trumpet blast?
- 22 *How foolish my people are!*
They know me not.
Stupid children are they
And void of understanding.
They are wise in doing evil,
But of doing good they know nothing.

Historical and Literary Contexts

Many students of Jeremiah have recognized that it is difficult or even impossible to determine with precision the date of this passage within the prophet's career because the text does not give precise elements of historical events.¹ Craigie, Kelly and Drinkard think that the prophet's words

¹ So also Craigie, Kelly and Drinkard, *Jeremiah 1-25*, 79.

of anguish are not necessarily provoked by the actual invasion and the beginning of disaster as the reading of this text seems to suggest, but that they stem from the prophet's imagination, from his mental re-creation of the reality of which he spoke.² Walter Brueggemann also supports this idea and makes the following comment on the passage: "This piece (vv.19-22) is presented not as public proclamation but as a scenario of the prophet at home".³ From the two arguments, one could conclude that the date of the events related in this passage cannot be known.

However, my argument is that the study of the literary context of this poem can give some clues and help the reader to determine the probable period of the events narrated in this passage. Jer. 4: 19-22 belongs to the larger unit of 4:5-6:30 known as the "foe from the North." In terms of the relationship between YHWH and his people, the section uses a lawsuit style to depict YHWH as the king who remained faithful to his obligation whereas Judah has defaulted on his. In terms of war or calamity, these passages depict Judah's enemies in the following ways: they are coming from a distant land (4:16; 5:15; 6:22), precisely from the north (4:6; 6:1,22); it is a tenacious and ancient nation, speaking a language unknown to Judah (5:15); its warriors are all mighty (5:16) and cruel men (6:23); they ride upon prompt and strong horses (4:13,29) and war chariots (4:13); they attack swiftly and suddenly (4:20; 6:26); they are armed with bow and spear (4:29; 6:23); they are well-trained soldiers (6:23), able to attack any fortified city (6:4,5). Briefly, the dominant message in this section is judgment in terms of terror of invasion, war and defeat because of

² Craigie, Kelly and Drinkard, *Jeremiah 1-25*, 79.

³ Brueggemann, *Jeremiah 1-25*, 54.

Judah's forgetfulness and the many offences that it has committed in the sight of its God.

When one reads Jer. 4: 19-22 in the context of the foe from the North, s/he notices a very deep anguish expressed by the prophet for his nation. It seems to me that such a deep emotion cannot stem from a simple mental re-creation of the far past or future. Rather, a concrete present situation or a very near future situation that God is showing his servant must have provoked it. Thus, at the beginning of verse 20, the prophet refers to disasters that are announced as coming very soon on the nation. In the same way, Brevard S. Childs notices that the description of the enemy in these passages indicates "a dependence upon an older tradition which has been used to portray a contemporary enemy."⁴ If this reading is right, I will then argue that it becomes necessary to connect this piece of poem with a specific military event shortly before the time of its production. The first Babylonian invasion in 598-7 BC that led to the first deportation may fit well into the context of this passage.

According to 2 Kings and 2 Chronicles, Jehoiakin (Jehoiakim's eighteen-year-old son) was placed on the throne in late 598 BC (2 Kings 24:8-16; 2 Chron.36: 9-10) for only three months. In March 597 BC, Jehoiakin, the queen mother, the princes, and ten thousand leading citizens, smiths, and craftsmen were taken along with servants and booty into captivity to Babylon. All these took place only nine years before the final fall of Jerusalem in July 586. If we put together the two military events that marked the end of Israel as a nation, we can then understand the meaning of

⁴ Brevard S. Childs, "The Enemy from the North," in Leo G. Perdue and Brian W. Kovacs, *In A Prophet to the Nations*, 56.

verse 20 that speaks of the disaster coming upon disaster until the whole land is devastated.

Structure

The passage has two parts: a unit in the confessional style depicting Jeremiah's agony because of Judah's near future judgment (vv.19-21); and an oracle stating the reason for the judgment (v.22). The analysis below will follow this division, but the passage as a whole will be interpreted in the context of the foe from the North unit.

Interpretation

Jeremiah's Agony (4:19-21)

Holladay has noticed that the entire speech of Jeremiah in these three verses maintains a high pitch of emotion.⁵ The opening words, "a double exclamation, *מעי מעי* (my innards! My innards!)", attest the depth of the emotions that grip the prophet."⁶ Commentators differ on the meaning of the first two lines in verse 19. For Holladay⁷ but also Craigie, Kelly and Drinkard,⁸ the prophet's pain is both psychological and physical. In fact the latter think of Jeremiah in this

⁵ Holladay, *Jeremiah 1-25*, 160.

⁶ Timothy Polk, *The Prophetic Persona: Jeremiah and the Language of the Self*. JSOT Supplement 32 (Sheffield: Sheffield University Press, 1984), 53.

⁷ Holladay, *Jeremiah 1-25*, 160.

⁸ Craigie, Kelly and Drinkard, *Jeremiah 1-25*, 79.

passage as a person who is sick to the stomach, an unstable cardiac patient, whose heart flutters and palpitates, creating what seems to be a voice that he cannot control.⁹ A. R. Diamond, on the contrary, thinks that Jeremiah's language here is used to emphasize the disturbing and distressful nature of the message rather than to provide a personal emotional transcript of the prophet.¹⁰ But William McKane quotes Kimchi who understands the language here as a metaphor, and therefore, not signifying that the prophet is complaining about severe pains in his bowels.¹¹ McKane himself observes that,

the significance of the appearance of *לֵב* is that the pit of the stomach is believed to be the seat of the most intense emotions, and there may be an empirical foundation for this, namely, that this is where there are physical repercussions when one is subject to severe emotional stress.¹²

In the Old Testament, there is a linguistic convention or a language game for emotional behavior in which *לֵב* "innards" is used. There are examples in which the emotions that are associated with *לֵב* or *לֵב* are both grief (Job 30.27; Isa. 16.11; Jer. 48.36; Lam. 1.20-21), delight (Ps. 40.8f.), and compassion (Isa. 63.15; Jer. 31.20). Thus, McKane is right to reject Jeremiah's lament as coming from the one who is sick to the stomach (*contra* Holladay and Craigie et al.). However, Diamond's understanding of the passage must also be rejected since he does not recognize any relationship

⁹ Craigie, Kelley and Drinkard, *Jeremiah 1-25*, 79.

¹⁰ A. R. Diamond, *The Confessions of Jeremiah in Context. Scenes of Prophetic Drama* (Sheffield: Sheffield University Press, 1987), 119.

¹¹ McKane, *Jeremiah 1-25*, 102.

¹² McKane, *Jeremiah 1-25*, 102.

between the prophet's emotional involvement and the kind of message he is delivering. The fact is that Jeremiah is not sick but his heart is crying in distress; in other words, his heart is groaning because he is anxious, unsettled and frightened.

Jeremiah's emotional state is well summarized in the sentence *לֹא אֶחְרִישׁ* "I cannot keep silence". This sentence indicates three things: (1) a loss of inner quietness and stability in the prophet¹³ (2) a compelling emotion that cannot be contained and, therefore, must find expression; (3) a transition from an exclamation to syntax, from immediacy of bursts of feeling to a coherent sentence construction and a rational discourse.¹⁴ In short, the prophet finds himself in a very dire situation: as the servant of YHWH, he must warn his people of the coming judgment; at the same time, he strongly feels the pain of his decaying nation, and knows that the brutal end of his beloved country has come, though the people and their leaders are trying to ignore it. These people and their leaders were living in a kind of denial of reality, self-deception and wishful thinking, ignoring that the nation has reached the very end of its existence. Whether the prophet is actually hearing the sound of war (v.19b) or just imagining it, he must end up expressing it, because it is very painful for him. This is probably the sense of the prophet's exclamation that he cannot keep silence.

Moreover, instead of engaging in a kind of confrontation, the prophet is here groaning over the fate of his nation; he is mourning the funeral of his numb people. As Brueggemann puts it: "he (Jeremiah) takes his listeners

¹³ McKane, *Jeremiah 1-25*, 103.

¹⁴ McKane, *Jeremiah 1-25*, 103.

inside his very own person as an attempt to pierce their numbed indifference. He dares to suggest that his wild anxiety is more real than their cynical self-confidence."¹⁵

Jeremiah's way of speaking to the community through grieving and lamenting might not work well in most societies today. In our modern society, people do not like those who keep on lamenting, grieving and complaining. When someone cries, others will either mock him and think that he is a "woman" because men (like Jeremiah) do not cry, or they will mistake him for a fool. Moreover, some of us do not even have time to take heed of somebody crying at the corner of the highway. We are in a hurry; we do not care because each one has his/her own agenda. But it probably was not so in Jeremiah's traditional society where people were sensitive to emotional feelings of others. Unfortunately, for the case of Jeremiah, though people listened to him, they did not

¹⁵ Walter, Brueggemann, *A Commentary on Jeremiah: Exile & Homecoming* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1998), 58. In another book (*Theology of the Old Testament: Testimony, Dispute, Advocacy* [Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997], 625), Brueggemann points out that despite the fact that the prophets are characteristically immersed in public crises, they are not primarily political agents in any direct sense and they rarely urge specific policy. He also adds that prophets are first of all utterers, and that they speak most often with all of the elusiveness and imaginative power of poetry. They use images and metaphors that aim to disrupt, destabilize, and invite to alternative perception of reality. His conclusion is that the poetic idiom and the elusive quality of imagination together constitute a strategy among the prophets for taking the listening community outside of administered ideology, which is most often identified with royal policy and royal imagination. While this argument needs to be discussed in the light of the ministry of each prophet (for example, I doubt if this will be true for Amos), I agree that it fits well the passage of my investigation, in that the prophet has chosen not to confront anybody but to lament for the situation of his nation and to show his contemporaries the reason of his lamentation.

understand his terrifying message. So, the prophet was treated like a "doomsday spokesman or a pitiful man who had a grudge and sat around crying...."¹⁶

In the context of my country, I see the groaning prophet as representing two kinds of people. On the one hand, he represents the man of God who sees the danger to come on the nation and who tries to bring the grief of his dying country to public expression while trying at the same time to create an alternative consciousness in the citizens. The creation of this alternative consciousness is particularly important in two situations: when the politics of a nation create or tolerate a culture of oppression, corruption and injustice; and when a king or a president tries to create a kind of fulfilled eschatology in the mind of the citizens. What I am calling a fulfilled eschatology is the fact that a president or a king creates a system that makes people think that their president/king is the answer to all their problems, that he/she has become their "father"¹⁷, and that people should not have hope in any other better future than in his/her government, or that people should not criticize whatever the government is

¹⁶ Walter Brueggemann, *The Prophetic Imagination* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1978), 51. It is amazing to realize that in Jer. 29:26, the prophet Jeremiah is actually referred to as "a madman" who sets up as a prophet.

¹⁷ In DR Congo (then Zaire), Mobutu was actually referred to as "our father," "the father of the nation," "the one who will reign eternally." Some of the many songs to praise him and his deeds were to start with some words like: "Mobutu libela." This Lingala sentence means that Mobutu will reign eternally. Some other songs stated: "Topesaki cinq ans na Mobutu, tobakisi sept ans, ponakosukisa, cent ans." In English, it means: "We gave Mobutu five years, we added to him seven years and we finally decided to give him a hundred years to rule over us."

doing.¹⁸ In the same way, I see Jeremiah's ministry, particularly in this section, as being against the royal ideology of the day, a deceptively constructed world that the administration of Judah has managed to set up. In other words, the prophet is calling the people to reason, and to get rid of the dominant but wrong ideology that has taken people far from God's law and that is now bringing judgment against them.

In DR Congo, there were several examples of such an attempt to create an alternative consciousness, especially during the reign of the late Mobutu whose dictatorship was maybe one of the worst in Africa since independence. Several years after his death, people are still suffering from its consequences, and it will take a long time before the nation recovers from it. In the late eighties, Congolese people started looking for the ways to get rid of the dictator and his regime. On the political side, Etienne Tshisekedi, one of the strongest opposition leaders became known as the Congolese Moses, the one who would deliver the oppressed people from the oppressive power of the new Pharaoh. His speeches and political actions against Mobutist ideology of those days remind of the confrontation between Pharaoh and Moses. Tshisekedi strongly stood against the corrupted and deceptively constructed world of Mobutu and the system that he created.

On the religious side, the best example I know is about a Catholic priest, José Mpundu, who started a small group for reflection and action against the dictator and the total corruption that had ruined the country. The group was named "Groupe Amos" (Amos group), after the name of one of the

¹⁸ Rom. 13:1-7, which teaches that all human authority comes from God, is often quoted by some of these leaders to justify their lust for power.

prophets of Israel who stood profoundly against the corruption in their country.

The conviction of *Groupe Amos* was that "the dynamic of the exodus as concrete spiritual experience of liberation would open for the church an horizon for permanent call, profound education, and solid formation of the people in the light of the recommendation of the Gospel."¹⁹ The group set the following goals for reflection and action:

- (1) To become a group of constant analysis of the evolution of political and social situations in the country.
- (2) To protest against the evil system that has turned the country into an abominable chaos.
- (3) To serve as a school of education for democracy and human right in a society where the dictator and the system that he has constructed undermine the value of human life.
- (4) To serve as a dynamic initiation of the political, economic, social and cultural reading of the word of God in a context where only men and women trained to use their faith in public and real life situation of their nation can enforce true change.

Groupe Amos organized seminars, published pamphlets that common people could afford and read, organized public debates and initiated concrete actions and resistance against the regime.²⁰

Like Jeremiah in Judah, Tshisekedi and *Groupe Amos* were among the many who helped the Congolese people to start realizing that Mobutu's regime (built on the pyramid of money and violence) could be criticized and fought against.

¹⁹ Kä Mana, *Christ d'Afrique. Enjeux Ethiques de la Foi Africaine en Jesus-Christ* (Paris: Karthala, 1994), 39.

²⁰ For details on "Groupe Amos," See Kä Mana, *Christ d'Afrique*, 39-40.

On the other hand, the same groaning prophet can represent a class of good and responsible citizens who are badly affected by the destruction of their nation and who are suffering the consequences of their decaying country. Kā Mana²¹ gives several examples of how a decaying country can destroy its own citizens. One of these cases is of particular importance for this thesis since it concerns my country. It is about professor François Nkombe Oleko of the Catholic University in Kinshasa.

Kā Mana describes professor N. Oleko as an eminent teacher, greatly appreciated by his students and the Congolese learned community. Above all, there was in the young professor a kind of quiet, reasonable and beaming faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. His struggle for the relevance of the Gospel in the reconstruction of Africa was both genuine and impressing. But only after two years of a brilliant teaching career, Oleko plunged into a strange spirituality with visions, direct revelations from God, and a kind of spiritual power enabling him to compose songs and psalms under direct inspiration of angels. All of a sudden his intellectual capacity greatly weakened.

There were all kinds of speculations on the possible causes of the situation. For some people, Oleko's situation was due to a parody of spirituality and a desire to become a prophet for material gains in a society torn apart by dire crisis. For others, it was a state of folly provoked by the impossibility of a marriage between the professor and his sister-in-law that he dearly loved. For some others, it was a manifestation of pure madness.

However, it seems that the reasons are to be found in the severe socio-economic and political crisis in which professor Oleko found himself in his country, a situation

²¹ Kā Mana, *Christ d'Afrique*, 153-58.

for which he was not able to find a solution despite his patriotism, his great effort and sacrifice. This is the situation of someone who, after his studies in the West, comes back excited to serve his country and determined to help his people, but who finally realizes that it is not possible, and consequently becomes the victim of that same situation.

There are hundreds of cases similar to Oleko's in my country. Many scholars and other eminent people have left the country. Those who were not able to do so have ended up in many ways: some in fetishism and abandonment of Christian faith, others in creating prophetic churches with the hope to gain some material advantages, others in drunkenness, and many others forms of revolt. My argument is that socially, Jeremiah himself could be considered as a citizen living in such revolt against his people and against the government. This is why we call him a groaning prophet. This form of revolt can clearly be found in what is known as the confessions or laments of Jeremiah.

Most of us living in a country like DR Congo and many other torn apart African nations do understand this kind of prophetic message and lamentation. Many a time we do cry for our nations, whether in groaning like Jeremiah or in a word of prayer. Sometimes, our prayers actually express hopelessness (even revolt)²² as it seems to be the case with the man of Anathot. The least we can say with Jeremiah is that it is extremely difficult to continue living in a decaying country, where one knows that the future will be worse than the present. In such a situation, the general tendency is to seek refuge in other nations around. But Jeremiah was a hero, someone who accepted to suffer for and

²² Revolt against God who seems not to hear us and intervene.

with his people as long as this was possible. Moreover, Jeremiah did not suffer simply for the sake of becoming a hero; he had a mission: to announce God's will to his indifferent contemporaries until the very last minute of the existence of his country. This again is, to my understanding, another clear model for prophetic ministry of the Church in my country and in many other African countries: not to forget her mission, not to attempt to escape when going gets tough, not to succumb to denial or cynicism, not even to quickly blend into the color of the regime of the nation in which she finds herself.

Unfortunately, according to Philippe Kabongo-Mbaya,²³ the Protestant Church in Congo did develop a politic of complicity and collaboration with Mobutu's regime, as we shall see in this thesis. Political conformism has not only transformed the Congolese Protestant Church into a resonance of Mobutist ideology, but it has also made her a place of its religious application, especially in the area of power and institutional structures. The dominant Christological model followed in that Church (until this day for most of them) became that of Jesus as an almighty chief in the image of the dictator Mobutu himself. Church leaders swiftly adopted that model, not with the concern for efficiency in the ministry but in order to become themselves powerful and unchallenged leaders (exactly what Mobutu was doing in the political arena).

In this way, the Congolese Protestant Church knowingly or unknowingly gave support to Mobutu's political system. In his turn, Mobutu also supported this Church against the Roman Catholic Church whose leader, the late Cardinal Joseph Malula, was in open conflict with his regime. One

²³ Quoted by Kā Mana, *Christ d'Afrique*, 143-46.

understands why the Protestant Church in Congo, though spiritually active, became politically lethargic, culturally insignificant and unable to groan for the decay of the nation like Jeremiah, and also unable to create an alternative consciousness when the country was undergoing severe destruction.

The last two lines in verse 19 and the whole of verse 20 reveal the cause of the prophet's groaning:

*19b For I have heard the sound of the trumpet,
my soul the alarm of war.*

*20. Disaster upon disaster is announced
The whole land is devastated
Suddenly my tents are devastated
In a moment my curtains!*

I have already argued that the cause of the prophet's suffering has to do with the coming disaster on the nation. This idea becomes clear in verses 19b-20. The sentence "sound (קול) of the trumpet, blast (תרועת) of battle" describes the "intense shouting of combatants augmented by the blowing of trumpets."²⁴ Verse 20 builds upon verse 19 and describes the effect of the war to come. Jeremiah presents it as cruel and devastating. The prophet chooses very well his words, and with intensity, shows what is going to happen soon: disaster upon disaster (שבר עלישבר). This expression might mean that the coming war will be cyclic with terrible effects: starvation, diseases, killings, deportation/refuge, humiliation, destruction and all kinds of sufferings (both physical, psychological, moral and spiritual).

How much the prophet wishes his people could have realized that there is a terrible danger coming ahead? But they cannot and the prophet takes their place, suffers for

²⁴ Holladay, *Jeremiah 1-25*, 161

them in a kind of prophetic substitution. In this way, the prophet found himself isolated and swallowed up by both anger, fear and despair. Anger because his people cannot understand anything about their own situation and the disaster to come; fear because more than any other person in Judah he could see the mighty enemy approaching. Finally, the prophet is desperate because the people of Judah and their leaders are not willing to listen to his/God's voice. On the contrary, they are deceiving themselves by thinking that they will be able to make peace and survive by their own effort, without following God's instruction. In fact, the text does not show any hope of repentance. Every hope is now gone away and the tragedy, which is actually YHWH's judgment, is unavoidable and the prophet can already hear it coming. For the prophet, this is what Thompson calls a state of emotional shock.²⁵ In this respect the prophet's suffering is a suffering with God, the prophet's anger is YHWH's anger, and the prophet's knowledge of YHWH means a sharing of God's emotions and sufferings for the wicked but beloved people of Judah.

It is interesting to realize how much Jeremiah loves his country; we hear him speak about "my tents", and "my curtains". It might be wrong, to my understanding, to think as H. G. Reventlow, that here Jeremiah as a mediator represents the people in their lament before God and consequently becomes a virtual opponent of God for the people.²⁶ Nothing in this passage shows that Jeremiah is against God. The prophet knows that YHWH is in his right to punish the wicked people. He consequently knows well what is going to happen to his beloved nation and he laments both

²⁵ Thompson, *Jeremiah*, 228.

²⁶ H. G. Reventlow, *Liturgie und Prophetisches Ich bei Jeremiah* (Guterlsoh: Mohn, 1963), 200.

for the country, for his people, and for himself. This in fact explains his grief and cry in verse 21. The prophet is wondering how much longer (יָדָנִי-מָוֶת) he could stand the emotional strain of it all, witnessing the standard of the enemy raised high and hearing the sound of the trumpets blasts.²⁷

The prophetic grief and cry in this passage speak powerfully to my situation as a Congolese minister. Many a time, we dissociate the general politics of our nation from our ministry and think that our call is to serve God in the Church, and not to fight for political issues. We do well in this way by caring for the soul, but this care keeps us too busy, too sure that we are doing the right thing and too invested, so that we forget grieving for the direction the whole nation is taking or has already taken. To my understanding, this is mostly due to the kind of education we receive in our Bible/theological schools, and in the context in which we are nurtured as new believers. In fact some years back, in most of our denominations, Church leaders would not agree with a pastor who preached on political issues. Jeremiah is showing us that we must deeply grieve for national matters and speak out. It is interesting to realize that though Jeremiah's life demonstrates intense

²⁷ Thompson, *Jeremiah*, 228. He quotes McKane (*Jeremiah* 1-25, 105) who seems to understand this passage as indicating military organization on the side of Israel to fight the advancing enemy. For him, that kind of organization is empty gestures and noises and an aggravation of the prophet's agony, since the prophet knows that it is all in vain. I understand the passage as describing the advance of victorious and ferocious enemy against Israelites, and not the opposite. The reason is that in the prophet's groaning, there is a sense of fear of a coming danger. Moreover, the fact of lamenting for his tents and curtains demonstrates that the attack is against Jerusalem and not the other way round.

times of combative prayers as we read in the confessions, he was also a man who could deeply grieve for his nation, openly address public opinion and confront political leaders. Conformism as in the Congolese Protestant Church had simply no place in his ministry. Jeremiah's view of the ministry was probably a result of his grief for both religious and socio-political matters of his nation. As with Group Amos, the man of Anathoth was a person who used his faith in public and real life situations of his nation. To my view, this is one of the areas that need to be revised and reformed in the curriculum of our theological institutions.

The Reason for the Judgment (4:22)

*How foolish my people are!
They know me not.
Stupid children are they
And void of understanding.
They are wise in doing evil,
But of doing good they know nothing.*

Several things need to be observed before starting the interpretation of this passage. The first one is the change of the speaker. It is no longer the prophet who is speaking, but YHWH. Second, there is a change in the mood. In verses 19-21, the prophet was complaining but in verse 22, YHWH is speaking as a schoolmaster. Third, the vocabulary used in verse 22 is very much informed by Israel's wisdom literature. Thus, אִוִּיל (foolish) appears nineteen times in Proverbs and two times in Job; סָכַל (stupid) appears in Jer. 5:21, and six times in Ecclesiastes; the niphal participle נִבְוִיִּם (be discerning) of the verb בִּין appears nine times in Proverbs and once in Ecclesiastes. For an alert reader, this first glance of verse 22 can anticipate what the problem in

Judah was and what YHWH found lacking in his people. In other words, Judah's problem had to do with wisdom.

Verse 22 continues with the same idea found in verses 19-21, that the problem of Judah was national and that the judgment to come would also be national. But now the prophet gives reasons for this judgment. The particle ׀ connects the two sections and introduces the idea of verse 22 that the accusation is against the whole people (עמי: my people), and that the punishment must also affect the whole nation.²⁸ The Septuagint gives a restrictive version of this passage. For it, those being accused are only the leaders (οἱ ἡγούμενοι) not the whole people. This certainly comes from the fact that instead of reading the adjective אׁיל (stupid, fool), the Septuagint has confused it with the plural construct of אׁיל, "a ram." But the general context of this passage, which is about a collective accusation of the people, indicates that the adjective אׁיל is the correct word. Moreover, the substantive אׁיל is found only once in Jeremiah (51:40) and it is used to designate animals. The general term used by Jeremiah to designate human leaders is רעים (Jer. 3:15; 23:2,4).

Moreover, the people who are being accused are also called "my" people (עמי) and "my" children (בני) by God (see also Hos. 11:1-6). The use of the possessive "my" with these two nouns is significant because it recalls the election of Israelites and underlines God's love for them as a people. In other words, the Israelites belong to YHWH who is their father. This love, expressed by the possessive "me" or "my", can be seen everywhere in the book of Jeremiah (1:16; 2:13,

²⁸ I prefer the translation "For my people are foolish," instead of "well, my people are foolish" (see Holladay, *Jeremiah 1-25*, 143). My understanding is that the ׀ introduces the cause; consequently it is more accurate to render it by "for" or "because" than by "well."

6:14; 7:12; 12:1, 16; 18:15; 23:2, 22, 27, 32; 30:3; 33:24; 50:6;). This way of talking on the part of the Lord underlines a very difficult task for him in dealing with Judah. In other words, God dearly loves his people who are also his children, but the very children he cherishes do not know him (אוֹתִי לֹא יָדְעוּ), consequently he must punish them. The beloved children of Judah are said to have become אוֹיְלִים, סֹכְלִים, and לֹא בִינִים. The use of each of these words is important for this thesis and must be studied in detail.

Firstly, the people of Judah are accused of being אוֹיְלִים, i.e., stupid. In the Old Testament, the adjective אוֹיְלִים often stands in antithesis to חָכָם, wise (Prov. 10.8, 14; 11.29; 12.15; 14.3; 17.28; 29.9). The אוֹיְלִים is someone who is not receptive to advice (Prov 11.29; 12.15), and it is folly and useless to instruct him. He is also someone who speaks the wrong things or at the wrong time and gets himself into trouble (Prov. 14.3; 17.28). He is quarrelsome and licentious. McKane emphasizes not only the fact that אוֹיְלִים is opposed to חָכָם, but also that true חָכָם expresses itself in practical competence that the stupid man lacks. Thus, such wisdom is above the grasp of the fool because "he is not amendable to educational discipline and does not attain the maturity of character and nicety of judgment which lend weight to public utterance."²⁹ Chou-Wee Pan concludes by stating that the אוֹיְלִים will never be made a leader or become a decision-maker in the community.³⁰

Secondly, the same people are סֹכְלִים. When used as an adjective or a noun, the word סֹכְלִים equates folly. It is

²⁹ McKane, *Jeremiah 1-25*, 189.

³⁰ Chou-Wee Pan, 'אוֹיְלִים' in *NIDOTTE*, 1:307.

normally used in a moral or spiritual sense and indicates incapacity for doing good."³¹

Thirdly, they are said to be לֹא בִינִים (void of understanding). The verb בִּין is frequently used to convey the idea of giving attention to God's deeds.³² It is also connected with terms meaning "to hear" and "to see," and in such instances it obviously denotes the act of perceiving³³ what is right and just and fair (Prov. 2:9), wisdom (Prov. 10:23), patience (Prov. 14:29), keeping the law (Prov. 28:7), and shunning evil (Job 28:28).³⁴

In this verse, Jeremiah uses the verb יָדַע twice (both in negative form), once with YHWH as its object and once with "doing good" as the object. It is difficult to decide which of the two actions depends on the other. But it seems that they are synonymous, one depending on the other. Thus, in this passage, to know YHWH does not mean to know his name or who he is, but to know what he wants. What he wants is to do good. Thus, to know YHWH is to know how to do good. The expression "doing good" (טוֹב) is here used in a general sense, without any clear indication of what it really means. But this is our problem as modern readers and not the problem of the original audience, who could have known very well what YHWH was requiring of them and what the prophet was speaking about. From my Congolese perspective, it is clear that the problem of Judah as a society was the lack of wisdom in understanding the prophetic teaching in general

³¹ G. Fleischer, טַל, in *TDOTT*, 10:257.

³² Ringgren, "בִּין," in *TDOTT*, 2: 100 (See also Deut 32:7; Ps 107:43; Jer 2:10).

³³ Ringgren, "בִּין," in *TDOTT*, 2: 100

³⁴ Terence E. Fretheim, "בִּין," in *TDOTT*, 1: 653

and applying it to the socio-economic, political and religious context of the nation.

Moreover, the use of two contrasting words עָלַם "to do evil" (in hiphil) and טוֹב "to do good" (also in hiphil) in verse 22 can help us understand what not to know YHWH means. In Lev. 5:4, this couple is used with reference to the consequence of a vow. But in other prophetic books of the Old Testament, and with clear reference to social justice, the pairing טוֹב and עָלַם is found in Isa. 1:16-17:

Wash and make yourself clean.
Take your evil deeds out of my sight!
Stop **doing wrong**, learn to **do good**!
Seek justice, encourage the oppressed.
Defend the cause of the fatherless,
Plead the cause of the widow.

We have the same exhortation in Amos 5:14-15 with the pairing טוֹב and עָלַם used here as substantives:

Seek **good**, not **evil**,
That you may live.
Then YHWH the Almighty will be with you,
Just as you say he is.
Hate **evil**, love **good**;
Maintain justice in the courts.
Perhaps YHWH the Almighty will have mercy
On the remnant of Joseph.

From these two prophetic passages in which the pairing טוֹב and עָלַם is clearly used in the context of social justice, I can argue that it is possible that in 4:22, Jeremiah had in mind the issue of social justice in Judah. If this is right, which I think it is, I will then argue that it is the perversion of this social justice that the prophet is considering as the manifestation of the lack of the knowledge of YHWH. Put differently, our intertextual reading

shows that to do good and to hate evil in Jer. 4:22 is to do justice in the society in terms of encouraging the oppressed, defending the cause of the fatherless, pleading the cause of the widow, and maintaining justice in the courts. To practice this kind of justice is a manifestation of the knowledge of YHWH. Therefore, it is this lack of the knowledge of God that is bringing judgment on Judah, judgment for which Jeremiah is lamenting in verses 19-21.

Total Moral Depravity in Jerusalem (5:1-6)

Translation

1. *Go up and down through the streets of Jerusalem,
Look around and observe carefully!
Search her public places
if you can find a man,
anyone who acts justly,
who strives to be honest,
so that I may forgive her.*
2. *Though they say "As the Lord lives,"
they are surely swearing falsely.*
3. *Your eyes, O YHWH,
do they not look for honesty?
You struck them down,
but they were not weakened;
you took them to the limits,
(but) they refused to accept correction.
They made their faces harder than rock;
they refused to repent.*
4. *Then I thought: these are only the poor,
they act foolishly;
for they do not know the way of YHWH,
the manners of their God.*
5. *Let me go to the noblemen,
and speak to them,
for they know the way of YHWH,
the manners of their God.
But they (too) have broken the yoke,
they have burst the bonds.*
6. *Therefore, a lion from the forest will smite them,*

a wolf from the desert will destroy them;
a leopard keeps watch over their cities,
every one who goes out shall be torn in pieces,
because their rebellious deeds are many,
their backslidings are numerous.

Historical and Literary Contexts

This text, like 4:19-22, belongs to "the foe from the North" unit (4:5--6:30), especially the section concerning judgment against Judah because of its wickedness. According to Laurent Wisser, the section is accepted by the majority of scholars as authentically Jeremianic.³⁵

Thompson thinks that it is not easy to date the material of chapter 5.³⁶ With much hesitation, he proposes the early Jehoiakim's reign or the end of Josiah's as the probable date. But he concludes that there are no strong grounds for proposing any date. However, Holladay³⁷ is less hesitant and argues convincingly that the period between 605-601, most probably the autumn of 601 fits well the context of this text. He supports his argument with two specific textual elements: (1) the passage hints at YHWH's law (the path of YHWH, the justice of God), material appropriate to a season in which the Deuteronomic law was recited (one of those seasons being 601); (2) the phraseology of verse 5 that can well be applicable to the time when Baruch read the contents of Jeremiah's first

³⁵ Laurent Wisser, *Jérémie, Critique de la Vie Sociale: La Connaissance de Dieu et la Justice Sociale dans le Livre de Jérémie* (Geneva: Labor et Fides, 1984), 31-32. But Thompson (*Jeremiah*, 234) is among the few who suspect the unit as an editorial intrusion.

³⁶ Thompson, *Jeremiah*, 234. So also Craigie, Kelly and Drinkard, *Jeremiah 1-25*, 87.

³⁷ Holladay, *Jeremiah 1-25*, 176.

scroll to the courtiers and then to the king (36:10-26). Finally, another argument that favors the date of the passage at the end of Josiah's reign is its emphasis on social and personal morality rather than idolatry. This might suggest the period post josianic-reformation, "after the cult centers had been destroyed and the grosser elements of Baal-worship had been eliminated."³⁸ In the same way, Bright thinks that מוֹסֵר (to chastise) in verse 3b might be an allusion to the death of the king Josiah during his campaign against Pharaoh Neco in 609. This discussion suggests that the consensus of scholars points at the very end of Josiah's reign or the beginning of Jehoiakim's as the probable date of this passage. The view held in the interpretation of this passage is that the oracle must have been uttered during Jehioakim's reign (not at the end of Josiah's).

Structure

John Bright, Thompson,³⁹ Holladay,⁴⁰ and Craigie, Kelly and Drinkard⁴¹ consider 5:1-9 as making up the unit, whereas Mckane,⁴² Wisser,⁴³ and Carroll⁴⁴ think that the unit in this

³⁸ Thompson, *Jeremiah*, 235.

³⁹ Thompson, *Jeremiah*, 233-41.

⁴⁰ Holladay, *Jeremiah 1-25*, 174.

⁴¹ Craigie, Kelly and Drinkard, *Jeremiah 1-25*, 85-88.

⁴² Mckane, *Jeremiah 1-25*, 114.

⁴³ Wisser, *Jeremie, Critique de la Vie sociale*, 31-33.

⁴⁴ Carroll, *Jeremiah*, 174. He quotes Duhm, Giesebrecht, Rudolph and Weiser as among those who take 5:1-6 as a unit.

passage is constituted of 5:1-6. Those who consider verses 1-9 as constituting a unit perceive the passage as a dialogue between YHWH and Jeremiah. This dialogue breaks into three sections according to the speaker. YHWH speaks in verses 1, 7 and 9; Jeremiah intervenes in verses 2-5,⁴⁵ and YHWH concludes in verse 9. However, according to Holladay, verse 6 is without immediate clues, though Bright states that it could be assigned to either speaker.

For McKane and those who think that the unit is formed by verses 1-6, there is no dialogue as such between YHWH and Jeremiah. In fact the verbs in verse 1 are all in second person plural (imperative),⁴⁶ and this indicates that YHWH is speaking to more than one person. Thus, the passage can be sub-divided into two units: verses 1, 2, 6 as the word of YHWH and verses 3-5 as the word spoken by the prophet. In other words, in verses 1-2, YHWH concludes that there are no possible grounds for sparing Jerusalem and the threatening word follows in verse 6, whereas Jeremiah intervenes in verses 3-5 to reflect on Jerusalem's wickedness.

My conclusion is that textual delimitation is indeed difficult for this particular section of chapter 5 in Jeremiah. But as it can be seen in the portion of the text I have translated, I agree with those who see the unit as constituted by verses 1-6. My argument is that in verse 7, YHWH is speaking to a new interlocutor, i.e., Jerusalem, and that verses 7-9 constitute another unit in which Jerusalem

⁴⁵ Bright is hesitant about the portion to be assigned to the prophet, he thinks that Jeremiah's contribution is verses 2-5 or 3-5 or 3-6.

⁴⁶ McKane, *Jeremiah 1-25*, 114. He argues that "the supposition that there is a dialogue is an attempt to deal with structural difficulties, but it is a solution of dubious value."

is addressed (by YHWH) as a mother and is being shown how wicked her children have become.

Interpretation

A Search for One Righteous Person in Jerusalem (5:1)

The first verse opens with a command to search through the streets of Jerusalem for one righteous person. Three elementary questions will help us to analyze the passage: Who speaks? To whom does the person speak? And what kind of person is the speaker looking for?

The last sentence at the end of verse 1 that says, "so that I may forgive her," shows that YHWH is the one speaking here. In fact, the Septuagint adds the sentence: "λέγει κύριος" (thus says the Lord or the word/oracle of YHWH) at the end of verse 1. But in the following paragraphs we will come back to this question and show how YHWH does speak in the passage.

The question "to whom is YHWH speaking" is difficult and there is no agreement about it among the students of Jeremiah. Hyatt, Craigie, Kelly and Drinkard argue that the command is addressed to Jeremiah; Thompson writes that it is to the people of the city, Carroll thinks about the heavenly assembly or the divine council,⁴⁷ McKane says that the command is addressed to the outsiders who have been urging YHWH to have mercy on Jerusalem in the manner of Gen 18:23-33. In His response, YHWH advises them to go into the city and see things at first hand.⁴⁸

⁴⁷ See this discussion in Carroll, *Jeremiah*, 175.

⁴⁸ McKane, *Jeremiah 1-25*, 115.

McKane's argument echoes Jer. 22: 8-9 which states that "many nations will pass by this city, and each one will say to his/her neighbor: 'why has the Lord done this to this great city?'" (i.e., to Jerusalem, after her destruction). Though the two contexts are different, they remind us that even outsiders do take note of what is happening in the house of the Lord, so to speak. In other words, the nations can aptly recognize the hand of the Lord in dealing with his people. But as I have already stated, the contexts of the two texts are different and I would not agree with McKane that the people to whom YHWH is speaking are outsiders. One thing we need to acknowledge here is that the text is poetry and it can speak in images or symbols.

To continue with this same thought, I would not even accept that there was no single righteous person in the city, as the text seems to suggest, because Jeremiah himself, as the servant of YHWH, must have been a righteous man. I am convinced that some other good people like Baruch stood with him. Moreover, to think that outsiders are the ones who were commanded by YHWH to go inside Jerusalem (this is McKane's position) is simply to force this text.

This takes me back to the first question before I continue with the second. It seems that in this passage, Jeremiah is the one speaking, but he is speaking the word of YHWH. In other words, the word of the prophet in this passage is actually the word of YHWH. In fact, sometimes it becomes difficult to set a clear limit between the speech of YHWH and that of the prophet. But this should not be a problem because the prophet is sent not to speak his own word but that of YHWH.⁴⁹ This probably justifies the reason

⁴⁹ Jer. 1: 9 can be a good explanation of what is going on in this passage. It starts as follows: "Then the Lord touched my mouth and said, 'See, I have put my words in your mouth.'" The putting of YHWH's word in the prophet's mouth

for the addition of the sentence "λέγει κύριος" in the Septuagint. Therefore, it is possible that verse 1 is YHWH's word pronounced by the prophet, in direct speech to a group of people from Judah and not from outside (*contra* McKane), who came to inquire on the real reason of YHWH's decision to destroy the city. To put it differently, it might be that the prophet has been persistently announcing the judgment of Jerusalem. Then some few people (maybe some few righteous)⁵⁰ came asking to the prophet the exact reason for divine judgment. Then, YHWH recommends the prophet to send them through the streets and at the public places to observe for themselves what was going on.

can mean two things: either the prophet speaks in direct speech and adds the messenger formula at the end of the speech ("Thus says YHWH") or he speaks referring to YHWH in the third person. In fact, in his study on Jeremiah, Claus Westermann (*Basic Forms of Prophetic Speech* [Cambridge: The Lutterworth Press, 1991], 48-49) notes that "it is not possible to distinguish between the true words of Yahweh and the prophet's words simply on the basis of the fact that they are introduced by the messenger formula. Rather, according to Wildberger, the evidence shows that the messenger formula is found in 67 of the 107 genuine speeches of Yahweh and is missing in 40 of these speeches. It is found before 67 genuine words of Yahweh and 14 that are not genuine. In 26 it is used incorrectly. This is by no means an unambiguous situation, but rather, quite a confused one."

⁵⁰ McKane (*Jeremiah 1-25*, 115) is of different point of view. For him, it is not possible that YHWH might have been speaking to the people of Jerusalem. His argument is that if YHWH is speaking to the people of Jerusalem in verse 1, we have to assume that those who live in Jerusalem are capable of observing and acknowledging the truth about themselves and their city. From his argument, this is not possible. But it seems to me that people could have reacted from Jeremiah's persistent preaching on the judgment against the city. If this is possible, what I think it is, then we can assume that some among these people could have gone to see the prophet and ask him the question to which YHWH, through Jeremiah, is responding in 5:1.

Before answering the last question, I need to reflect on one more issue directly related to the one I have just discussed. Why did YHWH, through his prophet, send people to search in some specific places like streets (חוצות) of Jerusalem and marketplaces (רובות)? Is this choice a simple coincidence, did YHWH do it arbitrary? My argument is that the Lord chose these places purposefully.

The word רוב refers to a broad open place in a city or village. In ancient time, it was an essential part of a city (Deut. 13:16; Dan. 9:25), usually near a city gate (2 Chron. 32:6; Neh. 8:1,3,6) and interconnected with its streets (Jer. 5:1). It was used for various public and private purposes such as: public assemblies (2 Chron 29:4; 32:6; Ezra 10:9); public proclamations; public speeches (Prov 1:20); public lamentations (Esther 4:6; Ps. 144:14); social life (Prov. 5:16; Zech. 8:4,5); public encampment where travelers could lodge (Gen. 19:2; Judg. 19:15,17,20); public hanging of enemies and criminals (2 Sam. 21:12); public inquiry (Jer. 5:1); public celebration of the Feast of Tabernacles (Neh. 8:16); public service by important individuals (Job 29:7); and figuratively of a place representative of public opinion (Ps. 55:11; Isa. 59:14).⁵¹ חוצות is the plural feminine of חוצ and refers to streets which are outside the houses of a city or town.

YHWH could have sent people into the temple or private homes, but he chose the streets and the marketplaces because these are places where people meet and deal with social matters. In the temple, people can hide their behavior and pretend they are spiritual or religious; they can greet one another with smile, they can talk politely, but in marketplaces they easily forget their masks and reveal their true behavior. To anticipate the following point, I will

⁵¹ James D. Price, "רוב," in *NIDOTTE*, 3: 1093.

argue that righteousness is not written on the faces, but it is observed through daily lives and interactions in the society. Therefore, the best place to observe it is a public setting like marketplaces and streets.

Concerning the kind of the person YHWH was looking for, the text is explicit that it was a person who acts with justice (משפט) and who strives for honesty (אמונה). משפט here means what is just, right and proper, or simply righteousness. משפט is a guiding principle, the God-given norm to ensure a well-ordered society. Accordingly, proper conduct in all spheres is to be done in משפט or in conformity with משפט. This is the first character the Lord was looking for in Jerusalem. According to Brueggemann, "Israel understood itself in its unsolicited witness, as a community of persons bound in membership to each other, so that each person-as-member is to be treated well enough (with משפט) to be sustained as a full member of the community."⁵²

The word אמונה means faithfulness to the covenant and to the Lord of the covenant. But in the social sphere, it means the character that enables someone to keep his or her word, to be counted on, and seeks to be faithful in all circumstances. It also means integrity, trustworthiness, and dependability. In the Old Testament, אמונה is often used as the opposite of שקר (falsehood, deception, lying).

Holladay notices also that elsewhere in the Bible, אמונה is the object of the verb "to do" (Prov. 12: 22), but that in this passage Jeremiah speaks not of "doing אמונה" or "acting honestly" but of "seeking honesty." The verb to seek has a profound meaning; it engages our energy, our will and our consciousness. In other words, honesty is what we should

⁵² Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 1997, 423.

want and long for in private as well as in public life. משפט and אמונה are what could have differentiated the people of YHWH in their communal life from the people of other nations. In the context of the Church in my country, משפט and אמונה are two basic elements which should have characterized all Congolese Christians for the building of a society based on brotherhood and responsibility, where each individual Christian, each social group, each ethnic group is driven by the desire to live by the standard of the Gospel for the building of a new society. Applic

Many scholars have noticed a similarity between this text and the intercession of Abraham on behalf of Sodom in Gen. 18:23-33. Abraham bargained over the number of righteous persons who could spare Sodom from destruction. From fifty people, he managed to convince YHWH to accept to waive the sentence if there could have been only ten righteous persons. But for the case of Jerusalem, YHWH goes down to only one person. Does this mean that Jerusalem is ten times as wicked as Sodom? This is what Ezek 16:48 seems to suggest. But it is also possible that the prophet is here using a hyperbolic language to indicate that by far the great majority of people in Jerusalem were wicked.

However, there is another possible interpretation for this passage. If we link it with Jer. 22:15 that speaks of Josiah as a just king and Jer. 22: 13 that also speaks of Jehoiakim as a king who worked by injustice, it will be possible to think that in 5:1, YHWH is mostly condemning the wickedness of the leadership in Jerusalem as the capital city where all the decisions of the nation are conceived. In this case, YHWH would have been looking for one righteous person among the leaders. How those who have power lead the nation matters a lot to YHWH.

The Result of the Search: Jerusalem is Apostate (5:2-3a)

The result of the search was disappointing. Those who went in the streets and public places⁵³ found that the people in Jerusalem were very religious. The proof is that they were swearing by YHWH. To swear by YHWH is to call upon his name as the guarantor of any obligation that a person may take upon himself. In the event of a violation of any duty or agreement, YHWH would be expected to visit the covenant-breaker with severe judgment.

But in Jerusalem, the oath sworn in YHWH's name had no honesty in it; it was שקר, i.e., falsehood, deception, lying, pretense, and fraud. People were superficially orthodox, they used the proper formula of oaths (אם חי יהוה) literally, "as YHWH lives") but their language was false. Swearing had become a habit, a culture, a mere word, but its meaning and value were forgotten.

The Decalogue forbids false swearing, for we read in Exod. 20:7 and Deut. 5:11 that, "You shall not take the name of YHWH your God in vain." The Syriac version has in fact translated the passage in the Decalogue by "You shall not swear falsely by the name of the Lord your God." In the Old Testament, the condemnation against people who swear falsely is also found in Lev. 5:24; 19:12; Zech. 5:4; and Mal. 3:5.

⁵³ This text might be regarded either as a result of the search done in the streets and marketplaces in Jerusalem or simply as a warning to those who are going to do the search. In other words, YHWH/Jeremiah may be showing in advance what they will find in Jerusalem. These possibilities do not change anything for our interpretation. However, I consider the text as the result of those who went for the search in Jerusalem. Though their report is not shown in this text.

What false swearing demonstrates here is that, in Judah, though people seemed religious, God's law had become remote and unimportant for them; the longing for fidelity to YHWH's word was ignored. The insistence of God on being trusted and obeyed was also looked at as unimportant. With the overlooking of the law and the fear of God the claims of neighborly love and trustworthiness were also lost. In place of truth came well-calculated duplicity. Swearing by YHWH's name was but "mere words."

This fact is underlined by the use of the antithesis אמונה and שקר as I have already noted in the first section of this chapter. According to Jeremiah, it was the second attitude that dominated the Judean society, a society in which nobody was keeping his/her oath. In such community, it became impossible to trust anybody. This attitude is but a window that shows Judeans' attitude toward YHWH's demand and their knowledge of it. This portrays an image of a totally corrupted society where telling lies was considered as value, and truthfulness a weakness. But YHWH's eyes were looking for a faithful person, someone who feared God's name so that through such a person, he might have forgiven and rescued Jerusalem (v.3a).

Israelites were all children of the covenant by birth. They knew God from childhood, but this knowledge had become something ordinary, that carried no weight with it. This is what false swearing expresses. The book of Jeremiah in particular is full of condemnations of this wrong or superficial knowledge of God.

One clear example of this shallow understanding of YHWH's demand is Jer. 7:4-11, where religious Judeans were being mistaken by thinking that because of the presence of the temple (which also meant YHWH's presence) in Jerusalem, and because of YHWH's name that they frequently invoked

there, nothing could harm them. Thus, Jeremiah again rebuked them saying:

Do not put your trust in those deceptive words (שקר): This is the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord. But if you really do amend your ways and your works, if you really do enact justice between one person and another and you do not oppress a sojourner, an orphan, or a widow, and do not shed innocent blood in this place, and if you do not go after pagan gods to your own detriment, then I will make you dwell in this place, in the land which I gave to your forefathers, from of old and forever.

If the above chorus in the Temple can be ascribed to religious leaders of Judah, Jer. 6:14 and 8:11 can be attributed to political leaders who continually talked about peace in their propaganda whereas there was no peace. As Jeremiah watched carefully, he clearly realized that death must come to put an end to that rotten society characterized by a wrong sense of YHWH's law, and a wrong sense of security. In short, everything was falsehood (שקר) in Jerusalem. Corruption and falsehood carry in them the seed of destruction.

The discussion in this section has a huge implication for the Church in my country and in most African countries. In the introduction to this thesis, I spoke about the contrast between the high number of Christians in Africa south of the Sahara and the deep crisis in which most of the countries in that part of the continent find themselves. What Jeremiah was telling Israelites a long time ago is still very relevant for us today. To be a Christian means going beyond theories, beyond singing and meeting on Sundays, beyond reciting the Apostolic Creed and preaching in the streets. It means to live by the very Word we hear, we sing, we read and we confess. This is how Christ himself lived, and this is what it means to be a disciple.

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Discipleship goes beyond a simple pious or religious speech to the renewal of our mind (Rom. 12:1-2), to striving for truth and honesty with God and with our neighbor. To be born again should not be understood as a simple slogan, or a simple fact of joining the Church, but a real transformation, a true newness in the way of the Lord. It also means a struggle to live honestly and justly in a society where materialism, corruption, patriotism and tribalism are valued more than Christ's precepts.

In Congo, like in Jerusalem during the time of Jeremiah, we are still far from understanding the meaning of being God's people. To give but few examples, in the past three years, about 60,000 people have been killed in ethnic clashes in my province alone during different ethnic clashes. According to different reports we are receiving, many church members are believed to participate directly or indirectly in those destructions of human lives. Different ethnic groups are finding it very difficult to live together and even to worship together. Some Church leaders are directly accused of being the force behind the killings, and the brain behind the violence. Some of them even speak positively about the killers. Recently, a local chief accused a bishop of one of the denominations in our area to the provincial high court because the bishop was heard saying: "our warriors (he was talking about people from his ethnic group who specialized in killing) will come to exterminate x and y villages."⁵⁴ And this happened precisely as he predicted. More than 60 people lost their lives during those attacks. The Vatican recently de-commissioned the Roman Catholic Bishop of my province (in April 2002) because

⁵⁴ This is a true story and to protect the people involved, I have decided to withhold the names of these villages.

about 500 firearms were reported to have been discovered in his residence. And these guns were certainly going to be used in ethnic conflicts against another ethnic group in my area. There are many other cases like these two in my country. The question then becomes: if church leaders (who are supposed to know God better than common people) are deeply involved in bloody ethnic conflicts, how much will it be for other ordinary members of the church?

What this means is that God's word has not really transformed many people, including their leaders. God's command to love one another, to forgive one another, to be in peace with one another, to strive for truth and righteousness have become "mere word" as it was in Jerusalem. The result is that many Christians are still living in falsehood, in a parody of Christianity.

There is, therefore, an urgent need to change this situation and help millions of Congolese Christians to live a mature and responsible Christian life. From my perspective, this can be done in the following ways:

(1) To discover why Christianity has not done enough in terms of changing our lives despite its wide acceptance by the vast majority of the people in my country.

(2) To develop a theology that goes beyond simple emotions and singing on Sundays. My understanding is that nowadays, we are developing feelings and emotions more than hard thinking in our churches, especially in the so-called independent Churches.⁵⁵ Even when things are not good at all, we teach people to feel good, to pray harder, to close their eyes, to use certain spiritual "magical" formulae in

⁵⁵ But this tendency has also invaded the so-called mainline Churches. I am not saying here that emotion is not important but that our faith does allow both emotion and thinking because Christian life is a matter of belief but also decision and daily choices.

order to miraculously receive answers to all our problems. We teach them to think about their victory in Jesus and then we tell them to sit and wait for what God has already done or is going to do.

I am not against developing faith and waiting upon God. I am not denying miracles. But I am arguing that this kind of teaching and practice undermine the value of thinking and action, and create a culture of parasitism and passiveness with all their consequences. Christianity should involve faith, thinking, action and daily choice.

My argument here is that the central principle of human action must be found in the responsibility assumed in accordance with God's purpose. Or as Kā Mana puts it, this responsibility

does not lie in the use of extraordinary psychic power to change the world, but in the ability to harness the "ordinary" forces that God has given to human beings to use to build the world. It is not with miracles that we change the world, but with the quiet strength of the human spirit which the Lord has filled with his kindness. So it is pointless tempting God, testing him to act in our place. He has already done what he had to do. It is up to us now to do what we have to do.⁵⁶

(3) People should go beyond meetings and listening to a single person preaching to them every Sunday. Church members should have time to meet outside worship settings and discuss hard questions related to political, economic and spiritual life in their context from a Biblical perspective. In such meetings, mature Christians should strive to come up with solutions to the problems they are facing in the area

⁵⁶ Kā Mana, *Christians and Churches of Africa Envisioning the Future: Salvation in Christ and the Building of a New Society* (Akropong-Akuapem, Ghana: Regnum Africa, 2002), 80.

and in this way, contribute to the *shalom* of the province and the nation.

(4) Creative critical Bible studies in small groups should be emphasized. In such Bible study, people should always strive for practical lessons and encouragement to the participants to practice what they are learning.⁵⁷ There is need for such Bible study to be guided by someone who has a good knowledge of the Word of God, but there must also be a strong emphasis on letting readers discover for themselves practical lessons from the Bible. The aim of such Bible study should be the transformation of believers to a mature Christian character. The Word of God must become a compelling force behind everything we do as Christians. Being born again should be understood in terms of the covenant with Jesus Christ, a covenant that drives us to seek truthfulness and righteousness in every aspect of our life in the image of Christ himself.

(5) True theology should be written in the offices (for deep thinking), in the libraries (for interaction with ideas from other people), in the local church (the local church is the best place where we interact with the people who are living what we write), and in the streets or the marketplaces (this is where we observe people in their daily struggle, fulfillment and disappointment of life). YHWH sent people to go into public places to search and take note on what was

⁵⁷ The Roman Catholic Church in Congo has given a good example in organizing her believers in different small cells. This is especially well developed in big cities and towns and gives the believers opportunities to meet in small groups for sharing, Bible studies and other activities during the week. Those cells are known in my area as "Shirika," a Kiswahili word for "a (small) community of believers." This is a good example to follow, though there is need to know the effectiveness of those cells. But effectiveness and initiative are two different issues.

happening. In the streets and the marketplaces we can understand better how people live their faith, how they apply what they learn, how they understand or misunderstand God, whether their theology is right or wrong. A theology written from our experiences with the people we meet in public places⁵⁸ might have more impact than what we produce from reading only western books.

(6) Theological institutions should become laboratories where specialists take time to think and discuss about the impact of Christianity in our nation(s), about the relationship between Christianity and all aspects of our cultures. They should always search for new ways of making it (Christianity) a tool for impacting the lives of the people in harmony with the word of God.

I will argue that for the moment, most theological institutions in my country lack originality. They look like boxes of resonance of ideas conceived in the West. Teachers are like slaves who simply repeat ideas that they read from books produced from other countries (France, Switzerland, America, etc.), or ideas they were taught in the classrooms twenty or more years ago. Most of these ideas are far removed from the present struggle of the people. Moreover, eminent professors who could help with new ideas have all left the country and those who have refused to go or did not have opportunity to follow them are more teachers than researchers. Their struggle seems to be focused more on life than on doing research⁵⁹ and producing fresh ideas that can help Christianity transform the lives of Congolese people.

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⁵⁸ I would call this a "popular theology."

⁵⁹ They apply here an old Latin proverb: "Primum manducare, dehinde philosophare." This is another example of how the economic and political situation of a country can reduce our intellectual and spiritual capacity.

It might also be that they lack motivation since they are living in a country in total disintegration. Surely, the DR Congo needs a new generation of aggressive Christian thinkers who will help with new ideas that will have impact on Congolese Christianity and find solution to the challenges of falsehood the country is undergoing right now.

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I would conclude this section by stating that YHWH hates falsehood in the society. This was true for Judah and it is still true for us in Congo today. For Congolese, Christianity should mean a transformed life, a life lived in conformity with YHWH's word. In this way, Christians would become true salt for safeguarding the society from decay; and light for pointing to others the way to follow. But as said earlier in this section, hypocrisy, corruption and falsehood carry in them the seed of destruction. This is what happened in Judah and this is what is happening in Congo today.

Jeremiah's Reaction: the Poor and the Noble do not Know YHWH (5:3b-5)

This section begins with a series of corrective punishments inflicted by YHWH on his people, with the hope that they would change. It is difficult to connect these punishments with specific historical events, but the history of Israel is full of such punishments of YHWH's people because of their failure to keep the covenant.

First of all, YHWH struck his people down. The verb הכיתה is the hiphil perfect second masculine singular of (נכה). It means to strike, to smite. In the book of Proverbs, this verb is used for discipline and teaching wisdom (19:25; 23:13-14). In reference to the covenant with Israel, God promised blessings for obedience and curses for disobedience

(Lev. 26; Deut. 28). He warned that he would afflict (נכה) his people for their sins seven times over (Lev. 26:24). These punishments included disease (Deut. 28:22, 27, 28; Isa. 1:5; Jer. 14:19), crop failures (Amos 4:9; Hag. 2:17), death (2 Sam. 6:7), and other unspecified judgments (I Kings 14:15; Isa. 5:25).⁶⁰ Though the passage lacks precision, it is easy to argue that Jeremiah is here referring to some of the many punishments Judah (and Israel as a whole) has undergone.

But the reaction was negative. The people were not חלה. This verb means to become weak, ill, to feel pain, or even to regret what has happened. McKane writes that the thought that the people did not feel pain, in spite of the punishment which was inflicted on them, can be matched by examples from the book of Proverbs, where it constitutes an allusion to the ineffectiveness of corporal punishment when administered to a fool (Prov. 17:10; 29:1) or the unawareness of a drunk man that he is doing himself injury (Prov. 23: 35).⁶¹

Secondly, YHWH took them to the limit (כליתם). The verb כלה (here used in piel perfect second person masculine singular) means to bring a process to completion, to finish, to complete. In the Old Testament, this verb is used both positively (Gen. 41:53; Ruth 2:23; Exod. 39:32; 1 Kings 6:38) and negatively. In the negative, God's anger could also turn against his own people because of injustice and idolatry. This is the case in this text. However, because of his covenant faithfulness (חסד), YHWH might pour out his anger over his people but he will not annihilate them. This might mean that the verb כלה is used as a hyperbole to show

⁶⁰ Cornelis van Dam, נכה, in *NIDOTTE*, 3: 103.

⁶¹ McKane, *Jeremiah*, 116.

the seriousness of YHWH's punishment to his people. But the people were unbending in their resistance to YHWH's discipline. They made their faces harder than rock, they refused to return (Hos.11:5). The verb שׁוּב means to return, to repent. In the context of this section, it is proper to translate it by, "they refused to change their mind and their deeds."

Then the prophet makes his first conclusion; probably the search was done in the wrong place (the streets and marketplaces) with the wrong people (the poor or the דלִים). Different translators of the Bible understand and translate verse 4 differently. The New Living Translation has: "But what can we expect from the poor and the ignorant? They do not know the ways of the Lord." The Jerusalem Bible has: "only the ordinary people ...behave foolishly." The New American Bible renders it by: "it is only the lowly. . . who are foolish."

I would suggest that the particle אֲכִּי which is normally used as restrictive, be translated by "but," to clearly show the difference between the two groups (the poor and the noble). Moreover, I will follow Holladay who proposes that אֲכִּי דלִים הֵם be understood as a nominal clause, and that וְאֵלֵינוּ be understood as a subordinate clause (as if introduced by אֲשֶׁר). My interpretive translation would then read as follows (with a slight difference from Holladay's translation): "But these are just the poor people! This is why they act foolishly since they do not know the way of YHWH, the manners of their God."

How would we understand this sentence? Is Jeremiah condemning the poor or is he justifying their ignorance? Who are the דלִים (the poor)? I will start with the last question.

דלים comes from דל which means scanty, helpless, powerless, insignificant, dejected. The stative verb דלל means to be small, to be unimportant. In the Bible, the דלים are sometimes identified simply as the opposite of the rich (Ruth 3:10), or simply as the powerless and insignificant, as opposed to those who have power and influence (Lev. 19:15). According to Holladay, they designate (in this text) the petty merchants, the peddlers, the craftsmen and porters crowding and shouting.⁶²

Thompson argues that the reference to the word דלים in this context seems to poverty of knowledge and understanding rather than poverty of an economic kind. He adds that this view gains support from verse 5 where these poor are contrasted with the great, the men of high station. Thompson explicitly adds that

The reference may well be to the citizens of Jerusalem, who were insensitive to God's chastenings and unable or unwilling to read the signs of the times because of their preoccupation with their own affairs, which required them to enter into agreements with an appropriate oath. There was no intention on their part to submit their lives and their business dealings to God's scrutiny. They hardly believed that God would care. God was not in their thoughts or in their hearts although they took his name constantly on their lips.⁶³

My understanding of the poor is slightly different from Thompson's explanation. My argument is that poverty in this passage is of both knowledge and economy, since one has an effect upon the other. In other words, the poor in the streets of Jerusalem were economically poor. This forced them to spend the whole day (and may be night) in the

⁶² Holladay, *Jeremiah 1-25*, 178.

⁶³ Thompson, *Jeremiah*, 238.

streets, looking for any means for survival. Their understanding of God who seemed not to respond to their daily needs (while the rich seemed to have everything they needed) might have been profoundly distorted, and their faith might have taken a totally different form. Their survival and that of their families was more important than keeping the covenant, than going to the Temple or sitting for long times to read and meditate the law of Moses, and to perform some rituals. As a consequence, this economic poverty created a poverty of knowledge and faith in YHWH.

This reminds me the story of Barbara, a young lady who works in an Internet café in my area. She opens the office at eight in the morning and closes it at ten o'clock in the night. She works from Monday to another Monday, without a rest, not even on Sunday. I was in that office one day between eight and ten at night. I noticed that her employer kept calling her on the phone every half an hour, probably to check whether Barbara was still there or if she had left the office before ten. When I asked her why she accepted such a condition, why was she not asking her employer for a day off, especially on Sunday so that she might go to worship God with other believers (Barbara is a Christian). Her answer was simple and straightforward:

The boss will not accept the request and if I dare to disagree with him, I will be fired and another person will take this job on that same day. What should I do in this country of misery? I spent four years looking for a job. I even made a bad mistake and became pregnant because I needed money. Now that God has offered a job to me, why should I leave it for someone else?⁶⁴

⁶⁴ This verbatim quote is a reconstruction based on personal conversation with Barbara.

This is a 57 of our day. Barbara has no choice but to serve as a slave and be there in the office despite her unbearable conditions. Should Barbara disobey her boss and go to the Church on Sunday, and then lose her job? Will not this force her to go back to selling her body and become pregnant again probably to end up dying with HIV/AIDS? Should she forget about church programs and continue with her job as long as this is possible? What will be the consequence of her decision on her faith if she continues with her job seven days a week and fourteen hours a day? Does she really have time to pray and meditate on the word of God? What will happen to her faith after a year or two, if she continues with her work, and forgets about prayers, meditation, and worship with other people in the Church? These are issues facing most of our people nowadays. And this might have been some of the problems of the 57 in the streets of Jerusalem. The Church in Congo and in Africa needs to think about this situation and come up with solutions, where possible.

This also reminds me of my own mother who used to leave home early in the morning to go to the farm, and come back around four in the afternoon. Before she started making food for us, she had to fetch water. The whole day was too busy for her to take time and meditate on God's word. In fact, in our villages supper was often served around nine at night. Should I add that most of the time we did not have light in the house. We had to use a special kind of wood to light the casserole when our mother was making food. Moreover, my mother did not know how to read and to write, and she also did not have a Bible. The only thing she had to remember was what her pastor preached on Sunday.

Both Barbara and my own mother are examples of the impact of poverty on knowledge and faith. We can multiply examples from all corners of Africa. These, to my understanding, were some of the problems of the םלל in the streets of Jerusalem. Some might have been spending their times in trying to sell very few items. I know of people in my hometown who start their business with a very insignificant amount of money, but they still call themselves businesspeople. In such a situation, they need to spend the whole day being very busy, trying to get the attention of everyone passing by. Michela Wrong provides a vivid illustration of this complex situation in the context of my country. Logging what she ironically calls an "unrelenting stream" and a "walking supermarket" of street sellers in Kinshasa the capital city of DR Congo, she relates her experience with the following words:

In the space of forty-five minutes, as I worked my way through a steaming plate of rice and beans, I was offered the following items without straying from my seat: cigarettes, chewing gum, hard-boiled eggs, cola nuts, spice sachets and carrots (all from a medicinal box aimed at those plagued by bad breath or sore throats), French perfume (two tatty boxes, clearly fake), plastic briefcases and plastic sandals (range of), a shoe polish (a small boy knocking his brush against a stool to attract attention), men's trousers, transistor radios (choice of two models), a display of tinny-looking watches and sunglasses, ginger powders, a couple of sports shirts, cheap nylon ties, disposable razors, men's briefs (packet of three), men's shirts, paper tissues, roasted peanuts (in the sachet), grilled prawns (on wooden skewers), socks (variety of colours).⁶⁵

Wrong concludes her observation by stating:

⁶⁵ Michela Wrong, *In the Footsteps of Mr Kurtz: Living on the Brink of Disaster in the Congo* (London: Fourth Estate, 2000), 149.

Today
enlightened
seller
(1)

the traders patiently allowed their goods to be examined and commented on by the skeptical but not unfriendly diners, then moved tirelessly on. It was like watching predators on the savannah as the prowled the long grasses and scoured the horizon, searching relentlessly for a kill.⁶⁶

Supermarket owners use other means for advertising, they do not stand in the streets to call people for shopping, whereas the דלִיִּם make a lot of noise as in the streets of Kinshasa, but it is not a non-sense noise. Others might have been working as salesmen and saleswomen or even for rich people, and some others might not have had employment and the whole day was spent in trying to get such an opportunity. Thus, the idea of Holladay that these people were just shouting in the streets might not be totally true.⁶⁷ This might have been a mixed crowd with different concerns, and undergoing a very dire situation. In such a situation, it could not have been a big problem for the poor to behave like people who did not know YHWH in terms of telling lies when necessary, making an oath that could not be kept, stealing if one was compelled to. It seems to me, and this is an important point I want to make, that it was with compassion that Jeremiah looked at the poor and noticed that something very important was missing in them: they were too busy for life, and rightly so, but they lacked the proper knowledge of YHWH. In this way, poverty is not to be accepted as a virtue, it is an enemy of faith. I would even argue that this is what Jeremiah seemed to notice in the streets of Jerusalem. Can I make a connection here and state that HIV/AIDS, terrorism, prostitution, civil wars, etc. in

⁶⁶ Wrong, *In the Footsteps of Mr. Kurtz*, 149.

⁶⁷ Holladay, *Jeremiah 1*, 178.

Africa and in most of the Third World nations are also consequences of poverty?

So my conclusion here will be that for the poor people in Jerusalem, to demonstrate that they knew YHWH by following his commandment was not a priority. The most important thing was to survive and to help their families. After all, YHWH would not like to have them and their families dead for the sake of keeping the oath, and being honest, some of them would argue. Moreover, YHWH's blessing had become a remote story of their forefathers. Why bother? The concern for survival was by far stronger than just honesty and justice. In DR Congo, we call this "article 15,"⁶⁸ which means: "fighting for survival," no matter how one fights: the end justifies the means.

There is a need to discuss one more issue here. The fact that the poor in Jerusalem did not know YHWH and therefore, that poverty appeared to hinder faith in God seems to contradict the reality we are living in

⁶⁸ In the years that followed the Congolese independence, there was an attempt of secession by the Luba of the South Kasai Province in order to revive their old Luba empire. This secession was led by Albert Kalonji in the early 60s. But only after a short time, Kalonji found himself overwhelmed by returning Lubas fleeing the central army which interpreted its orders to put down the secessionist revolts as a freedom to massacre members of that particular ethnic group. Annoyed by constant requests from refugees for shelter, seeds, tools and money, he finally issued a statement telling them to stop bothering the government with their problems, going so far, some say, as to write the principle into the empire's new constitution: "*Vous êtes chez vous, débrouillez-vous*" (This is your home, so fend for yourselves). So people interpreted it as a new (a fifteenth) article on his constitution. Probably, his constitution had up to fourteen, when he reacted to the refugees' requests. People started using this expression in different circumstances but with the same meaning of fighting for life in a nation where the government is not able to help the citizens.

Congo/Africa today. Africa is becoming or has become a Christian continent, yet it is also the poorest continent of all. This seems to suggest that poverty opens an opportunity for the people to seek God and worship him. How then are we to explain the two contradictory situations between Africa and Judah? This issue will be discussed in more details in the second chapter, especially the quality and impact of our Congolese/African Christianity, as I understand it. My argument is that in the Bible, poverty and severe sufferings are indeed hindrances to faith, and therefore to good knowledge of YHWH. The following examples will be enough to support my argument.

In Exodus, YHWH sent Moses to urge Pharaoh to let his people go from Egypt. Exodus 5 opens with the following sentence: "Afterward Moses and Aaron went to Pharaoh and said to him: 'Thus says YHWH, the God of Israel: Let my people go, so they may hold a festival to me in the desert'" (v.1). And verse 3 repeats almost the same thing: "Then they said: the God of Hebrews has met with us. Now let us take a three-day journey into the desert to offer sacrifices to YHWH, our God, or he may strike us with plagues or with the sword."

According to these passages, the immediate objective of liberation of the people is "to go and worship or offer sacrifice to YHWH out of the land of Egypt." What this passage suggests is that Egypt had become an oppressive nation, reducing all the Israelites to severe sufferings and utter poverty. This reading suggests that in this oppressive situation, it was not probably possible for the Israelites to properly worship YHWH. Here worship and God's service are clearly associated with liberation from oppression and from poverty. Israelites could have had an idea about YHWH but it probably would have been a distorted image of a God who was

not able to come to their rescue. Even if Israelites wanted to worship YHWH, it could not have been possible because of the oppressive situation in which they found themselves in Egypt. In fact, I can go as far as to affirm that for the suffering Israelites, the oppressive gods of Egypt might have appeared stronger than YHWH. The important principle here is that suffering and poverty can become a hindrance to worship and create a distortion of our faith in God. YHWH's will is to deliver his people from sufferings so that they can know him better and worship him.

The second example is taken from Luke 4: 16-30. In his studies of the socio-economic conditions of the poor in the Lukan community, Philip Francis Esler has convincingly argued that,

The (...) poor suffered extreme forms of economic, social and political deprivation. For them life was a very grim business. Ill-fed, housed in slums or not at all, ravaged by sickness, precluded from all access to social prestige and power over their own destinies, and having virtually no hope of improvement in their condition, they went through life with little if any confirmation that they, as much as the tiny elite who lorded it over them, were creatures with personal dignity and respect, entitled to share in the fruits of the earth.⁶⁹

Poor + NT use

It was in this general context, argues Esler, that Jesus pronounced his revolutionary programmatic speech (Luke 4:16-30) in which he clearly linked the Good News with deliverance from social, economic, spiritual and physical bondages. All the miracles performed in verses 31-41 were a demonstration that people needed first to be released from their oppression (and sufferings) before they properly knew and worshiped God. And Jesus never separated physical from

⁶⁹ Philip Francis Esler, *Community and Gospel in Luke-Acts: The Social and Political Motivations of Lukan Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 179.

spiritual needs. Therefore, it is again clear that Jesus knew that sufferings and poverty were obstacles to YHWH's knowledge and service. This is why, wherever he went, he sought to deliver his people both physically and spiritually. I wonder what would have happened to the faith of the blind, the lame, the demon-possessed if Jesus had to call them only to repentance without first healing their physical sicknesses, as we tend to do today. Would it even be possible for them to respond to Jesus' call with the hope that they will enjoy good health in heaven?

The last example is taken from Acts 2: 45, where we read that wealthier Christians had to willingly put their possessions on sale and distribute the proceeds to the needy members of the Christian community. This is an example of what a Church should look like, and how the rich should use their wealth to lessen the pain of the poor so that they might serve YHWH together in joy and unity. This also could have served as a testimony of the Church's just social shape. In other words, Luke's community demonstrates that the elimination of poverty, and the alleviation of the sufferings of the destitute must be a vital constituent of Christianity in this world.⁷⁰

*Social
justice*

We then come to another question concerning Jer. 5: 4: "Was Jeremiah condemning the poor or was he justifying their

⁷⁰ Another clear principle here for the Church in DR Congo and elsewhere in Africa (and the world) is that God blesses us so that we might be a blessing to others. In Genesis 12, God calls and promises blessings to Abraham with a view to accomplishing a divine mission: through Abraham's blessings (and latter on through Israel), all other nations would be blessed by YHWH. This is not a place to analyze in detail the text of Genesis 12, but suffice it to add that it appears to me that God advances his task on earth by blessing his servants, and that it is wrong when we divorce this blessing of God in our life from its ultimate goal, i.e., to bless others.

ignorance?" From the preceding discussion, I will argue that Jeremiah was trying to justify their ignorance. In other words, the poor were faulty but excusable because of the condition in which they found themselves. This will be clarified in the following paragraphs. At this point, Holladay seems to agree with me and writes the following sentence: "...one can hardly blame them; how can they know any better?"⁷¹ In this passage, knowledge of YHWH is associated with certain conditions of life. And for the poor, the concern for life was stronger than the concern for faithfulness to YHWH.

Verse 5 is introduced by a cohortative *אלכהלי*, "let me go off to the גדלים for they know the way of YHWH, the manners of their God." There are three important things to be noted here. First, the word גדלים which means the big people, those who occupy a position of prominence or importance refers in this passage to "the shapers of opinion, those who set the pace for the whole community,"⁷² the leaders, the makers of decision, etc. These are truly "Grosses Legumes" (Big Vegetables)⁷³ as we call them in Congo today.

Second, the prophet seems to suggest that the leaders lived in a different place, since they were not to be found in the same place with the גדלים. This is why, the prophet has to go off to meet them. This gives an image of rich

⁷¹ Holladay, *Jeremiah 1*, 178.

⁷² Holladay, *Jeremiah 1*, 178.

⁷³ This term was often used to refer to a social class composed of those who were close to Mobutu, who helped him to make most decisions (very often for their own benefit), and who became rich by plundering the nation under the leadership (and with the help) of Mobutu. I need to recall here that ordinary Congolese used this term with a mixture of resentment and awe.

people as opposed to the poor who crowded the streets of Jerusalem. גדלים does indeed suggest the idea of rich people, living in beautiful houses, far from the noisy and bad-smelling streets and slums. In modern terms, and in the context of my country, we will have to think about high-value residential areas with very well protected and fenced large compounds and big dogs watching day and night.⁷⁴

Third, the prophet assumes that the leaders know the law. He does not go to check whether they knew the way of YHWH, the manners of their God, but simply to speak to them (ואדברה אותם) as just and honest people. The prophet assumes that they must have known it. In fact the second line in Hebrew is introduced by the particle כִּי ("because," "for" they know. . .) to mean that the prophet was certain to find a better situation than the one he experienced with the poor. Moreover, the pronoun הֵמָּה (they) in the same line is emphatic and seems to constitute another indication of the confidence Jeremiah had towards the leaders. Thus, that sentence has to be translated by " For/because (כִּי) they are the ones (הֵמָּה) to know ..." or "For they know for sure the way of YHWH, the manners of their God."

Unfortunately, Jeremiah noticed that the leaders too had broken the yoke; they had snapped their traces. Thompson observes that the "picture here is one of rebellion and defiance and seems to have in mind the ox, who is normally

⁷⁴ Does this picture of "high-value residential areas" for the rich reminds us that in our own society, the gap between the rich and the poor also means disaster of insecurity facing the oppressor who cannot feel safe? It seems to me that the rich will never be at peace unless they also attend to the oppression and the poverty of the poor. This is why, despite their power, the rich have to protect themselves with fences and dogs. In most of our poor countries, this would also mean that the liberty of the oppressed would also mean the liberty of the oppressor.

yoked to his plough and draws the plough with the aid of its traces."⁷⁵ In other words, the leaders were active rebels, deciding willingly not to submit to the master.

But the important question for this interpretation is: "Why did Jeremiah assume that leaders should have known the law while the poor are somehow excusable?" It is clear that leaders, who are also the rich, do not have the same struggle for life as the poor. They have money, they have time, they have education, they have light in their houses to study and meditate on the law. They do not work like the poor who come back home late, exhausted and hungry. I also assume that they would have been attending all prayer meetings and Bible study sessions during the week in the Temple, they would have been performing all the religious rituals, and therefore, they should have known the way of YHWH their God better than the poor.

In my context, this section should remind us of the huge responsibility we have for having had opportunity to study God's word more than many other people. It also reminds us of our responsibility as God's servants among poor people, among refugees and those who are suffering from the effect of genocide and endless civil wars in Africa. Jesus' warning has its place here: "From everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded; and from the one who has been entrusted with much, much more will be asked" (Luke 12:48). This passage can be applied in different ways, but suffice it to say that our greater knowledge brings with it a greater responsibility to live according to that knowledge and to help others come to know Christ.

Moreover, I do not agree that the church should help the poor only by preaching the Gospel. Jeremiah is showing

⁷⁵ Thompson, *Jeremiah*, 238.

us that material poverty is a hindrance to the knowledge of God. Therefore, there is a need for the church to come up with a totally new structure and system to help those who are suffering from poverty. To my understanding, this has to be done to help not only the poor who are already in the church, but also those who have not yet received Christ as their Savior. This is another way of preaching the Gospel to the suffering world.

The Consequence of the Rebellion (v.6)

In presenting the structure of this passage, I linked verse 6 with verses 1 and 2 as the word of YHWH either spoken by the Lord himself or through the prophet. After concluding that there is no possible ground for sparing Jerusalem, verse 6 now describes the kind of judgment to come on the city.

The description of the judgment is introduced by the conjunction לְכֵן-לָכֵן meaning "therefore," which also constitutes an establishment of fact. Everyone in Israel was supposed to know that when YHWH was disobeyed or affronted, he had to punish. The punishment for disobedience in Israel was rooted in covenantal sanctions. The complete lists of these punishments, to which Israel has agreed in its covenant oath, are found in Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28 (1 Kings 8:33-53 and Amos 4:6-11). YHWH's demand for obedience was to be taken with maximum seriousness, and disobedience was to be dealt with severely. In the prophetic writings, the enactment of the sanctions was given in the lawsuit speeches that sought to justify the punishment on the basis of the indictment that the prophet spoke. According to Brueggemann, the sentences, characteristically,

are introduced by "therefore," meaning "as a result," linking them to the indictments.⁷⁶

In verse 6, the judgment introduced by "therefore" is the result of the lack of the knowledge of the way of YHWH, the manners of God, observed in both the poor and the leaders. Moreover, the same judgment is portrayed under the imagery of attacks of three wild animals: lion, wolf, and leopard.

In the Bible, the figure of lion (אַרְיֵה) is used in a general way as a figure of danger. He is a human-eater sent by YHWH in the cases of disobedience (1 Kings 13:24-28; 20:36; 2 Kings 17:25-26; Isa. 15:9).⁷⁷

The wolf (לְבַיַּט) is described in the Old Testament as a fierce, ravenous (Gen. 49:27; Ezek. 22:27), and devouring animal (Gen. 49:27). Along with the panther, lion and eagle, it also symbolizes a nation that is bitter, hasty, dread, terrible, and violent (Hab. 1:8).⁷⁸

Likewise, the leopard (נֹמֵר) was an animal feared in the Old Testament times (Hos. 13:7); it was also admired for its swiftness (Hab. 1:8). In apocalyptic imagery, it represents a nation that quickly conquers major regions (Dan. 7:6; Rev. 13:2).⁷⁹

These three animals represent the invaders referred to in the entire unit ("foe from the north"). The image of wild, ferocious animals as representing invaders are also found in Jer. 2: 15; 4:7; Hos. 13: 7-8; Hab. 1:8; Zeph. 3:3.

⁷⁶ Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 374.

⁷⁷ However, YHWH protects those who are faithful to him from being eaten by the lion (Dan.7: 7-27).

⁷⁸ Botterweck, "לְבַיַּט," in *TDOTT*, 4: 5.

⁷⁹ John A. McLean, "Leopard," in David Noel Freedman (ed.), *Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2000), 80.

The cruelty of the animals chosen in this passage shows the severity of the punishment to come on Jerusalem.

In conclusion, the lack of justice and honesty (v.1), and all kinds of falsehood (v.2) that characterize Jerusalem are described as a consequence of the lack of the knowledge (לא ידע, in vv.4c, 5b) of the way of YHWH (יהוה דרך). There are at least three important points to be mentioned here:

(1) This lack of the knowledge of YHWH's law explains why there was nobody acting justly and striving for honesty. This is the picture of an entire community broken down and living in total deception because it has departed from its primary value, its initial vision, its initial hope and ideals. These primary visions, value and hope were rooted in the law and the covenant which YHWH made with his people. What Jeremiah is calling here the lack of the knowledge of YHWH is actually the breaking of this covenant or the abandonment of the law.

(2) It is possible to be religious without knowing YHWH. This was the case in Judah where people were superficially orthodox, using the proper formula of oaths (אם חי יהוה "as YHWH lives") while knowing that what they were saying was false. In this way, swearing had become a habit, a culture, a mere word, but its meaning and value were forgotten. What false swearing demonstrates here is that, in Judah, though people seemed religious, God's law had become remote and unimportant for them. With the overlooking of the law and the fear of God the claims of neighborly love and trustworthiness were also lost. In place of truth came well-calculated duplicity; telling lies was considered as value, and truthfulness a weakness. To sum up this description, it is right to say that Judah was a thoroughly corrupted community despite its apparent orthodoxy. This opens a nice window for the situation in my country where the majority of

the people claims to be Christians but refuse to conform their lives to the standard of the word of God.

(3) Jeremiah condemns the lack of the knowledge of YHWH in the people of Judah in general. Yet he also clearly shows that this lack of knowledge of YHWH is partly involuntary for the poor because of their severe economic conditions; but totally voluntary for the leaders (rich) who have no excuse of not knowing YHWH. It seems to me that this point might also explain why the tradition of Jeremiah is very much concerned about the punishment of the leaders in Jerusalem (who must be removed from the land) while the poor or the people of the land remain.

**YHWH's Desire to Abandon His People because of their Sin
(9:1-8)**

Translation

1. *Oh that I could find in the desert a traveler's lodging that I may leave my people, and go far away from them!*
For they are all adulterers, a band of traitors.
2. *They bend their tongue like a bow;
it is by falsehood not faithfulness
that they prevail in the land;
They proceed from an evil deed to another,
They do not know YHWH, the Lord's oracle.*
3. *Let each man be on a guard against his fellow,
And put no trust in any brother;
For every brother is a deceiver
And every friend a slanderer.*
4. *Each man trifles his neighbor;
They never speak the truth,
They have taught their tongues to speak lies;
They commit iniquity, they have no will to repent.*
5. *Oppression is heaped on oppression,
Fraud on fraud.
They refuse to know me, YHWH's oracle.*
6. *Therefore, thus says YHWH of hosts:*

- I am going to refine and assay them;
For what else can I do because of my people?*
7. *Their tongue is a deadly arrow,
Deceitful are the words of their mouth.
One speaks peace (amicably) to his neighbor,
While planning an ambush in his heart.*
8. *Shall I not punish them for these things?
YHWH's oracle.
On a nation like this,
Shall I not avenge myself?*

Historical and literary contexts

There is no direct clue from which to establish a precise setting for this passage. Some students of Jeremiah consider it as editorial, hence produced many years after the ministry of the prophet himself. However, my argument is that despite the fact that the passage is lacking clear historical clues; it is possible to discover its probable setting from the literary analysis of the passage in its context.

Jer. 9:1-8 belongs to the section that begins from chapter 8 up to 10. Several units in these three chapters are poetry (8:4-23; 9:1-11, 16-21; 10:17-22) and two themes appear to be common to all of them: (1) the destruction of Jerusalem caused by invaders (8:10,13-17, 18-23; 9: 9-11, 16-21; 10:17-22); and (2) the idea that Jerusalem brought destruction upon herself because of her depravation and her unwillingness to come back to YHWH (8:4-7, 8-9, 10-12, 14; 9:1-8; 10:21). Jer. 9:1-8 fits into the second category.

Thus, the two themes (invasion and reasons for invasion) establish similarity between 9:1-8 and the enemy from the north unit (4:5-6:30). Moreover, there are also several passages in 9:1-8 that are found in 4:5-6:30. For example, the sentence "me they do not know" is found both in 9:2, 4:22 and 5:4-5. In like manner, the idea contained in

the sentence "they refuse to know me" in 9:5 is similar to "they refuse to repent," in 5:3 and 8:5.

Therefore, it will not be wrong to allocate 9:1-8 to the same period as the texts related to the enemy from the north with a difference that in chapters 8 to 10, there is no mention of any hint of repentance of the people of Jerusalem; and therefore, no possibility of forgiveness, as it was the case in 5:1. On the contrary, 8:4-6; 9:4b; 10:19 show that people are no longer able to come back to YHWH. This means that 9:1-8 should be located to a period later than the one referred to in 4:5--6:30. In this context, Holladay's suggestion that this text is best assigned to the autumn of 601 would be exact.⁸⁰ I would even argue for a later time, at the very end of Jehoiakim's reign.

Structure

According to Craigie, Kelly and Drinkard, the major issue in this passage is to determine who is speaking.⁸¹ For Rudolph, Bright, and McKane, Jeremiah is the speaker in at least the first five verses.⁸² Commentators who adopt this view delete the sentence, "the Lord's oracle" in verses 2 and 6 where it occurs. This textual amendment is supported by the Septuagint. They also read "the Lord" in place of "me" in the phrases "me they have not known/they refuse to know".⁸³ Other commentators omit "therefore, thus says the Lord of

⁸⁰ Holladay, *Jeremiah 1-25*, 299.

⁸¹ Craigie, Kelly and Drinkard, *Jeremiah 1-25*, 143.

⁸² Craigie, Kelly and Drinkard, *Jeremiah 1-25*, 143.

⁸³ Craigie, Kelly and Drinkard, *Jeremiah 1-25*, 143.

Hosts" in verse 6. Their justification is that "the problem with God being the speaker is an anthropocentric viewpoint of the verses."⁸⁴ Rudolph, in particular, removes verse 7 and places it immediately after verse 3 because the two passages are both condemning the sin of the tongue. He also deletes the whole of verse 8, considering it as a repetition of 5:9, 29. Bright considers 9:1-5 as the prophet's word, and 9:6-8 as an oracle of YHWH's judgment introduced by לכן.

Holladay⁸⁵ and Craigie, Kelly and Drinkard⁸⁶ adopt the opposite view and argue that YHWH is the one speaking (through his prophet) in 9:1-8. Their position is supported by other passages in the book of Jeremiah that contain a first person lament by God preceded by a lament of Jeremiah (12:7-13 and 15:5-9). The position adopted in the analysis of this passage is that the whole passage is YHWH's word. The reason is that I do not see a convincing ground for deleting the formula "thus says YHWH," and hence to attribute the first verse of the passage to Jeremiah simply because it looks abnormal that YHWH might complain like a human being and decide to leave his people (the so-called anthropocentric viewpoint).⁸⁷ Thus, the structure of this passage will be as follows:

⁸⁴ Craigie, Kelly and Drinkard, *Jeremiah 1-25*, 143.

⁸⁵ Holladay, *The Architecture of Jeremiah 1-20*, 110-113.

⁸⁶ Craigie, Kelly and Drinkard, *Jeremiah 1-25*, 143.

⁸⁷ However, it is wise not to be adamant concerning this issue. Polk (*The Prophetic Persona*, 113) acknowledges the systematic ambiguity of the relation between the word of YHWH and that of the prophet. This can be justified by the fact that, in the book of Jeremiah, the prophet shares YHWH's perspective and attitudes (see other ambiguities in 9: 9; 13: 17a; 14: 17).

- 1-2: YHWH's discouragement and desire to leave his people;
3-5: reason for YHWH's lament: sin of the tongue and others;
6-8: YHWH's lament and judgment of Judah.

Interpretation

YHWH's Discouragement and his Desire to Leave his People (vv1-2)

YHWH's wish to leave his people (v1a)

There is a stylistic connection between 9:1 and the end of the preceding chapter (8:23). In the latter, the prophet Jeremiah speaks the contrary-to-fact-wish out of grief for his people, whereas in 9:1, YHWH uses the same style and speaks the contrary-to-fact-wish out of rejection and abandonment of his people.⁸⁸ The situation described in verse 1 is singular and unthinkable. So far, the image has been of the people abandoning YHWH, their God and going after other gods (2:13, 17, 19; 5:7, 19); and YHWH has been trying to help them come back to him. He has been looking for different ways to help them to the point of being ready to make a concession (5:1) and forgive his people in case he finds only one person who does righteousness. This is

⁸⁸ The use of the same style in the two verses should not necessarily mean that the speaker is the same. I remain consistent in my analysis and argue after Carroll (*Jeremiah*, 238) that the speakers in the two verses are different and that they both "have different viewpoints about the nature of the community, and their response reveal distinctive attitudes to the people. The poems appear together because they have certain associated elements in common."

somehow unusual for YHWH who is known as the God of justice. But out of love, he was ready to forgive. Now the situation has become unbearable for him. His own people have pushed him to the limit. It has become impossible for him to continue with them. He must leave (עזב) them and look for a place in the desert.⁸⁹ For the first time in the book of Jeremiah, YHWH decides to walk away from his people.

By leaving his people, YHWH is also leaving a beautiful temple built for him in Jerusalem, but which has now become a corrupted place, a den of thieves (Jer. 7:11). Instead of the temple, he prefers a modest accommodation for travelers in an uninhabited place (מלון ארחים). The wilderness (מדבר) would help YHWH to be free from the hideous and unattractive "sights which thrust themselves upon him day by day in Jerusalem."⁹⁰ However, the fact that YHWH decides to leave Jerusalem and go in the desert is also an indication of the tension between the two dominant but apparently contradictory theologies in Judah. The desert represents Sinai with its covenant (Exod. 19-20) and the curses to come on the nation because of the disobedience (Deut. 28: 15-68). Jerusalem, and therefore, the temple, represents the Davidic covenant with its belief that YHWH would live in Zion forever (2 Sam.7:10-16).⁹¹

Reasons for the discouragement (1b-2)

⁸⁹ The grammatical form of the wish shows that God has not yet left his people (so also Craigie, Kelly and Drinkard [*Jeremiah 1-25*, 144]), but the Lord's threat is serious and should not be taken lightly.

⁹⁰ Thompson, *Jeremiah*, 309.

⁹¹ These two dominant theologies will be discussed in details in chapter three.

The end of verse 1 mentions the causes of YHWY's discouragement: the entire people (כלם) are accused of committing adultery (זנא), and being a band of traitors (בגד). The word זנא occurs 34 times in the Old Testament, with a strong concentration in the prophetic literature (24 times). Jeremiah alone uses it 9 times. In general, the word זנא used as a verb means to commit adultery. In Israel, adultery was considered as detrimental on both sociological and theological grounds. Sociologically, the extended family was the cornerstone of Israelite society; a threat to its stability could not be tolerated. Theologically, marriage was grounded in a divine ordinance (Gen. 2:24); therefore it was regarded as a mirror of God's covenant with his people.⁹²

זנא is also used metaphorically to describe offenses against the covenant between YHWH as husband and Israel as wife.⁹³ But even in this case, the prophetic condemnation of the adultery of Israel does not only refer to the breaking of the covenant. It also "includes the actual adultery of the worshipers who surrender themselves to cultic prostitution in the Canaanite fertility cult."⁹⁴ Thus, the use of זנא in Jer. 9:1 is ambiguous and it is difficult to

⁹² Gary H. Hall, "זנא," in *NIDOTTE*, 3: 3.

⁹³ D.N. Freedman & B.E. Willoughby, "זנא," in *TDOTT*, 9: 114.

⁹⁴ Freedman & Willoughby, "זנא," in *TDOTT*, 9: 116-7. They quote the prophet Hosea as a probable illustration of actual adultery in religious practices, and their argument reads as follows: "Gomer's violation of her marriage with Hosea may have resulted from participation in cultic prostitution (Hos. 2:6-13[4-11]). In this case, we may be dealing with actual adultery, and we would have here an example of how the Israelites committed adultery when they took part in the worship of Baal."

determine whether it is used in a literal or metaphorical sense, or both.⁹⁵ However, it seems to me that the context in which this word is used does not prepare us theologically to argue for a metaphorical use of it. Therefore, my argument is that the word is used in this passage to indicate literal adultery as a social evil.

Israelites are also accused of acting faithlessly or treacherously. The verb **גָּלַל** occurs 43 times in the Old Testament. It is very often used of those whose outward masks the inner realities (Jer. 12: 1, 6). It also applies to those who, while mouthing words in praise of God, betray him in action and to those who, while using benevolent and conciliatory language in conversations with others, have malicious intentions and plan ambushes in their minds.⁹⁶ The use of **גָּלַל** in 9:2, shows that,

not only does the deceitfulness of life erect a barrier between God and his people(...), but the poison, corruption, and treachery it generates causes communities to disintegrate(...). Faithlessness to God inevitably leads to acts of faithlessness against members of the community.⁹⁷

Apart from adultery and the fact of being traitors, verse 2 adds another long list of perversion in Judah: their tongue is like a bow, they prevail in the land by falsehood, and proceed from one evil deed to another.

The first evil on the list is the tongue. This word is here used as a metonymy for human speech. The fact of bending the tongue like a bow is a clear image of how human speech is destructive when used to harm other people. The tongue can cause enormous, sometimes irreparable damage.

⁹⁵ So also Gary H. Hall, "גָּלַל," in *NIDOTTE*, 3: 4.

⁹⁶ Robin Wakely, "גָּלַל," in *NIDOTTE*, 1: 583.

⁹⁷ Wakely, "גָּלַל," in *NIDOTTE*, 1: 583.

Prov. 16:27 compares the speech of a crook to a burning fire. Ps. 140:3 gives the image of evil men who make their tongues as sharp as a serpent's with the poison of vipers on their lips. Paul quotes the same passage to illustrate the various sins of the non-Christian world (Rom. 3:13). For James (3:6), "the tongue is a fire, a world of evil among the parts of the body. It corrupts the whole person, sets the whole course of his life on fire, and is itself set on fire by hell." Jesus himself pointed to the danger of our speech by stating: "by your words you will be acquitted, and by your words, you will be condemned" (Matt. 12:37). In a different circumstance, Jesus' response to those who accused him of allowing his disciples to transgress the customary Jewish law about ritual cleanness shows also the danger of evil speech:

What goes into a man's mouth does not make him unclean, but what comes out of his mouth, that is what makes him unclean (...) Don't you see that whatever enters the mouth goes into the stomach and then out of the body? But the things that come from the heart, and these make a man unclean. For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander. These are what make a man unclean; but eating with unwashed hands does not make him unclean (Matt. 11, 17-20) (emphasis mine).

The list of evil deeds in Judah culminates in two antithetical words: שקר (falsehood) and אמונה (truthfulness, trustworthiness) presented side by side in the passage. The prophet is accusing those who have become rich and the leaders in general that they are prevailing not by acting justly but falsely. I have already dealt with the meaning of these two antithetical words; here I only need to add another dimension in the context of verse 2. The couple שקר and אמונה seems to go beyond the fact of meaning falsehood and trustworthiness as related to individuals. It designates the whole "attitude of human being in his global

orientation: his faithfulness to the revelation and will of God (or their rejection) and the consequences that follow such an attitude in the society (5:1-3)."⁹⁸

The emphasis here is on community building. For Jeremiah, a human being exists in community, which ought to be characterized by a common will and a common sense of responsibility.⁹⁹ But after observation, YHWH and his prophet came to the conclusion that nobody in Judah has a concern for the building of a just, loyal, and harmonious community. Everybody looks for ways to increase his/her own power, material possession, and whatever can make him or her a גב (a great person) in the land. The passage makes it clear that (some) people in Judah who have become strong did so not by loyalty but by שקר (falseness). Because of the falsehood in which they constantly lived, they were driven to commit a series of evils. Thus, the term שקר carries in it the operation of a destructive power in the society.

The sentence "they proceed from an evil deed to another," underlines the fact that social evil in Judah had become a culture, a system that appeared to be accepted by the majority of the population. In other words, almost all the people who became great (rich and powerful) did so through falsehood, corruption, extortion, and all kinds of social injustice. With this kind of falsehood and perfidy disease in Judah has extended to the very heart of the social order.

In the context of my country, the first area where this idea of falsehood and extortion as a way of becoming rich and powerful can be applied is the government and its army.

⁹⁸ Wisser, *Jeremie, Critique de la Vie Sociale*, 24 (my translation).

⁹⁹ Thomas W. Overholt, *The Threat of Falsehood. A Study in the Theology of Jeremiah*, (Naperville, IL: Allenson, 1970), 101.

It is known that this is a serious problem for most African countries, but there are extreme cases, and Mobutu's regime could have been classified in this extremity. For example, all over the country, it was not unusual to realize that high ranked soldiers have beautiful houses. Some of them managed to buy beautiful palaces in foreign countries in Europe and in South Africa. This was not because they were well paid but because they used their guns, their uniform and their position to steal from the government and to extort civilians. Thomas M. Callaghy notices that

The Zairian military constantly abuses the subject population in a whole host of ways: theft, extortion, and armed robbery of all kinds; arbitrary arrest; illegal fines; setting up unauthorized barricades; kidnappings; beatings; rapes; forced labor; harassment of businessmen; physical attacks and extortion in village open-air market; scavenging and pillage of crops, fruit, goats, and chicken; attacks on missions; and even fishing with dynamite, which destroys local fishing grounds.¹⁰⁰

Callaghy cites some concrete cases of the use of force to extort the civilians.

A police officer and eight of his men committed a whole series of abuses against the villages of the local collectivity of Mfidi, which included illegal fines, extortion, beatings, theft, the illegal arrest of the collectivity chief and others, and general harassment of the villagers by confiscating identification cards. For example, a man from the village of Sadi was truly treated like a savage beast; he was beaten, bound and forced to pay a seven-Zaire fine without a receipt. During this period, these police agents extracted 1,213 Zaires¹⁰¹, 313 chickens, and 25 pigeons from 137 villages.¹⁰²

¹⁰⁰ Thomas M. Callaghy, *The State-Society Struggle: Zaire in Comparative Perspective* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984), 294.

¹⁰¹ In 1972, this amount was equivalent of about US\$3,000. We need to keep in mind (as the end of the quotation underlines) that such an amount was taken from

As we can read in the preceding report, this extortion is very often associated with violence against civilians. Thus, some years later, the traditional chief of Gombe-Sud, not very far from the capital city, had to complain that the situation his population was undergoing was worse than it was under colonial domination:

My people truly suffer in a situation that we never thought we would see, even in the period when the colonial troops sowed panic. But the situation of my people, which is now the work of Zairians against Zairians, seems unnecessary. If such a situation continues without a solution, we will see some regrettable consequences because our military brothers make old people from sixty to eighty carry sacks filled with beans and march more than twenty kilometers on foot and the girls and even old women are often violently raped. The slightest resistance to these things results in beating. It is truly inhuman citizen Commissioner. The protectors of the Zairian people fiercely attack their own brothers!¹⁰³

A. P. Janse Rensburg quotes president Mobutu himself who lamented that during the invasion of Shaba Province by Katangan expatriates in 1978, a group of military officers diverted some 35,000 liters of petrol intended for military transport.¹⁰⁴ In September 1995, just one year before another war broke out, Congolese' fleet of Mirage fighter jets, nominally sent to France for maintenance, were all sold by some top army officers. When Mobutu asked for investigation, he was told that the Mirages had been surrendered to allow

poor people in the villages. This is the oppression of the poor in its crude form.

¹⁰² Callaghy, *The State-Society Struggle*, 295.

¹⁰³ Callaghy, *The State-Society Struggle*, 294.

¹⁰⁴ Abraham Paul Janse Rensburg, *Africa's Men of Destiny* (Pretoria: De Jager-H.A.U.M., 1981), 427.

the president's helicopter fleet to be modernized. But the new helicopters never came to the country.¹⁰⁵ In 1996, as the rebels began attacking the eastern part of the country, the Congolese generals called for the defense budget to be upped, then "siphoned off the best of deliveries, leaving the FAZ¹⁰⁶ with ammunition that did not match its rifles, second-hand equipment from Eastern Europe long past its prime."¹⁰⁷

The most difficult time for the Congolese people came when the then Zairian army started fleeing from the advancing rebels and a coalition of foreign armies. The FAZ took everything they could find on their way: cars, money, clothes, etc. They also killed hundreds of civilians on their way.

In the civil administration, a whole host of abuses flourished all over the country as a result of corrupted officials whose dream was only embezzlement of public funds, and harassment of the civilians. Illegal taxes were collected freely, fictitious positions not recognized by administrative regulation existed, and often these positions had greatly exaggerated salaries and indemnities for the benefit of those who created them. The Commissioners themselves were too corrupted and most of the time, they acted like little Mobutus in their area. "No wonder that by the 1990s, Zaire had more than 600,000 names on its civil service payroll, notionally responsible for tasks the World

¹⁰⁵ Wrong, *In the Footsteps of Mr Kurtz*, 256.

¹⁰⁶ FAZ means "Forces Armées Zairoises" (the name of the Zairian army during Mobutu's regime).

¹⁰⁷ Wrong, *In the Footsteps of Mr Kurtz*, 256.

Bank estimated could be carried out by a mere 50,000."¹⁰⁸
Rensburg made a nice analysis of the situation of corruption in Congo during Mobutu's regime when he wrote:

The bribery and corruption start at the gateway to Zaire. At the international airport outside Kinshasa official palms wait ready to be crossed with American dollars by travelers anxious for a smooth passage through immigration and customs formalities.

A United States 10-dollar bill is the unofficial passport through these barriers into one of Africa's most bizarre societies where corruption is a way of life. The going bribery rate- or "matabeche" (sic) as it is known by the locals- varies according to contingencies. It is higher for entering Zaire without a visa than with one. Departing without a formal currency declaration costs more than going out with one (...) It is what President Mobutu Sese Seko has himself called "the Zairean disease." He has also called it the "invisible tax" which is not on the statute books but "which the whole world knows about."¹⁰⁹

In a frank speech before 5,000 Party members assembled for the second congress of the Popular Revolutionary Movement in November 1981, with delegates from 17 other African countries in the audience, Mobutu analyzed the situation in his country and expressed his grief for the level that the corruption had reached in his country:

"What is it that is wrong?" asked Mobutu. "To my thinking, the heart of the Zairean sickness rests in a profound inversion of all our values." Corruption, he suggested, was certainly a primary symptom. Party functionaries were profiteering on Government goods, returning from State visits with suitcases bulging with luxury items that escaped duty and "transforming department cash registers into private wallets." An "invisible tax" - a bribe- was needed, he continued, to obtain medical treatment, a seat on an aircraft, an import licence, a diploma, or a place for a child in school.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁸ Wrong, *In the Footsteps of Mr Kurtz*, 97.

¹⁰⁹ Rensburg, *Africa's Men of Destiny*, 425.

¹¹⁰ Rensburg, *Africa's Men of Destiny*, 426.

It is unfortunate that most of these practices are still continuing up to this day, especially in the areas controlled by rebels.

However, the government and the army are not the only domain of injustice and corruption in Congo. Businesspeople plan ambush and kill others on the way, in order to get their money. Some wrongly accuse their fellows and take them to court after they have corrupted judges. In this way, they are always right and end up getting whatever they want from others. In the Church, many pastors and bishops are also accused of embezzlement. They repeatedly misuse the money designed for specific projects and use it to buy big personal houses, cars, cows, and accomplish many other personal projects. It is the combination of all these problems and many others that we shall see, which ended up destroying Congo. And these open some windows for us to see what was happening in Judah, though in different forms. We then understand why YHWH had to leave the totally corrupted Jerusalem.

Moreover, at the beginning of verse 2, the tongue is described as being one of the most effective and powerful weapons used in this series of evils. In Jer 9: 2, YHWH compares it with a bow¹¹¹ or a deadly weapon. Commenting on this passage, McKane writes: "the situation described by Jeremiah is one where evil is on the increase as men become more and more bold in their socially destructive

¹¹¹ Holladay rejects this translation and argues that 9:2a should be translated this way: "and they have drawn their tongue, their bow is falsehood." But in the context of social justice and community building, these differences in translation do not make a lot of difference in meaning. The issue is that the tongue has been used for destroying others (other members of the community), not building them up.

enterprises."¹¹² He concludes that "the general summing-up is that they do not know YHWH: they have no commitment to him, no faithful adherence to his demands."¹¹³ In other words, the widespread negative attitude and deeds observed in Judah is the lack of the knowledge of YHWH, or the refusal of the people of Israel to be faithful to the revelation and will of God. The habits of destructive speech is the result of the refusal to know YHWH or to remain faithful to his will and his covenant.

Reason for the lament (9:3-5)

The section formed by verses 3-5 "reflects civil unrest at its worst."¹¹⁴ The community is totally broken down because of the sin of "unclean lips." McKane calls it "the worst kind of civil war, where mistrust has become part of the ordinary life of the community and where every social encounter has to be regarded as a possible trap."¹¹⁵

The passage begins with a word of warning. YHWH, through his prophet, cautions the entire community of Judah that each person has to be on his guard against his/her fellow (ַל). The word ַל which means neighbor or fellow suggests that the danger in the society is not coming from foreigners or longstanding enemies but from the people who live together, who even share some material goods. In our context we will talk about neighbors, colleagues, classmates, members of the same Church, etc. What makes the situation

¹¹² McKane, *Jeremiah 1-25*, 200.

¹¹³ McKane, *Jeremiah 1-25*, 200.

¹¹⁴ Craigie, Kelly and Drinkard, *Jeremiah 1-25*, 144.

¹¹⁵ McKane, *Jeremiah 1-25*, 200.

worse in Judah is that the evil does not only come from the neighbor, but also from the brother (אח). The word אח can signify a blood brother or simply a brother Israelite. In the latter case, there will be no need to make a distinction between אר and אח. They would all designate the same people, the Judeans who were all sons and daughters of Abraham. But it is important to consider that the prophet puts the two words together and in the same context. My opinion is that the prophet is emphasizing the level of the brokenness of Judah as a society; he is putting weight on the level of evil as it has utterly destroyed relationship between members of the same community who are condemned to live together in total mistrust. For the prophet, what makes the situation of Judah as a community very desperate is the fact that these destructive evils are coming from within.

The reasons for the warning are piled up in the lines that follow (vv.3b-5a): every brother is a deceiver (יִעֲקֹב), every friend a slanderer (רִכִּיל), every man trifles his neighbor, they have taught their tongues to speak lies, they never speak the truth (אִמְתָּ), they commit iniquity, oppression (תֵּן) is heaped on oppression, and they have refused to know YHWH. The passage describes the Judean society as a community collapsing under the force of its own corruption. Some of these words are important and should be analyzed in details.

The word יִעֲקֹב used as a verb is found five times in the Old Testament. Three of the five usages allude directly or indirectly to Jacob's grasping Esau's heel at birth and of supplanting him twice by taking his birthright and blessing. Gen. 27:36 records how Esau complained that Jacob has supplanted him. In Hos. 12:3, the prophet accuses Israel of behaving like their forefather Jacob; and Jeremiah (9:4) describes the social decay of Judah as having its root in

the way of Jacob. In other words, "rather than seeking each other's good, brothers sought to hinder each other for their own advancement."¹¹⁶ Thus, in Jer. 9:3, the verb יֵעֲקֹב means to supplant, to overreach, to deceive, to hinder, or to dupe in order to take advantage. In the same text, the author is referring to Jacob as the specialist of deception and is at the same time saying that Jacob has been emulated by so many Judeans.

Another important issue that was destroying the community life was רָכִיל. This word means slander, defamation, or gossip. Five of the six occurrences of this word in the Old Testament use some form of the idiomatic syntagm הֵלֵךְ רָכִיל (go about as a huckster/deceiver/defamer (Lev. 19:16; Prov. 11:13; 20:19; Jer. 6:28; 9:3)). It is possible that the idiomatic use alludes to the reputation of the רָכִיל as a deceptive door-to-door peddler/hawker.¹¹⁷

This text and particularly the use of רָכִיל needs to be understood in the social and cultural contexts of the ancient world of Jeremiah. During that time, information was transmitted from one person to another. People lived in community and each one needed to protect his testimony. There was neither television nor radio where one could go for a public self-defense. A bad testimony could be a hindrance to social issues like marriage, business, nomination to the eldership, etc. The Decalogue considered defamation as a grave offence in Israel. Thus, in Exod. 20:16, it is written: "You shall not testify falsely against your neighbor." Lev. 19:12 puts it as follows: "You shall not go about as a defamer among your people" (see also Exod.

¹¹⁶ Eugene Carpenter and M. A. Grisanti, "יֵעֲקֹב," in *NIDOTTE*, 3: 504.

¹¹⁷ Robert H. O'Connell, "רָכִיל," in *NIDOTTE*, 3: 1114.

23:7; Lev. 5:22, 24; Deut. 19:18). Unfortunately, this law was not being observed in Judah.

Another important word to be considered in this text is **יִהְיֶה**. This is the imperfect hiphil of the verb **תָּלַל** (third masculine plural), which means to mock, to deceive, or to trifle. In the Old Testament, this verb is used eight times and generally, it designates the person deceived (Gen. 31:7; Judg. 16:10, 13, 15; Job 13:9). According to Carpenter and Grisanti,¹¹⁸ the root meaning is deception, putting forth that which is not true/real. In most cases, the deception is willed by the speaker/doer. From several examples, especially in Gen. 31:7, Exod. 8:25, and Judg. 16:10, 13, 15, it can be said that the **תָּלַל** designates someone who does not respect his own word by not accomplishing what he has promised (such as Laban's attitude toward Jacob, Pharaoh toward Moses, and Samson's toward Delilah).

Judeans have also rejected **אֱמֶת** (truth) and are now characterized by **שֶׁקֶר** (falsehood). The lack of truth has almost the same meaning as **תָּלַל**, in the sense of someone who does not tell truth. However, it is important to add here that in Judah or Israel as a whole, the lack of **אֱמֶת** could cause death in case of a wrong testimony in the court; such was Naboth's case (1 Kings 21), who was wrongly sentenced to death because false and corrupt witnesses refused to stand for truth on his behalf. This is why the law insisted that at least two testimonies had to be heard before deciding the case of anybody in the courts, especially for a capital offense (Deut. 19:15ff).

Finally, the Judean society was characterized by **תֵּן** (oppression). In the Old Testament, this word is used five times (Pss. 10:7f; 55:12; 72:14; Prov. 29:13; and Jer. 9:5) and points to some form of social oppression in a corrupted

society. In three of the five passages (Pss 10:7f; 72:12-14; Prov. 29:13), the poor are mentioned in the immediate context of oppression. This probably signifies that the word טן denotes the tyranny of political and economic exploitation of the socially weak in Israelite society. In other words, the rich and the powerful were using oppression as a mean to exploit the poor in order to make exorbitant profit and remain in power.

In the context of my country, this exploitation and generalized corruption can take different forms. It is what Elmer A. Martens calls megatrends of sin expressed in corporate misrepresentation; double-tongued diplomacy; deceit, cheating, and petty thievery in business; excessive competition; the hoarding of power; excessive concern for self-fulfillment, etc.¹¹⁹ The consequences of such megatrends of sin in the community are legions: (1) High rate of infant and adult mortality due to the lack of medical treatments in the country while the rich are going for medical treatments in Europe and other more advanced countries. (2) High rate of children's death due to malnutrition while the rich are throwing out tons of scraps every day. (3) Lack of adequate housing while the rich are living in villas and are buying houses abroad; (4) Lack of education for the poor while the rich are sending their children to study in more advanced countries; (5) Persistent civil wars that are decimating families of the poor while the rich who provoke these same wars get rich, stay away and send their families abroad. (6) Starvation, unemployment, compulsory migration, spread of HIV/AIDS. (7) Lack of good roads and means of

¹¹⁸ Carpenter and Grisanti, "תלל," in *NIDOTTE*, 4: 299.

¹¹⁹ Elmer A. Martens, *Jeremiah*. Believers Church Bible Commentary (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1986), 89.

communications, etc. Briefly, it is a society where nobody is caring for the progress of the community as a whole. Instead, each one is fighting for his own interest.

Moreover, the prophet seems to condemn a class (of rich and powerful), not just individuals. This means that the oppression in this text is an institutionalized injustice; it is a system that is made up to protect a small group of people tied in with all the wealth of the country, by denying to the poor all the means of overcoming their poverty.

This section ends with a summary as in verse 2: "they refuse to know me, YHWH's oracle." One can easily overlook this short statement; but careful observation reveals that in all three passages analyzed so far, this expression always comes after a long list of sins that are intended to spell out what the absence of knowledge of YHWH means (adulterers, traitors, deceivers, slanderers, oppressors, etc). A careful analysis will probably demonstrate the connection between the evil being condemned in Judah and the Mosaic covenant in general and the Decalogue in particular. This analysis will be done in the last section of this chapter. Therefore, it will be enough to state here that the prophet could be seen as rebuking the people for their transgression of the law. Thus, my argument is that one component of the knowledge of God is the knowledge of and obedience to the divine commandment as described in the Decalogue. In other words, to know YHWH according to this passage is to know or to follow his law, especially the second part of the Decalogue that seeks to protect Israel as a community against any form of social abuse or social injustice. Consequently, this knowledge has a link with covenant and means to have a right relationship with one another in the community. It is this right relationship

between one another that also shows a right relationship with YHWH. And this is what it means to know him.

It is worth mentioning that in the general context of the book of Jeremiah, the people who are accused in this passage would not accept the accusation that they did not know the law. In fact, they would argue that they knew it from their childhood, that they have regularly been going to the temple, and therefore knew how to pray, that they have memorized and repeated several times the story of Abraham, the slavery in and deliverance from Egypt, they also heard many stories of how YHWH fought for them in different times.

However, for Jeremiah, the measure in which the nation departs from YHWH's law is the measure in which it ceases to know Him. To rejoice in certain external manifestations of religion, while all the time, in their attitude toward their fellow citizens, they reveal that they are far from the law that YHWH himself has given them is a false knowledge, a שקר. For the prophet of Anathoth and all other true prophets of YHWH, the measure of a nation's knowledge of YHWH is the measure in which, within its own borders, the signs that wrong humanity are stamped out. This knowledge should not be a simple chorus but must guide the nation's will. Put differently, as long as theft, fraud, adultery, slander, telling lies in the court and in the society as a whole, and deception in their newer and subtler forms are rampant, people who claim that they know YHWH are living in falsehood. And falsehood is indeed a feature in Jeremiah's theology as one can notice throughout this chapter. Positively, true knowledge of YHWH was supposed to empower the people of Judah for positive changes in the society in the light of YHWH's law. Unfortunately, it was not the case in Judah where people made claims on YHWH as of right and cherished ambiguous dreams of a supposedly inevitable and

glorious future. As J. Lindblom noticed, for the people of Judah, "the essential was not the claim of the people on Yahweh, but Yahweh's claim on Israel in virtue of election."¹²⁰ This created an attitude such as "no matter what we do we are secure because YHWH has to be with us." This was an easy attitude about the certainty of YHWH's protection.¹²¹ And this is why, this passage opens with YHWH's desire to abandon his people.

No other option but judgment (9:6-8)

In section two above, I demonstrated how the particle לכן (therefore) best rendered as "as a result of," introduces judgments in the lawsuit speeches of the prophet, seeking to justify the reason for "sentences." In this passage, לכן has the same meaning and introduces YHWH's judgment against Judah. But there is a new and important element in this section. At the end of verse 6, YHWH laments saying: "what else can I do because of my people?" (כִּי־אֵיךְ אֶעֱשֶׂה מִפְּנֵי בְנֵי־עַמִּי) This is a statement of someone who has been deeply disappointed. This sentence takes us back to verse 1. There it was said that the passage (v.1) describes an unthinkable situation. That so far, in the book of Jeremiah, YHWH has been trying to help his people to come back to him. That he has been looking for different ways to help them, and that he was even ready to make concessions, for example by agreeing to forgive his people in case he could find only one person who does justice (5:1). Now because the situation has become unbearable for him, YHWH was forced to leave his people.

¹²⁰ Quoted by Overholt, *The Threat of Falsehood*, 12.

¹²¹ Overholt, *The Threat of Falsehood*, 16.

Verse 6 describes YHWH's dilemma and pain. Therefore, it is important that the sentence "what else can I do" be understood not as a question that seeks a response, though the rhetoric in this sentence has led me to put it that way. YHWH is not seeking advice from somebody. He is not actually even looking for what should be done. The sentence depicts someone who is tired with the same mistakes his people are persistently making. It depicts someone who has done his best to help but it was in vain. The last solution is, therefore, to punish. Mark S. Smith portrays YHWH's situation in Israel with the following words:

Like Jeremiah, God begins as Israel's helper, but becomes Israel's victim and therefore initiates Israel's demise. Both victims of Israel, Jeremiah and YHWH, call for Israel's destruction.¹²²

YHWH starts the process of judgment by examining (בַּחַן) his people. Terry L. Brensinger notices that the verb בַּחַן "captures the process through which YHWH evaluates the spiritual condition of his people."¹²³ The emphasis of the evaluation or examination is placed on the heart and the mind. In other words, "YHWH's envisioned testing involves his examining the inner condition, the thoughts and motives, of his people."¹²⁴ Such an examination might indicate that YHWH wants to find out what is exactly going on, the degree of the responsibility of each member of the society and then exercise a true and fair judgment. This idea seems to be confirmed by the use of the verb צָרַף (to dissolve, to purify, to purge, to refine, to winnow, to test, etc). This verb designates an operation consisting of melting a metal

¹²² Mark S. Smith, "Jeremiah 9:9- A Divine Lament," in *Vetus Testamentum* 37 (1987) 98.

¹²³ Terry L. Brensinger, "בַּחַן," in *NIDOTTE*, 1: 636.

¹²⁴ Brensinger, "בַּחַן," in *NIDOTTE*, 1: 637.

in order to purify it. In this text, the word probably anticipates the punishment to come on the nation as a way of purifying the corrupted society, with the hope that such a punishment will succeed where all else has failed.

Verse 7 is a recapitulation of what was said in verses 1-5, but insists on the tongue as the major problem in that society. The new and important element in this passage is hypocrisy. People greet one another with a wish of peace on the lips while they are planning ambush in their heart. This kind of evil is worse than just telling lies or deceiving other people (v.3). Probably this is why it is put at the very end of all other evil deeds in Judah.

Verse 8 is a conclusion to the whole passage. It is the response to the rhetorical question "what else can I do because of my people?" The answer is: I must punish them for their deeds. The use of **גוי** should be understood as indicating that the punishment is to be inflicted on the whole nation of Judah.¹²⁵ The last line of the section ends with a sad note. YHWH asks himself if he should not avenge his soul on a nation like this. In the whole Old Testament, the expression **תתנקם נפשי** (literally "shall my soul not take vengeance?") is only used in Jeremiah (three times). The other two passages (5:9, 29) are very similar to 9:8 and are used in the same context of the punishment of Judah. Wisser comments that the use of the expression shows YHWH as "a person passionately engaged in the history that he begun

¹²⁵ Thompson (*Jeremiah*, 310) suggests that the use of the term **גוי** for Israel may represent the transfer to Israel of a term which was regularly used of non-Israelite peoples. He also adds that its use here suggests that Jeremiah had come to regard the people as no different in their behavior from the **גוי**, the people outside the covenant. This is a good insight, but it seems to me that the main idea in the passage is the designation of the entire nation as a faithless people.

himself with his people and strongly affected by their faithlessness."¹²⁶

In this section, I have demonstrated that Judah as a society has been destroyed internally by the force of its own corruption. This corruption is the result of not living by the standard of the law. This refusal to live by the law is a demonstration that Judah has broken the covenant, and consequently, has ceased to be a covenant community.

Once the covenant is broken, any claim Judah might make that she knew YHWH was wrong because to know YHWH means to follow his commandment and it is an expression of high ethical earnestness. Concretely, the breaking of the covenant in Jer. 9:1-8 is manifested in the following ways:

(1) The practice of adultery (either literal or metaphorical) as a social and spiritual evil against God's commandment.

(2) The abuse of tongue that has destroyed the community.

(3) Oppression of the weak members of the community as a way for the powerful to prevail in the nation and to increase their wealth and their control over the nation.

(4) Total deceitfulness in the community and the lack of confidence in one another.

These evils point at a total lack of the concern for the building of a just community, each one destroying his fellow citizen and each one looking for the his/her own interest without any regard for the word of God. It is the sum of these social evils that Jeremiah calls the lack of the knowledge of YHWH.

¹²⁶ Wisser, *Jérémie, Critique de la vie Sociale*, 31.

**Knowledge of YHWH and the Use of Political
Power (22:13-19)¹²⁷**

Theological Background

This text refers to two specific kings of Judah (Josiah and Jehoiakim) and deals with the question of the use of power in Judah in its relation to the knowledge of YHWH. I consider it as a case study of what has been said so far since the prophet moves from general cases to very specific ones, as it will be shown in the analysis below. Therefore, it is necessary to understand briefly the issue concerning the monarchy in Israel and to set the criteria against which the use of power as related to the knowledge of YHWH will be analyzed in this section, before I start the interpretation of the text itself, since there is a widespread disagreement over the issue of God's attitude toward Israelite human kingship. For example, J.J.M. Roberts admits that the monarchy arose and developed in controversy, and that the ancient debate continues to provoke sharp controversy in modern attempts to evaluate the theological significance of the Israelite kingship.¹²⁸ For David M. Howard, the problem is that the Biblical texts relating to God's attitude toward

¹²⁷ This section contains a reworked material in my Master's thesis entitled "The use and abuse of political power/authority in Jeremiah 22:13-21 with implications for the Church in Africa," presented to *Nairobi Evangelical Graduate School of Theology* in June 2000.

¹²⁸ J. J. M. Roberts, "In Defense of the Monarchy: The Contribution of Israelite Kingship to Biblical Theology," in Patrick D. Miller, Paul D. Hanson, and S. Dean McBride (eds.), *Ancient Israelite Religion* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987), 377.

kingship in Israel appear "-on the surface- to be ambiguous."¹²⁹

Whoever wants to study or evaluate the monarchy in Israel cannot ignore the two central questions frequently asked: should Israel have asked for a king? Did God intend there to be a king in Israel at all? Roberts gives a summary of the three leading positions in ancient scholarship concerning the issue:

In the ancient debate some voices claimed that the mere request for a human king was tantamount to a rejection of God, to a rebellion against divine rule (Judg. 8:22-23; 1 Sam. 8:7; 12:12,17-20). Others, arguing less theologically but equally opposed to the monarchy, saw kingship as a totally unnecessary and unproductive drain on the resources of a healthy society (Judg. 9:7-15; 1 Sam. 10:27). Still others, the ancient promonarchists, viewed kingship as God's gift that finally brought order to an irresponsibly chaotic society in which formerly "every man did what was right in his own eyes" (Judg. 17:6; 21:25; cf.18:1; 19:1).¹³⁰

The issue continues to divide modern scholars as well. On the one hand, there are those who argue that from the beginning to the end, human kingship was what God wanted for Israel;¹³¹ others think that kingship had never been God's

¹²⁹ David M. Howard Jr., "The Case for Kingship in the Old Testament Narrative Books and the Psalms," *Trinity Journal* 9 (1988): 19.

¹³⁰ Roberts, "In the Defense of the Monarchy," 77.

¹³¹ Some of the supporters of this view are: Howard, "The case for Kingship," 19-35. He argues that among the modern scholars, Gerbrandt has pointed the way toward a resolution of the issue by saying that the view in what is commonly called the deuteronomistic history of the institution of kingship in Israel is essentially a favorable one, not a negative one, as is commonly supposed. He also adds that the real issue in the Biblical texts is what kind of monarchy was to exist or to be exercised, not whether Israel should have a monarchy or not. In another article,

intention for Israel and that by developing it on the model of pagan states, the Israelites introduced a paganization into the political and social history of Israel with fateful and lasting consequences.¹³² A third group of scholars agrees with this second view but adds that, though God never intended for Israel to have a human king, he adopted Israel's decision and then sought to adapt it in order to fit his covenant.¹³³ It is important to recall at this point

"The Case for Kingship in Deuteronomy and the Former Prophets," in *Westminster Theological Journal* 52 (1990): 101-105, Howard argues that Israel's sin was in asking for a king who would be like those of the nations, leading it in battle. He also quotes Gerbrandt who stated that the king was to lead Israel by being the covenant administrator, who could then trust YHWH for victory. Another scholar who adopts this view is Roberts, "In Defense of the Monarchy," (377-96). His argument is that the transition to royal rule took place in Israel because the old system was no longer working. He further argues that under the combined pressure of Philistine and Ammonite expansion, the loosely organized Israelite confederacy could not muster and maintain sufficient military forces to deal with the continuing threat. He concludes by saying that the advantages the league offered during the earlier period of the struggle with the Canaanites city-states no longer worked against the new enemies.

¹³²George E. Mendenhall, "The Monarchy," *Interpretation* 29 (1975): 155.

¹³³ I owe these two terms (adoption and adaption) to professor Chester Wood ("With Justice for All; the Task of the People of God: A Biblical Theology," unpublished class notes [Nairobi Evangelical Graduate School of Theology], 1998) who argues that in terms of the argument for and against the monarchy, adoption must not be confused with legitimation. In that way, Wood also quotes Wright, who argues that with the adoption, the king became the focus of new dimensions of God's self revelation. In other words, the king had to represent God's rule among his people in the present and became the symbol of the future hope of God's ultimate, perfect Messianic rule among men. Earl S. Kalland ("Deuteronomy," in Frank E. Gaebelin (ed.), *Expositor's Bible Commentary*, 12 vols., [Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1982], 3:116) argues that the possible

that the task of this thesis is not to discuss or to evaluate these different positions rather, it is to evaluate the use of power by two of the last kings of Judah in relationship with the knowledge of God. However, a good evaluation requires a clear understanding of the issue as it now stands. This is why, as far as the different positions about the attitudes towards kingship are concerned, I concur with those scholars who argue that God adopted and then adapted human kingship in Israel. I agree with this position for three reasons: first, the concept of kingship seems to be a totally foreign idea to Israel's tradition; second, it also seems that whatever position we adopt on the interpretation of I Samuel 8, this text clearly speaks against the establishment of kingship in Israel; and third, I agree with Craigie that Deut. 17: 14-20 appears to be a permissive legislation rather than positing a requirement.¹³⁴ In other words, though God did not intend for Israel to have a human king, he did allow them to have kings according to

future institution of kingship comes not as a command. It does not arise out of the Lord's immediate plan for government but out of a supposition that the people will want a king because the surrounding peoples had kings. But most important is Kalland's argument that "the Lord, in developing revelation, revealed his eternal plan of using kingship as the vehicle of central importance in messianic prophecy and fulfillment."

¹³⁴ Peter C. Craigie, *The Book of Deuteronomy* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1976), 253. See also Jack Ford and A.R.G. Deasley, (*Deuteronomy*, Beacon Bible Commentary [Kansas: Beacon Hill Press, 1966], 563). They also state that the monarchy is treated as a permitted institution but not commanded, and that it was a concession to the people's desire to be like the nations round about. A. D. H. Mayes, *Deuteronomy* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1987), 271. He argues that "the monarchy originated on the basis of a desire of the people, not as a divine ordinance."

their own request,¹³⁵ but a king who would "know" him and work strictly under his covenant.

Moreover, in order to allow a human king to rule under him, YHWH sets strict and precise regulations. These regulations are found in Deut. 17:14-20 and I Sam. 8:1-18. In Deut. 17: 14-20, there are, at least, six limitations on the kingship. The Lord must select the king (15a); the king must not be a foreigner (15b); he must not acquire great numbers of horses (16a); he must not take many wives (17a); he must not accumulate large amounts of silver and gold for himself (17b); and finally, he must write for himself on a scroll a copy of the law (18,19).¹³⁶

¹³⁵ Maybe a good example, often quoted, of the way God, in his sovereignty, does sometimes adopt our decision can be seen in the discussion between the Lord Jesus and the Pharisees in Matt. 19:1-9 concerning divorce. In the passage, the Pharisees quote Deut. 24:1 and think that God had legitimated divorce, but Jesus responds by referring to the will of God in Genesis 1 and 2. And Jesus' statement is very clear: "It was because you were hard-hearted that Moses allowed you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning it was not so. And I say to you, whoever divorces his wife, except for unchastity, and marries another commits adultery (NRSV).

¹³⁶ Many scholars do not agree on the date of this passage in general, but on the date of verses 18-19 in particular. Marcus Dodd et al. (*Exposition of the Bible: Genesis-Ruth*, [Hartford, Conn: The S.S. Scranton Co., 1908], 573) have a lengthy discussion on Deut. 17: 14-20. Their argument is that the passage is of late origin because of several reasons. Two of those reasons are that (1) the passage suggests that the book of the law would already be available to the king, and yet during the time of Moses it was impossible to think about such book; (2) the sending of Israelites to Egypt in order to buy horses was a reality during the time of Solomon, not before. But J. A. Thompson (*Deuteronomy: An Introduction and Commentary*. Tyndale Old Testament Commentary [Leicester:IVP,1974], 204) argues that "there is no reason why Moses should not have been aware of the extremes to which human monarchs could go in the exercise of their autocratic rule, for he had the example of the king of Egypt." See also Jack Ford and A. R. G. Deasley

Deut 17:14-20 gives two important results of the limitations. First, the king will not consider himself better than his brothers and he will not turn from the law to the right or the left (v.20a). This would give to the Israelite monarchy its particularity compared to the other nations around. In fact, most of the kings in Near Eastern nations thought of themselves as above other people. In Mesopotamia, for example, kingship was considered as having been lowered from heaven and therefore, far different from the common people.¹³⁷ But the Israelite king was a brother among (and not above) his brothers; he had to follow the law and to trust in God for his leadership; he was forbidden to become a great military, political or economic power, since these three things could mislead him and let him think that he was ruling by his own power. The idea behind these restrictions is that the land and, therefore, the whole nation of Israel and the whole earth belong to YHWH (see Lev. 25:23). In this context, the king had no absolute power, rather he was commissioned to lead under God himself. Commenting on these limitations, Wood rightly states that,

the outcome of all of the provisions taken together, if obeyed, would have been a kingship/monarchy that did not look like a monarchy by any of the Ancient Near East standards. The adapted monarchy would have at least two positive results. First, the transformed monarchy would not subvert God's plan that his people live in a community, a nation, a kingdom,

(Deuteronomy, 563) who state that the passage fits the time of Moses on the eve of entering the land as it fits no other time. I adopt a more traditional view and agree with Thompson that the passage fits well the time of Moses and that, in his sovereignty, God might have inspired Moses to instruct the Israelites on the possible danger ahead of them.

¹³⁷ On the nature of kingship in Mesopotamia, see the detailed study by Perdue, *Wisdom and Cult* (Missoula: Scholars Press, 1977).

where there was equality of access to the means of producing wealth (. . .). Second, such a transformed monarchy would also maintain the witness to the Lord's name, character, through the just social shape of his people Israel.¹³⁸

The second result of the limitations would be that the king and his descendants would not be threatened from their throne, either from inside or outside (v.20b). Theirs would be a stable kingship, and therefore, a stable nation. This means that the reign and the success of any king in Israel depended totally on the way he ruled the nation under God. In other words, success in leadership (which involved both victory over enemies and the continuation of the dynasty) depended directly on whether a king accepted to abide by the covenant or not. Success or failure of a king had a direct consequence on the nation as a whole.

The second text, I Samuel 8, poses the question of the establishment of kingship in Israel with great vitality. According to this passage, the request for the establishment of the monarchy in Israel was precipitated on the one hand by the age of Samuel, the prophet and the judge of Israel, and on the other hand by the pursuit of selfish gain by his two sons (8:1-5).¹³⁹ The request is, therefore, seen as the

¹³⁸ Wood, "With Justice for all," 50.

¹³⁹ See also Lyle M. Eslinger, *Kingship of God in Crisis: A Close Reading of 1 Samuel 1-12* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1985), 251-282. Another important study on this issue is M. Weinfeld, "Judge and Officer in Ancient Israel and in the Ancient Near East," *Israel Oriental Studies* 7 (1977): 65-88. On the evidence of this passage as characteristic of the time of Samuel, see I. Mendelsohn, "On Corvée Labor in Ancient Canaan and Israel," in *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research* 167 (Oct 1962) 31-35. This article can also be used to validate my argument on the date of Deuteronomy 17 as possibly reporting Moses' warning to Israelites before they occupied Canaan.

result of a crisis situation. Many scholars also think that the real issue that motivated the elders of Israel to ask for a king was the constant threat by neighboring nations. But while considering external threats (or historical context), it is also important to keep in mind that I Samuel 8 comes immediately after the passage that relates, with great detail, the mighty victory of Israel, under Samuel, over the Philistines (I Samuel 7).¹⁴⁰ Commenting on the passage, Wood rightly notices that,

although Israel is "disorganized" and weak from the point of view of its military structure (no standing army or central command), nevertheless with the aid of the Lord they gain a mighty victory over the powerful Philistines.¹⁴¹

The three arguments (Samuel's age, the corruption of Samuel's sons, and the Philistine threats) most often given as justification to Israel's request for a human king cannot stand if one compares chapters 7 and 8. What stands out very clearly is that the problem of Israel was not external but internal, more specifically its relationship with YHWH and with one another. And this is very important for my

¹⁴⁰ It is possible that the threat of the Philistines and the other neighbors of Israel was renewed after the victory related in I Samuel 7, just as Walter Brueggemann sees it (*First and Second Samuel* [Louisville, Kentucky: John Knox Press, 1990], 61). When commenting on I Sam. 8:1-3, he writes: "it is a long time between chapters 7 and 8. Samuel is suddenly old." But to my opinion, the long time between Chapters 7 and 8 cannot justify that Israel is now unable to cope with the situation and that the solution is to have a human king. The issue is that of faithfulness of Israel to YHWH: whenever the people were faithful, God intervened to help them, and whenever they became unfaithful, God abandoned them. I would, therefore, say that the request for a human king is another story of the unfaithfulness of Israel to Yahweh.

¹⁴¹ Wood, "With justice for all," 6.

thesis. Several times the Bible warns the people of Israel that their lives and security in the land depended on their faithfulness to YHWH.¹⁴² Moreover, the strong reaction of Samuel against the establishment of kingship in Israel reveals that he knew the human king would not be able to solve the problem of Israel but that he would just worsen it. This is what actually happened. It is interesting to note here that Samuel's warning about the danger of the monarchy was not based on historical grounds but on social and religious grounds.

First was the religious danger of the monarchy (1 Sam. 8:6-8). God's response to Samuel concerning the request of Israel (vv.6-8) makes it clear that the problem of Israel is more theological than political or historical, as it might appear at first. The point of crisis is that the monarchy is the rejection of YHWH himself. Brueggeman rightly points out that this rejection is not a new happening but a characteristic of Israel's history and that the whole history of Israel is one of "forsaking" and going after other gods.¹⁴³ This request of a human king "is one more step in that continuing performance of mistrust."¹⁴⁴ It will not, therefore, be an exaggeration to argue with Samuel that the request of the people of Israel to have a human king marks

¹⁴² Craigie, *Deuteronomy*, 211. In his commentary on Deut 11:18-25, he writes that the main emphasis in the passage is on "the requirement of God for his people (law, obedience, and love), upon which the future blessing of God in the conquest and the possession of the Promised Land would be contingent." What is very interesting is the use of many conditional sentences, that is, success for the Israelites depended on their relationship with God. Some examples of such conditional sentences can also be found in Deut 10:11-11:25.

¹⁴³ Brueggeman, *First and Second Samuel*, 63

¹⁴⁴ Brueggeman, *First and Second Samuel*, 63

the climax (or the beginning of the climax) of disobedience to YHWH, since "the issue of monarchy in Yahweh's speech is perceived as Israel's unwillingness to have Yahweh as the source and ruler of life."¹⁴⁵ This is what Eslinger calls a covenantal sin of Israel.¹⁴⁶

Second was the social danger of the monarchy (1 Sam. 8:9-20).¹⁴⁷ God makes it clear to Israel that their request for a king will bring a serious distortion in the society. One of these serious distortions was the structural change from a clan-based economic system to a centralized, temple-based system. But YHWH accepts their request for a king but, at the same time, he commands Samuel: "you shall solemnly warn them, and show them the ways of the king who shall reign over them." A warning precedes a danger, and here YHWH wants the people to know the consequences of their request. The real danger comes from the "ways of the king" (משפט המלך) literally translated, "justice of the king." YHWH is asking Samuel to explain to the people the kind of social justice a human king will introduce into the society and its consequence for the whole nation. These "ways of the king" are contained in 1 Sam. 8:10-18,¹⁴⁸ and the governing

¹⁴⁵ Brueggman, *First and Second Samuel*, 63

¹⁴⁶ Eslinger, *Kingship of God in Crisis*, 264.

¹⁴⁷ This is another text that is debated by Old Testament scholars. Robert Polzin (*Samuel and the Deuteronomist* [San Francisco: Harper & Row Publishers, 1989], 85), for example, seems to disagree with those who take 1 Samuel 8:11-18 literally, when he says: "To consider the royal practices listed here by Samuel as particularly abusive is, in my opinion, tendentious."

¹⁴⁸ Brueggemann (*First and Second Samuel*, 63) argues that this speech placed in the mouth of Samuel is the harshest, most extensive criticism of monarchy in the Old Testament (see also Deut. 17:14-20). He adds that it is one of the most important pieces in the Old Testament on the abuse of public

word in the passage is the verb "to take." The king is the one who takes or who confiscates what belongs to the people, and Samuel goes on to list what the king will take: he will take their sons for military purposes (vv.11-12); he will take their daughters to serve in the newly emerging royal class and its routine (v.13); he will take the best of their fields and vineyards and olive orchards (v.14); he will take one-tenth of their grain and of their vineyards (v.15); he will take their slaves, cattle and donkey (vv.16-17a). The king thinks that everything belongs to him and that apart from him, nobody has the right to own anything in the country.

The first consequence of human kingship is that the people will become slaves of their king. The Israelites knew from experience what it meant to become slaves of a king, as they themselves were slaves of Pharaoh in Egypt. Thus, we read several times in Deuteronomy, "Remember that you were a slave in Egypt" (Deut. 5:15; 15:15; 16:12; 24:18). Eslinger rightly points out that the election of a king will return Israel to the slave status from which YHWH originally freed them.¹⁴⁹

power, but that it is disputed whether this indictment of oppressive political power is post-Solomonic- and, in fact, a critic of Solomonic abuses - or whether it reflects an awareness of the nature of monarchy drawn from the evidence of neighboring states. Brueggeman's conclusion is that either way, the statement reflects what must have been a strongly held view among theological conservatives in ancient Israel who greatly feared centralized government.

¹⁴⁹ Eslinger, *Kingship of God in Crisis*, 276. See also Brueggemann (*First and Second Samuel*, 65) who noted that Israel, especially the old Israel of Samuel, still had vivid memories of the Exodus and the deliverance from slavery. He adds that the people's request of a human king is a return to the pre-Exodus situation of bondage, and that it does not matter greatly if the one who enslaves is a pharaoh from Egypt or an Israelite king. He concludes by saying that Monarchy, in

The second consequence is that people will cry because of their king. People cry because they are miserable, and this misery is brought by the monarchy as described in the preceding passage. Once again, Samuel is trying to dissuade the people that whatever they think of a king, life under monarchy will turn to their disadvantage, and that will surely lead people to cry to YHWH for help, as it happened when they were in Egypt.

The third consequence is that the Lord will not answer the people in that day (when they will start crying). Cry-answer is "a central construct and practice in Israel's faith (cf. Exod. 2: 23-25)."¹⁵⁰ The immediate context shows how in 1 Sam. 7:8 the Israelites requested Samuel to cry to the Lord on their behalf because of the imminent attack by the Philistines.¹⁵¹ In Exodus, YHWH tells Moses that he has heard the cry of his people in Egypt and, therefore, he decided to act (Exod. 3:7). Isa. 65:24 also shows that, because of his covenant, God will answer his people even before they call (cry). But by substituting God by a human king, Israel was forfeiting the possibility of God answering their cry. Or, as Brueggemann says, "Samuel warns that in choosing the monarchy, Israel chooses a desperate autonomy that finally can lead only to futility, abandonment, and eventually death."¹⁵²

principle, generates destructive inequality and stratification, and thus enslavement is presented as intrinsic to the institution of monarchy.

¹⁵⁰ Brueggemann, *First and Second Samuel*, 64.

¹⁵¹ In fact, I Samuel 1-12 can rightly be considered as part of "Deuteronomistic book of Judges," where Samuel, the last judge of Israel before the beginning of the monarchy, participates in the cycle of judge-stories, in which cry-answer plays an important part.

¹⁵² Brueggemann, *First and Second Samuel*, 65.

In conclusion, YHWH knew that one day the people of Israel would request a human king; then in his eternal wisdom, he foresaw the need of setting a guideline. In this way, the idea behind the limitations in Deuteronomy 17 can be seen as a guide to the king to use properly his power and to maintain justice with the Lord and with His people Israel. A king who would rule according to these limitations, would demonstrate that he knew YHWH. In this way also, the kingdom of Israel would remain different from the other kingdoms around. In return, YHWH promised the continuation of the kingdom as the result of the obedience to the covenant, since the guideline is actually nothing more than the covenant itself. I Samuel 8 is a warning to the Israelites that the king they wanted would not be able to keep the covenant and that it would be dangerous for the people to long for a human king. The text can also be seen as another guideline that could help the kings of Israel to realize the temptations and dangers they were going to face in the exercise of their power.

Translation

13. *Woe to him who builds his house by unrighteousness,
and his upper room without justice;
who makes his neighbor work for nothing,
and does not pay him his wages;*
14. *Who says, "I will build for myself a large house
with spacious upper rooms,"
and cuts out windows for it,
paneling it with cedar,
and painting it with vermilion (Bright red)*
15. *Do you reign because you compete in cedar?
Your father, did he not eat and drink
and do justice and righteousness
and it was well for him.*
16. *He judged the cause of the poor and needy;
then it was well.
Is not this to know me? Word of YHWH.*
17. *But your eyes and your heart are on nothing else*

- except on your dishonest gain,
and on shedding innocent blood,
and on practicing oppression and extortion.
18. Therefore, thus says the Lord concerning Jehoiakim,
son of Josiah, king of Judah:
"They will not lament for him,
Ah, my brother! or Ah my sister!
They will not lament for him,
Ah! Lord! or Ah! his majesty!
19. He will be buried with the burial of an ass,
Dragged off and thrown out
outside the gates of Jerusalem.

Historical and Literary Contexts

Unlike all other preceding passages, this poem has one specific clue to help the reader set a precise date for it: the name of king Jehoiakim. However, if this specific passage refers directly to Jehoiakim, it is important to recognize that the text is but a small section of Jer. 21:11–23:8, which contains different sayings almost equally divided between poetry and prose. They were probably uttered over a considerable span of time, and have been drawn together because of their relationship to the theme stated in the heading (21:1): "to the royal house of Judah."¹⁵³

Structure

Most scholars divide this passage into two parts (vv. 13-17: accusation speech; and vv. 18-19: judgment speech). However, for the sake of clarity, I divide it into three parts. My choice is justified by the concern to compare Jehoiakim with his father. Thus, my division of the text will read as follows:

-the abuse of power (vv. 13-15a, 17);

¹⁵³ Bright, Jeremiah, 144.

- the right use of power (vv.15b-16);
- the announcement of judgment (vv.18-19).

Interpretation

The Abuse of Power: Jehoiakim (Jer. 22:13-23)

The passage starts with a "woe" (v. 13), which is usually used to denounce practices that are unjust and which disrupt the social order of the community.¹⁵⁴ This woe introduces a series of accusations against king Jehoiakim because of his disdain for righteousness and justice; but the name of the king is not given until verse 18. The following are the three charges all connected with the building project: he builds his house "by unrighteousness" (בלא צדק); his upper room "without justice" (בלא משפט), and makes his neighbors work for nothing or without paying them their wages.¹⁵⁵

¹⁵⁴ Carroll (*Jeremiah*, 426-27) discusses in detail the use of "woe" in the prophetic literature and concludes that the "woe" saying is a feature of some of the prophetic traditions (e.g. Isa. 5:8-23; Amos 6:1-3,4-6), but not of the book of Jeremiah. He adds that the "woe" sayings are formal denunciations of anonymous groups introduced by the word "Woe . . .", and have their origins in the wise men's reflections about the conditions of the world." He also adds that to denounce groups in this manner is to call down bad luck on them and is parallel to the curse (i.e. cursed is . . .). More important for this work, Carroll argues that the rhetorical question which concludes the "woe" saying may have misled the editors into thinking that it referred to a king and, therefore, was about royal building projects. For Carroll, the original meaning may not have had a king in mind at all since kings are not usually the recipients of "woe" sayings. But for this thesis I do think that, contrary to Carroll's argument, the woe here refers to king Jehoiakim.

¹⁵⁵ H.-J.Zobel, "הוי," in *TDOTT*, 3:363. He argues that all the woe sayings in the prophetic oracles are related to

The first charge in verse 13 is that the king builds his house¹⁵⁶ by unrighteousness. There are two important observations to make at this point: First, it might appear that the condemnation is not on the building itself but on the way the building project was carried on. In other words, the king was using unrighteous means to build his palace. This is what נב repeated twice may suggest here. But the problem with this argument is whether there was a need for the king to build a new sumptuous palace apart from the one built by Solomon (2 Kings 7:1-12) and where, apparently, all

the misconduct which lies in the social sphere. And this is exactly the case in Jeremiah 22.

¹⁵⁶ Craigie, Kelly and Drunkard, *Jeremiah 1-25*, 310. They argue that the mention of the "house" can appear at first sight ambiguous, since it is difficult to know if the writer is talking about his house, his family, or his dynasty. They also indicate that some of the ambiguity is quickly removed by the mention of the upper room which presupposes a building of a house. Holladay (*Jeremiah 1*, 594) thinks that the real difficulty in this text is to determine whether the reference is to a new building or a renovation of Solomon's palace. His view is that Solomon's palace continued to be the residence for kings in Jerusalem after Solomon's time. This means that scholars have not yet been able to recover the exact meaning of the passage. It is probably the lack of evidence that made Carroll (*Jeremiah*, 427) write that the original meaning of this passage may not have had a king in mind at all, since kings are not usually the recipients of woe sayings. But as Carroll himself realized, it is difficult to separate verses 14 and 15 from the five following verses which clearly contain accusations against king Jehoiakim. Thompson's (*The Book of Jeremiah*, 478) argument can be accepted as a solution to this debate concerning the debated passage. He writes that nothing is known archeologically about buildings in Jerusalem itself, but that the reason might be that the city suffered severely from the many attacks over the centuries. He also adds that excavations at Ramat Rachel in recent years have brought to light evidence of some fine structures from the end of seventh century which would illustrate the point made by Jeremiah and may well have been the work of Jehoiakim.

the kings after him lived.¹⁵⁷ Moreover, Jehoiakim was a vassal of Egypt and as such, he found himself with the terrible burden of raising the tribute demanded by Egypt. 2 Kings 23:35 reports that the only means of raising revenues that was available to him was the taxation of his people. It is, therefore, unbelievable to imagine that under the yoke of Egypt, and later on of Babylon, the small-minded king could think about starting a luxurious building project and in this way, add another burden to his people. Thus, it becomes obvious that the project could not be carried on without harming the people already impoverished by heavy taxation. We can, therefore, understand why the prophet opens the accusation against Jehoiakim with a woe, which, as I have already mentioned, is used to denounce practices that are unjust and disrupt the social order of the community.

Second, he builds his upper room without justice. The upper room here refers to the building mania of Jehoiakim: it was not a small house but a pompous building enterprise. Commenting on this passage, Martens writes: "it is tempting to equate an elaborate complex of buildings found by archaeologists south of Jerusalem with Jehoiakim's palace."¹⁵⁸ He also adds that the "imposing wide house with large chambers was surrounded by a citadel extending over five acres."¹⁵⁹ Craigie, Kelly and Drinkard also underscore this point when they say that it is not even the house of just any well-to-do person, but a house that is quite elaborate, both in its dimensions (large, with spacious

¹⁵⁷ See also Ovid R. Sellers "Palace," in *IDB*, 3:620. He notices that presumably subsequent kings of Judah occupied Solomon's palace.

¹⁵⁸ Martens, *Jeremiah*, 147.

¹⁵⁹ Martens, *Jeremiah*, 147.

upper rooms, and windows cut out for it) and in its decor (paneled with cedar).

In verse 14 we find two important items of information: first, the passage describes the king as saying: "I will build for myself..." (לִי). The declaration shows the intention of the king. The project was not for any national interest but rather for a personal one with a negative impact on the whole nation. It was a kind of private villa for the king. In this way, he could have two or more villas like all the other Near Eastern monarchs of his day. Feinberg is right when he writes, concerning Jehoiakim, saying: "the building mania, common among oriental monarchs, had seized him."¹⁶⁰ Therefore, for Jehoiakim, to be a king meant, among other things, to become very rich, and one way to show that wealth was by having several palaces. In terms of our standards, the building mania goes against the fifth limitation (Deut. 17:17b), which prohibits the Israelite king against the accumulation of personal wealth at the expense of his subjects.

For Congolese people, this reminds them of Mobutu, their late president, who had a particular taste for building palaces all over the world. Inside the country, a villa lay ready in every major town for the president's use. And with each of these villas were associated luxurious cars for the president. In 1996, when the eastern town of Goma was captured by rebels, there were five Mercedes Benz, "in pristine condition, two ambulances, in case the president fell sick and a Land Rover with a podium attachment to allow him, Pope-like, to address the public."¹⁶¹ Kinshasa, the capital city, boasted a choice of presidential residences,

¹⁶⁰ Feinberg, *Jeremiah*, 157.

¹⁶¹ Wrong, *In the Footsteps of Mr Kurtz*, 6.

including a beautiful hillside mansion whose grounds served as a private zoo. There was another pagoda in the Chinese village built at N'sele, east of the capital, and a luxury cruiser Kamanyola, "furnished with oyster-shaped settees in pink silk."¹⁶²

One of the most remarkable of Mobutu's achievements in building mania inside the country was his palace complex at Gbadolite (Mobutu's village). In the words of Wrong, the palace complex at Gbadolite "gradually blossomed into life like one of those lush tropical flowers which virtually poison the air around, so potent is their scent."¹⁶³ Cleophas Kamitatu who served as both Agriculture and Finance Minister at the beginning of the 80s, reports that as work on Gbadolite palace escalated,

We decided together (as ministers) that \$2 million a month should be enough. When I went to see Mobutu and told him, he said: "You are pulling my leg. It's out of question. I need \$10 million." I told him the World Bank and IMF would never agree to that and after a lot of discussion we agreed on \$3 million a month, which, after all, added up to \$36 million a year. Yet, within a week of the Zairean delegation returning to Kinshasa, Mobutu asked the central bank governor for \$10 million, citing the country's interests' as justification. A month later, there was a request for another \$10 million. Four months after the IMF and World Bank meeting, he'd already had \$36 million, the agreed budget for the year.¹⁶⁴

But the true scandal was the great number of his villas outside the country:

Most notorious was the \$5.2 million Villa del Mar in Roquebrune Cap Martin, not far from King Leopold's former French Riviera estate. The story goes that when buying this neoclassical property, the president agreed

¹⁶² Wrong, *In the Footsteps of Mr Kurtz*, 94.

¹⁶³ Wrong, *In the Footsteps of Mr Kurtz*, 95.

¹⁶⁴ Wrong, *In the Footsteps of Mr Kurtz*, 203.

the price, then as an afterthought enquired whether it would be in dollars or Belgian francs, the 39 fold difference in value held no meaning for a man of such careless wealth.

On a similar lavish scale were Les Miguettes, a converted farmhouse in the Swiss village of Savigny and the \$2.3 million Casa Agricola Solean estate in Portugal's Algarve, blessed with 800 hectares of land, a 14,000-bottle cellar and 12 bedrooms. There was also a vast apartment on Paris's Avenue Foch, conveniently close to the furrier who made his trademark leopardskin hats and the fashion designers patronized by his family. From Cape Town to Madrid, Marbella to Marrakesh, Abidjan to Dakar were scattered a string of farms, villas and hotels.

However, the bulk of his real estate network was located in Brussels. The turreted Château Fond'Roy was just one of at least nine buildings scattered across the upmarket districts of Uccle and Rhode St Genèse... It was an impressive collection for a man who in 1959 claimed to have just \$6 to his name.¹⁶⁵

I wonder what Jeremiah would have told Mobutu, if he vigorously condemned Jehoiakim for building only one palace, as we read in the text. Should I add here that Mobutu was not the only one buying and building palaces all over? Who

¹⁶⁵ Wrong, *In the Footsteps of Mr Kurtz*, 96. A more detailed, though older report of Mobutu's property list comes from L. B. Ekpelu (*Zaire and the African Revolution* [Nigeria: Ibadan University Press, 1989], 244). He quotes the Belgian magazine *Choc* reporting that the Zairean president was the number two richest leader, a runner-up to the Shah of Persia in the league of wealthy national leaders. He adds that Mobutu's possessions in buildings and land amount to about £12,500,000... He also adds that one source estimated the value of Mobutu's property outside Zaire as follows: Namur Chateau at £1,200,000; the villa at Rhode-St Genese between Waterloo and Brussels about £550,000; land and buildings at Uccle, a fashionable residential Brussels suburb £1 million; two apartment blocks in Brussels, one 10-storey building on Boulevard Reyers valued at about £1,200,000 and another on Boulevard Lambermont at over £500,000; the Avenue Foch appartement in Paris, just over £550,000; residence in Nice £600,000; another in Venice, £400,000; a villa in Spain, £700,000 and in Africa, the building at Bangui, £120,000 and the villa at Abidjan, £250,000.

knows the exact number and value of palaces owned by the Congolese *Grosses Legumes* all over the world? One then understands how the Congolese economy was ruined; and this also helps to understand YHWH/Jeremiah's concern for Judah. Building mania destroys the economy of the nation; it destroys the social shape of the nation by impoverishing the common people. Moreover, the costs to maintain these palaces and sometimes to feed the many relatives who are living in them¹⁶⁶ become unbearable for the entire community.

Third, Jeremiah's statement that Jehoiakim is making his neighbor work for nothing, without paying him his wage, is a proof that the king is treating his subjects like slaves. By doing that, the king is breaking the law that forbids the Israelite to withhold his neighbor's salary. Lev. 19:13 reads as follows: "You shall not exploit your friend, and you shall not rob him. You shall not hold back the wages of a hired worker until the morning."¹⁶⁷ Commenting on the similar law in Deut. 24:14-15, Craigie argues that failure to behave in this manner would bring down sin on Israel as a community (v. 15b), for the poor and the needy

¹⁶⁶ My understanding is that in Judah, most palaces belonged to the kings and the princes and would serve as houses for wives and relatives. This is also the case in DR Congo where the powerful were using their many buildings for their concubines and their extended families. In this way, these powerful would continue to plunder the nation because they need money to feed those living in the houses and to maintain these buildings.

¹⁶⁷ Jacob Milgrom, "The Changing Concept of Holiness in the Pentateuchal Codes with Emphasis on Leviticus 19," in John F.A. Sawyer (ed.), *Reading Leviticus: A Conversation with Mary Douglas* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1986), 68. He rightly argues that all the commandments enumerated in this chapter fall under the rubric of holiness, and that holiness is not just a matter of divinely imposed restrictions of God's nature; but that all Israelites should relate to each other as God relates to his creation.

would cry to God for help in their distress. He also adds that God does bring aid to the oppressed; but when that help should have been offered by the people of God in the first place, the people, by their failure, bring down the judgment of God on their own heads.¹⁶⁸ The reason is that not paying promptly a worker's labor will deprive him of the possibility of purchasing food for his family for the evening meal and for the following day. But Jehoiakim was not only delaying the wages until the following (morning) day; he was simply not paying them at all. In other words, he made his people become his slaves. This reminds us of the conclusion of Samuel's warning that the king will take everything from the people and that the people will become slaves of their own king (I Sam 8:17); and under Jehoiakim, and many other despots, the people did become slaves.

This takes us back to the central issue of kingship in Israel. What was the role or the responsibility of the Israelite king toward the people and toward YHWH? In other words, and in this very context, was the king allowed to use his power to enslave his subjects by his personal projects? The answer to these two questions is simply no. The king had two important responsibilities: to assure loyalty to the covenant, and to promote the well-being or the *shalom* of the people. To quote McKane,

It is his responsibility to ensure that the weaker members of the community do in fact, and not merely in theory, enjoy equality before the law... This is a concern to preserve an effective reciprocity of rights in the community despite differences of station, power and wealth among the individuals who constitute it. He must be vigilant that these rights are not infringed by new departures against which older forms of safeguards will not avail, and always alive to what is necessary to preserve them. It is the will to

¹⁶⁸ Craigie, *Deuteronomy*, 309.

implement whatever is required to achieve these ends which constitutes "knowledge of Yahweh" (emphasis mine).¹⁶⁹

The thought "I will build for myself" with all the negative impact on the people had simply no place in God's plan for the Israelite king. In addition, the detailed description of the king's own house (note the repetition of the upper rooms) with windows, a house paneled with cedars and painted with bright red or vermilion are significant. Questions that come from such descriptions are the following: what information does the prophet intend to convey to his readers by giving all these details? Why were not other building projects, like Solomon's, condemned with such strong words? Where did the vassal-king obtain funds for such a spacious building? The answer to the last question is simply that the labor for his building project cost him nothing because the text mentions that his subjects were forced to work for nothing; that is he did not pay them their wages.¹⁷⁰ The many details in the passage help us to notice the contrast between the huge building and the cost of such a building, and its impact on the economy of the nation. It appears, therefore, that Jehoiakim was a thoroughly spoiled and self-indulgent young despot¹⁷¹ in the kingdom of Judah.

The climax of the accusation against king Jehoiakim begins in verse 16. The passage starts with an important

¹⁶⁹ McKane, *Jeremiah*, 531.

¹⁷⁰ This may have two related senses: either structurally the entire economic system led to debt-slavery, or even those who were not debt-slaves were forced to work for no wages, as this text suggests.

¹⁷¹ Thompson, *The Book of Jeremiah*, 479.

question: "do you reign because you compete in cedar?"¹⁷² This question takes us back again to the role of the Israelite king, especially to the use of power by the Israelite king. Put in other words, Jehoiakim could be asked: "Why do you reign? Or why are you a king?" Jehoiakim's answers, according to the passage, would be: "I reign because I outdo everybody in cedar, I reign because I have the best houses in Judah, I reign because I can force my subjects to work for me without any pay, I reign because I am the richest person in the nation, I reign because everybody in the nation fears me, I reign because my soldiers can arrest (and kill) anybody, I reign because I have power, etc." This is probably how Jehoiakim and most of the evil kings of Israel and Judah understood the monarchy. This is also how most of our leaders in Africa understand their leadership.

The prophet then compares Josiah, the good king of Judah with his son Jehoiakim. The same question can be asked to the father: "Why do you reign, Josiah?" The answer would be: "I reign to do the will of God; that is by doing justice and righteousness, and by pleading the cause of the poor and the needy." To reign for Josiah meant to serve YHWH and His people, to abide to the covenant; but for Jehoiakim, it meant to serve himself and to be served by the people. Jeremiah declares in the second part of verse 16 that what Josiah did, proved that he knew YHWH. In other words, the deeds of each of the two kings were dependent on whether they knew God or not. Josiah knew God, and as a result, he

¹⁷² Scholars vary on the translation of this passage. Bright (*Jeremiah*, 137) writes that the text of verses 15 and 16 is somewhat confused, that the translation in some places is conjectural, and that the LXX differs widely from the MT. His translation of the passage resembles that of Thompson: "That makes you a king - outdoing everyone in cedar?"

used his power properly by defending the cause of the powerless. This is God's will for the covenant-king. But in verse 17, the prophet tells us that as a result of not knowing God, Jehoiakim had his eyes and heart on nothing else but dishonest gain, shedding innocent blood, and practicing oppression and extortion. Each of these charges deserves a special treatment.

First, the king is accused of having his eyes and heart on nothing else but dishonest gain. The word *לָצַל* here means gain or bribe (and the pursuit of gain through greed), and it is used in conjunction with perversion of justice. In that sense, the gain is to be understood as unjust (Prov. 28:16; Hab. 2:9), selfish (Ps. 119:36; Prov. 15:27; Jer. 6:13), or even sinful (Isa. 57:17).¹⁷³ God made it clear that the Israelite king or any other leader must first of all be one who shows righteousness and who judges with justice. One of the many examples is that of the qualifications for the men who were to be chosen to help Moses in Exod. 18:13-27. The Bible says that those men had to fear God, be trustworthy, and hate unjust gain. These qualifications were also considered to be indispensable virtues of a judge.¹⁷⁴

Likewise, the book of Samuel indicates that the people of Israel revolted against the sons of Samuel because their heart turned aside after gains (I Sam. 8:3). J. Clinton McCann rightly notices that turning aside after gain is the opposite of walking in the way of righteousness, according to the will of YHWH (Ps. 119:36; Isa. 33:15; 56:11; 57:17; Jer. 8:10).¹⁷⁵ The person who walks in his own way has little

¹⁷³ J. Clinton McCann Jr. " *לָצַל*," in *NIDOTTE*, 1:695.

¹⁷⁴ Diether Kellermann, " *לָצַל*," in *TDOTT*, 1:208.

¹⁷⁵ McCann, " *לָצַל*," in *NIDOTTE*, 1:695.

regard for God or for his fellow humans.¹⁷⁶ This was certainly the case of Jehoiakim, whom the prophet contrasts with Josiah the godly king who knew YHWH and who, consequently, did not love unjust gain.

The contrast between the good father and the evil son is introduced by the adversative particle ׀. According to Holladay, the particle ׀ expresses a strong opposition and it is followed by a subordinate ׀N, which expresses more opposition.¹⁷⁷ The combination of heart and eyes suggests that the total energy of Jehoiakim was concentrated on his selfish gain.¹⁷⁸

Second, Jehoiakim's heart and eyes were on shedding innocent blood. The word ׀I that is used in the passage refers to bloodshed in the contexts of either murder or warfare.¹⁷⁹ By using this word, the prophet may intend to show us that obsessiveness and diseased ambition drove Jehoiakim to oppressive and ruthless behavior.¹⁸⁰

Thirdly, Jehoiakim is accused of practicing oppression and extortion. The verb קשׁו means to oppress, to wrong or

¹⁷⁶ McCann, " ׀׀," in *NIDOTTE*, 1:695.

¹⁷⁷ Holladay, *Jeremiah 1*, 597.

¹⁷⁸ Samuel J. Schultz elaborates on this in "Jehoiakim," *ISBE* 2:976-977. His argument concerning the leadership of Jehoiakim as a covenant king is helpful for the understanding of the passage of our study. He comments that it is obvious that Jehoiakim was not in sympathy with the reforms promoted by his father Josiah and that, undoubtedly, Judah reverted to idolatry during his reign. He was responsible for the arrest and execution of a prophet named Uriah, for the burning of the scroll written by Jeremiah (Jer.36), and for the oppression of the powerless.

¹⁷⁹ Herbert Wolf and Robert Holmsted, "קשׁו," in *NIDOTTE*, 4:222.

¹⁸⁰ McKane, *Jeremiah*, 531.

to extort. When related to Israel, the word frequently describes various forms of social injustice by which the rich in Israelite society oppressed the poor.¹⁸¹ As I have already mentioned, the responsibility of the king was to rescue the oppressed from the hands of their oppressors; but when the king himself, as in this case, practices the oppression, the ones oppressed become helpless. This is why the Bible states clearly that the act of oppression against the poor is an act of oppression against God Himself (Prov. 14:31).

To conclude this section, it is important to note at this point with Craigie, Kelly and Drinkard that the spilling of innocent blood and oppression relate back to Jer. 22:3. They also add that the message of 22:3 called for justice and righteousness and not spilling innocent blood. Unfortunately, it is the king himself who is committing these very acts.¹⁸²

The Right Use of Power: Josiah (22:15b-16)

15b Your father,¹⁸³ did he not eat and drink
and do justice and righteousness, and it was
well for him?

Justice

¹⁸¹ Ignatius Swart, "קשע," in *NIDOTTE*, 3:577. See also Ignatius Swart, "ןי," in *NIDOTTE*, 2:471. In this second article, Swart argues that the meaning of "ןי" is closely related to that of "קשע," and that in the days of the Old Testament prophets, the oppressors were the rich and ruling class in society (Jer. 22:1-3; Ezek. 22: 6-7; 45:8; 46:18; Zeph 3:1,3).

¹⁸² Craigie, Kelly and Drinkard, *Jeremiah 1-25*, 312.

¹⁸³ Thompson (*The Book of Jeremiah*, 477) prefers "think of your father" or "now what about your father" in order to make the contrast clearer.

16He pleaded the cause of the poor and the needy;
then it was well.
Is not that to know me? says the Lord.

This is a section of the message addressed to Jehoiakim by YHWH through Jeremiah. The prophet takes king Josiah as the model of a good leader which his son should have followed; but Jehoiakim's leadership is in sharp contrast with his father's. In other words, the prophet is indicating that if Jehoiakim wants a predecessor to emulate, he can try his father.¹⁸⁴ The prophet briefly enumerates the elements that constitute the right leadership of Josiah: he ate and drank, he did justice and righteousness, and he pleaded the cause of the poor and the needy.

The exact implication of the first two verbs (to eat and drink) is difficult to understand and scholars vary on the interpretation of the passage. For Cornill, Bright, and Thompson it means that Josiah lived well and still managed to adhere to the covenant. According to Duham and Condamin, the passage means that Josiah lived simply and was concerned rather to adhere to the covenant. Volz thinks that what the passage wants to underline here is that there is no opposition between eating, drinking and doing justice; in other words, Josiah accepted the responsibility of being the head of his people in both his daily habits and in the royal maintenance of the covenant.¹⁸⁵ The passage can also mean that what was socially equitable and the will to maintain it came as easily to Josiah as the natural activities of eating and drinking.¹⁸⁶ Finally, Feinberg¹⁸⁷ has the following

¹⁸⁴ Holladay, *Jeremiah 1*, 596.

¹⁸⁵ Holladay, *Jeremiah 1*, 596.

¹⁸⁶ Mckane, *Jeremiah 1-25*, 530.

¹⁸⁷ Feinberg, *Jeremiah*, 157.

comment on the passage: "he (Josiah) enjoyed the normal comforts of life but never made ostentation his goal. He knew how to enjoy life without extortion or oppression. He was no ascetic but did not make it his ambition to rival Solomon in building." What is clear in all these different interpretations is that there is a relationship between eating/drinking on the one side and doing justice on the other.¹⁸⁸ I understand the verbs to eat and drink as representing the comfort of the king. When the comfort is exaggerated, it brings suffering and poverty upon the people who produce (or are forced to produce) it for their king. In other words, the king's comfort does not come from a vacuum, it must have been taken from somewhere (ordinarily from the common people). Bruce Malina talks about the fact that goods are limited in the world. According to him, all goods in the world exist in finite quantity and there are no ways to increase one's available quantities apart from wielding power and commitment, behavior that always takes place at the expense of the other individuals and groups.¹⁸⁹

¹⁸⁸ Holladay, *Jeremiah 1*, 596. He rightly says that the two verbs "eat" and "drink" form a hendiadys and are therefore joined by a simple copula, not the consecutive waw (compare 1 Kings 19:6). He adds that if the text is here correct (see structure), the sequence of verbs continues with "do justice...", a verb likewise joined by a simple copula.

¹⁸⁹ Bruce J. Malina, *Christian Origins and Cultural Anthropology: Practical Models for Biblical Interpretation* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1986), 88. He further explains that compliance with power and commitment never yields any increment or advantage for the person or group complying, only decrease and disadvantage for not complying. Thus the sum total of goods, including power and commitment themselves, is viewed as inherent in finite and limited nature. They are there to be divided and redivided, if necessary, but never to be augmented. This concept of limited goods may not fit well our context today, but it fits well the context of early

In Jer. 22:15b, the prophet is contrasting the well balanced life of the "good king" and that of Jehoiakim who lived too sumptuously at the expense of the common people. In other words, Josiah had enough food and drink (not too much), but that did not affect the economic condition of the people of the land because he cared both for his palace (as a king) and for his subjects. This is probably what eating, drinking and at the same time doing justice (משפט) and righteousness (וידקה) mean.

The word משפט occurs 425 times in the Old Testament and 32 times in Jeremiah. According to Enns Peter, the most frequent use of the word is in the prophetic literature, and the topic is often a breach of justice suffered by Israelites at the hands of their corrupt leaders.¹⁹⁰ King Josiah stands in sharp opposition with those corrupt leaders who think of themselves more than of their subjects. More than a simple contrast, the prophet might well have been thinking of Josiah as a good example of the covenant-king, who lived well and was mainly preoccupied with the right administration of the law. In fact, Booth Osborn thinks that the "proper administration of law by man" may be the correct meaning of the word משפט.¹⁹¹ If this is acceptable, it then

Israel where life depended on a fixed portion of land, and where there was no possibility of extending it.

¹⁹⁰ Enns Peter "משפט" in *NIDOTTE*, 2: 1144.

¹⁹¹ Booth Osborne, "The Semantic Development of the Term משפט" in *Journal of Biblical Literature* 61(1942): 106-107. In his detailed study of the concept, he distinguishes eleven different meanings of the word: manner or custom, rightful due, judicial decision, case for decision, commandment of man, commandment of God, that which should be, administration of the law by man, administration of the law by God, and litigation. His conclusion that the proper administration of law by man may be the correct meaning is drawn from the fact that this particular meaning occurs in forty-six passages,

becomes clear that in the context of Jer. 22:15b, the word **טפמ** can have two meanings: for the one who suffers under the oppression, it means deliverance and restoration, but for the other who is the cause of the oppression, the **טפמ**-action is judgment and the use of power to effect justice so that the misery of the oppressed (in all its manifestations) may be brought to an end. Mott writes that the action of deliverance of the oppressed must go beyond simple charity to the attack of the causes of suffering.¹⁹² He also adds that the first sphere in which one would expect such power for justice to be applied is that of government and law.¹⁹³ But in order to administer justice, the king or the governor (to use Mott's word) must himself be just, in other words, the king / governor must rightly use his power or authority.

The result of eating and drinking and, at the same time, doing justice and righteousness is that "it was well with the king." (**נח**). Holladay suggests that the word **נח** must be construed as a perfect verb, "it went well," and that it has the most general application suggesting not only that life was "pleasing" to Josiah in eating and drinking, but that things went well for him as head of the covenant people.¹⁹⁴ This is clearly the fulfillment of the promise given in Jer. 22: 4, that the result of the king's obedience to the law would be the continued blessings upon the monarchy. It also reminds us of the result of the king's obedience to the six limitations upon the Israelite

most of which are to be found in the prophets and the book of Proverbs.

¹⁹² Charles S. Mott, *Biblical Ethics and Social Changes* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), 73.

¹⁹³ Mott, *Biblical Ethics and Social Changes*, 73.

¹⁹⁴ Holladay, *Jeremiah 1*, 596.

kingship. "It was well with him" means that the king was blessed by the Lord because his reign was guided by the law.

In verse 16, the prophet states that doing justice and righteousness concretely involves pleading the cause of the poor and the needy. In the light of the beginning of the monarchy and its development in Israel, the primary task of the covenant-king was, above all other things, to maintain justice within the community and justice with God. The so-called "royal psalms"¹⁹⁵ contain several teachings concerning the protection of the powerless. For example Ps. 72:1, 2, 4, 12 suggests that it was the king's commission to judge the people in righteousness, and above all, to be the advocate and supporter of the weak and oppressed. This means that the king was to carry out the office of judge, on behalf of those to whom justice had been denied.¹⁹⁶ This is what Josiah did, according to Jeremiah. The result was that "it was well" (וַיֵּשֶׁבֶט) repeated twice in the passage. Many commentators rightly notice the difference between "it was well for him" in Verse 15, and "it was well" in verse 16. Craigie, Kelly and Drinkard¹⁹⁷ write that the lack of the prepositional phrase "to him" following "it was well" indicates the broader scope for good. Perhaps the implication is that the whole nation enjoyed the good brought about by justice and righteousness of the king who fears the Lord. This also reminds us of Ps. 72:3 that shows

¹⁹⁵ Hans-Joachim Kraus, *Theology of the Psalms* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1986), 107. The so-called "royal Psalms" include the following: Psalms 2; 18; 20; 21; 45; 72; 9; 101; 132; 144:1-11.

¹⁹⁶ Kraus, *Theology of the Psalms*, 107.

¹⁹⁷ Craigie, Kelly and Drinkard, *Jeremiah 1-25*, 311. See also Holladay (*Jeremiah 1*, 596) who argues that the lack of וַיֵּשֶׁבֶט is an indication that things went well not only for Josiah but for everyone in the nation.

what the life of a nation is to be under a righteous king in Israel. Commenting on the passage, Kraus writes,

Life, bounteous harvest, good fortune and blessing in boundless measure- these are the expectations connected with Yahweh's presence with his king, and they are not to be thought of as due to the immanent power of a "divine monarchy." Thus the petitions and hopes that look toward שָׁלוֹם (*Shalom*), in the most comprehensive sense of the word, are closely connected with the monarchy in Jerusalem.¹⁹⁸

At the end of verse 16, YHWH, through his prophet, asks a rhetorical question: "Is not that to know me?" This is the central issue in the whole chapter, if not in the whole book of Jeremiah; or even the entire prophetic corpus. How well we know the Lord determines how we live or, in the case of the king, how well he knows the Lord determines how he leads his country. According to Jeremiah, helping the poor, the needy, doing justice, etc., is dependent on the king's relationship with the Lord. But what is to know the Lord? Craigie, Kelly and Drinkard¹⁹⁹ rightly state that the verb יָדָע "to know" communicates much more than knowledge in the sense of information. It implies relationship: to know YHWH is to have relationship with him, and that relationship is based on the covenant and the keeping of the covenant. Botterweck adds that to know YHWH refers to a practical, religio-ethical relationship.²⁰⁰ In his commentary on Hosea 4:1, McComiskey says that the knowledge of God, of which Hosea speaks in this verse, is not theological knowledge only, but knowledge of YHWH's directive will. The nation is

¹⁹⁸ Kraus, *Theology of the Psalm*, 120

¹⁹⁹ Mays, *Hosea*, 311.

²⁰⁰ Botterweck, "יָדָע," in *TDOTT*, 5:469.

to be destroyed for lack of this knowledge (4:6). The fact that the knowledge of God is in parallel with רַחֻם (loving-kindness) in 6:6 indicates that knowledge of God involves an understanding of the ethical sphere in which God's people must live if they have to experience YHWH's love and bounty...²⁰¹

The opposite is that those who do not know YHWH sin against him, they are ungodly, treacherous, adulterers, oppressors, and murders. It becomes, therefore, clear that Josiah did justice and righteousness because he knew YHWH; that is, he properly understood his commission as a covenant-king to lead the covenant-people. The result was that it went well or - to use the language of the Psalter - there was *shalom* both for the king and for the nation. In Jer. 22:16, the prophet is demonstrating what can happen when YHWH's presence is with the king as a result of obedience to the covenant. In fact, 2 Kings 23:25 speaks of Josiah's obedience as one of the best examples of kingship in Israel. The text reads: "Before him, there was no king like him, who turned to the Lord with all his heart and with all his soul and with all his might, according to all the law of Moses; nor did any like him arise after him." This is the true knowledge of God, and it is only when the king knows the Lord and turns to him with all his heart that he can lead well.

In terms of our evaluation, it can be said that Josiah followed most of the limitations as described in Deut. 17:14-20. Commenting on 2 Kings 22:2, Hobbs writes that Josiah equals Hezekiah in his piety and matches the standard

²⁰¹ Thomas McComiskey, "Hosea," in Thomas E. McComiskey (ed.) *An Exegetical & Expository Commentary: The Minor Prophets* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1992), 56.

of the royal piety for the deuteronomist, king David.²⁰² Numerous facts show Josiah's attachment to the covenant: First, at the hearing of the words of the book of the law found in the temple (2 Kings 22:11), Josiah reacted by tearing his clothes as a sign of repentance and humility.²⁰³ The young king came to realize how far short of divine acceptance Judean worship has fallen. Josiah understood that he was not above the law, that his royal power without the fear of the Lord could not protect the nation from YHWH's wrath,²⁰⁴ and therefore, that what was said in the book of the law will surely come to pass.

Second, God's law found and then read produced a right action on the king's side. In 2 Kings 22:13, Josiah sends to inquire of the Lord for himself, for the people of Judah, and for the whole nation (or "for all Judah" according to NRSV). It is important to note that the king sent to inquire

²⁰² T.R. Hobbs, *2 Kings*. World Biblical Commentary, (Waco, TX: Word Book Publisher, 1985), 325. See also Iain W. Provan *1 and 2 Kings*. New International Biblical Commentary (Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, 1995), 270. He comments that 2 Kings 22:1-2, alerts us to the kind of king he (Josiah) is going to be. There is reference to David- as we would expect. More significantly, however, there is an unmistakable allusion to Deut. 17:20, where the ideal king is one who "does not turn" (2 Kings. 22:2) from the law to the right or to the left. This is only the first of many references in 2 Kings 22-23 that link Josiah with the law of Moses in general and as a figure of Moses in particular.

²⁰³ Carroll (*Jeremiah*, 663) states that the story of king Josiah's response to the finding of the book of the law in the temple is the counterpart to the tale of Jehoiakim's burning of the scroll (Jer. 36:20-26).

²⁰⁴ Commenting on Jehoiakim's burning of the scroll, Carroll (*Jeremiah*, 663) correctly writes that the king may have been opposing the power of the spoken word with his own unquestioned power in the community; but the point of the story is that such royal power is inferior to the prophetic word. Against Yahweh's word there is no effective power, not even that of a prophet-killing king.

from the Lord so that he might know more about God's will and act accordingly, for the sake of the whole nation. This is further seen in that the king assembles all the elders of Judah, all the people of Judah, all the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the priests, the prophets, and all the people, both small and great to hear for themselves the word of God (2 Kgs 23:1-2). Moreover, it is the King himself who reads the law for the people. This is very important in that he acknowledges before the people, that his royal power is inferior to the word of God. The king does not stop at reading. In 2 Kings 23:3-20, he "leads the nation in a covenant renewal,"²⁰⁵ or as Wiseman says, "the reading of the book publicly resulted in both a reaffirmation of the divine covenant (2 Kings 23:1-3) and a series of acts of reformation based on its teachings (2 Kings 23:4-25)."²⁰⁶ This is the result of the knowledge of (the law of) YHWH. Thus, in 2 Chronicles 34:31-32 it is written that,

The king stood in his place and made a covenant before the Lord, to follow the Lord, to keeping his commandment, his decrees, and his statutes, with all his heart and all his soul, to perform the words of the covenant that were written in this book. Then he made all who were present in Jerusalem and in Benjamin pledge themselves to it. And the inhabitants of Jerusalem acted according to the covenant of God, the God of their ancestors.

The covenant made by the king before the Lord to follow him and to keep his commandment, his statutes, and decrees can well explain the fact that it went well for the people of

²⁰⁵ Raymond B. Dillard, *2 Chronicles*. Word Biblical Commentary (Waco, Texas: Word Books Publisher, 1985), 290.

²⁰⁶ Donald J. Wiseman, *1 & 2 Kings*. Tyndale Old Testament Commentary (Leicester, England: Inter-Varsity Press, 1993), 294.

Judah during Josiah's time.²⁰⁷ In fact, the writer of 2 Chronicles concludes chapter 34 by stating that "during all his days (the days of king Josiah) they did not turn away from following the Lord the God of their ancestors." This is a good example of what a nation can become under the leadership of a godly king, and this is what God intended when he gave the six limitations in Deut. 17:14-20.

In the narrative of Josiah's reformation in both 2 Kings and 2 Chronicles, the renewal reaches its climax with the celebration of the Passover. Hobbs has convincingly demonstrated that it is not right to think that there was no Passover celebration before Josiah's reformation, but that the significance of Josiah's Passover lies in the fact that it was celebrated in accordance with the demands of the book found in the temple.²⁰⁸

The Passover celebration gives another clue for our interpretation. In terms of Samuel's warning (2 Sam.8:1-18), Josiah was a good king in that he was not the one who could impoverish the people by taking ("taking" was the key word in Samuel's warning) their properties as other kings did. On the contrary, Josiah and his officials are described as the ones who gave or contributed²⁰⁹ to the people's welfare. In 2 Chronicles 35:7-10, it is written,

²⁰⁷ In Jeremiah's language, to say that it went well with the people can mean that justice reigned in the country (this is clear since people were guided by the law of Moses which insists strongly on justice to the poor. By justice I understand both justice with the Lord (no idolatry) and justice with one another (social justice).

²⁰⁸ Hobbs, *2 Kings*, 337.

²⁰⁹ It is important to note the contrast between the verb to "give" (or to contribute to) used for Josiah and his officials in this passage and its antonym to "take" found in I Samuel 8:1-18).

7 Then Josiah contributed to the people, as Passover offerings for all that were present, lambs and kids from the flock to the number of thirty thousand, and three thousand bulls; these were from the king's possessions. 8 His officials contributed willingly to the people, to the priests, and to the Levites. Hilkiah, Zechariah, and Jehiel, the chief officers of the house of God, gave to the priests for the Passover offerings two thousand six hundred lambs and kids and three hundred bulls. 9 Conaniah also, and his brothers Shemaiah and Nethanel and Hashabiah and Jeiel and Jozabad, the chiefs of the Levites, gave to the Levites for Passover offerings five thousand lambs and kids and five hundred bulls(emphasis mine).

Most kings mentioned in the Bible are described as tyrants, oppressors (robbers) of the poor (Isa. 58:3; Jer. 6:6; 2 Kings 21:16; Ezek. 22:29), and perverters of justice (Amos 5:7-13; Isa. 3:12-15). But Josiah and his officials are seen here as helpers of the poor people, most of whom were probably unable to afford animals for sacrifices. To use Samuel's language, Josiah and his officials were "givers," not "takers." Moreover, the text states that the officials "gave willingly," that is without being forced by the king or even by any other circumstance, or even not out of any political reason. In other words, they feared the Lord of justice whom they came to know and whom they were willing to serve. Once more, from this passage, we can understand why Jeremiah emphasized the fact that it went well for the king and for the whole nation, or that before and after him there was no king like him. To conclude this section, it is appropriate to say that Josiah understood his authority or power in the context of the covenant, that is as the one who had to reign strictly under the power of God by following all the limitations imposed upon the Israelite monarchy. This in fact is what it means to know YHWH.

Judgment upon Jehoiakim (vv.18-19)

The judgment upon the king is introduced by the preposition ׀ל (therefore), which connects the accusations in verses 13-17 with the judgment in verses 18, 19. According to Craigie, Kelly and Drinkard, the connection implies that the truthfulness of the accusations is the reason for the judgment.²¹⁰ The formula, "thus says the Lord" follows immediately the transitional word to assure an awareness that the judgment is not being spoken by a mere messenger but is from the one who sent the messenger: YHWH himself.²¹¹

Another important element that appears at the beginning of the judgment is the identification of the one who is being accused and judged: Jehoiakim, the son of Josiah, king of Judah. From verse 13 to verse 17, the prophet has been using different pronouns to identify Jehoiakim.²¹² But in verse 18, he calls him by name "to make unmistakable the one to whom the harsh judgment is spoken."²¹³ The judgment itself concerns his death and it has two aspects: he will die

²¹⁰ Craigie, Kelly and Drinkard, *Jeremiah 1-25*, 312.

²¹¹ Craigie, Kelly and Drinkard, *Jeremiah 1-25*, 312.

²¹² In verse 13, Jeremiah uses two pronouns: "him" and "who" to identify Jehoiakim ("Woe" to him who builds...). In verse 14, he is identified by "who," "I" and "me" (Who says, "I will build to me -myself- a great house..."). And in verses 15 and 17, the king is directly addressed: "Do you think you are a king because..." It would be interesting to study the reason for the change of those pronouns designating the same person and in the same passage (context).

²¹³ Craigie, Kelly and Drinkard, *Jeremiah 1-25*, 312.

without being mourned and he will be buried with the burial of an ass.

The first judgment is that Jehoiakim will not be mourned at his death. According to E. Jacob, lamentation and other funerary rites were as imperative a duty as burial, and their absence was considered a grave misfortune.²¹⁴ The sentence "they shall not lament for him," repeated twice in the same verse, shows the emphasis the prophet is putting on the dishonor of the king at his death because of his heavy-handed oppression. Jehoiakim, who was thinking of himself as the greatest and the best man in the land, will die without honor.²¹⁵ There is another contrast between Josiah and his son at this level also. In 2 Chronicles 35:24b-25, it is written that all Judah and Jerusalem mourned for Josiah, that Jeremiah uttered a lament for him, and that all the singing men and singing women have spoken of Josiah in their laments.

The second judgment is that Jehoiakim will be buried with the burial of an ass. The Hebrew word used here קבר is always related to the burial of people, never animals or lifeless objects. Jer 22:19, is therefore, an exception to that general use. But how was a donkey buried? According to Charles H. Dyer, when an animal died in the city, it was

²¹⁴E. Jacob, "Mourning," in *IDB*, 3:452.

²¹⁵ Because of some cultural differences, some people might not understand very well the meaning and importance of mourning for a dead person. But in the ancient world - as it is still true for some societies today - lamentation or mourning was an integral part of ancient Semitic life (J.E.Hartley, "Lament; Lamentation," *ISBE*, 3:64). See also "Dirge," *ISBE*, 2:946. The author of this article ("Dirge") states that the main feature of an Israelite funeral was the lamentation for the dead. In such society, it would not be conceivable not to lament for a king. This simply means that Jehoiakim's judgment was among the most serious curses.

simply dragged away from the spot where it died and thrown outside the gates,²¹⁶ and then dumped in a field to become a prey to dogs and vultures.²¹⁷ Burial for humans, says J. Barton Payne, constituted the biblical procedure from the days of the earliest patriarchs onward (Gen. 23:4; 25:9; Deut. 10:6; 34:6), and for a corpse to remain unburied or to be exhumed subsequent to burial, and thus become food for beasts of prey, was the climax of indignity or judgment.²¹⁸ For the specific case of Jehoiakim, it is important to note a contrast between his grandiose way of life and his dishonorable death as predicted by the prophet.²¹⁹

²¹⁶ Charles H. Dyer "Jeremiah," in John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck (eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: Old Testament* (Colorado Springs: Chariot Victor Publishing, 1985), 1157.

²¹⁷ Holladay, *Jeremiah 1*, 598.

²¹⁸ J. Barton Payne "Burial," in *ISBE*, 1:556.

²¹⁹ The question of how Jehoiakim died, and therefore, how the curse came to pass is still dividing scholars. The problem is that 2 Kings 24:6 states that Jehoiakim slept with his fathers, and nothing is said on how he was buried. The formula, "he slept with his fathers" can be said to have been used for normal burial. There is a further prediction in Jer. 36:30 that the corpse of Jehoiakim will lie unburied. Holladay (*Jeremiah 1*, 598) quotes Weiser who suggests that the verse be taken to mean that Nebuchadnezzar, at the conquest of Jerusalem, had the grave of his faithless vassal violated. But Holladay himself disagrees saying that disinterment is not at issue here, and that Jeremiah speaks of lack of burial. Unfortunately, Holladay's solution to the issue poses a more difficult problem; he says that, "in any event the power of the present verse is in its utterance, not in its literal fulfillment." To my view, the suggestion given by S. J. Schultz ("Jehoiakim," in *ISBE*, 2:977) can be considered as a more acceptable explanation. For him, since neither of the historical accounts reports the circumstances of Jehoiakim's death, nor mentions even his burial, the conclusion that this defiant king was killed in battle seems warranted. His conclusion is that in wartime, it was impossible to provide an honorable burial.

History repeats itself in different ways. If it is impossible for the moment to know exactly how the corrupted Jehoiakim ended his life, we know of the dictator Mobutu who ended in exile and died in Rabat, far from all his palaces he built in DR Congo (Zaire), and from the people who applauded him for most of his life. Most important is maybe the similarity between Mobutu's death without honor and the prophet's prediction of Jehoiakim's end:

In September 1997, less than four months after fleeing Kinshasa, Mobutu died. Far from his beloved forests and vast river, a sick leopard fading away in the arid dryness of Morocco, he had lived just long enough to see his achievements discredited, his reputation besmirched, his name vilified. There was a quiet funeral in Rabat's Christian cemetery. Ngbanda, who flew in for the event, was amid the group of former aides, personal doctors and bodyguards who stood at the grave after the family had withdrawn. Stricken by a sense of collective guilt, military and civilian alike sobbed aloud, begging their late master for forgiveness.²²⁰

Then Wrong concludes:

Nothing could have been more merciless than this interment in exile. In an African society only recently touched by urbanization, where the spirits of the dead vie with the living for respect, burial outside the land of one's ancestors is worse than unnatural. For the man who had created the very nation of Zaire, with all its warts and blemishes, it could never constitute a laying to rest.²²¹

The ruler who uses his power for the service of others will demonstrate that he knows YHWH. In his turn, YHWH will exalt him in terms of being respected and loved (and mourned at death). Can we here think about Nelson Mandela of South Africa and Julius Nyerere of Tanzania? But most corrupted

²²⁰ Wrong, *In the Footsteps of Mr Kurtz*, 280.

²²¹ Wrong, *In the Footsteps of Mr Kurtz*, 280.

leaders end up in jail, exile and dishonor (some examples are Didier Ratsiraka of Madagascar, Pascal Lissouba of Congo-Brazzaville, Idi Amin Dada of Uganda, Mobutu himself, etc.) If there is one particular but very important lesson we can learn from both Jehoiakim's (though we are still speculating about it) and Mobutu's death, it is that YHWH is still on his throne judging the rulers who refuse "to know him" and who misuse their power.

This section can be summarized in the following two points:

(1) According to Jeremiah, Israel's social and political ordering was authorized by YHWH's sovereignty through his law and it did not consequently reflect the will of any political rulers. In other words (and this is important for any society), the power of the state as the creation of YHWH, is culturally bound to the norms of the word of God. In this way, any ruler reigns not above the Creator and his law but under the sovereignty of YHWH.²²² Therefore, for any king/president or any leader, to know YHWH is to recognize that the power he possesses has been delegated to him, and that he must use it according to the one who possesses absolute power, i.e., YHWH himself.²²³ This is what Josiah did and what both Jehoiakim and Mobutu failed to do.

(2) The warning in I Samuel 8 and the limitations in Deuteronomy 17 are an indication that power can be used to oppress the powerless and to break down the entire community. The motive behind these limitations was to ensure that the Israelite king would not behave like the unjust

²²² See Stuart Fowler, *The State in the Light of the Scripture* (Potchefstroom: Potchefstroom University, 1988), 10ff.

²²³ This point will be dealt with in detail in chapter three.

kings of other nations, but that he would follow closely the will of YHWH and thus maintain a society which is just with itself (from within) and right with YHWH. On the other hand, I Samuel 8 warns the people of Israel, who were asking for a human king against the potential danger of the establishment of such kingship because of the religious deviations and its socio-economic burdens it might entail. The implication of this argument is that the moral, social, economic, and religious conditions of any nation or society depend, in large part, on the kind of leadership of those in power. The book of Proverbs (29:2) rightly states that "when the righteous are in authority, the people rejoice; but when a wicked man rules, the people groan" (NKJV). This is true, not only for Judah (Israel) but also for us in DR Congo and in Africa at large.

The Meaning of the Term ידע יהוה in the Four Passages

The task of this last section is to define the concept ידע יהוה or ידע את־יהוה from the analysis of the four passages in its relationship with social justice in the general context of the Old Testament and the Ancient Near Eastern background.

ידעו יהוה in the Ancient Near Eastern Context

In his study on "the treaty background of Hebrew ידע," Hebert B Huffmon²²⁴ demonstrates that certain usages of the verb ידע in the Old Testament are technical. His study shows

²²⁴ Hebert B. Huffmon, "The Treaty Background of Hebrew yada'" in *BASOR*, 181 (1986) 31-37.

that "the most obvious technical usage of the verb to 'know' is that with reference to mutual legal recognition on the part of suzerain and vassal."²²⁵

Huffman cites several examples from Near Eastern world. For example, in a treaty between the Hittite king Suppiluliumas and Hugganas from eastern Asia Minor, Suppiluliumas is reported as saying to his vassal:

And you, Hugganas, know only the Sun (...) regarding lordship; also my son (of) whom I, the Sun, say, "This one everyone should know (*sakdu*), you, Hugganas, know him (*apun sa[k]*)! Moreover, those who are my sons, his brothers, (or) my brothers ...know (...) as brother and associate. Moreover, another lord ... do not ... know (...)! The Sun (alone) know ... Moreover, any other do not know (...)"²²⁶

Likewise, the Amarna tablets exhibit a considerable amount of treaty terminology and the use of 𐎶𐎵 in some passages is clearly technical. One of the clearest examples comes from a letter in which Abdi-Asirta, king of Amurru, faced with raids sponsored by the Mitannian king (and probably with the accusation by Rib-Addi of Byblos of being a rebel against Pharaoh), requests military aid from his suzerain (Amenophis III) and ends with the plea: "May the king my lord know me (*lu-u-yida-an-ni*) and put me under the charge of Paha(m)nate, my (royal) governor."²²⁷ Huffman argues that those who translated this passage in *The Assyrian Dictionary* by "Let the king, my lord, take care of me," missed the point and that the proper rendering of this request is: "May

²²⁵ Huffman, "The Treaty Background," 31.

²²⁶ Huffman, "The Treaty Background," 32.

²²⁷ Huffman, "The Treaty Background," 32.

the king my lord recognize me as a legitimate vassal" (and therefore provide proper support).²²⁸

ידעו יהוה as a Technical Term in the Old Testament and
in Jeremiah

The Old Testament too uses the verb ידע as a technical term. In Gen. 18:19, YHWH says of Abraham, "For I knew him," that is "I recognized him as my legitimate servant."²²⁹ In the same way, YHWH declares to Moses: "I have known you by name; moreover, you have found favor in my eyes" (Exod. 33:12). In 2 Sam. 7:20 (1 Chron. 17:18), responding to Nathan's oracle concerning God's promises to David and his house, king David declares, "What more can David say, for you have known (i.e., recognized as legitimate) your servant, O Lord God." Finally, in Amos 3:2, YHWH declares to Israelites: "Only you have I known of all the families of the earth; therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities." If one compares this text with Amos 9:7 where other tribes or nations (which were not "known" by YHWH) are mentioned, it becomes clear that in Amos 3:2, the Lord is invoking the covenant between himself and Israel and from which it follows that covenant breaking invokes punishment or curse.²³⁰

Knowledge of YHWH and Wisdom (4:19-22)

In the interpretation of 4:19-22, I mentioned that verse 22 is very much informed by wisdom literature and that the

²²⁸ Huffmon, "The Treaty Background," 32.

²²⁹ This becomes clear if we understand the passage from the context of YHWH's covenant with Abraham (Gen. 15).

²³⁰ Huffmon, "The Treaty Background," 35.

problem of Judah according to that passage was the lack of wisdom. This is confirmed by the use of three words foolish, stupid and without understanding put side by side in verse 22.

According to John Bowman, "Wisdom is a God-given aid to man to bring him to God and his service."²³¹ Thus, the function of Wisdom was to teach people to fear and honor the God of the covenant, the creator of everything, including an ordered society. This fear should not be thought as terror or sorrow but as a reverential fear to the creator, a recognition of his sovereignty, and his kingship over the whole creation. YHWH himself is the source of wisdom. The book of Proverbs maintains that one cannot have (true) wisdom without having that kind of fear of the Lord (Prov. 9:10); and Job states that the fear of the Lord is wisdom (28:28). Again, in Proverbs it is written that the fear of the Lord is the beginning or the source of (true) knowledge (1:7). According to the Scriptures, Daniel was a wise man, and his wisdom is clearly said to have come from the reverence of YHWH. Joseph is said to be "a didactic wisdom-story."²³² This was due to the deep fear he had for the Lord. In technical terms, it will be said that both Daniel and Joseph "knew" YHWH, and consequently YHWH blessed them with wisdom, understanding, knowledge and power. In this way, we can multiply examples of wisdom linked with the fear of YHWH in the whole Bible even up to Jesus himself, the fulfillment

²³¹ John Bowman, "The Fear of the Lord," in W.C. van Wyk (ed.), *Studies in Wisdom Literature* (Pretoria: University of Pretoria, 1973), 11.

²³² Roland E. Murphy, "Wisdom - Theses and Hypotheses," in *Israelite Wisdom: Theological and Literary Essays in Honor of Samuel Terrien*, (New York: Scholars Press, 1978), 39.

of true wisdom. Said another way, knowledge of YHWH brings blessings but the lack of his knowledge brings curse.

The accusation in 4:22 that Judeans had wisdom to do evil not good is evidence that their wisdom and knowledge were removed from the source of true and pure wisdom. True wisdom comes from YHWH, from his law and from his covenant. For Judah, this meant that their wisdom was functioning contrary to the faith in YHWH, and contrary to the law and the covenant. It was an intellectual and worldly wisdom, without any reference to the law of YHWH.²³³ This is what the lack of the knowledge of YHWH means. It is what Gerhard von Rad calls "a practical atheism."²³⁴ In other words, though they knew YHWH in theory, in practice they were not willing to follow his will as revealed in his law.

In like manner, one cannot miss the clear connection between obedience to the covenant and acquisition of wisdom in Deuteronomy 4:5-6:

Look, I have taught you statutes and ordinances, just as the Lord my God commanded me, so that you may act accordingly in the midst of the land into which you are about to enter in order to take possession of it. And you will keep them and you will do them, because that will be your *wisdom* and your *discernment* in the eyes of the people who will hear of all these statutes, and they will say: Surely this great nation is a wise and discerning people! (emphasis mine)

According to this text, YHWH's plan was to make Israel a great nation among other surrounding countries. This

²³³ Joseph Blenkinsopp, *Wisdom and Law in the Old Testament: the Ordering of Life in Israel and Early Judaism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983), 75. He cites the example of Ben Sira who identifies the law as divine wisdom sent on earth to instruct humankind (Ecclus. 24: 1-29).

²³⁴ Gerhard von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel* (London: SCM Press), 1972, 65.

greatness was not to come from military power or wealth as it was the case in other nations, and as it is still the case today, but from Israel's wisdom and discernment which had to be different and manifested in Israel's way of worship and of living in the society. Wisdom and discernment were unmistakably the fruit of keeping the law or the covenant. In other words, the distinctiveness of Israel had to be found in the "intimate relationship the covenant created between God and his people."²³⁵ This intimate relationship is what Jeremiah is calling to "know YHWH."

At this point, I need to pose and briefly discuss two issues I have been referring to throughout this thesis: the law/torah and the covenant.²³⁶ According to the Pentateuch, YHWH transmitted the Law or Torah to Israel through Moses at Sinai. This Biblical account of the transmission of the law is well summarized by Frank Crusemann:

after Israel has been delivered from Egypt. There was, after the arrival of the people at the mountain of God, a kind of prelude in which the legal organization was founded (Ex.18). Then, in connection with a theophany (Ex.19), we have the delivery of the Decalogue in direct divine speech (Ex.20). In view of the people's reaction, they were unable to bear God's direct speech (Ex.20:18-21), the first block of laws were given to Moses (Ex.24:7), called the Book of the Covenant (Ex.20:22-23:23). After the solemn covenant ceremony (Ex.24), explicit instructions were given to Moses for the ceremony (Ex. 24), explicit instructions were given to Moses for the construction of a tent shrine (Ex. 25-31). Before they could be carried out (Ex.35-40), we have the narrative of the golden calf as an interlude. Next we have God's threat to destroy the people, ultimately prevented by

²³⁵ Peter C. Craigie, *The Book of Deuteronomy*, 131.

²³⁶ There is an abundant literature on these issues. It will therefore not be possible to discuss each of them in detail. I am here only concerned with a brief survey of the state of the debate as it now stands and the way I understand it in this whole thesis since I am also concerned with historical events.

Moses, the destruction and renewal of the stone tablets of the law and the giving of a new block of divine laws (Ex.32-34). From Lev.1 through the departure of the people from Sinai in Num.10, God issued a great number of additional instructions through Moses. After the long journey through the desert, forty years later, Moses gave the people a second law in the long address of Deuteronomy before crossing the Jordan river. He continued what he had received from God on Horeb (Deut.5:31).²³⁷

This Biblical version remained unchallenged until the beginning of the application of the historical-critical methods to the study of the Old Testament. There are now at least two dominant positions concerning the origin of the Torah and the covenant: for some, they are a product of the late royal period, not at all connected with Moses or Sinai.²³⁸ But for others, there were additions and gradual growth around (a) central core(s) given at Sinai when YHWH made a covenant with his people.²³⁹

²³⁷ Frank Crusemann, *The Torah: Theology and Social History of Old Testament Law* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1996), 6-7.

²³⁸ Some of the leading scholars among the supporters of this position are: Julius Wellhausen, *Prolegomena to the History of Israel* (Edinburg: T. & T. Clark, 1885); B. Stade, *Geschichte des Volkes Israel* vol. I, (Berlin 1887); Hermann Gunkel, *Genesis, Übersetzt und Erklart*, Gottingen, 1901, William Johnston *Exodus* (Shieffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1990); Frank Crusemann, *The Torah*, 1996. Though I speak here about only two dominant positions, we have to recognize that there are a lot of differences within the same group.

²³⁹ This position is supported by scholars like: W. Eichrodt, *Theology of the Old Testament*, vol. 1, (London, 1961); G. E. Mendenhall, "Covenant Forms in Israelite Tradition," *BA* 17 (1954): 50-76.; G. E. Mendenhall, "The Hebrew Conquest of Palestine," *BA* 25 (1962):66-96. A. Weiser, *Introduction to the Old Testament* (London: Barton, 1961).

According to the first view, the laws connected with Sinai belong to a much later period when Israel had already become an agrarian and settled community. Von Rad for example, quotes Deut. 26:5b-9 and argues that this passage represents one of the earliest examples of Israel's creed. But his understanding is that the fact that in this passage, there is no reference to the making of the covenant on mount Sinai which immediately follows the Exodus is a proof that there was no such thing like the giving of the Torah at Sinai.²⁴⁰ In this way, when the prophets condemned Israel for not following the law (Hos. 8:12; Isa. 10:1-4; and Jer. 8:8)²⁴¹, they were referring to the written instructions presented as the words written by YHWH to Israel during their (the prophets') own time. This demonstrates that toward the end of the pre-exilic period, there was a written form of the will of YHWH, which was called the Torah. Jer. 8:8 is always taken as a proof that this Torah was the work of different groups of scribes, not YHWH-given tablets at Sinai.²⁴² And this Torah was considered as that which guaranteed the wisdom to live and probably also security of both individuals and the nation.

²⁴⁰ Quoted by E. W. Nicholson, *Exodus and Sinai in History and Tradition* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1973), 2-3. To Deut. 26: 5b-9, von Rad adds another passage (Jos. 24: 2b-13), which he considers a much more expansive account of the history of Israel, and which contains many details concerning the events narrated (victory over the army of Pharaoh, Balaam, the war against the inhabitants of Jericho, etc.). For him, the fact that the Sinai events are missing even in this detailed narration is a proof that Israelites knew nothing about the giving of the Torah and of the making of the covenant at Sinai.

²⁴¹ In fact, another argument held by those who reject the Sinai events is that the classical prophets rarely used the term בְּרִית (covenant).

The association between the law and Sinai was an attempt by the deuteronomic movement to explain the destruction of the Northern Kingdom. Said differently, this association was the response to theological challenges posed by the exile.²⁴³ In this way, Sinai is to be considered as a utopian place, temporally and physically outside state authority. Consequently, the law that is supposed to have been given at Sinai is considered above the power of the king and therefore, taken as an alternative to royal ideology that had now failed.

The second group (those who support the historicity of an initial covenant at Sinai) argues that it is this covenant at Sinai, during the giving of the Decalogue, which gave Israel's religion its distinctive feature as a religion of election. This election rendered Israelite's religion unique among the religions of the ancient Near East. In other words, the covenant and the events at Sinai removed the "relationship between God and the people from the sphere of the natural and transferred it to the realm of history in which YHWH's power, the declaration of his will, and his holiness were made manifest,"²⁴⁴ to his chosen or elected nation: Israel.

Another argument within this group is that the recurring cultic festival in Israel (Pss. 81 and 95), which included a proclamation of the divine law, was later on seen

²⁴² See more details in Frank Crusemann, *The Torah*, 1-26.

²⁴³ Rad's version slightly differs here. For him, the origin of the Sinai covenant tradition is to be found in early, pre-monarchic Israel, more precisely in a cultic festival which was celebrated periodically at the ancient sanctuary at Shechem at the autumn feast of Tabernacles (see details in Nicholson (*Exodus and Sinai*, 8-9).

²⁴⁴ J. Hempel quoted by Nicholson, *God and his People*, 29.

as a key to understanding the basis of the ethical teaching of the great prophets, who were the spokesmen of the initial covenant between YHWH and Israel. Thus, they argue,

Even if they (the prophets) did not use the word *berit* itself, in a number of important ways they nevertheless presupposed the covenant tradition which had been transmitted through the centuries in Israel's cult and so was familiar to them and their contemporaries.²⁴⁵

As I said above, it is beyond the scope of the present task to give a full account of the debate concerning these particular controversial issues. But what appears clearly is that the two scholarly positions are now in tension among scholars with no resolution in sight. However, my suspicion is that the true problem with the two groups goes beyond the law/torah and Sinai debate to embrace the whole matter concerning the historicity of the (Bible) Old Testament itself. Said differently, differences among scholars do not necessarily come from the texts themselves²⁴⁶, but from different models of reality held, and from the methods used. Walter C. Kaiser is probably right when he argues that the disagreement among scholars is not so much over the "facts" in the field; rather, "over how one should interpret those facts, and with what sorts of presuppositions one may legitimately approach the study of Old Testament history."²⁴⁷

²⁴⁵ Nicholson, *God and his People*, 32.

²⁴⁶ V. Philips Long, "The Art of Biblical History," in V. Philips Long et alii. (eds.), *Foundations of Contemporary Interpretation* (Leicester: Apollos, 1997), 359. His claim is that most well informed scholars have access to essentially the same data, and that it is, rather, in the assessment of these data that differences arise.

²⁴⁷ Walter C. Kaiser, *A History of Israel from Bronze Age Through the Jewish Wars* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1998), 1-2. One would also read the following articles on current debates over Israel's history: Edwin

Thus, my understanding is that there are a host of (undeclared) theological and ideological agendas behind most approaches.

In this research, I am inclined to adopt a moderately conservative position, which holds that at least the central core of the law/torah was given at Sinai when YHWH made a covenant with Israel after their escape from Egypt. However, this does not deny the fact that there might have been late modifications and additions to initial commandment (law). In this way, my argument is that the prophets of Israel understood their mission in the light of the particular privileges and responsibility of the elected people. This election is an act of grace toward Israel that took place when YHWH called his people out of Egypt to become his own people (Hos.11:1; 12:10; 13:4-5).

Moreover, I always understand the law and the covenant as a new culture Israel as a community ought to acquire. In other words, the people had just left Egypt, the repressive land with its culture of idolatry and oppression. At the same time, they were going to live among other idolatrous nations (the Canaanites). How were they going to live in YHWH's land? Were they going to continue to follow the oppressive culture of Egypt? Were they going to adopt the idolatrous culture of the Canaanites?²⁴⁸ Finally, what was Israel's mission in Canaan? In this way, what was important

Yamauchi, "The Current State of Old Testament Historiography," in A.R. Millard, J.K. Hoffmeier and D.W. Baker (eds.), *Faith, Tradition, & History* (Indiana, Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1994), 1-36; and Elmer A. Martens, "The Oscillating Fortunes of 'History' within Old Testament Theology," in A.R. Millard, et al. (eds.), *Faith, Tradition, & History*, 313-40.

²⁴⁸ Bungishabaku Katho, "Reflexion sur le Début de la Monarchie en Israel," in *Revue Theologique de Monts Blues* 5 (2000): 37.

for the prophets was not the repetition of the word covenant or torah as some scholars would like it to be, but the religious and social implications of this law and this covenant.²⁴⁹ In other words, the law presupposes that human life falls short of what YHWH intended in creation, with deeply negative effects that impact on the relationship between the Creator and his creation, and between human beings, particularly the disadvantaged in the community. In this way, and particularly so for this first chapter of my thesis, one of the key concerns of the law and the covenant was the creation of a community of the people of YHWH with a just social shape; it was the creation of an alternative community. In such community, the law would help to maintain stability. This is why the frequency of the laws that seek to protect the poor, the needy and many other social evils are the most frequently used both in Exodus, Deuteronomy and the prophets. These particular laws are grounded in YHWH's own action on behalf of the Israelites themselves enslaved in Egypt (Exod. 22:21; Deut. 10:17-19). Therefore, according to 4:19-22, to know YHWH is to have wisdom. This wisdom was the result of following the law or the covenant. The law is here to be understood as the revealed culture of justice. In other words, obedience to the law would result in a society with a just social shape, which in turn will stand in striking contrast to the unjust social shape of the surrounding nations in Canaan and beyond. In this way, YHWH the God of justice would be revealed to the surrounding nations through Israel to the degree that they obey the

²⁴⁹ In this way, the laws had to cease to be a mere chorus, a dogma and become a way of life. In other words, when the prophet spoke of social justice, they were referring to the law and the covenant without necessarily citing them.

covenant stipulations that require them to reflect the justice of YHWH in their patterns of behavior.

For the church in DR Congo, the implication of this understanding of Israel (Judah) in its relationship with the law or covenant would be that the mission of the church is not only to save souls who would be ready to go to heaven, but also to provide an alternative community to which a converted person may be integrated and live by the standard of God's word. It is clear from all these discussions that YHWH's mission involves a corporate entity which witnesses to the world of his character and deeds. And this is possible only if this entity accepts or rather strives to live according to the wisdom found in the law of YHWH. Such entity would be said to know YHWH.

Knowledge of YHWH and the Law (5:1-6; 9:1-8; 22:13-19)

In his article, "the Decalogue in the preaching of Jeremias," Eustace J. Smith, notices that,

the sins censured by Jeremias throughout his preaching are nothing else but offenses committed against the Decalogue. As a matter of fact, critics will allow that it is in the book of Jeremias that by far the greater number of precepts in the Decalogue are found in this negative way. At least seven of the commandments can readily be discerned in the nature of the crimes condemned and, in some instances, an accepted terminology is disclosed that unmistakably suggests the Decalogue. Only the fourth, ninth, and tenth commandments lack representation.²⁵⁰

²⁵⁰ Eustace J. Smith, "The Decalogue in the Preaching of Jeremias," in *CBQ* 4(1942), 201.

Smith goes on to suggest that for the most part, the sins that are denounced are those against the first and eighth commandments, with references to the former occurring some fifteen times and the latter eleven.²⁵¹ Von Rad has also written: "Jeremiah stands and acts upon the Exodus-Sinai tradition, and in this gives his preaching a very broad foundation."²⁵² Finally, Rolf Rendtorff quotes Blenkinsopp who states: "the prophet's essential function, whatever else he does, is to mediate the covenant between the Lord and his people and speak the laws which guarantee its survival."²⁵³

These quotations sufficiently demonstrate that almost all students of Jeremiah have recognized that the law²⁵⁴ constitutes the major part of Jeremiah's preaching. This is particularly true for the last three passages analyzed in this chapter. Israel's life was to be a practice of bringing

²⁵¹ Smith, "The Decalogue in the preaching of Jeremias," 201. On the following page (202), Smith gives a catalogue of texts in the book of Jeremiah that are said to be taken from the Decalogue: 1st commandment: 1:16; 5:19; 7:9; 13:10; 16:11; 19:3f; 19:13; 22:9; 25:6; 32:29; 35:15; 44:23. 2nd com: 4:2; 5:2; 7:9. 3rd com: 17:19-27. 5th com: 7:6; 7:9; 7:31; 9:2; 26:16. 6th com: 7:9; 23:10; 23:14; 29:23. 7th com: 2:26; 6:13; 7:9; 22:3. 8th com: 3:23; 6:13; 7:9; 9:1f; 27:14; 27:15; 27:16; 28:15; 29:9; 29:21. 10th com. 5:8.

²⁵² Gerhard von Rad, *Old Testament Theology*, Vol. 2, (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1965), 217.

²⁵³ Rolf Rendtorff, *Canon and Theology: Overtures to an Old Testament Theology* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1994), 63.

²⁵⁴ I prefer speaking about the law in general instead of restricting Jeremiah's preaching to the Decalogue alone. This will include the entire recommendations Moses received from YHWH and passed on to the people of Israel: the book of the covenant (Exod. 20:22-23:33); but also the Deuteronomic law (Deut. 12-26); the mass of priestly/cultic regulations from which came what is known as the Holiness Code (Lev. 17, 18-26); the Decalogue (Exod. 20) and the collection of cultic and religious commandments (Exod. 34:11f).

every phase of its existence under YHWH's law. The Torah should then be understood as an instruction and nurture that bring Israel's life under the governance of YHWH. Frank Crusemann wrote that the word Torah, in its early function as well as later uses implies information, advice, instruction, the establishment of norms, demand as well as encouragement, to command but also the benefits included.²⁵⁵

Moreover, a close reading of Jer. 5:1-6; 9:1-8 and 22:13-19 reveals that the law referred to in these texts is about community or society. In other words, these passages containing condemnation against Judah reflect a cognizance of what has been traditionally referred to as the second table of the Decalogue that speaks about the well being of Israel as a community in its relationship with the knowledge of YHWH (adultery, slandering, oppression, fraud, deception, lack of honesty, planning ambush, etc). Thus, the concept of the knowledge of YHWH is here used in relationship with Judah as a community under the covenant. Hence, the concept *ידע יהוה* can be defined as follows:

(1) It is not first of all theological, intellectual or academic theories (as we learn in theology classes or books) concerning the self-sufficiency, omnipotence, omnipresence, and omniscience of YHWH. In other words, knowledge of YHWH in these passages cannot be thought of in terms of the possession of information concerning God.

(2) It is an understanding of the history of Israel: how YHWH began with them and how Israel agreed to abide by the covenant with YHWH, and finally how the very heart of this covenant is concerned with the well-being of the society.

(3) It is a realization that the new path into which the community is engaged is a path of destruction, but that

²⁵⁵ Crusemann, *The Torah*, 1.

there is a good, original and true way called "the ancient way" in Jer. 6:16. This old way means a return to the Torah, a return to Israel's true identity, and to the traditional teaching that will help Judah to constantly reorder its social life and renew its relationship with the Lord of the covenant.

(4) The antithetical couple **שקר** and **אמנה** best defines what to know and not know YHWH is: It designates the whole attitude of human being in his global orientation: his faithfulness to the revelation and will of YHWH (or their rejection) and the consequences that follow such an attitude in the society (5:1-3).

(5) For the monarchy, it is to acknowledge that YHWH is the only and true King of Israel, and that human kingship should have the responsibility of promoting the well being of the community by following the divine constitution: the Torah.²⁵⁶ In this way, the human king has to be a covenant-king. Whenever he breaks the covenant (that is, he refuses to know YHWH), he brings the curse (punishment/judgment) not only on himself, but also on the whole nation.

(6) YHWH, the God of the covenant is concerned with the establishment of institutions that will order life in covenantal ways. This is why he set limitations for kingship (Deut. 17:14-20). Said another way, YHWH knows that public power can and must be administered in just ways. Therefore, for the covenant king, to know YHWH is to maintain a society with a just social shape and to protect the powerless.

²⁵⁶ It would be interesting to study the constitutions in our nations in the light of the Torah; to see similarities and differences and how they reflect the fear of the Lord.

Conclusion

This section has shown the difficulty of defining the concept *ידע יהוה* with a single reference. For Jeremiah, the call to know YHWH meant nothing else than the call to Judah to return to its traditions founded on election and sustained by the covenant God made with them. In this way, Israel as a society had the responsibility of being a permanent testimony of God's sovereignty, justice and *shalom*. Each member of the community had to be driven by this vision and strictly follow the law in every aspect of his/her life in the community. The king himself had to rule justly and promote every aspect of the covenant. There was no distinction between secular and religious, and whoever tried to break the law by pursuing his or her own interest (5:2; 9:1) offended not only other members of the community, but YHWH himself as the giver of the covenant. To break the law was a refusal to know YHWH.

It is first of all by reference to the theology of the covenant that to disobey the torah which God had given would mean to be deprived of privileges that belong to living in covenant with him. As the context of the Near Eastern Society has demonstrated, the positive side of keeping the covenant or knowing YHWH as the sovereign Lord over all Israel would be the blessing of living under the providential care of YHWH, and of enjoying all benefits of the land and nationhood as described in the book of Deuteronomy. But to those who broke the covenant (like the contemporaries of Jeremiah) there were serious threats of the loss of these privileges and the suffering of all manner of ills including exile (Deut 11:16-17; 28:15-68).

For the Congolese context, the lesson we can learn from this chapter is that a solid foundation for the building or

the re-building of our country must start with a clear understanding of God's word, more specifically of what it means to know God, and the responsibility attached to it. Christianity must also be understood in terms of a covenant with YHWH, through Jesus Christ as an example for our own lives, and also as the Lord of all lords and the king of all kings. The ministry of evangelization must also be understood as a means to organize people and help them to re-organize themselves so as to prepare for the dawn of a society worthy of YHWH's plan. But as long as Congolese Christians continue to live negligently both at private and public level, as long as the Church continues to please politicians (as the Protestant Church did) instead of helping them and showing them the true way of leadership, as long as Christianity does not transform our entire life to love, to care, to forgive, to form a truly new community of believers, our claim that we know God will remain useless. In other words, the church in Congo must assist the citizens, particularly Christians, in the building of a better nation by helping them to practice in their daily lives what the word of God teaches, and also by helping them to resist all kinds of wickedness both at local and national levels.

Finally, the Congolese church has the huge responsibility of teaching the whole nation and the political leaders the proper understanding and use of power and of helping the citizens to clearly realize that they are responsible for the kind of the constitution they have accepted but also for the government in power, because their destiny is linked to the kind of leadership they have accepted to rule over them. My Congolese context demonstrated that the problem in Judah was the failure of priests, prophets and Levites to function as effective

checks against any departure from YHWH's law, be it in the use of power or any other social evil in the nation. In the same way, the text of Jeremiah helped me to understand that the problem with my country is the lack of a clear social project and a vision that can help us build a united and coherent society.

CHAPTER 3

KNOWLEDGE OF YHWH AND IDOLATRY

This chapter analyses the relationship between the term ידע את־יהוה and idolatry in the book of Jeremiah. The only passage in which the term to know YHWH is clearly found in relationship with idolatry is 2:4-13. Like in the first chapter, my analysis will pay particular attention to my Congolese context to find out how this passage can help me understand my situation in DR Congo, but also how my Congolese situation can illumine my analysis. After the interpretation of the passage, there will be a section in which different findings will be summarized. This summary will have a special focus on the understanding and the definition of the term ידע את־יהוה in Jeremiah 2:4-13.

Judah Has Changed Its God (2:4-13)

Translation

4. Hear the word of YHWH, house of Jacob, and all the families of the house of Israel.
5. Thus says YHWH:
What evil did your fathers find in me,
That they went far from me?
And went after vanity, and became vain in the process.
6. And they did not say: "Where is YHWH"
who brought us up from the land of Egypt,
who guided us in the wilderness,
in a land of desert and pit,
in a land of dryness and utter darkness,
in a land through which no one passes,
and (where) no one settles?
7. I brought you into a fertile land,

- to eat its fruit and its good produce;
but when you went in, you defiled my land
and changed my heritage into an abomination.
8. The priests did not say: where is YHWH?
Those who handle the Torah did not know me.
The shepherds rebelled against me,
And the prophets prophesied by Baal;
They walked after things that do not profit.
9. Therefore, I still contend with you, says YHWH;
and I shall contend with your grandchildren
(descendants).
10. Now, cross to the coasts of Cyprus and see,
send to Kedar and examine with great care
and see if anything like this ever happened.
11. Has a nation ever changed its gods,
although they are no gods?
But my people have changed their glory,
For that which does not profit.
12. Be horrified at this, O heavens!
Be shocked, be absolutely amazed, YHWH's oracle.
13. My people have committed two evils:
they have forsaken me,
a fountain of running waters,
to hew out cisterns for themselves,
broken cisterns
that do not hold water!

Historical and Literary Contexts

Jer. 2:4-13 belongs to the same historical context as chapters 4-6 called the foe-from-the-north unit. In 4:5-6:30, the prophet speaks about divine judgment on Judah. In 3:1-4:4, YHWH is depicted as pleading with Judah for repentance, whereas in chapter 2, Jeremiah is indicting Judah for its evil. Thus, the macro-structure of chapters 2-6 will be as follows:

1. The accusation of Judah for disobedience (2:1-37);
2. Jeremiah/YHWH's plea with Judah for repentance (3:1-4:4);

3. The announcement of divine judgment as a result of the rejection of YHWH (4:5-6:30).

This macro-structure indicates that the prophecy in chapter 2 must have been uttered earlier than 3:1-4:4 and 4:5-6:30, more probably at the beginning of Jeremiah's ministry. Craigie, Kelly and Drinkard suggest that the section of our concern (2:4-13) might have been delivered before Josiah's reformation (622 BC), and that the mention of idolatry may reflect in part, Judah's vassal status to foreign power (Assyria).¹ Thompson recognizes that the whole of chapter 2 consists of a literary arrangement of several originally independent segments dealing with the same theme and brought together to serve a theological purpose.² The literary unity of verses 4-13 can be distinguished from other unities in the context by the fact that in verses 1-3 as well as verses 14-19 the person of address is second person feminine singular, whereas in verses 4-13 the second person masculine plural is employed to designate the persons who are being addressed. Thompson also rightly pointed out that in the context of the whole chapter, verses 4-13 form a bridge between the statement of Israel's early devotion to YHWH (vv.1-3) and the description of her present sad state of bondage to Assyria (vv.14-19). This gives a clear sequence of the chapter: Israel's early

¹ Craigie, Kelly and Drinkard, *Jeremiah 1-25*, 28. This argument might support the fact that Jeremiah begun his ministry on the thirteenth year of Josiah's reign (in 627 BC), five years before the beginning of the reform. And that the years before reformation might have been characterized by the domination of Assyria and also by the practice of idolatry that had grown up under Manasseh.

² Thompson, *Jeremiah*, 160.

devotion (vv.1-3), Israel's apostasy (vv.4-13), and the tragic results of this apostasy (vv.14-19).³

Moreover, Jeremiah's use of the verb לָחַם (contend, bring suit) in 2:4-13 and the fact that the same passage contains a number of elements that suggest a literary link between it and the so-called prophetic lawsuit form⁴ advocate a special attention for analysis.

The study of Jeremiah 2 that shows how Israel started well with YHWH, only to end in apostasy, is very important for us in Africa, particularly in DR Congo. It is easy for a country to slowly but surely abandon the primary vision of justice, unity, love and progress and embrace vanity that finally destroys the whole nation with its people.⁵ As

³ Thompson, *Jeremiah*, 167.

⁴ In the Ancient Near East, the לָחַם was a legal form in which the suzerain king laid a charge against a rebel vassal. Thompson (*Jeremiah*, 159-60) writes that the shape of the לָחַם was as follows: (1) an appeal to the vassal to pay heed, and summons to the earth and the sky to act as witnesses; (2) a series of questions each of which carried an implied accusation; (3) a recollection of past benefits bestowed on the vassal with some statement of the offenses by which he had broken his treaty (covenant); (4) a reference to the futility of ritual compensations, recourse to foreign cults, or other kind of aid; (5) a declaration of culpability and a threat of judgment. See also Michael de Roche, "Yahweh's Rib Against Israel: A Reassessment of the So-called 'Prophetic Lawsuit' in the Preexilic Prophets," *JBL* 102/4 (1983) 563-74. According to him, the לָחַם in this passage is derived from the proceedings of the civil lawsuit as conducted specifically in Ancient Israel, and not necessarily in the Ancient Near Eastern society in general.

⁵ In most of our countries in Africa, the anthems composed during the time of independence contain such a primary vision like the need for building a better nation, the need for unity, for justice, love, sometimes even a prayer to God to bless our nation, etc. The constitution is

I read this text and seek to discover what went wrong in Judah between YHWH and his beloved people, I will also be reading my own Congolese story and try to discover if there is any parallel and if the word of God has something to help us change our own situation in DR Congo.

Structure

Following the discussion on the literary context of this passage as presented in the preceding section, the structure of Jeremiah 2:4-13 can be presented as follows:⁶

- (1) Introduction (v.4);
- (2) Question and analysis (v.5-8);
- (3) Announcement of lawsuit (v.9);
- (4) Substance of the suit (vv.10-11);
- (5) Address to the legal witness (vv.12-13).

Interpretation

Introduction (v.4)

This verse, which also constitutes the heading of the whole passage, opens with an appeal to the house of Jacob

another document in which one may find such a primary vision.

⁶ This structure follows Craigie, Kelly and Drinkard's presentation with two differences: (1) they do not mention the first verse of the unit that I am considering as an introduction to the whole passage; (2) they have separated verses 5-8 while I think that they have to be analyzed together.

(בית יעקב) and the families of the house of Israel (בית ישראל) to hear (שמעו) the word of YHWH. For Holladay, verse 4 originally introduced Jeremiah's word to the northern tribe. He also reminds that the expression בית ישראל (household of Israel) was the designation of the tribal league at the time of Judges (1 Sam 7:2,3) and of the kingship of Saul and David (2 Sam 1:12; 6:5); and that בית יעקב (household of Jacob) is a poetic synonym (Amos 3:13) functioning as a reminder of Israel's election.⁷ Thompson does not agree with this idea, but thinks that this oracle might have been spoken at some covenant festival during which the people of Judah (not the northern kingdom) would have been addressed as representing "all the tribes of the house of Israel." His conclusion is that the twice-repeated formula "where is YHWH?" (vv.6, 8) is possibly a liturgical formula used at such festivals but taken up here to serve the prophet's purpose.⁸

My understanding of the passage will disagree with Holladay, Thompson, and Carroll.⁹ It seems to me that Jeremiah is here using his usual powerful prophetic imagination to remind his audience about the whole history of Israel (not only Judah). In this sense, we do not need to see it as either addressed to the northern kingdom (*contra* Holladay) or to a particular Judean festival (*contra* Thompson). It might be that the prophet simply

⁷ Holladay, *Jeremiah 1*, 85.

⁸ Thompson, *Jeremiah*, 167.

⁹ Carroll, *Jeremiah*, 123. He writes that "it is unnecessary to make the phrases 'house of Jacob', 'house of Israel' refer to Israel rather than to Judah and treat the discourse as extracts from Jeremiah's early preaching to the northern clans."

wanted to show to his audience where the root of their failure was to be found. I see the passage as showing a continuity of history. Though the northern kingdom no longer existed, the prophet saw the need (as I will seek to demonstrate in the following section) to show his contemporaries that their own situation is linked to that of their fathers (v.5), or that their present state of apostasy begun with their fathers at the very beginning of their history with YHWH. In other words, the question with which YHWH opens his case against Judah relates to the beginnings of a history of Israel as a whole, not only Judah. This is important for us in that how we choose to live both socially and spiritually in our days will have an impact on the generations to come. This is what happened with Israel and this is what is happening with most of our nations in Africa.

Question and Analysis (vv.5-8)

The whole message begins with an important rhetorical question: "what evil did your fathers find in me, that they went far from me?" The word here translated by "evil" or "fault" in verse 5 is עוֹל. When used as a verb, it means to act wrongly or unjustly. It is evil in an ethical sense. Its antonym is צדקה (good behavior, righteousness, covenantal kindness, justice). The implication of such a question is that some failure in YHWH might have forced the Israelites to depart from him. In the immediate context of verses 1-3 that describe the relationship between YHWH and Israel as between a husband and his wife, and in the context of the whole Old Testament, this passage reminds of Deut. 24:1 that speaks of a man divorcing his wife when he

finds some indecency in her. However, in Israel, the wife was not allowed to divorce her husband, but in this text, Israel as YHWH's wife decided to do so, against nature. Moreover, theologically, the wicked actions depicted by the word **לָלַךְ** in relation to YHWH have absolutely no part in the character of God (Deut. 32:4; Job 34:10). One then understands YHWH's shock in this passage at Israel's rejection, because it makes him look like an evil person, or a person who is unable to care for the need of his people. Said differently, Israel's accusation against YHWH as seen in the rhetorical question touches the very character of God. Nonetheless, though the prophet does not attempt to immediately respond to this allegation, it is clear that there was no fault in YHWH and that the fathers are the ones to be blamed, because they were the ones who walked away (**רָחַק**) from YHWH their God, not the opposite.

The verb **רָחַק** means be or become distant, remote, be removed or remove oneself, withdraw, make distant, walk away.¹⁰ Many commentators understand the expression "walking away from YHWH" as going after YHWH's rivals or after other gods (idols) in order to serve them.¹¹ This is contrasted with walking after YHWH in verse 2 where it is said that Israel followed YHWH in the desert during the time of love. The love that is referred to in verse 2 is the covenantal love. In his article on the Near Eastern background of the

¹⁰ Robert H. O'Connell, "רָחַק" in *NIDOTTE*, 3:1099-1100.

¹¹ Thompson, *Jeremiah*, 167. He notes the fact that in secular treaties of the day, a rebel vassal who went after some other ruler was understood to have renounced allegiance to his overlord. This is probably what the accusation meant in this passage.

love of God in Deuteronomy, William L. Morran defines it as,

A love intimately related to fear and reverence. Above all, it is a love which must be expressed in loyalty, in service and in unqualified obedience to the demands of the Law. For to love God is, in answer to a unique claim (Deut 6:4), to be loyal to him (11:1,22; 30:20), to walk in his ways (10:12; 11:22; 19:9; 30:16), to keep his commandments (10:12; 11:1, 22; 19:9), to do them (11:22; 19:9), to heed them or his voice (11:13; 30:16), to serve him (10:12; 11:1, 13). It is in brief, a love defined by and pledged in the covenant - a covenantal love.¹²

This quotation clarifies the kind of love Israelites expressed in the desert and it helps to understand the present sad state in which YHWH's people found themselves.

The heart of Judah's problem is thus expressed in one single verb, *חָנַךְ* "to walk away" (from YHWH). This walking away suggests a distancing from YHWH, i.e., from the center of life, of true power, of true vision for the community or of sense of direction for the future and a distancing from the source of human worth. Said differently, it suggests a sense of autonomy from YHWH, a revolt from his commandments, an unwillingness to obey his law, a deviation from godly principles and a loss of initial vision in relationship with the transcendence. This loss of worth creates disintegration in human thinking and leads to the death of the nation. Therefore, one way to understand

¹² William L. Morran, "The Near Eastern Background of the Love of God in Deuteronomy," *CBQ*, 25 (1963) 78. In this interesting study, Morran demonstrates how the concept love was used to describe the loyalty and friendship joining independent kings, sovereign and vassal kings and subjects. His conclusion is that a good understanding of the concept love as a sovereign-vassal terminology might have a great impact on our understanding of the Lord's commandment: "if you love me, keep my commandments."

idolatry in this passage is to consider it as whatever makes a person, a society and a governmental system to distance themselves from YHWH's law, to think that they are above everything, that they have a monopoly on life, on all kinds of decisions without any regard to YHWH's commandments. In the governmental system, and particularly from my African/Congolese perspective, it also creates a dysfunctional kind of government that becomes absolute and brings only death because the owner of true power, life, and social justice/order has been done away with. Such leaders lack self-confidence, they are like empty vessels since they have no other greater power and example to imitate. Instead they trust in pseudo-experts (like false prophets, as we shall see in this interpretation), soothsayers and praise singers. This is a kind of government led by leaders who are totally ineffective, mentally bankrupt and teach the people deceptive ideological theories without strong convictions of helping the nation to move ahead. In fact, they are able to move nowhere because the true direction has been lost, though they are sometimes surrounded by very well educated but totally corrupted people, powerful diviners, renowned witchdoctors, and even some religious leaders. Therefore, my understanding is that when God is done away with, he is always replaced by something else: either a person (personality cult) or a system/doctrine (communism, socialism, Mobutuism, etc). In one way or another, this might have been the problem of the people of Judah when they distanced themselves from YHWH. This might also shed light on the current situation in most of African countries where it seems that people are walking in darkness (darkness of war, of hatred, of poverty, of HIV/AIDS, etc).

In both Israel and DR Congo, this darkness might well symbolize the loss of direction for the entire nation.

In my context, the classic illustration of this absolutism and the walking away from YHWH is of course Mobutu's system and his government, the Protestant Church in DR Congo and also the entire Congolese people. The situation my country is undergoing clearly depicts a deviation from the normal or the godly way of living. For example, while Mr. Emery Patrice Lumumba, the first Primer Minister of the independent Congo promised justice, freedom, unity, prosperity, and forgiveness for the nation; we have seen only suffering, destruction and death. An extract of his speech might help us compare the two periods of our nation and find out how and why the deviation took place:

Together we are going to establish social justice and assure that everyone receives just remuneration from his work (...) We are going to re-examine all the former laws and from them make new laws which will be noble and just (...) We are going to suppress effectively all discrimination, whatever it may be and give to each person the just place which his human dignity, his work and his devotion to his country merit him (...) We are not going to let a peace of guns and bayonets prevail, but rather of courage and goodwill(...) I ask all of you to forget the hazardous tribal quarrels, which exhaust our strength and make us contemptible to the foreigner.¹³

This was the clear, noble and godly vision at the independence, a vision of unity, of justice, of love, of peace, etc. It seems to me that this is what YHWH wanted to see in Judah and what he would like to see in most of our

¹³ Felix Kiruthu, *Voices of Freedom: Great African Independence Speeches*, Vol. I (Nairobi: Cana Publishing, 2001), 37.

governments. Unfortunately, the Congolese people have never experienced true peace and justice. From Jeremiah 2, my argument would be that one of the reasons of this horrible situation in DR Congo is the deviation from the primary vision, i.e., the rejection of YHWH by our leaders and the adoption of worthless ideologies with nonsense objectives of elevating human leaders and destroying the nation.

In the Congolese political system, one can easily trace the trajectory of this deviation. It was on 24th November 1965 that Mobutu came to power by a *coup d'état*. The following statement by one of the Congolese prefects in early 1972 is a witness to the situation and a good justification of Mobutu's *coup d'état*:

When we look at the past, it is absolutely clear that the Zairian people, then Congolese, were very fed up with the total failure of the institutions of the period . . . tribal struggles, rebellions, secessions, massacres, famines, scarcity of basic goods, looting, inflation, black markets, etc. It was necessary on 24 November 1965 for the Army High Command, under the direction of Citizen MOBUTU SESE SEKO, to intervene to put an end to this tragedy.¹⁴

This quotation, at the beginning of Mobutu's reign shows that something was already wrong in DR Congo. The visionary Prime Minister has been murdered with the complicity of colonial power and the country had plunged into chaos. Unfortunately, the welcome people gave to Mobutu misled him and his entourage. Instead of following the primary vision announced at the independence, he decided to do away with God and started building a veritable political religion around the presidential monarch. The quasi-political party

¹⁴ Thomas M. Callaghy, *The State-Society Struggle: Zaire in Comparative Perspective* (NY: Columbia University Press, 1984), 166.

came in April 1967 with the creation of the Mouvement Populaire de la Revolution¹⁵ (MPR) as the state-party. The document containing the guiding principle of the MPR was known as "le Manifeste de la N'Sele" (N'Sele Manifesto). The idea contained in the Manifesto was known as Mobutuism. This Mobutuism was defined as the teachings, thought, and action of the president-founder of the MPR. It was recommended to high party officials and state administrators to take up the spread of this highly organic-statist gospel since the MPR had to be considered as a Church and her Founder as the Congolese Messiah.¹⁶ It was the Manifeste de la N'Sele that had to be learned in school and community, in lieu of the Bible. All the Christians signs (the Cross, and other writings) in classrooms and school offices were to be replaced by Mobutu's image as the guide. In truth, the Manifesto was about the exaltation of Mobutu himself.

In 1972, a state radio broadcast openly defied the Church by declaring: "the party and not religion should inspire the people" and that the people should believe in the MPR (and in Mobutu) and not in the Church.¹⁷ Mobutu's mother, Yemo (known as Mama Yemo), was praised both as the queen mother and Virgin Mary. Mobutu was sung as the savior (the Zairian Jesus) of his people who created order out of chaos. His rule was interpreted as a divine one. I remember that as primary and then secondary school pupils, we had to sing for Mobutu every morning before we started any

¹⁵ In English, "Popular Movement of Revolution."

¹⁶ Callaghy, *The State-Society Struggle*, 173.

¹⁷ Callaghy, *The State-Society Struggle*, 305.

activities; and it was the same in all schools in Congo (then Zaire). This new system was imposed to replace morning prayer in our schools. All the markets' activities had to start with songs to praise him, instead of praising God for him. It was the same for soldiers in their barracks. Sometimes it looked funny for us as small children going to school and watching soldiers in their uniforms dancing early in the morning like small children for a human being like themselves. But it was the same all over because those who were dancing for Mobutu were not only young people but also and mostly stocky prefects and provincial commissioners. They had to show an example to the common people. They had to demonstrate their allegiance to the new lord.

By the end of 1980, Mobutu had really become more than a president for most Congolese people, he was a god. Even when the war that forced him to exile begun in 1996, many people, especially in rural areas, could not accept that anybody in the world would be able to overthrow him. A serious revolution has taken place in the Congolese society. In the words of Kä Mana, "people trained by insignificant leaders and enlightened by insignificant intellectuals, have themselves sunk into insignificance."¹⁸ It seems to me that this quotation fits well our Congolese context.

I am not here claiming that this is exactly what happened in Judah, but this helps me to understand what the issue was in that community when people decided to walk

¹⁸ Kä Mana, *Christians and Church of Africa Envisioning the Future: Salvation in Christ and the Building of a New African Society* (Ghana, Akropong-Akuapem: Regnum Africa, 2002), 14.

away from YHWH and change the whole system that should have protected the nation. One of the lessons we can learn from this text read from my Congolese perspective is that a single person (mostly a leader) can create a system that can change the whole vision and the whole course of history in a nation, if the community is not watchful. It is then important to be careful on the choice of leaders. Unfortunately, the people never choose most of these leaders in Africa, since they come to power by *coup d'état* or other unlawful means like starting civil wars and imposing themselves as the head of States. Sometimes they attempt to organize fake democracies supported by rigged elections.¹⁹

Therefore, one way of defining idolatry is to consider it as a particular leadership and/or administrative system that claims total independence from the wisdom coming from above it. An idolatrous government always claims that it has the knowledge and the power, and therefore, does not need any reference from God or from whatever power and knowledge that can be presented as being above it. An idolatrous government claims to be able to give to people whatever they need. As a consequence, it is very easy for such a system to become absolute and totally corrupted since whatever it does cannot be questioned. It is also easy for the absolute system to rule out any idea of change. This is why Mobutu used to say that he would only be called "the late president" but never "the former

¹⁹ However, I must mention in passing that some countries like Senegal, South Africa, Mali, Kenya, etc, have given hope to Africa that change for democracy and progress is possible.

president." In other words, nobody else could become a president of DR Congo before Mobutu dies.

What is more, verse 5 states that the fathers walked after הַבַּל (vanity). According to Michael V. Fox, the literal sense of הַבַּל from which many other meanings are derived is "vapor" (Is 57:13; Prov 13:11; 21:6; and Ps 144:4).²⁰ Other meanings that come from this basic one are: ephemerality, vanity, nothingness, incomprehensibility, deceit, senselessness, nonsense,²¹ worthlessness, unprofitable,²² etc. Thompson argues that the noun הַבַּל might have been used here as a play on "Baal," the principal deity of Canaanite worship.²³ Craigie, Kelly and Drinkard quote Barstad who suggests that the word "vanity" might actually "be a term for a particular god, or a type of god, and refers to a later pre-Islamic deity named Hubal."²⁴

Whatever the correct meaning of this verse might be, it is clear that there is a close association between vanity and idols in this whole passage. For YHWH, idols are vanity because they have turned Israelites away from her primary vision, from her initial relationship with God, and from the mission that was assigned to her. Idols are also vanity because by turning to them, Israel lost her value and her identity, and became a useless community for YHWH. Said differently, by turning to vanity/idols, Israel became

²⁰ Michael V. Fox, *A Time to Tear Down & a Time to Build Up: A Rereading of Ecclesiastes* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Co., 1999), 27-28.

²¹ Fox, *A Time to Tear Down*, 28-29.

²² Gordon H. Johnston, "הַבַּל," in *NIDOTTE*, 1:1003.

²³ Thompson, *Jeremiah*, 167.

²⁴ Craigie, Kelly and Drinkard, *Jeremiah 1-25*, 28.

valueless exactly like one of the idols worshiping nations of her time. To use New Testament words, Israel as a community became like a salt that had lost its flavor. According to Jesus, such salt had to be thrown out and trampled underfoot as worthless (Matt. 5:13). The worthlessness here is not to be understood in abstract terms. It is very much expressed in concrete situations like social injustice, corruption, ideologies, terrorism, harassments, etc. This is why we need to link this chapter with the preceding one and state that in Jeremiah, there is a strong relationship between idolatry and social injustice as far as community life is concerned.²⁵ Consequently, idolatrous practices in Judah threatened the missiological function of Israel by obscuring the worship of YHWH, the true and living God and by skewing the just social shape of the nation. Foreigners who came into contact with the people of Judah who followed worthless idols like their own and had adopted patterns of social behavior similar to theirs would not see anything distinctive about Judah and therefore would fail to ask about YHWH who legitimates such behavior. This is the same with the Church in DR Congo today. Many non-Christians have ceased to be impressed by our liturgy and prayer meetings. These non-Christians know that many Church members do not live by the standard of YHWH's commandments. They know that in the Church, one can find all kinds of social evils (ethnic divisions, stealing, telling lies, adultery, etc.) that are destroying our nation. In this way, our motto in the Congolese Protestant

²⁵ One of the best books I have come across that discusses the relationship between holiness (as against idolatry) and social justice is Walter C. Kaiser, *Towards Old Testament Ethics* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983), 140ff.

Church that "Muklisto adjali Muinda"²⁶ becomes meaningless or a simple wish.

From this analysis, it might be right to state that the true problem between YHWH and his people (as described in v.5) is that there came a time when Israelites became remote in their relationship with God, then started pursuing after useless things/gods. As a result, they themselves became הבל, that is useless or worthless. This worthlessness was a result of a broken relationship with YHWH and also a failure of Israel to accomplish the mission it was assigned, of being a society with a just social shape, and thus testifying to other nations of YHWH's existence and will. This reminds of Hos. 9:10 that points out the fact that one becomes like what he or she worships. In other words, the Israelites' worth was not found in themselves, but only in YHWH whom they served. Another implication here is that each nation and government should listen to other voices, such as the Church or any other religious groups that point to a greater power than the one found in the government/leadership itself. It is dangerous to suppress other voices in the community and think that the leader and his team (government) know everything, and are able to do everything by their own power and knowledge (I will come back to this point in Chapter three).

Verse 6 elaborates more on the cause of the failure by pointing out that the failure of the Israelites was a consequence of the loss of spiritual memory, an abandonment of their history with YHWH, i.e., the abandonment of primary vision. More specifically, the prophet accuses them

²⁶ "Muklisto adjali Muinda" is the motto of the Protestant Churches in DR Congo. It means, "A Christian is light (to the community)."

of not asking the question: "Where is YHWH?" This question is repeated twice in verses 6 and 8, and therefore shows its importance in the whole passage. Holladay relates the question "Where is YHWH" with the use of two participles: *המעלה* (hiphil participle masculine singular of *עלה*, with the meaning "to bring up") and *המוליך* (hiphil participle masculine singular of *הלך*, which means "to lead, to bring in"). According to Holladay, this question suggests a constant possibility of YHWH's acts of rescue (Job 35:10) in the Promised Land (where YHWH "brought in" his people after "bringing them up" from Egypt).²⁷ In this sense, the question where is YHWH can be understood as a constant call or cry of Israelites to YHWH for help during a time of crisis in the land. In the same way, Overholt notes that the question can also be employed in two different ways: either as a mode for calling on YHWH for help (Ps. 89:50; 2 Kings 2:14), or as pronounced by enemies, where it has a derogatory inflection. In the later case, the one who asks the question (who is an enemy or a foreigner) observes the community's (or an individual's) miserable condition and wants to know where YHWH is that he has permitted such a state of affairs to come to pass (Pss. 42:4, 11; 79:10; cf. Joel 2:17; Mic. 7:10). The expected answer is thus "YHWH is nowhere," in the sense that he has forsaken his people.²⁸ Thus, from the perspective of an enemy, this passage might point at YHWH's failure to intervene in favor of his people.

²⁷ Holladay, *Jeremiah 1*, 86.

²⁸ Overholt, "Jeremiah 2 and the problem of 'audience reaction,'" in *CBQ*, 41 (1979) 267.

However, the question in this specific passage can also be taken as an accusation that Judah had grown accustomed to God, so at ease that God was taken for granted and ignored. He was no longer the center of Judah's life; and he was not called upon during the time of danger. Instead, people chose to go after idols, which are implicitly and ironically presented as more helpful than YHWH himself. Thus, the issue at stake in Judah, according to this text, was the question of the presence of YHWH, his effectiveness in directing the life of the entire community, the awareness of the people that YHWH was present in daily activities, and whether he was to be followed or not. It is important to see how the lack of asking the question "where is YHWH?" is here linked with the issue of going far from YHWH, i.e., after idols.

YHWH wanted his people to remain close to him and to keep calling on him during their time of need. I have already demonstrated elsewhere (chapter 2) that to call upon or to cry to YHWH was a central construction and practice in Israel's faith, and how in Exod. 2: 23-25 and 1 Samuel 7:8, YHWH decided to act as an answer to his people's cry. To cry or to call somebody for help is a sign of recognition of superiority and confidence in him. This confidence must be rooted in concrete historical facts that have proved the effectiveness of the one upon whom people are calling. For this reason, the question "where is YHWH" is linked with some important historical and theological events that characterize the deity from whom Israelites have distanced themselves: First, YHWH reminds his people how he brought them up from the land of Egypt.

The book of Exodus relates how a perishing people was turned into a flourishing multitude that prospered under

the most difficult political, environmental, religious, military, economic, and social conditions in Egypt under Pharaoh. It also relates how it took YHWH's powerful interventions for the people to be freed from the hand of Egyptians. The Israelites' response to this act of salvation ought to be a perpetual recognition of YHWH as the only one who birthed²⁹ Israel and who was able to deliver them and make them what they had become afterward.

Furthermore, deliverance from Egypt is associated with the hardship in the wilderness. In other words, without YHWH, the people of Israel could not have been freed from their slavery. In addition, even if someone else could have delivered them, it would have been impossible for them to reach the Promised Land because of the hardship in the wilderness.

This desert or the land of desert (ארץ ערבה) is described as (1) a land of pit (שוּחָה). The word שוּחָה derives from the verb שוּח that means to humble, to sink down. In the ancient time, the pit was dug and camouflaged, in order to trap wild animals that would sink into it. The metaphorical use of שוּחָה in the Old Testament derives from this sense of danger. Thus, the term שוּחָה means a hidden danger in the path of one's physical or spiritual journey.³⁰ (2) A land of dryness (צִיָּה) and utter darkness (צִלְמוֹת). The Hebrew word צִלְמוֹת is a compound word made up of צֶל (shadow) and מוֹת

²⁹ Eugene Carpenter, "Theology of Exodus," in *NIDOTTE*, 4: 609. He notes that one ancient title for Exodus was "the coming out of Israel." He argues that the term "coming out" was normally used to describe the birth of an infant and that in this sense, Exodus is about the birth of a nation whose father is YHWH himself.

³⁰ For the hidden danger in the path of one's spiritual danger, see Prov. 22:14; 23:27.

(death), so that the original meaning of this word is "a shadow of death." This word is used in Jer. 2:6 to express an extreme danger someone is facing (see also Ps 23:4). (3) A land through which nobody passes and in which nobody has ever lived. This is a demonstration of the impossible situation that was made possible through the miraculous hand of YHWH for the sake of his people, Israel.

To come to the point, the desert through which YHWH took his people gently and surely was a threatening place, a place that was hostile to the life of human beings.³¹ But YHWH had demonstrated his power and his effectiveness by taking his people safely through it. What is being underlined here is not simply the fact of crossing the desert and entering the Promised Land, but the danger the people faced and the impossibility of the entire journey without the strong hand of the Lord. This should have created confidence of the people in YHWH as someone totally dependable. Also, this should have remained perpetually written in the memory of Israelites.

One then understands why, in this text, the desert crossing serves as the basis for the present generation's condemnation. It is the people's ingratitude to YHWH's care through many miraculous interventions that constitutes the basis for the present judgment.

Verse 7 introduces another reminder of how YHWH brought the people into the land. The verb בָּרַךְ is the hiphil of בָּרַךְ (to bring in). The hiphil here emphasizes the idea of causative. In other words, it is YHWH who caused

³¹ However, in my analysis of 9:1-8 (cf. chapter 1), the desert was presented as a quiet place where YHWH wanted to dwell after he had left his people. This is a positive description of the desert that is different from the image depicted in 2:6.

the people to get into the land. Said differently, it was absolutely and solely by YHWH's grace that people were where they were.

Furthermore, the new land into which YHWH brought his people into is carefully contrasted with the other land (the land of the desert) through which they walked, with YHWH's help, after their deliverance from Egypt. It is now a land of gardens (ארץ הברמל) that is, a fertile and productive land.³² YHWH wanted his people to enjoy the fruits of the good land he had given to them.

Regrettably, when the Israelites went into the land, they defiled (ותטמאו) it. ותטמאו is the piel imperfect (with waw consecutive) of the verb טמא. It means to defile, to make unclean. When used metaphorically, defilement includes pagan practices and the cult of other gods. For example, Lev. 18:6-23 contains regulations prohibiting sexual transgressions and prohibition against sacrificing children to Molech (v.21). Lev. 19:2-37 is concerned about holiness laws, and verse 31 speaks about defilement through consultation of departed spirits and wizards. Ezekiel also associates uncleanness with idols (14:11; 20:7, 18, 31; 22:3f.; 23:7, 13-17, 30, 38; 36:18, 25; 37:23). From these

³² The word "garden" reminds us of the Garden of Eden. Carpenter ("Theology of Exodus," in *NIDOTTE*, 4:609) rightly notices that the loss of the garden in Genesis 3 was a tragedy, but that God's intention was to restore to his people a place of habitation that equaled or exceeded the perfect conditions of the original dwelling place of humanity.

It then becomes clear that Jer. 2: 7 with its description of the Promised Land as a land of garden (translated in this text as a fertile land), a land of plenty of fruits and good things (produce), intends to remind the reader that YHWH's plan was to give back to his people the lost land of Eden.

few passages, one can conclude that in the context of Jer. 2:4-13, the defilement here is probably related to idolatry in Judah.³³ The prophet's accusation is that this defilement started immediately after the occupation of the land.³⁴

Verse 8 elaborates on this defilement by describing why things went wrong. Here the prophet names four groups of people who are accused of being the cause of evil in Israel. It is important to note that the four groups are all leaders of the nation. This confirms my definition of idolatry in this particular passage as a particular leadership and/or administrative system.

The first group is that of the priests (הכהנים). Jeremiah accuses them of not having said: "where is YHWH?" In Israel, the priests had a specific task: they represented God to the people in the splendor of their garment, in their behavior and in oracles and instructions. Moreover, priests provided general instruction and specific guidance for the nation.³⁵ Any tribal leader or king would

³³ For a detailed analysis of the concept נָטַס in the Old Testament, see G. André in *TDOT*, 5:330-342.

³⁴ According to Biblical text, the problems in Israel began immediately after the death of Joshua, the leader who helped Israelites to take possession of the Promised Land. The main problem was idolatry (abandoning YHWH in order to worship and serve other gods) or syncretism (the mixing of the ways of YHWH with the ways of others nations and their gods). The rest of the history of Israel, from the time of Judges until the time of the exile, is one at times of fighting the influences of foreign nations but more often than not of capitulating to foreign influences. In the same way, the message of the prophets can well be summarized as the call to turn from idolatry and social injustice (see especially 2 Kings 17).

³⁵ It was the responsibility of Levites to demonstrate to the people that right behavior assured YHWH's presence

call upon them to use the oracle to determine the decision on an important issue (I Sam 30:7-8). In brief, the priests had to instruct Israel in the way of YHWH so that the whole nation would remain holy, i.e., distinct from all other nations, and thus become a testimony to those nations of the distinctiveness of YHWH. It is for this reason that Exod. 19:6 states that Israel as a nation was "a kingdom of priests and a holy nation." In other words, the holy nation or the priestly people had the responsibility of mediating "the knowledge and the blessing of the holy God to other peoples (cf. Exod. 15:11-17; 19:5-6; Lev. 20:22-26),"³⁶ and the priests had that obligation of turning the whole nation to a kingdom of priests. In this way, the failure of the priests would actually be the failure of the whole nation to know YHWH.

Yet, priests frequently failed in their responsibility. For example, Aaron is reported to have participated in the making of the golden calf (Exod. 32); Micah's priest decided to disobey for prestige and prosperity (Judg. 18:19-21); Eli and his family were judged because of inconsistent character and the wickedness of his sons (1 Sam 1-2); in Ezra 10:18, the priests were blamed for marrying foreign women. Finally, in Malachi priests are blamed for abuse of their sacrificial privileges (Mal. 1:7-8), and failure to instruct the people in the proper ritual behavior (Mal. 2:7-8).

It is important to note that the accusation against the priests in this passage is not for what they did not

(Lev. 15:31) and blessing (Num. 6:24-27), and avoided calamity.

³⁶ Philip Jenson, "כהן" in *NIDOTTE*, 2:600.

do, but for what they did not say. The priests neglected or forgot to say or to tell (the story), that is "to remind" the community of the faithfulness and uniqueness of YHWH, of his deliverance from Egypt and his leadership in the desert, and finally of his goodness in granting them the Promised Land. This failure to say or to preach led to forgetfulness and a sense of autonomy in Judah. I will here dare to add that these priests might also have been telling wrong or distorted stories. This would equally have been a failure. It is important to tell the story, but more important to tell the right story. In other words, after they have forgotten the (right) story about their God, people started living a life without YHWH. According to Jeremiah, memory should have played a central role in making Israel uncompromisingly aware of the nature of God's past compassionate acts as well as of her own covenantal pledge. This same question could also have helped Israelites to bridge the gap of time and form solidarity with the fathers in their encounter with YHWH. In our modern terms, this is called actualization, i.e., the process by which a past event is contemporized for a generation detached in time and space from the original generation that actually experienced an event.³⁷ This is why

³⁷ Remembering is very important for any society. For example, in the context of my country, memory should have helped us to learn that ethnic conflicts and what call "tribalism" have only helped us to destroy our nation. It was for this reason that in his independence speech on 30th June 1960, the first Prime Minister of DR Congo asked his fellow Congolese "to forget the hazardous tribal quarrels, which exhaust our strength and make us contemptible to the foreigner." (see Kiruthu, *Voices of Freedom*, 37. Unfortunately, Congolese people seem to have never learned this bitter truth and continue to destroy one another and from one generation to another.

Israel celebrated in her seasonal festivals the great redemptive acts of the past both to remember the tradition, to renew it, and to participate anew in its power. Brevard S. Childs puts it this way:

This is to say, each new generation was challenged to enter God's redemptive time, to participate itself in the Exodus. The dynamic quality of the Exodus event is seen in the events becoming a vehicle for a reality which then continued throughout Israel's history. The chronological position of the Exodus in Israel's history remained fixed (1250 BC?), but its quality as redemptive event -not just meaning-continued to reverberate in the life of the people (...) Redemptive history continued in the sense that each generation of Israel, living in a concrete situation within history, was challenged by God to obedient response through the medium of her tradition. Not a mere subjective reflection, but in the biblical category, a real event occurred as the moment of redemptive time from the past initiated a genuine encounter in the present.³⁸

The second group to be accused is that of the guardians of the law or scholars (תנפשי התורה). These were probably the Levites, particularly the group entrusted with the business of religious education.³⁹ For this very reason of teaching, the Levites were dispersed to what is known as Levitical cities (Num. 35:1-8), where people lived so that they could keep on watching over the community and giving them right instructions about God's way of living. The prophet accuses this group of not knowing YHWH. This is a serious issue because these were the very people whose assignment was to watch over the people on a daily basis, of instructing them

³⁸ Brevard S. Childs, *Memory and Tradition in Israel* (London: SCM Press, 1962), 84.

³⁹ Craigie, Kelly and Drinkard, *Jeremiah 1-25*, 29.

in the knowledge of YHWH or in the right way of community life.

Craigie, Kelly and Drinkard got the point about what was happening with the תפשי התורה (the Levites) in Israel when they wrote that this group knew well their "Bible," but they did not know, in a personal and intimate fashion, their God.⁴⁰ In other words, these scholars were blind people leading other blind, or rather making many blind in Israel. Their blindness did not come from their lack of the knowledge of the word but from their lack of the knowledge of YHWH himself. Put differently, it is possible to know (the word) about YHWH without "knowing" him, as Jeremiah understands it. This leads to telling a wrong, lifeless story about YHWH and causes the entire community to disentangle.

This is a serious matter for us today. We can be scholars, be admired as teachers of the Bible, but we are useless and even very dangerous for the Church if we have no personal or intimate relationship with YHWH. The implication of this argument is that we need to know who is going to be appointed as pastors in the Church or teachers in our theological institutions if we want a change in our society through the Church. If we choose a scholar who has no intimate relationship with the Lord but simply because of his admired scholarship, we are going to destroy the Church. This is what happened in Israel when scholars of the law abandoned faithfulness to YHWH and started serving for other reasons (maybe for their own interest). This is what is happening in our Churches and theological institutions where people who see no relationship between

⁴⁰ Craigie, Kelly and Drinkard, *Jeremiah 1-25*, 29.

their scholarship and true faith in Jesus Christ are appointed as teachers and pastors. They work hard to promote themselves through their scholarship, but they forget that they have been appointed to watch over the community.

Moreover, this point also helps us to question the motivation of many people in my country in choosing to study theology and becoming pastors or Bible college teachers. It is believed that during this time of hardship in DR Congo, pastors and theologians who are attached in one way or another to missionary institutions are the ones among the extremely few who have access to a salary or financial help. I know from my experience that this is true and that somehow, many people have now chosen to do theology (though without divine call for some of them), with the hope to be able to work with missionaries in the future. I remember having met one of my countrymen in Nairobi as he was expecting to study in one of theological schools there. One of the questions he asked me was whether the theological institution he was planning to join would ordain him and give him a parish immediately after his graduation. This clearly showed that he did not know what he was doing. As I continued to ask him more questions, I discovered (and he confessed it to me) that what he was looking for was not theological education with the vision of the ministry in future but how to get a scholarship or simply how to get money.⁴¹ I wonder how many people like that Congolese are actually accepted in our schools and get

⁴¹ Ironically, the scholarship for this fellow countryman came after he had left Nairobi in discouragement. I was asked by the school to look for him. Though I knew his address, I was not ready to help him come back because I knew that he did not have a call.

scholarships and education. I also wonder about the impact of their ministry after they have completed their education. Is not this one of the reasons of the failure of the Church in DR Congo?

The third group was that of the shepherds or pastors (הרעים). These were national leaders responsible for the government and the welfare of the people. They also were engaged in rebellion against YHWH. The sentence והרעים נשעו בי "and the shepherds rebelled against me" is to be understood in both its covenantal and political nuance. In other words, the duty of the shepherds was to tend their people; and it mattered a lot how they fulfilled this duty because we know from Jesus' teaching that there are good and bad shepherds (John 10:1-18). What is at stake in this passage is the issue of allegiance. Therefore, for political leaders, to rebel against YHWH means to refuse to acknowledge YHWH's sovereignty and to rule the nation without any consideration for YHWH's will. Concretely, as far as the ministry of the shepherds was concerned, this might mean for example that during the time of serious needs (as the question "where is YHWH?" implies) or during the time of national or individual crisis, rulers turned to other lords (be they idols or allies or pagan kings) instead of crying to YHWH. This is a clear indication that even political leaders had lost confidence in YHWH and had been trying to lead the country by their own management skills in political and social affairs.

The question "where is YHWH" shows that for Jeremiah, it was not secular skills or techniques that mattered, but petition, trustful asking from YHWH, or trustful crying to God during the time of national need. Sadly, the royal system had led the country far from this trust in the Lord

and had convinced the citizens that trusting in other gods would prove more helpful for the well being of the nation than calling upon YHWH.

At this point, most of Churches in DR Congo in general have to be congratulated, particularly during the second civil war that started in August 1998. As one body, many Churches are being mobilized to pray, to fast and seek YHWH's help to end the suffering of the people. This partly came as a result of hopelessness, a realization that the country has no army and as it happened in 1996-7, foreign armies might end up occupying the whole land with terrible consequences this second time.⁴² This also came from the realization that the international community cannot be trusted at all because they are not helpful as far as the situation in DR Congo is concerned. The understanding of many people is that nothing could have stopped the advancing powerful enemy apart from YHWH himself because of the prayers of the saints in DR Congo. This is a very positive realization for the church and it now needs to be nurtured so that people might continue to firmly put their trust in YHWH, even when the war will be over and the country will finally have a strong army. This is, to my

⁴² At the beginning of August 1998, a faction of the Congolese army together with Rwanda's and Ugandan forces were about to capture Kinshasa the capital city when all churches in Congo decided to cry to the Lord. Miraculously, the prayer was answered, rebels and the foreign armies were unable to capture the city, though they were already in. People could not understand how, and why Angola decided at the very last minute to intervene in favor of the Kinshasa government. For many Congolese, and rightly so, God has intervened to rescue them. This fact strengthened the faith of many people and encouraged many to continue praying. Many songs were composed to thank the Lord for hearing prayers and intervening to help his people.

view, what Jeremiah wanted the people of Judah and their leaders to be doing.

The last group being pointed out as the cause of Israel's moral and spiritual failure is that of the prophets. Prophets were first and foremost preachers of the revelation and word of God (Isa. 1:1; 2:1; Jer. 18:18; 27:18; Ezek. 7:26). This word came to them (Jer. 1:2,4; 2:1, etc), was with them (Hab. 2:1), was spoken to them by YHWH (Jer. 46:13), and enabled them to speak in the name of the Lord (Deut. 18:20).⁴³ Almost all true prophets in Israel addressed their messages primarily to the kings, the shepherds of the community.

In general, the content of these messages was either a call to return to the covenant obligation or judgment and punishment because of the leaders' failure to follow YHWH's word.⁴⁴ However, there were also false prophets, who were particularly active in the decades prior to the destruction of Jerusalem in 587 BC, and whose source of inspiration was a surrogate revelation. In this way, P. A. Verhoef quotes Lam who sees false prophets (with their ideologies⁴⁵) as primarily responsible for the country's disaster.⁴⁶ According to Ezekiel (13:19), most people in Judah listened

⁴³ P. A. Verhoef, "Prophecy," in *NIDOTTE*, 4: 1075.

⁴⁴ There are, however, few cases in which the prophets addressed a message different from judgment: Nathan to king David (2 Sam. 7), and Jahaziel to king Jehoshaphat (2 Chron. 20:15).

⁴⁵ On this aspect of false prophets and their ideologies, see Henri Mottu, "Jeremiah vs. Hananiah: Ideology and Truth in Old Testament Prophecy," in Norman K. Gottwald (ed.), *The Bible and Liberation: Political and Social Hermeneutics* (New York: Orbis Books, 1984), 235-251.

⁴⁶ Verhoef, "Prophecy," in *NIDOTTE*, 4: 1077.

to false prophets more than to the true ones, and followed their falsehood since what they were prophesying was what people and their leaders wanted to hear (see also Ezek. 13:10, 16; Jer. 5: 30-31; 6:14; 8:11; 23:17; Mic. 2:7; 3:5-8, 11). The general content of the message of these false prophets was that YHWH would never forsake Jerusalem, his own holy city and that consequently, people were forever secure despite all the evil they were doing, or in terms of this passage, people were secure despite their "walking away" from YHWH (Jer. 6:13-15; Mic. 3:5-12). In the same way, it seems that many people did not like the prophecies of true prophets who persistently showed the people that destruction was sure if the nation did not repent (Isa. 28:9, 10; Jer. 6:10; 26:9; 29:24-28; Hos. 9:8; Amos 7:12, 16; Mic. 2:6-11; 3:5).

By way of summary of what has been discussed so far, I would argue that the problem with Judah was that they lost the primary vision of the nation (this vision was found in the law and the covenant). As a result, they started distancing themselves from YHWH and lost their identity of being a holy nation, a nation set apart by YHWH to demonstrate the kind of community he would like to see on earth. In the process, they became worthless. They became worthless because they chose to serve worthless gods and had not recounted the story of YHWH's action in their history in creating them as a people and in giving them a land. Those who failed to help the people to remember their history were the priests, the scholars, the shepherds, and the (false) prophets.

At this point, I can make one more connection between the failure of Levites, priests and prophets in Judah and the stand of the Church in DR Congo. In the first chapter,

I demonstrated how the Protestant Church in DR Congo was trapped in Mobutu's system, especially in the 70s and 80s by giving strong support to Mobutu's corrupted ideology. I also concluded that, as a consequence of that cooperation with the corrupted system, the Protestant Church forgot her primary mission of being the light for the nation. In this way this Church was unable to make a significant impact on the nation and to counter the corruption by helping the citizens realize that change is possible for a better nation. To use Jeremiah's word, the Protestant Church in DR Congo became somehow worthless and unable to lead the way for the nation. A few examples will help us to understand the situation more clearly.

In 1971, the Congolese government nationalized the Church's university in Kinshasa. Later, the theology faculties of UNAZA (University of Zaire) also were completely abolished. In the same year, the government announced that all seminaries had to have JMPR⁴⁷ sections. The Catholic Church reacted and rejected the government's decision. In a letter addressed to the heads of all Catholic seminaries in the country, the president of the Bishops' conference of DR Congo simply asked them to close all the seminaries instead of accepting the JMPR ideology in their schools where priests and many other of God's servants were trained.⁴⁸ The president of the Republic

⁴⁷ JMPR means "Jeunesse du Mouvement Populaire de la Revolution" (this is the youth wing of MPR), the State-Party created by Mobutu in 1967.

⁴⁸ The letter is found in Max Arnold (ed.), *L'Eglise au Service de la Nation Zairoise: Actes de la XIe Assemblée Plénière de l'Episcopat du Zaire (28-2 au 5-3-1972)* (Bruxelles: Av.R. Dalechamp, 1972), 206-7. This is an important document as far as the relationship between the

insisted that religion as a subject in schools had to be replaced with Mobutuism (the new religion of the nation). Christian names were also forbidden. Mobutu abolished all Christian holidays and festivities (Christmas, Passover, etc.) and replaced them with his own birthday (30th October), the day he took power (24th November), and the anniversary of MPR (17th May). It was not acceptable to have Christian writings in different classrooms and offices; they had to be replaced by Mobutu's ideas. The cross as symbol of Christianity was also banned and had to be replaced by Mobutu pictures, etc. As the tension grew stronger, the Roman Catholic Cardinal's residence was brutally taken by the regime and it became the JMPR's headquarters. Finally, the cardinal died mysteriously, and many believed that Mobutu was behind his death.

While the Catholic Church clearly perceived that Mobutu's regime was suppressing Christianity in the nation and leading the Congolese nation toward idolatry and therefore to destruction as it was the case in Judah, the Protestant Church organized under a loose association called "*L'Eglise du Christ au Zaire (ECZ)*"⁴⁹ decided to tightly collaborate with the regime and help Mobutu establish his absolutism. In a letter addressed to President Mobutu in 1972, concerning the issue of authenticity⁵⁰ that Mobutu was promoting, the executive committee of the Protestant Church uncritically wrote:

Roman Catholic and Mobutu's regime was concerned, especially during the ten first years of Mobutu's reign.

⁴⁹ In English, "The Church of Christ in Zaire (CCZ)."

⁵⁰ Authenticity as a movement was born in 1971 as an attempt by Mobutu and his regime to recover a sense of

We, members of the national executive committee of the Church of Christ in Zaire, meeting in an extraordinary session in Kinshasa, . . . , openly declare our support to the President-Founder of the national Party, the MPR, the head of the government, and the Commander of the Army, the Citizen Mobutu Sese Seko.

We support with relief his noble struggle for authenticity. In fact, Africa and particularly the Zairian people, had lost their personality during the period of colonization and foreign oppression. Now that we are forever free, this revalorization of our BEING, starting from our cultural ETHOS, continues to reassure our human dignity. It is here that we actually perceive the grandeur, the depth and the originality of the second Regime (...)

Because this program is for the social good of the citizens, which is a very important element of Christianity, the Church of Christ in Zaire, promises to you her participation and reiterates her firm support to the regime.⁵¹

So far, so good. As one can see in this address, there is only praise, and no warning at all. On the 12th anniversary of independence (30 June 1972), the President of ECZ (Bishop Jean Bokeleale) made another strong speech to support the regime. In that speech, Mobutu was magnified and compared to Noah, Abraham, Joseph, Moses, David, Martin Luther King, John the XXIII, and Jesus Christ himself! He finished his speech with the following words:

God needs human beings to solve the problems of this world . . . After five years, as our musicians use to

African identity and pride crushed by the colonial experience. It was defined as "the realization by the Zairian people to return to their origins, to seek out values of their ancestors, to discover those which contribute to their harmonious and natural development." But this idea with many others, quickly became an element of personality cult.

⁵¹ Philip Kabongo-Mbaya, *L'Eglise du Christ au Zaire: Formation et Adaptation d'un Protestantisme en Situation de Crise* (Paris: Karthala, 1992), 309-10 (my translation).

sing, the Lord has given us a man. It was the General Mobutu Sese Seko, with a very clear mission: to bring peace to Zaire and to save our nation.⁵²

From that time on, writes Kabongo-Mbaya, all Protestant Church services and ministries became like a mirror or a photocopy of the regime, reflecting everything Mobutu wanted to see. Bishop Bokeleale himself openly declared: "for us Protestants, the respect for authority is a Biblical recommendation."⁵³ In fact, it was only after 1990 that the MPR flag was removed from inside most of Protestant Churches in DR Congo, including my own.

This defense of the regime became even worse, when Pastor Jean-Perce Makanzu Mavumilusa, one of the "official" theologians of the ECZ declared that if the 25th December (Christmas day) was no longer considered by the regime as a national holiday, it was because the Church actually deceived the people on the exact date of the birth of Jesus. Then he asked a provocative question: "Why then are we being shocked and continuing to accuse the President of persecuting the Church?" He continues: "Let us thank God for President Mobutu, God is sovereign, he is the one who gave us the President of the Republic. He knows what he has done by giving us the man." He concludes his speech by saying: "Finally, we Zairian Christians, let us be serious,

⁵² Kabongo-Mbaya, *L'Eglise du Christ au Zaire*, 312 (my translation).

⁵³ Kabongo-Mbaya, *L'Eglise du Christ au Zaire*, 314. Pastor Makanzu, the coordinator for Evangelism in ECZ openly recognized and declared in a conference entitled "Dieu ou César?" (God or Cesar?) that Mobutu was indeed the (political) messiah, the one sent by God himself (Pp.1-5).

and let us accept the punishment God has given us through the government."⁵⁴

Here, for the first time, Makanzu recognizes that God had punished the nation through Mobutu. I wonder to what extent, had he realized that something wrong was happening. Did Makanzu notice that something was drastically changing in the nation as far as Christian faith was concerned? Did he notice that the government was destroying all the memory of Christianity that the Congolese people have accumulated since the first encounter with God's word? Was Makanzu becoming a false prophet, serving the interest of the ruling class in DR Congo? All these are questions that need to be analyzed if we want to understand the present contradiction between the high number of Christians in DR Congo and the present sad state of destruction in which our nation finds itself.

One more example comes from a memorandum addressed to Mobutu on 30th March 1990, by the same President of the ECZ, on behalf of the entire Protestant church in Congo. The memorandum begins with generous salutations and praises to the dictator:

(CCZ) seizes this opportunity to praise and appreciate . . . your high degree of patriotism and your political courage to have initiated the popular consultation. . . This is an act of high political significance which shows, on the one hand, the height of the responsibility of he whom God has placed at the leadership of the country for the past thirty-five years.⁵⁵

⁵⁴ Kabongo-Mbaya, *L'Eglise du Christ au Zaire*, 318 (my translation).

⁵⁵ Kabongo-Mbaya, "Churches and the Struggle," 136.

The conclusion of the memorandum is more explicit in showing that for Bishop Bokeleale, Mobutu is the only one capable of leading the country to the most needed change. The most important element to note in the following quotation is the very soft tone of the message addressed to the dictator who, by this time, has completely destroyed the nation and caused the death of thousands of his own people:

Ride on. We will support you in prayers and you will succeed! May God help us overcome this important stage for the honor and dignity of our President, of our country and of our people created in God's image.⁵⁶

Once again, this letter might reveal why Congo finds itself where it is now. When the highly respected man of God like the representative of the whole Protestant Churches in Congo with over 15 millions of members, condones evil, approves it, or treats it superficially,⁵⁷ who else can effectively confront the dictator? Who else can lead the way for the ordinary believers? The mission of the Church should have been to break this death grip of Mobutu's idolatrous system (as the Roman Catholic Church was doing) instead of praising the tyrant. The ECZ should have helped Mobutu and his government to realize that they are responsible for the destruction of the nation, instead of just encouraging them to continue with their evil. Here the warning given by the French essayist Etienne de la Boetie as quoted by Mott is important. He says that the tyrant is

⁵⁶ Kabongo-Mbaya, "Churches and the Struggle," 136. Kabongo-Mbaya rightly qualifies the tone of this letter as idolatrous.

⁵⁷ Such condemnation of superficial treatment of sin is particularly clear in Jer. 8: 8-13.

the same as everyone else in society "except for the advantage you give him to destroy you."⁵⁸ Clearly, what the ECZ as an institution has done was to give all the advantages to the dictator to continue ruling the country when everybody knew that it was time for the Congolese people to unite and get rid of Mobutu.

Some of the reasons for the support of the Protestant Church to the dictatorial regime are to be found during colonial era: (1) More than 90% of Belgians are Catholics and most of missionaries who evangelized Congo during colonial era came from Belgium. Protestant missionaries were suspected as receiving large subsidies from their governments (USA and Great Britain) in order to gain political influence for their own countries. (2) Protestant missionaries came under pressure from colonial authority because they were accused of reporting home about the atrocities committed on Congolese people. It was reported that rubber and ivory were obtained by forced labor; and that Congolese were overworked, underpaid, physically abused, and underfed. Many who failed to gather the required quantity got killed. (3) The Belgian colonial system operated on the basis of interdependence between Catholic missionary, administration, and commercial interests. This system also worked to limit the influence of the Protestant missions. (4) Unlike Protestant missions (called "foreign missions"), most of the activities of the Catholic missions (called "national missions") received important financial support from the colonial government. (5) Protestant missionaries came to Congo divided according

⁵⁸ Charles Mott, *Biblical Ethics and Social Change* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), 143.

to their denominations.⁵⁹ (6) The Protestant missionaries were portrayed as being a threat to the Belgian colonial system because they encouraged a sense of independence and rebellion against authority that was a direct outcome of *libre examen*, i.e., individual interpretation of the Scriptures. G. Dufontey quotes a Catholic prelate who made the following observation:

Protestantism ordinarily has the effect of introducing a spirit of pride and independence, which renders access to grace extremely difficult. And, as one has seen in many countries, this spirit of independence, born of *libre examen*, has rapidly led primitive peoples to adopt a mentality of revolt against all authority, whether religious or political.⁶⁰

All these factors and many others made the Protestant missions weaker than their Catholic counterpart during the entire colonial period. In fact, it was clear that whether based on religious or nationalist grounds, the pressure on the Protestants, especially during the 1920s and 30s was aimed at either limiting their expansion or forcing them out of the colony.⁶¹ One then understands why, after the independence, the ECZ decided to support Mobutu who was in

⁵⁹ Marving D. Markowitz, *Cross and Sword: The Political Role of Christian Missions in the Belgian Congo 1908-1960* (Stanford, USA: Hoover Institution Press, 1973), 78-152. Concerning the atrocity committed by Belgian colonialists on the local population in DR Congo, one would read with interest Martin Ewans, *European Atrocity, African Catastrophe: Leopold II, the Congo and its Aftermath* (London: Routledge Curzon, 2002).

⁶⁰ Markowitz, *Cross and Sword*, 103. He also adds that it was felt by some Belgians that the final objective of the Protestants missions in the Congo was to eliminate Belgian rule.

⁶¹ Markowitz, *Cross and Sword*, 104.

open conflict with the Catholic Church, hoping that this support will give them the same advantages that Belgians gave to the Roman Catholics and will help them to counterbalance the strong influence of the Roman Catholic Church in DR Congo. Unfortunately, this support contributed to strengthening the dictator, to kill the nation and to weakening the testimony of the Church.

Another important lesson we learn here for DR Congo in particular and for Africa as a whole is that it is very dangerous for the nation when religious leaders become more concerned with the standing of their religious institutions rather than seeking to make the church relevant to the context and to confront regimes over policies which are often disastrous for the society at large.

It is with joy and relief that we are noticing a great change and improvement in the leadership of ECZ (now called ECC) in its engagement in socio-political issues of the nation. Dr Marini Bodho, the new president of the ECC and his team are working hard in the process of reconciliation and peace in the nation, and in pushing the new political leaders toward a right direction for DR Congo. In my view, they also must work hard to establish a strong collaboration with other religious groups like the Roman Catholic Church and other independent groups for coherent actions toward the re-building of the nation.

The last line in verse 8 is climactic. It constitutes a summary concerning the nature of the evil committed by the four groups who have just been indicted. The passage states that these leaders (political and religious) walked after things that do not profit. I have already noted that the verb "to walk after" means to serve, and to walk after any other person or thing apart from YHWH means to be

collaborated in doing evil. They created a system, a "network" that favored them, but destroyed the nation. This makes a nice link with our own system in DR Congo and in many countries in Africa: sometimes political and religious and all other civil leaders work first for their own interest. They collaborate not to benefit the citizens, but to maintain their own interest.⁶³ One can hardly imagine the success of some dictators in maintaining themselves in power for long time without the support (implicit or explicit) of other important groups in the nation who also seek their own benefit.

However, the prophet does not spend time elaborating on the reasons for which Judeans abandoned YHWH. What we read in the text is a *fait accompli*. In fact, the tradition of Jeremiah in general is more concerned with consequence than with long stories of the manner in which Judeans sinned. Therefore, it is important for us to try to understand what was really happening at a national level or what could have forced the nation to abandon YHWH their God. Here, both the book of Jeremiah as a whole and all historical books of the Old Testament can be of great help for the understanding of the situation narrated in 2:4-13.

In the search for the historical context of this passage, I argued that this text is to be located at the beginning of Josiah's ministry, more precisely before the reforms. Apart from the prevailing oppression of the poor and social injustice in the nation as we have demonstrated

⁶³ One of the best books that discuss this kind of network between religious and political leaders in African countries concerning self-interest seems to be J.-F. Bayart, *L'État en Afrique. La Politique du Ventre* (Paris: Fayard, 1989). Unfortunately, I have not yet come across it.

in chapter one, this was also a time of severe political and theological crisis. In 732 BC, under king Ahaz, Judah became a vassal state of Assyria and it was compelled to undertake the obligations of a normal vassal, which involved the paying of tribute and the recognition of Assyria's gods in the temple in Jerusalem. Hezekiah (715-687 BC) tried to bring in religious reforms. This meant a revolt against the Assyrian suzerain king (Sennacherib) who besieged Jerusalem and forced Hezekiah to surrender and to pay a heavy tribute (2 Kings 18:9-19:37). His son Manasseh (687-642 BC) led Judah back to the position of a loyal vassal state of Assyria. Manasseh went far with the idolization of Jerusalem by annihilating all the effort of the reform initiated by his fathers. According to 2 Kings 21:4-7 and Zeph. 1:4-5, Manasseh was even able to tolerate a fertility cult with its sacred prostitution in the Temple itself. 2 Kings 21:6 narrates that he himself practiced the cult of Molech, characterized by human sacrifice. Amon, Manasseh's son, reigned only for two years (642-640 BC) and was assassinated, probably by the anti-Assyrian wing in Jerusalem. Josiah (640-609 BC) became king in succession of Amon when he was only eight years old. This is also the period of the beginning of Jeremiah's ministry, and probably of the context referred to in the passage I am interpreting.

As one can understand from this brief history, the time during which Jeremiah uttered this oracle was a time of deep political and religious crisis. As I demonstrated earlier on in this chapter, a social crisis always accompanies a religious crisis. There was a strong tension between the Old Covenant (that embodied YHWH's promise of protection) and the severe crisis the nation was

undergoing.⁶⁴ People were aware that Israel (the Northern Kingdom) was destroyed and that their turn might also come any time. This might also explain why they wanted to hear more from false prophets who would tell them that the worse will not come and that the nation was secure, than Jeremiah who would shout at them that the danger is at the door. At the same time, this crisis would probably have forced Judeans to try to look for practical but disastrous solutions⁶⁵ through alliances with other powerful nations for protection. This is why, Jer. 2:36-37 states,

Why do you take so very lightly
The changing of your way?
You shall be disappointed by Egypt,
Just as you were by Assyria.
You will only get out of this
With your hands upon your head,
For the Lord has rejected those whom you trusted,
So that you will find no success with their help.

This passage clearly shows that one of the problems with Judah in 2:4-13 was the turning of the people from YHWH to human help (Assyria and Egypt). In terms of Ancient Near Eastern societies, these alliances would have involved two facts: the powerful nation would agree to protect Judah, while the latter would *de facto* become a vassal state. In that culture also, one of the things that demonstrated the vassal's allegiance was the acceptance by the vassal of the suzerain's gods. This adoption of foreign gods would also involve the abandonment of social behavior such as social

⁶⁴ This strong political and religious crisis can explicate the difficult context in which Jeremiah ministered and his suffering as one of the true prophets of YHWH in the opposition with false prophets.

⁶⁵ This might also remind us of the situation of crisis that forced Israelites to ask for a king in 1 Samuel 8.

justice, endogamous marriage, primary socialization, etc., that distinguished Israel from other surrounding nations in order to adopt foreign (and unjust) policies.

Therefore, for many Judeans especially the leaders, it could have seemed unrealistic to continue waiting upon YHWH while the situation was terribly deteriorating. There was a kind of conspiracy of silence from YHWH's side. In this way, YHWH could not have been very dependable. And an urgent and "practical" solution was needed in order to save the nation. This abandonment of faith in YHWH should not be taken as having happened abruptly, but as the situation was becoming more complicated, the government and all other leaders were seeking more practical means to cope with the crisis, and false prophets, for their own benefit, were telling lies that everything would be alright, a bit like the Protestant Church in DR Congo that was just encouraging the dictator to ride on, and that he would succeed. In this way, false prophets could have been treated as nationalists while Jeremiah could have been considered as an enemy of the nation, a traitor. It seems to me that this is what the ECZ was also looking for from the government, i.e., the recognition that it supported the nationalist vision of political rulers and became *ipso facto* a "national Church" while the Catholic Church could have been accused of defending foreign ideas and could have been qualified as a "foreign Church". It is interesting to note that during colonial era, Roman Catholic missionaries used the same strategy against their Protestant counterpart.

It is interesting to note here that a political crisis and a crisis of faith in YHWH as the protector might have occurred simultaneously. We then understand why, in this passage, Jeremiah recalls three specific events: (1)

deliverance from slavery (v.6), (2) guidance through the desert (v.6), and (3) the gift of the land (v.7). These three events summarized the whole history of Israel (which is a history of divine power and fidelity) from its beginning until the time when things started going wrong on the people's side.⁶⁶ This was also a history of Israelite true identity. For the prophet, the solution was a reconsideration of their past, especially in their relationship with YHWH. From this reconsideration should have resulted an internal transformation of the people's consciousness. They should have learnt again that YHWH was still able to save them. Finally, by seriously reconsidering the past, they could have learnt again about YHWH's will, holiness, and power. This could have renewed their confidence (faith) in him and it could also have removed the falsehood or their wrong understanding (knowledge) of YHWH, and the wrong reading of the political events in the area. Verse 8 in this passage is all about this lack of confidence born from the neglect of the knowledge of the past.

What we learn from the history of Judah is that tradition must be taken seriously and that it is a mistake to try to absolutize the present while dismissing the past. But for the people of Judah what mattered was the present, not the past. They had acquired a very utilitarian view of God.

Once more, this text speaks powerfully to the situation of my country, especially in the area where I am

⁶⁶ It would be interesting to study the importance of history in the theology of Jeremiah. The prophet seems to argue that the solution to Judeans' problem can find solution in the careful reconsideration of the history of YHWH with their fathers.

coming from. As Judah itself, DR Congo is undergoing a severe political and economic crisis, which has a strong impact on the spiritual life of people. Different official statistics are showing that at least three millions people have died mainly in the eastern part of DR Congo since 1998 as a result of war. This situation has created at least two opposed reactions and views of God: (1) Some people are openly confessing that they have prayed for peace and stability, but that God has not answered their prayers. My estimation is that this situation has created a similar kind of crisis as it did in Judah. Not only are people now trying to justify their wickedness by the crisis in the country, but also their view of God as the one who answers prayers has been distorted. Many people are finding it very hard to believe in a God who does not act, who remains silent in the face of suffering of millions of innocent people. (2) In the ministry of the Gospel, many have now arrived at a view of God that is essentially utilitarian. God is God for what he does in the present for the people, not for who he is himself. God's holiness and otherness are forgotten. The prosperity Gospel attracts thousands of people who are deserting their traditional Church because it does not make people "rich". It is clear that for most cases, what people want in the Church and from YHWH are material benefits.

People are endlessly asking questions of/about God: how is God helpful here and now for Congolese? Why should people follow him if he is not efficient? Why should he blame people for going astray if he does not intervene now to save Congo from wars, from a completely destroyed economy? Why does he not stop sickness when he knows that people have not got money to buy drugs? etc. In fact

someone expressed the belief of many in DR Congo when he told me that God should not send any Congolese to hell after people have suffered this much.

The many pastors ministering in the area do not encourage one another but view one another as rivals because they are competing and one has to attract more people so that he may receive more offerings and more tithing. In the cities, one finds Church buildings too close to one another. Some people even boast that my country has now become a truly Christian nation,⁶⁷ but the truth is that in the Church, some people are only looking for a God who is useful.

My understanding is that, in most cases, what we call Christianity in Congo is a religion that arises as a false liberation, to justify our fatigue, our passivity and submission in the face of a situation of oppression, severe crisis and sufferings, internal and external injustice. Some people decide to join the Church after they have failed everywhere else. They think that it is in the Church that they will find magic solutions to all their problems. Some pastors do advertise that their churches offer solutions to all human problems.⁶⁸ This is why some churches prescribe long hours, many days, and several months of prayers, thinking that all the problems people are facing

⁶⁷ Kabongo-Mbaya, "Churches and Struggle for Democracy in Zaire," 149. He rightly notes that the church in Zaire (Congo) can be described only with superlatives such as Africa's largest Catholic community, the world's most influential francophone Protestant movement and, in terms of numbers, the continent's biggest "independent" church.

⁶⁸ Many independent churches adopt names like: "Maximum Miracle Center," "The Healing Power of God Church," "A Place Where Miracles Happen," etc., to attract more people.

will be solved in those prayer rooms. For example, I mentioned in chapter one how some women literally died in their prayer room. The outcome is that people are disappointed (and many leave the church) when they discover that their problems were not solved, or that their situation became worse after joining a particular Church and spending weeks in prayers. Many go back to old practices of consulting witchdoctors. For me, this should not necessarily be considered as a loss of faith, but as an act of hopelessness. People sing loud⁶⁹ and pray hard in the church but the primary goal of their singing and prayer is not to glorify YHWH, but to seek some personal advantages from him. It will be a mistake to condemn these people.⁷⁰ Most of them are in terrible need and they are crying for help. But the problem of such faith is that people will end up having a distorted image of Christianity. And a distorted Christianity is not helpful for the re-building of the nation. In fact, I have argued in chapter one that poverty and severe sufferings are indeed hindrances to true

⁶⁹ There are hundreds of popular Christian songs being sung in our Churches. I wonder if these songs take people to their inner selves. My impression is that they only serve to raise our emotion and superficially convince us that God has heard our praise and that he is ready to act. This is another aspect of research to be done in our Churches.

⁷⁰ This situation is similar to what Jeremiah observed among the poor in the streets of Jerusalem (see my interpretation of Jer 5:4 in chapter one, section II). And my interpretation demonstrated that the prophet seemed to argue that the poor were faulty but excusable because of the condition in which they found themselves. My argument is that, it will be a mistake to condemn the poor in DR Congo who seek refuge in the church. What is needed is how the church will help them to grow as responsible Christians for the re-building of the nation.

faith, and therefore to good knowledge of YHWH (see chapter one, section II).

Another consequence of this distorted understanding of Christianity, especially in most independent Churches, is that because people think that their redemption depends on God and their own holiness, there is no need to challenge the government to take care of material needs of the community. Their theology is summarized in one sentence: God is able and he will give us whatever we ask him! The result is that there is no engagement of Church leaders and Church members in socio-political life of the nation. They believe that God has given the mandate to political leaders to rule the country (unchallenged?) and that spiritual leaders should stick to spiritual matters.

The true challenge for Congolese theologians will then be to help those Churches to get the right understanding of God, the God who acts decisively but not necessarily in ways that will suit those who come to Church with their own agenda. We need to show to such Christians that God is present and everywhere but not necessarily in ways that one can control. In brief, what is needed is a Biblical knowledge of God as Jeremiah understands it. We also need to train a new type of pastors who are able to help Congolese Christians become responsible for their destiny in both spiritual and political matters. These pastors should understand their ministry as the challenge to transform the minds of Congolese people according to a clear vision of the future, a concern to promote the creative spirit and a strong determination to change the present situation towards a new destiny for the entire nation. It is only here that one perceives the importance of theological institutions and well-trained mature and

spiritual theologians in my country and many other African countries.

Announcement of Lawsuit (v.9)

Verse 9 is introduced by the conjunction לכן (therefore, that is why). In chapter one above, I demonstrated that this conjunction was used to introduce judgment as a consequence of people's failure to keep the covenant. However, in this passage לכן does not introduce judgment but a suit that YHWH wants to bring against his people because of their unfaithfulness. The sentence אָרִיב אִתְּכֶם "I shall enter suit with you" expresses the introduction of that suit. Holladay recognizes that it is difficult to find a good English equivalent for the verb אָרִיב since our words tend either to be too specific in their legal denotation or too general to communicate the forensic context.⁷¹ His understanding is that the verb אָרִיב means "to argue out in public," particularly in the context of legal dispute.⁷² It is interesting to note here that the people who are being put to trial by YHWH are not only the hearers (not even only the leaders), but also their later generations (descendants).⁷³ Craigie, Kelly and Drinkard consider this passage as a classic example of a lawsuit introduction as

⁷¹ Holladay, *Jeremiah 1*, 90.

⁷² Holladay, *Jeremiah 1*, 90.

⁷³ I have already argued that this is probably a prophetic imagination, and that Jeremiah is here taking his contemporaries back to the root of the problem and at the same time, he is probably showing them how this sin will affect the future generation.

it was practiced in the Ancient Near Eastern society in general. But they add that for Israel (Judah),

The statute under which the charges would be laid was none other than that of Israel's covenant with God, first formed at Sinai and renewed in different forms through subsequent generations. Israel, in committing itself to God in covenant, had sworn itself to total allegiance and accepted the consequences if it should fail in that allegiance. Now the failure had come to pass, and Israel must answer to God for its loss of allegiance. Jeremiah is the messenger through whom the divine declaration of the legal suit is declared.⁷⁴

Substance of the Suit (vv.10-11)

Verse 10 introduces a new section and begins with the particle ׀, which some commentators and Bible translators inadequately render by "for."⁷⁵ The fact is that the particle is not introducing a consequence of what precedes, but a new argument. A good rendering of the particle would, therefore, be "look," or "now," or "yes."⁷⁶

This section states the offense for which the people are charged: they have exchanged their glory for nothing. According to C. John Collins, the word כבוד (glory) is especially used in the Old Testament as a technical term for God's manifest presence (Exod. 16:7; 29:43; 40:34, 35;

⁷⁴ Craigie, Kelly and Drinkard, *Jeremiah 1-25*, 29.

⁷⁵ Carroll, *Jeremiah*, 127; Craigie, Kelly, and Drinkard, *Jeremiah 1-25*, 26. See also RSV.

⁷⁶ Holladay, *Jeremiah 1*, 50. Thompson, *Jeremiah*, 166. He renders the particle by "Yes, Indeed."

Lev. 9:6, 23; 1 Kings 8:11; Ps. 63:2).⁷⁷ Therefore, the accusation that Judeans have changed God's glory means that they have rejected YHWH himself. And the thing that does not profit with which they have exchanged YHWH is probably a reference to idols, to worthlessness also called "no gods" in this same verse.

For Overholt, the "no gods" is a designation of national gods, as is the case in 2 Kings 19:18 where Hezekiah confesses that: "Sennacherib was able to destroy other nations and their gods because they were no gods, made by man of wood and stone."⁷⁸ I have already dealt with this aspect in the analysis of verse 5 above. With reference to 2 Kings 19, the important point to note in this passage is the contrast drawn between the effective power of the no gods, "who could not save their own nations (from the hand of their enemy), and Yahweh whom Hezekiah feels certain will be able to deliver his."⁷⁹

This kind of change, according to YHWH, has never happened in any other society except in Israel. This is why, before pronouncing the accusation against his people, he sends the witnesses to cross to the coasts of Cyprus⁸⁰

⁷⁷ John C. Collins, "קִדְּוָה," in *NIDOTTE*, 4:581. Collins also adds that in Old Testament, the concept קִדְּוָה is specifically used to reveal God's person and dignity and that the proper response to such a revelation is to give God honor and glory.

⁷⁸ Thomas W. Overholt, "Falsehood of Idolatry," *JTS*, 16 (1965) 9.

⁷⁹ Overholt, "Falsehood of idolatry," *JTS*, 16 (1965) 9.

⁸⁰ The Hebrew text has קִיִּטִּים (Kittim). This name derives from the Phoenician colony of Kittim on Cyprus. Later on, the name קִיִּטִּים came to designate the inhabitants of Cyprus

and to Kedar⁸¹ in order to make an observation. Kedar and Cyprus can be considered as paradigms of communities that are far from one another both by culture and location: Kedar is far in the east and might have been used in this text to represent uncivilized nomadic communities; whereas Cyprus is located in the far west and might have stood as a symbol of civilized societies. The text is suggesting here that what has happened to Israelites has never been observed in any of these nations, even though the gods they worshiped were not really gods. Thompson claims that there is a certain literalness in this accusation. The reason he gives for it is that,

While over the centuries polytheists changed the names of their deities, or their relative importance within the pantheon, due to syncretistic contacts with their neighbors or due to infiltration of foreigners, the changes were not fundamental since their deities were personifications of aspects of nature and remained basically the same.⁸²

Israelites who knew and worshiped the only true God, were expected to be more radical with respect to their relationship with YHWH. The covenant and the law were intended to reinforce such radical faith so that others might see and know that there is only one God, and YHWH is his name. This was Israel's mission. The *Shema* was intended

as a whole and even the islands and coastlands further to the west.

⁸¹ McKane, *Jeremiah 1-25*, 34. Kedar is an Arabian tribe, but used as an omnibus term for nomadic communities.

⁸² Thompson, *Jeremiah*, 170.

to reinforce this uniqueness of YHWH in Israel.⁸³ But what has happened in the life of YHWH's people was unthinkable, something even pagans could not afford to do.

Address to the Legal Witness (vv.12-13)

This last part of the oracle in the passage is addressed to the heavens. McKane denies the fact that heavens can be considered as a legal witness. Holladay thinks of it as a metaphor of YHWH's council.⁸⁴ Heavens can also be taken for a metonymy and represent the inhabitants of heaven (first of all YHWH himself) who administer earthly activities. However, in the context of YHWH's relationship with Israel, one has to remember the fact that in the initial forming and renewal of God's covenant with Israel, both heaven and earth were the witnesses called upon to observe the solemn conclusion of the covenant relationship (Deut. 4:26). Now the heaven is called again to act as a witness and observe how Israel had swiftly denied the allegiance to YHWH as he promised in the covenant. Craigie recognizes that in the context of Near Eastern societies, treaties or covenants were essentially political documents between a suzerain king and a vassal state, and that gods were normally

⁸³ Marvi R. Wilson, "Shema," in *NIDOTTE*, 4: 1217. He comments that Deut. 6:4 (Hear O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is One") also called the Shema, was the credo par excellence of Israel's faith. It was intended to be recited morning and evening as a duty and proclamation of faith. After the temple had been built, priests came together at an interval in the morning services to recite the Shema. Children, especially boys, were required to memorize the Shema as soon as they could speak.

⁸⁴ Holladay, *Jeremiah 1*, 91.

summoned as witnesses because they were believed to have the power to enforce the threat against any breach of the treaty.⁸⁵ Certain Akkadian political decrees recovered from Ras Shamra-Ugarit, on the coast of Syria, also reveal that sometimes heaven and earth were included in the list of deities witnessing the treaty.⁸⁶

One of the three verbs used to describe the probable heavenly reaction is שָׁעַר. This is the gal imperative masculine plural of שָׁעַר, and means to bristle the hair as a reaction to terror or to be strongly agitated.⁸⁷ The use of this strong verb shows the gravity of the offense and the level of YHWH's disappointment with his people. In this sense, the adverb מְאֹד (exceedingly) can be understood as modifying both שָׁעַר and חָרְבוּ (be dry and be desolate) to put weight on the seriousness of the situation, and probably on the consequence of such a transgression.

Verse 13 spells out two transgressions for which YHWH brought the lawsuit against his people: (1) Israelites have abandoned YHWH the fountain of living water; and (2) they have then tried to hew their own cisterns. The verb יָזַן means to abandon and is used here in the sense of abandoning YHWH and going after other gods. This verb is synonymous of רָחַק "walking away" from YHWH, in verse 5.

YHWH presents himself metaphorically as a fountain of living or running water. Barnabas Lindars writes that the phrase running waters has symbolic overtones, and that it also occurs in Zech. 14:8 as an eschatological fountain, following the same tradition of the renewal of the

⁸⁵ Peter C. Craigie, *The Book of Deuteronomy*, 139.

⁸⁶ Craigie, *The Book of Deuteronomy*, 139.

⁸⁷ McKane, *Jeremiah 1-25*, 34.

paradisaal streams as Ezek. 47:1-12, where fresh water that supports life is distinguished from salt waters of the Dead Sea.⁸⁸ Rodney Whitecare sees in the phrase "fountain of the living waters" an image of God's revelation, the Torah.⁸⁹ Finally, Ernest Haenchen, argues that in Judaism, living water is primarily a figure for YHWH himself and the salvation that comes from him (Prov. 13:14; 18:4; Sir. 24:21). He then adds that it is often interpreted to refer to the Torah. He also refers to the Damascus Document in which Num. 21:18 is interpreted as follows: "The well in question is the law." Finally, he quotes Philo who calls God himself "the spring of living," by which he understands concretely the law and the God who teaches virtues through the law.⁹⁰

According to these different interpretations, living waters represent God, his law, salvation and blessings that come from following him. In the same way, to refuse this living waters and to attempt to hew for oneself a cistern, depicted as a broken one, is to reject YHWH's law and his saving protection, which include blessings, protection and abundant life in the land. This is what Jeremiah's contemporaries have done, and this is also what not to know YHWH means.

⁸⁸ Barnabas Lindars, *The Gospel According to John* (London: Oliphants, 1972), 182.

⁸⁹ Rodney A. Whitecare, *John* (Leicester: IVP, 1999), 103.

⁹⁰ Ernest, Haenchen, *A Commentary of the Gospel of John 1-6* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1980), 220.

Finally, there is a parallel between no gods, things that do not profit⁹¹ (v.11), and vanity (v.5) on one side, with the broken cistern that cannot hold water in verse 13 on the other. In the same way, YHWH is put in parallel with a fountain of living water. As I have already stated, the issue here is of political and socioeconomic ineffectiveness of the gods compared with YHWH. By worshiping idols, people were expecting some active assistance from them. Consequently, by exposing Baalism as gods who are unable to give life to the nation, Jeremiah was nullifying the political, economic and cultural authority of the government. As Brueggemann puts it, "prophetic theology concerns the unmasking of the idols that keep the system functioning."⁹² This is true both for Judah and for the Church in DR Congo.

Summary and Definition of יָדַע אֶת־יְהוָה

(1) The interpretation of this passage has shown that as in chapter one, the verb יָדַע is here used as a technical word. It does not simply mean to know the word of YHWH and to know about YHWH himself. It is not even to be a good teacher of YHWH's word (v.8). The concept is used in the

⁹¹Overholt, "Falsehood of Idolatry," *JTS*, 16 (1965), 9. He writes that the phrase "which does not profit" is often used to describe the result of turning aside from YHWH to inferior things: emptiness (1 Sam. 12:21), idols (Isa. 44:9f.; Hab. 2:18), false prophecy (Jer. 23:22), or riches (Prov. 11:4). It also means something that is not able to deliver, or that will be put to shame (Isa. 30:1-5).

⁹²Walter Brueggemann, *A Social Reading of the Old Testament: Prophetic Approaches to Israel's Communal Life* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1994), 238.

passage with reference to mutual legal recognition on the part of YHWH as suzerain and Judah as vassal. In this sense, to know YHWH is to recognize him as the Lord, as the center of life, and this recognition is binding.

(2) In chapter one, the knowledge of YHWH was related to the right relationship between Judeans (to know YHWH was to do what is right in the relationship between fellow citizens). But in 2:4-13, the prophet is concerned with the right relationship between the nation and YHWH himself. To use the same image as in chapter one, this text can be related to the first tablet of the Decalogue, particularly the first commandment. This is above all clear in the sentences like "they (yours fathers) went far from me, they went after vanity" (v.5); "has a nation ever changed its gods? But my people have changed their glory" (v.11); "and the prophets have prophesied by Baal" (v.8); "my people have forsaken me" (v.13); "those who handle the Torah did not know me" (v.8). In the same way, Smith asserts: "the prophet (Jeremiah) more than once deplores and decries the non-observance of the first commandment as the root of the tribulations and calamities in that day."⁹³

(3) A broken relationship with or a distancing from YHWH could have had a direct consequence on social and economic issues in the community. I argued that this distancing from YHWH creates a loss of vision and of national worth for the entire nation and brings in only death. In this way, it would be wrong to separate social injustice strongly condemned in the first chapter with idolatry that is being denounced by the prophet in this chapter. In other words, the broken relationship between one another in the society

⁹³ Smith, "The Decalogue in the preaching of Jeremias," *CBQ*, 4 (1942), 201.

(cf. chapter one) actually begun with a broken relationship with YHWH. And those who failed to rightly direct the people toward a right relationship are the four groups of leaders mentioned in verse 8.

(4) In 2:4-13, the Judeans' problem of knowledge was due to a crisis of memory, the loss of the capacity to rightly think the past and actualize it. This past had to be constituted as a fixed recital of YHWH's sovereignty that was indispensable for Israel's life. In other words, it is the neglect of the past that lay at the root of their failure, because this past could have reminded them whose they were and why they existed. In the same way, I argued that the Congolese crisis is the crisis of approach or of understanding God's way of dealing with them. Congolese people are discouraged and think that YHWH is no longer able to solve the present crisis. The crisis of memory and that of approach/understanding paralyze human thinking and faith, and create a victim mentality. This victim mentality forces people to act with little consideration of the Lord. They think they will try by their own ways, by their own effort. It also makes them think that they cannot be judged for their evil because they were forced by the situation, and also because YHWH himself failed to rescue them. The consequence is that at the end, YHWH is forgotten and both faith and reason are de-articulated. With the de-articulation of reason and faith, the past becomes meaningless and only the now and the here are important. With the victim mentality also the will to act positively in the light of God's word and commandment dies out. This opens the way to a pathological spiritual and social thinking that does not perceive any bright future, since it is not rooted in the history, and in a right understanding

of the ways of YHWH. This is a kind of thinking in which belief is assigned to unworthy and unworkable objects called הוּל (vanity, nothingness, incomprehensibility, deceit, senselessness, nonsense, worthlessness, unprofitable) in verse 5. According to this passage, this is exactly what not to know YHWH means. At this level, idolatry means whatever we do (in the government, in our private life, in our career, in our marriage, in our family, etc.) in order to secure our nation, our lives, our profession by trusting in other things than God. In modern terms we can think of money, the making of sophisticated firearms (in the case of the government), the application of article 15, consulting witchdoctors,⁹⁴ making international allies with the hope that these things or people will be able to help us, during our times of need. This is also probably what happened to Israel and what is happening to most of us in DR Congo. Jeremiah calls it a result of the abandonment of faith, the lack of the knowledge of YHWH.

(5) This abandonment of faith does not happen suddenly. In fact the passage underlines the fact that Israelites have been on their way to this mismatch for a very long time, since the beginning of their history (vv.5-6) which itself is a history of unfaithfulness. This slow but sure process of the abandonment of faith (or of idolatry) in Israel is a good demonstration of how people can fail to perceive that something is going wrong in their own society.

⁹⁴ I am wondering if consulting witchdoctors is not the "remembering" of our African traditional history. But the question is how much does it affect our faith in Christ? Another study might be needed for this aspect, but such study should distinguish between African traditional healers and witchdoctors.

(6) This passage shows the importance of taking tradition and history seriously. It also shows that both history and tradition in our Churches must be read critically. The critical reading is important in order to help us avoid the distortion sometimes introduced by the official and ideological reading in our Churches, and to discover if what we think about ourselves, about God, and what we are doing as a result of this understanding is right.

(7) Jeremiah was bringing in a different voice, a different reading of history, a different understanding of the covenant, and a different understanding of the knowledge of YHWH. For him, the history of Israel was an ongoing violation of the law and the covenant with an obvious consequence of judgment. By showing this, he was inviting his contemporaries to withdraw their allegiance to the understanding constructed by the political and religious system of their time. For him, the covenant was indeed conditional and the knowledge of YHWH was a clear understanding of what a conditional covenant requested as far as allegiance to YHWH alone was concerned. According to Jeremiah, the solution for the crisis in the country was not to be solved by transferring allegiance to different lords, which also meant to recognize their gods (vv.5, 8, 11), but by coming back to YHWH and letting him solve the problem of his nation because Judah belonged to him.

(8) In the Congolese Church too we need to undertake a critical reading of both God's word and the history of our own nation and traditions. Or if one may put it so, it is important for us in Congo, to re-read the history of our nation in the light of God's word. For example, our reading should go beyond the present disaster and ask ourselves what has gone wrong (this is the memory, the remembering)?

Where did the problem actually begin? What right attitude should we adopt as a nation, instead of living in utter discouragement and keep confessing that YHWH has left us? What can we do to change the situation? And what should be done so that we do not repeat the same mistake again? This will involve a serious critique of our Church administration at all levels; a serious examination of our theologies *vis-à-vis* the political system of the country; our part as a Church, in the fall of the people's consciousness, and our responsibility to raise the Congolese society to a new and positive consciousness.

(9) Finally, the Church in Congo must concern herself with the shutting of the monopolies around which life is organized and dispensed independently from YHWH's will. All kinds of demagoguery and ideology that tend to exalt a human being or a system and replace God by a person or philosophy must be fought against.

CHAPTER 4

KNOWLEDGE OF YHWH AND TRUE GLORIFICATION

Chapter four analyses the relationship between knowledge of YHWH and the ground for true glorification both for individuals and community (society). More precisely, it discusses three things in which people or nations of this world trust and glory: knowledge, power and wealth. The prophet Jeremiah offers an alternative to this view and argues that there is only one thing in which human beings and nations should glory: knowledge of YHWH. It is this knowledge, says the man from Anathot, which should guide our use of knowledge, power and wealth if we want to build a just community which is obedient to YHWH. Otherwise, the misuse of knowledge, power and wealth can lead to suffering, destruction and even death of individuals and nations.

glory

YHWH
glory

In the context of my country, the interpretation of this passage will have a particular focus on the question of the failure of leadership characterized by a selfish and idolatrous use of knowledge, power and wealth as opposed to the godly way of understanding the proper use of power, wisdom and wealth for the building of the nation.

Translation

22. Thus says YHWH:

*Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom,
And let not the powerful man glory in his power,
Let not the rich man glory in his riches;*

23. But let him who glories glory in this:

*That he has understanding and knows me,
That I am YHWH
Who practices steadfast love (loving kindness),
Justice, and righteousness on the earth;
For in these things I delight."
YHWH's oracle.*

Historical and Literary Context

Earlier commentators thought of this passage as characteristics of wisdom tradition because of its many usages of wisdom vocabulary.¹ In addition, most of them did not perceive any connection between 9:22-23 and its immediate context (the text that precedes and the one that follows it). As a consequence, the general tendency among earlier Jeremiah scholars was to reject its authenticity. But modern students of Jeremiah scholarship have started recognizing that the oracle is authentic. Brueggemann for example, has gone beyond a simple passive acceptance of its authenticity to view the passage as a specific expression of Jeremiah's prophetic message.² This is important for my interpretation because it helps to locate the text historically.

It seems to me that in the general context of chapters 8-10, it is possible to see why the text of our inquiry was

¹ Craigie, Kelly and Drinkard, *Jeremiah 1-25*, 152. They quote Bernard Duhm (*Das Buch Jeremia. In den Vermassen der Urschrift* [Tubingen: Mohr, 1907]), Paul Volz (*Der Prophet Jeremia*, [Tubingen: Mohr, 1930]), and E. Kutsch ("Das Jahr der Katastrophe: 587 v Chr. Kritische Erwagungen zu neueren Chronologischen versuchen," in *Bib* 55, no.4 (1974), 520-545) as representatives of those commentators who treated the book of Jeremiah as an editorial addition inspired by Israelite wisdom literature.

placed where it is now. This is important for our understanding of 9:22-23 as I will now try to demonstrate. Two words occur very often in the three chapters (8-10). These are "wise/wisdom" (8:8a, 9; 9:16b), and "know/knowledge" (8:7, 12b; 9:2b, 5b; 10:23, 25a). Although these two (groups of) words have different nuances, their frequent usage in chapters 8 to 10 might indicate that the prophet brought them together in order to pose the central epistemological question that Jeremiah discerned at the end of Israelite royal history.³ In other words, the prophet might have sought to demonstrate that in Judah, there was a problem related to the use of wisdom, wealth and knowledge. Said differently, the prophet might have sought to prove that there was a distorted knowledge of YHWH that resulted in a distorted wisdom by which the nation was being administrated, as well as a distorted understanding of material possessions and power.

Then, the question can be asked as to whom the oracle was addressed. All the verbs used are in the third person masculine singular, referring to a certain unknown individual. The passage looks like a neutral statement addressed to any rich, wise and powerful person in Judah. And my translation reads:

Let not the wise glory in . . .

The powerful glory in . . .

The rich glory in . . .

Therefore, the passage might be considered as a general critique of individuals who make up the whole nation of

² Holladay, *Jeremiah 1*, 317.

³ Brueggemann, *Old Testament Theology*, 279-80.

Judah. In this sense, one can argue that the oracle was addressed to every single member of the covenant community to reconsider the way he/she is using his wealth, power and knowledge because these three things can easily become objects of worship and they can easily control the person who owns or wants to own them if he/she does not know YHWH. As a consequence, the distortion and the worship of these three things end up creating severe social, economic, political and spiritual disruption in the community.

However, if we consider the fact that in Israel and Judah, it was the responsibility of the king (and his administration) to lead the way for the whole community, and that the message of the prophet was primarily addressed to kings,⁴ it will become clear that Jer. 9:22-23 is a critique of the royal ideology during the days of Jeremiah's ministry. In this way, the verb "to glory" or "to boast" might well remind the reader of the reign of Jehoiakim, in particular, who was characterized by self-aggrandizement or self-glorification (see chapter one, section four). Thus, the passage can well fit the period of the reign of king Jehoiakim,⁵ and my social-historical interpretation will follow this particular direction.

Another particularity of this passage in the whole prophetic spectrum is that, while it is clearly an oracle (see the formula "thus says YHWH" in verse 22 and the

⁴ Gary V. Smith, "Prophet," in *ISBE*, 3:993. He argues that "although some prophets delivered their messages in the temple, others spent far more time delivering God's word to the kings of Israel."

⁵ I remain open to the fact that this passage can be used to criticize any government in Judah (not only Jehoiakim's), particularly in the last days of that nation.

phrase "YHWH's oracle" in verse 23), it does not issue either an open condemnation or a judgment. This is why Bernhard Duhm treated it as theologically unimportant because it is a "harmless insignificant saying."⁶ It is not possible, however, to agree with Duhm's judgment. On the contrary I see the passage as posing a serious problem of what was happening in the nation in terms of administrative skills (here called wisdom), national defense or security systems (referred to in the text as power), and the accumulation of wealth in Judah's leadership. In other words, my argument is that the passage is not insignificant and harmless (*contra* Duhm), but that the prophet is implicitly accusing Judah's leadership by demonstrating how a distorted tradition can lead to a purely human and secular skill that ignores YHWH and brings death in a nation.⁷ In modern terms, this reminds us of confidence nations and individuals place on military strength, on economic might and scientific knowledge. By so doing, they slowly but surely forget that true success and the true

⁶ Duhm, *Das Buch Jeremia*, 97.

⁷ So also Brueggemann, *Old Testament Theology*, 279. Here I stand in opposition with both Craigie, Kelly and Drinkard, (*Jeremiah 1-25*, 153), and Carroll (*Jeremiah*, 248). They both accuse Brueggemann of overstating his case when he argues that this passage represents two major views of life that are in conflict in Judah. Carroll thinks that such an understanding is misleading. I wonder if the problem with both Craigie, Kelly, Drinkard and Carroll is not that they emphasize too much literary matters over historical, social and political understandings of this passage. My African context is helping me to see that no text or saying in the Bible is produced in a vacuum, and that it is a mistake to dismiss a passage as unimportant simply because our own context does not help us to understand it.

reason for glorification come from dependence on (the knowledge of) YHWH and not from our own effort.

In the last part of the twentieth century and at the beginning of this twenty first century, Africa has undergone incredible changes with internal and external wars in many countries, with dictators using the country's wealth like their pocket money, and with presidents who became almost idols for their nations, boasting of their power, wealth and crushing all those who try to oppose their mismanagement. As a consequence of selfishness and the lack of understanding, most African countries have become poorer than when they were before or during independence. Many African thinkers are now crying for a "second independence"⁸ or what some are calling the "African re-naissance." The DR Congo has become one of the case studies for most African problems. Jer. 9:22-23 will be read in the light of what is happening in my country in terms of power, knowledge and wealth. However, the primary goal of this thesis is to understand what "to know YHWH" means through the critique of the prophet toward Judean leadership. By criticizing the leaders of Judah for their lack of the knowledge of YHWH, Jeremiah was also explicating why the country was finally destroyed. In the same way, by understanding what went wrong in Judah, I will

⁸ Napoleon Abdulai, *Crisis & Conflict in Central Africa. Zaire: Background to the Civil War* (London: Africa Research and Information Bureau, 1997), 2. According to Abdulai, the concept of the "second independence" was developed for the first time in Africa by ordinary people in the Kwilu region of western Zaire (now DR Congo), after observing that their political leaders who took over from the Belgian leadership after independence were an utter failure.

also try to understand what has gone wrong with my own country.

Structure

The internal structure of this passage poses no serious problem. The sentence is divided into two parts. Verse 22 is introduced by the messenger formula: "Thus says YHWH." The formula is followed by the condemnation of human self-boasting for wisdom, power and riches. Verse 23 presents the proper grounds for human boasting by showing what really constitutes the source of true greatness. This verse also ends with another messenger formula. Thus, my interpretation of the passage will be structured as follows:

- (1) The false concept of national greatness: self-glorification (v.22);
- (2) The proper ground for glorification (v.23).

Interpretation

False Concept of National Greatness (v.22)

The passage opens with the ordinary prophetic messenger formula כה אמר יהוה (thus says YHWH). This sentence is important for two particular reasons: it helps to identify the one who is speaking (and reveals his will), and it

shows that the whole passage is not merely a proverb but YHWH's oracle.⁹

The central word in the passage is the verb יתהלל, the jussive¹⁰ masculine, third person, singular of the verb הלל (to praise, glory, boast, exult). In verse 22, this verb is used three times, all in negative form. Moreover, in all three occurrences, the verb הלל is used in hithpael, and therefore, has the meaning of "to praise oneself, pride oneself," i.e., to brag, boast. All these three usages of הלל are put into relationship with what Holladay calls three traditional human pursuits: wisdom, power and riches¹¹ that the prophet is here condemning.

First, the prophet condemns boasting about one's wisdom (חכּם). The Old Testament in general recognizes human wisdom, while strictly presenting it not as a fruit of human effort but as a gift from YHWH (Gen. 41:39; 1 Kings 5:19-14; 10:7; Dan. 1:4; Prov. 1:2ff; 13:14).¹² It also

⁹ This remark is important since, as I have already said, many earlier commentators thought of this text as an abstract proverb that stood in contradiction with Jeremiah's practical interest elsewhere in this book.

¹⁰ Jussive is a hortatory mode. However, in this passage the speaker is not urging his audience to a specific action, rather he is making a non-discussable judgment about their way of living and its consequences (so also Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 283).

¹¹ Holladay, *Jeremiah 1*, 317.

¹² The issue concerning the place of Wisdom in Old Testament Theology is very complicated and we still have to wait for sometime to reach a scholarly consensus. However, my concern in this section and the whole chapter is about the place of wisdom, not in scholarly debate, but in daily social and institutional practice. In this perspective, see George E. Mendenhall, "The Shady Side of Wisdom: The Date and Purpose of Genesis 3," in Howard W. Bream et al. (eds.)

makes it clear that to those who are wise in their own eyes (Prov. 3:7; 26:5,12, 16; 28:11; Isa. 5:21), the door of true wisdom remains closed.¹³

In the context of prophetic literature, wisdom is some times associated with the critique of leadership in general, and of Israel/Judah's leadership in particular. Thus, in the book of Isaiah, particularly in the context of the critique of Judah's leadership (chapters 3-5), Isa. 5:21 condemns the leaders who think they are wise and consider themselves to be clever. Likewise, YHWH rejects the priests' claim to possess wisdom in Jer. 8:8-10 because their lying pen has turned it into a falseness. In Isa. 31:2, the reference to YHWH's wisdom treats with irony the claim to wisdom of the Jerusalem leadership: "the tactical shrewdness of those who go down to Egypt for help and rely on horses instead of on YHWH."¹⁴ In Isa. 10:12-13, YHWH promises to punish the king of Assyria for his pride (boasting) and arrogance, especially for saying: "By my own power and wisdom I have won these wars" Finally, in Isa. 29:14 YHWH promises to frustrate the wisdom of wise men so that they might be obliged to hide their political insights in the face of the terrible coming events. According to von Rad, in this last text (Isa. 29:14), "Isaiah sees, in conjunction with political catastrophes, a

A Light unto My Path: Old Testament Studies in Honor of Jacob M. Myers (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1974), 318-32.

¹³ Gerald H. Wilson, "Wisdon," in *NIDOTTE*, 4: 1283.

¹⁴ Muller, "דָּוִד," in *TDOT*, 4:384.

darkness falling with which human abilities at understanding will no longer be able to cope."¹⁵

Therefore, if the word "wisdom" (here associated with "power" and "wealth") in Jer. 9:22 refers to Judean leadership, as I think it does, my argument will be that it has the following mixed and broad meanings: the capacity to understand, manage and control political and social affairs of the nation; the necessary skill to maintain national security in the face of threats of all kinds (internal and external); the cleverness to manipulate and reduce everything to royal proportions; the maintenance of national status quo or/and well-being by purely human management without any reference to YHWH, etc. This can be equated to what we know today as leadership management techniques or skills, international cooperation or the management of political and administrative affairs, etc.

Our text gives no clear reason for the rejection of the boasting in this kind of wisdom (skill). Westermann would again qualify this critique as "a judgment speech without a reason."¹⁶ And for the modern person, it would look odd to condemn a mastery of modern leadership techniques as it seems to work well in different societies. But it was not so in Israel (Judah). Whenever human wisdom gave to human beings a sense of security, whenever it became a manipulation, wherever it tempted them to boast, to oppress other members of the community, or by-pass YHWH's law, as it surely was with most kings in Israel and Judah, such wisdom became idolatry, a self-serving tool,

¹⁵ Gerharld von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel* (London: SCM Press, 1972), 104.

¹⁶ Westermann, *Basic Forms*, 161.

and a revolt against YHWH. This is probably what happened to Solomon when he became more concerned to build an international reputation for mastery of such wisdom than to spend his energy on right leadership according to YHWH's word. In fact, we can now start questioning the hidden reason that pushed Solomon to compose his many wisdom sayings and songs (1 Kings 4:29-34 [Matt. 5:9-14]; 1 Kings 10:1-13).¹⁷ If we consider the fact that his apparent political success (apparently guided by his wisdom) collapsed with the division of the monarchy immediately after his death, we will discover that wisdom might have been one of the tools used for keeping the status quo and oppressing the people.¹⁸ Brueggemann rightly noticed that the modes of knowledge operating in wisdom instruction "tend to buttress the status quo as an order that is to be

¹⁷ I am aware that many scholars consider 1 Kings 4:29-34 and 1 Kings 10:1-13 as an exaggeration and legendary. However, my argument does not proceed from a correlation between literary evidence and historical evidence. Again, my understanding is that the text is not produced in a vacuum and that there are reasons to associate Solomon with wisdom teaching. Brueggemann (*Social Reading of the Old Testament*, 261) is one of the few who saw this correlation between Solomon and Wisdom teachings. He concludes his important study on this correlation by stating: "Solomon is remembered as a patron of a self-serving theodic settlement that permitted power, wealth, and wisdom in disproportionate measure. Thus, he was a patron of a theopolitical enterprise that did have emancipatory dimensions but that in the end was also ideological."

¹⁸ There is a clear contradiction between Solomon's most praised wisdom and the oppression of his subjects that was the main reason for the schism of the kingdom.

maintained and not disrupted."¹⁹ His further argument is that "proverb wisdom in any family or clan tends to assume the legitimacy and durability of present power arrangements."²⁰ Thus, the much praised Solomonic wisdom might reveal more than a God-given knowledge, especially since it was used in the royal court setting where the ideology of the monarchy is in action to justify and maintain (oppressive) power. Hence, the lesson we learn here is that even a God-given wisdom can be distorted and abused if it is used with other purposes than to promote justice and well-being of the community. In Israel, true or godly wisdom had to be strictly guided by the law and used for the promotion of a great and discerning people characterized by the intimate relationship the covenant created between God and this people (Deut. 4:5-6). Briefly, godly wisdom came from following God's commandment and not from any individual greatness, manipulation, academic or secular qualification. In the same way, in 1 Corinthians 2-3, Paul contrasts worldly and godly wisdom and condemns those in the congregation who pride themselves on being wise "by the standard of the age." According to Paul, and rightly so, worldly wisdom creates pride (boasting), division and destroys the community. This is exactly what happened in Judah from the time of Solomon until the very end of the kingdom. This is also what has destroyed most of our nations in Africa.

¹⁹ Brueggemann, *Social Reading of the Old Testament*, 257.

²⁰ Brueggemann, *Social Reading of the Old Testament*, 257.

Examples of this distorted wisdom in the context of my country are legion. Mobutu was known for his ability to tailor advice and counsel to his own interest. It was a kind of opportunism, a wisdom used to maintain the status quo and to oppress his subjects. For example, most of us are aware that he ruled the nation by co-opting those who tried to oppose him. A clear example is that of Nguz Karl-I-Bond who, in the early 70s, was emerging as a potential challenger to Mobutu's leadership. He first served as Mobutu's foreign minister in 1972, political director of the MPR in 1974, foreign minister for the second time in 1976; but he opposed Mobutu and was charged with high treason in 1977 and sentenced to death after being severely tortured. Yet, Mobutu "patriarchally" reduced his sentence to life prison before completely forgiving him (in 1978) and reinstating him again as Prime Minister in 1979. However, in 1981, Nguz fled into exile from where he wrote a book entitled *Mobutu ou l'Incarnation du Mal Zairois*²¹ ("Mobutu, the Incarnation of the Zairian Sickness"). Amazingly, he was again forgiven and appointed as ambassador to Washington in September 1986 (in order to defend the very same Mobutu whose leadership abuse he has been denouncing), and then as Prime Minister to fight against the powerful opposition leader, Etienne Tshisekedi, appointed to the same office by the National Sovereign Conference (NSC) in 1990. Thus, forgiveness becomes a "daring political act that reorients political conflict"²²

²¹Nguz Karl-I-Bond, *Mobutu ou l'Incarnation du Mal Zairois* (London: Rex Collins), 1982.

²² Walter Brueggemann, *Power, Providence, and Personality: Biblical Insight Into Life and Ministry* (Louisville: Westminster Press, 1990), 55.

and gives advantages to the "wise" forgiver rather than to the forgiven. By being used to oppose Tshisekedi, Ngunz was actually fighting for Mobutu and against the whole nation that had put hope in the NSC. This failure of the NSC (because of Mobutu and the team that helped him) is one of the direct causes of the present war in DR Congo.

This is only one example, but Mobutu did the same with hundreds of other brilliant Zairians like Bernardin Mungul Diaka, Faustin Birindwa, Nyamwisi Muvingi, Professor Mabi Mulumba, etc., who were silenced one after another. Nzanga described well his father's political method against his enemies:

My father used to say: "keep your friends close, but your enemies closer still." Leaving people in exile was a danger, they were making a lot of noise. The game was to neutralize their capacity to damage him. So they came back and one by one, I saw all those guys up in Gbadolite. My father would laugh about it. He would say "politics is politics."²³

In a country of misery, where salaries were not paid, it is clear that Mobutu used money to buy and silence his opponents. He was also pulling the strings of jealousy, rivalry and cupidity among his collaborators, preferring the method of "divide and rule."²⁴ Finally, after buying

²³ Wrong, *In the Footsteps of Mr Kurtz*, 102.

²⁴ It is told that Professor Mabi Mulumba made the mistake during his brief stint as Primer Minister of inviting the chairmen of four or five state companies to dinner, a gesture alarming to a president on the lookout for possible plots. One of his guests was immediately summoned by Mobutu, who told him: "I see you have been dining with Mabi and talking against me. By the way, did you know that he has asked for you to be sacked?" It was not the guest but Mabi himself who was first sacked by the

almost all the people who could oppose him, he prevented the emergence of anyone who could be embraced as a potential president to replace him. This situation gave rise to what has come to be known as the "Mobutu or chaos" thesis, which meant that he could not be replaced, otherwise there would be total chaos in DR Congo.

On different occasions, Mobutu preferred to use collaborators of mixed blood like Bisengimana Rema, of Rwandan origin, Kengo Wa Dondo, the son of a Polish magistrate, Seti Yale, of Belgian origin, etc. To my analysis, there were at least two specific reasons behind this fact: Firstly, under the Zairian (Congolese) constitution, people who were not a hundred percent Zairians (Congolese) could not legally aspire to the presidency. Secondly, these people knew that because of their legal status, they owed everything to Mobutu, and the latter hoped that they would remain conscious of this fact and would *de facto* remain more than faithful to Mobutu. But this also made them serve their own interest to the disadvantage of the nation because they knew that they were foreigners.

Mobutu and his collaborators also managed to manipulate the West, particularly the United States and France, by demonstrating that he was of major strategic importance to the United States, that he was beyond all doubt pro-American and anti-Communist, and that without him, Zaire and a great part of Africa would become a chaos (communist). Thus, strongly protected by America, all Congolese opposition politicians knew that in going against

president for his willingness to unite people under his leadership instead of dividing them, as Mobutu himself had been doing.

Mobutu, they would be confronting the United States themselves. This is how, the thesis "Mobutu or chaos" turned to be "Mobutu and chaos" as everybody watched him destroy the country, without any serious challenge and with the unfailing help of America. Kelly's confession is more than important to help us understand how Mobutu used his "wisdom" and managed to manipulate the West and to destroy his own country:

The United States bears considerable responsibility for the present state of affairs in Zaire and therefore has an obligation to do something about it. We have ceased being the ultimate guarantor of Zairian sovereignty and the days of the client-patron relationship are long past. But we owe it to the people of Zaire to help clean up the mess we created when we intervened in the first place.²⁵

These examples of manipulated wisdom both in Israel and in my country can help us to understand that in ancient world, as well as in our own, wisdom can be calculated and easily jettisoned to serve the interest of the few, but at the same time to produce only chaos, and death in the community. This is in fact how one can explain the division and the destruction of the kingdom of Israel. This is also how one can explain the situation we are undergoing in DR Congo and in most of African nations. It is important to add the role played by some educated people in helping

²⁵ Kelly, *The America's Tyrant: The CIA and Mobutu of Zaire* (Washington, DC: American University Press, 1993), 256. Some would argue that Mobutu was not manipulating America but that the latter was looking for its own interest in Zaire and in Africa by using Mobutu. This might be true but who ignores that Mobutu who became one of Africa's heads of state who managed to rule unchallenged for more than three decades did so by shifting his loyalties whenever he felt he stood to gain politically? Is not this manipulation?

Mobutu and most of African leaders in tailoring their foolishness. Kä Mana²⁶ cites people like Edem Kodjo, who provided the intellectual undergirding for the one-party state in Togo, Gambembo Mfumu wa Untadi, the philosopher, in the strengthening of Mobutu's ideology in DR Congo and professor Augustin Kontchou Kouomegni for his intellectual support to Cameroon's "New Deal" Policy. And my guess is that Africa is sick of these thoughtless, futile, mediocre, deceitful intellectuals who work in palaces to come up with new ideas, new worldly wisdom to oppose those who want to help the continent. Overholt would call this kind of calculated wisdom a falsehood, a deception, as we have seen in chapter two.

I have already mentioned (see chapter three) that many Israelite (Judean) kings relied on the wisdom of false prophets who would tell them exactly what they wanted and not what YHWH wanted of them concerning the right leadership. Reliance on false prophets was one of the important factors that led the kings of Israel and Judah astray. Jer. 37:17-21, for example, reports how king Zedekiah turned to the true prophet of YHWH for advise only when it was too late to receive true wisdom from YHWH, and when the deceptive channels of the national "intelligentsia" had been found inadequate. Then the prophet Jeremiah turned back to Zedekiah and asked him an ironic but very important question in verse 19: "where are your prophets (*intelligentsia*) now who told you the king of Babylon would not attack you?" Jeremiah's attack against

²⁶ Kä Mana, *Christians and Churches of Africa*, 14.

false prophets was actually an attack against false wisdom in Judah.

Second, YHWH condemns boasting about human power (גבור). In the Bible, the concept of power is primarily ascribed to God himself.²⁷ However, whenever it is used of a person, animal, or thing it designates the kind of power that surpasses ordinary strength and is capable of accomplishing a great feat" (Gen. 10:8; Ps 45:3; 89:19, etc.)²⁸ In discussing the issue of power, Edward Laarman notices that while many Old Testament passages express admiration for human power, they also criticize it because it is sometimes used either to obscure reliance on God's power or to oppress the powerless.²⁹ The book of 2 Samuel in particular, shows that power in its different forms belongs to the kings (10:7; 16:6; 17:8; 20:7; 23:9-22). Thus, power in this passage might include not only physical strength but also military and political supremacy.³⁰

²⁷ P. H. Menoud, "Power," in *IDB*, 3:855. He points out that all power of every kind is derived from God and that while God grants autonomy to human beings in their respective realms, his own prerogative remains uncompromised.

²⁸ Robin Wakely "גבור" in *NIDOTTE*, 1:810.

²⁹ Edward Laarman, "Power, Might," in *ISBE*, 3: 927. See also Andrew Kirk *Liberation Theology: An Evangelical View from the Third World* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1979), 209.

³⁰ Holladay, *Jeremiah 1*, 317. See also Robert Jamieson, A.R. Fausset and David Brown, "Jeremiah," in *Commentary Critical and Explanatory on the Whole Bible*. Available from <http://www.bible.crosswalk.com/commentaries/JamiesonFaussetBrown>. They understand power in this text as military prowess.

From the above understanding of the concept of power in the Old Testament, the passage of our inquiry can be interpreted in two ways: Firstly, if we consider the critique in verse 22 as addressed to the administrative leadership, power refers to the capacity of the royal/presidential establishment "to work its will by human might before which none may issue a challenge."³¹ In this context, power can also be used to protect the king/president, his administration, the system he creates and his relatives by crushing down all the opposition voices, including YHWH's voice through his prophet. This is what happened to the prophet Jeremiah under both Jehoiakim (Jer. 36) and Zedekiah (Jer. 37-38), and this is what is happening in most of our countries in Africa when those who try to denounce the abuse of power are crushed down.

In this way, power becomes an idol, something that destroys faith in YHWH. Such power leads only to the dislocation of the society because it loses touch with the real source of power.

Most of us in Africa who live in a continent governed by military regimes (almost up to 50 percent) will understand this situation very well.³² For Congolese people in particular, this would again vividly remind us of Mobutu's system of self-protection with its many special

³¹ Brueggemann, *Old Testament Theology*, 287.

³² Samuel Decalo, *Coups and Army Rule in Africa* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990), 2. This book was published in 1990, and Decalo estimated at that time that up to 65% of African nations were being governed by soldiers. I think that after more than 10 years, this situation is slowly changing. Ghana, Central African Republic, Nigeria, etc., are examples of the change from military rule to civilian regimes in Africa.

units and security organizations (DSP,³³ SNIP,³⁴ Garde Civile, the Kamanyola Division, the Paracommandos, the 21st brigade, the 31st brigade), often vying for identical duties: the protection of the regime. Michela Wrong notices that,

despite the sheer size of the country, most of these elites were kept close to Kinshasa, rather than patrolling the borders. Their positioning reflected their role. The Zairean army was not aimed at resisting external attack. It was an internal security machine whose sole raison d'être was protecting the president³⁵ (emphasis mine).

Someone had estimated that in case of any coup d'état or assassination of the former Zairian president, Mobutu would die after at least 10,000 people who were working day and night to protect him.

Secondly, if we consider the same critique as used in reference to the defense system of the nation (Judah), the sentence can be understood as a system of national security rooted in a mighty army, the accumulation of the best and sophisticated arms (whatever this meant during that time, but we know what it means today),³⁶ and other powerful

³³ DSP is an abbreviation for Division Spéciale Présidentielle ("Special Presidential Division"), Mobutu's military special unit composed of about 15,000 soldiers.

³⁴ SNIP stands for "Service National d'Intelligence et de Protection" (Intelligentia and Protection National Service).

³⁵ Wrong, *In the Footsteps of Mr Kurtz*, 252.

³⁶ Most of the times, military superiority creates arrogant boasting and haughty pride (Isa. 10:12-13; 14:13-14).

the axe vaunt itself over him who wields it (Isa. 10.15)? Thus, it is not the quantitative limitations of human capabilities which forbids self-confidence and self-glorification; it is, rather, something which can be explained only in theological terms: self-glorification cannot be combined with trust in Yahweh.³⁸

Consequently, according to Jeremiah and many other prophets of Israel, for YHWH to have a say, this falsehood or what I am calling the idolatry of power had first to be delegitimated. This is true not only for ancient Israel, but also for us today.

The issue of trust in military power has become a serious one in many African nations during our own days, with many consequences: many countries have become abusers and oppressors of their own citizens and other weaker nations, they have also become arrogant, defiant and have forgotten that YHWH should judge them for the way they are using this power. Africa has seen millions of refugees flocking from every corner of the continent, mainly because of the same factor: the abuse of military power. Internally, many countries in Africa, like my own, have seen rebel movements (some of them constituted on ethnic basis) arising from every side to destroy human lives and finally get to power where they can continue to oppress the poor people and make themselves rich. This is why YHWH did not want the Israelite kings to become superpowers (Deut. 17:16), but to use whatever power they had been given strictly under the leadership of YHWH himself. What this means is that wherever YHWH is not obeyed, and wherever power is not used to enforce justice in the community, a

³⁸ Von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel*, 102.

decisive break occurs in the life of every community or nation. The lesson we learn here is that power need not be defiant of YHWH, the source of all power that exists.

Third, YHWH condemns boasting about riches (עשר). Brueggemann insightfully notices that in the Old Testament, riches are primarily a royal prerogative (1 Kings 3:11, 13; 2 Chron. 1:12; Dan. 11:2; Esther 1:41; 5:11); and that they are an identifying mark of a good king (of David: 1 Chron. 29:12, 28; of Solomon: 1 Kings 10:23; 2 Chron. 9:22; of Jehoshaphat: 2 Chron. 17:5; 18:1; and Hezekiah: 2 Chron. 32:27).³⁹

In this perspective, it becomes clear that one of the reasons for YHWH's condemnation was against those who might have been using their position (power) to get rich, and those who were using their wealth to abuse the powerless. As Thompson puts it, "they have forgotten Yahweh in the midst of concentrating on their own achievements and activities."⁴⁰

Many of us know very well that in most African countries to become a president or to be appointed in the government is synonymous with getting rich. George Kinoti has rightly pointed out that one of the causes of Africa's economic and social wretchedness is the misuse of public institutions by African leaders whose aspiration is only to become rich. He elaborates on this when he says,

There is the problem of misuse of public institutions and embezzlement of public funds. In many African countries government is quite plainly in the hands of crooks . . . men are ready to do anything including killing others and

³⁹ Brueggemann *Old Testament Theology*, 286-7.

⁴⁰ Thompson, *The Book of Jeremiah*, 318.

causing civil war, to get into position from where they can eat.⁴¹

In one of their letters to Mobutu, Zairian Catholic bishops once openly criticized the plundering of national resources. Their memorandum read like this:

The national Bank, the parastatal institutions and the whole portfolio of the state satisfy political demands and function as the cash desk of the state-party, left at the disposal of individuals, especially the authorities of the country . . . each one fetching as much money as he pleases.⁴²

Apart from the fact of impoverishing the nation, there is another dimension of the danger of longing for material possessions, especially by those who have power in the nation. The burning desire for becoming rich bears in itself the seed of covetousness and murder. The story of Naboth with the king Ahab is a good illustration that shows how many people in Israel/Judah might have lost their lives under the monarchy and in our own societies because powerful people wanted their land and all other goods they possessed. Ambrose of Milan (339-97) most vividly describes

⁴¹ Kinoti, *Hope for Africa*, 38. This also reminds me of the late President Kabila's effort to put in place an office called: "L'Office du Bien Mal Acquis" (the Office of Ill-Gotten Gains). The key aim of the office was to secure the return of \$ 14 billion that Mobutu was believed to have allegedly stolen from DR Congo and salted away in Swiss bank accounts, foreign corporations and luxury real estate. According to Wrong, (*In the Footsteps of Mr Kurtz*, 96), Mobutu had only \$6 in his bank account in 1959.

⁴² Hizkias Assefa and George Wachira (eds.), *Peacemaking and Democratization in Africa: Theoretical Perspectives and Church Initiatives* (Nairobi: East African Educational Publishers, 1996), 134.

the plight of all the Naboths in our nations in these words:

The story of Naboth is an ancient one, but an everyday experience. What rich man does not daily set his heart on other people's goods? What millionaire is not engaged in tearing the poor man from his tiny holding and driving him empty-handed from the borders of his family allotment? Who is satisfied with what he has? What rich man's heart is not fired by the prospect of acquiring his neighbor's property? There was more than one Ahab born. An Ahab is born every day, alas! And Ahab will never die in this age A Naboth is cut down every day; every day a poor man is killed⁴³

Rich vs. poor

The story of Naboth is repeating itself in many ways in my country. Repeatedly, the UN and some human rights activists have accused Rwanda and Uganda of being in Congo not primarily for security reasons, as they pretend, but for plundering the DR Congo's resources. One report states that this illegal plunder "was going on at an 'alarming rate.'"⁴⁴ One year later, the United Nations released another report, condemning foreign armies and rebel factions fighting in DR Congo, and also showing the negative impact of the war on the local population:

The latest United Nations report on the Democratic Republic of Congo says rebels and foreign governments

⁴³ Taken from Oliver O'Donovan and Joan Lockwood O'Donovan (eds), *From Irenaeus to Grotius: A Sourcebook in Christian Political Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 75-6. The story of Naboth reminds us of Isa. 5:8-30 where the prophet condemns the powerful who end up buying all the land and all the good things in the country, leaving poor people hopeless and eventually homeless.

⁴⁴ Taken from <<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/Africa/1999913.stm>>.

ref. for I-net

are still plundering the country's resources, everything from diamond to animal skins. It portrays the DR Congo as a place where rebel movements and foreign armies are using the cloak of war to disguise what has become a blatant exercise in self-enrichment through the illegal plunder of scarce resources.

The report says that direct confrontation between rebel groups and the Congolese Government has all but disappeared- but it says fierce conflict is continuing on the rebel side of the ceasefire line, as different factions compete for access to gold, diamonds and other mineral resources.

The conflict over resources has an obvious impact on local populations who are often forced to flee fighting. But the report notes that local people also suffer because they are receiving no benefit from the theft of precious minerals from their home areas.⁴⁵

Thus, from Solomon onward, wisdom, power and riches were the basis of Israelites self-boasting (glory).⁴⁶ This in particular, characterized the monarchy with its concentration of power and its tendency to become like all other nations, forgetting that Israel's life was initiated and sustained by YHWH. They forgot that self-boasting in human wisdom, power and riches was an attempt to drive God back to heaven so as to leave space for human beings in their wickedness. This was the problem brought about by human kingship. Self-boasting in human achievement, in wealth and in power shows how the royal consciousness understood its way of maintaining its own security and the

⁴⁵ Greg, Barrow, "UN Condemns DR Congo 'plunder.'" Available from <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/africa/2007211.stm>

⁴⁶ Bruce C. Birch et al., *A Theological Introduction to the Old Testament* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1999), 249. They rightly argue that Solomon led Israel to a place of prominence among the nations, both in terms of wealth and political influence; but that it is clear that Solomon's policies have laid the foundation for the kingdom's

pretended well-being of the nation. Unfortunately, this was a mistake and the nation did come to an end, and Judeans' worldly and wicked way of leadership was proven wrong.

Wisdom, power and riches can lead to self-glorification. Self-glorification unmistakably leads to personality cult and to the dethronement of God by the human leader. In Africa, most of our leaders have not only forgotten God, the owner of our continent, but they have even taken his seat of sovereignty by promoting extravagant self-glorification or what is commonly referred to as personality cult. There are several examples to illustrate this misunderstanding of the nature of power and wealth in African context. In the early 70s, when the Catholic Church started opposing Mobutu's policy of authenticity, the president declared to journalists: "I am power with a capital P. Power is me and not the church."⁴⁷ In her book on Mobutu's reign, Wrong notes what Mobutu had become for Congolese: "The Guide, Helmsman, Father of the Nation, Founding President. . . ."⁴⁸ By 1973, Mobutu had changed his name from Joseph Desire to Sese Seko Kuku Ngbendu Wa Za Banga, that is "the all-powerful warrior who goes from conquest to conquest, leaving fire in his wake."⁴⁹ Wrong also noted how the daily television news broadcast began with an image of Mobutu's features, emerging God-like from

collapse and have undermined concerns for the Yahwistic covenant tradition.

⁴⁷ Callaghy, *The State-Society struggle*, 304.

⁴⁸ Wrong, *In the Footsteps of Mr. Kurtz*, 91-2.

⁴⁹ Wrong, *In the Footsteps of Mr. Kurtz*, 3.

scudding clouds, and how his arrival at different places was met with dancing and singing.⁵⁰

As if this was not enough, the officials of the regime put in a new effort to replace Christianity with a new religion called "Mobutuism". Mark Shaw quotes Hastings who writes that the credo of this new Zairian religion was summarized in a government statement of June 1974 in the following words:

God has sent us a great prophet, our wondrous Mobutu Sese Seko. This prophet is shaking us out of our torpor. He has delivered us from our mental alienation. He is teaching us how to love each other. This prophet is our liberator, our messiah, the one who has come to make all things new in Zaire. Jesus is the prophet of the Hebrews. He is dead. Christ is no longer alive. He called himself God. Mobutu is not a god and he does not call himself God. He too will die but he is leading his people towards a better life. How can honor and veneration be refused to the one who had founded the new Church of Zaire? Our church is the Popular Movement of the Revolution [MPR].⁵¹

One thing to note in this quotation, irrespective of who composed the credo, is that for Mobutu and his officials, Christ is dead. Mobutu has proclaimed his death so that he may usurp his seat of sovereignty. My argument is, therefore, that the history of Congolese's suffering and decay as we are experiencing it today actually starts with the history of the death of God/Christ in DR Congo by our political leaders. In other words, Christ was de-sacralized

⁵⁰ Wrong, *In the Footsteps of Mr. Kurtz*, 92.

⁵¹ Mark Shaw, *The Kingdom of God in Africa: A Short History of African Christianity* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1996), 266-67.

so that Mobutu might be sacralized. This is true not only for those who reject Christianity, but even for those who cover themselves with some kind of Christian religion. Needless to say that nothing of what Mobutuism promised really happened for the Congolese, except misery and decay of the nation as it was for Judah during the time of Jeremiah.

Apart from DR Congo, another African classical example of self-glorification worth quoting is Kwame Nkrumah, the first president of Ghana. According to Shaw, Nkrumah encouraged a messianic personality cult and interpreted his rule in kingdom terms.⁵² Peter T. Omari adds that meetings - during Krumah's reign- began with such songs as "If you follow him, he will make you fishers of men."⁵³ Shaw also points out that Nkrumah was so fond of quoting his parody of Matt. 6:33 that the words were inscribed on his statue in Accra: "Seek first the political kingdom and all other things will be added unto you."⁵⁴ In the same way, the youth wing of Nkrumah's party revised the Apostles' Creed. It read as follows:

I believe in the Convention People's Party, the opportune savior of Ghana and in Kwame Nkrumah, its founder and leader; who is endowed with the Ghana spirit, born as true Ghanaian for Ghana; suffering under victimization, was vilified, threatened with deportation; he disentangled himself from the clutches of UGCC; and the same day he rose victorious with the 'verandah boys';

⁵² Shaw, *The Kingdom of God in Africa*, 259.

⁵³ Peter T. Omari, *Kwame Nkrumah: The Anatomy of an African Dictatorship* (New York: Africana Publishing Corporation, 1970), 85.

⁵⁴ Shaw, *The Kingdom of God in Africa*, 259.

ascended the political heights; and sitteth at the supreme head of the CPP.⁵⁵

What was said about Mobutu is also true for Nkrumah: Christianity in Ghana was being replaced by the leaders' religion. It was no longer necessary to believe in God or in Christ but to believe in the Party (CPP)⁵⁶ and its founder. In fact Kwame Bediako rightly points out that Nkrumah adopted the title "Osagyefo" (which means "Savior" or "Redeemer")⁵⁷ in order to show that he had taken the place of the true and unique Savior of Africa/world. Unlike the case of Mobutuism, where a totally new credo was created for the new religion, Nkrumah and his followers were directly and consciously distorting the word of God and replacing it with that of the new Ghanaian "messiah": Nkrumah. This is where the abuse and misunderstanding of power, wisdom and riches can lead us.

What was happening in DR Congo and Ghana is similar to what happened in Judah during the monarchy, when the paganization of the monarchy caused the abandonment of the way of YHWH and replaced it with the ways of human beings. Brueggemann puts it this way:

Mendenhall, most critically, has characterized this history as "the paganization of Israel." Bureaucracy, harem, standing army, tax districts, and temple are not only institutions that concretize a social vision. They are ways by which pagan, that is,

⁵⁵ Shaw, *The Kingdom of God in Africa*, 260.

⁵⁶ CPP means "Convention People's Party."

⁵⁷ Kwame Bediako, "De-Sacralization and Democratization: Some Theological Reflections on the Role of Christianity in Nation-Building in Modern Africa," in *Transformation* 12 (1995): 8.

noncovenantal patterns of life were adapted from Israel's neighbors. This radical adaptation caused the abandonment of a certain vision of history, the loss of a covenant notion of God and humanity, and a forgetting of the messianic vision the monarchy was intended to guarantee."⁵⁸

To sum up this section, I have argued that there are always two alternative ways and possibilities for any government or leadership. Either one decides to follow the way of YHWH, of justice, of understanding the high position as that of service, or he/she deviates and starts following the way of corruption, of self-service, and of self-glorification characterized in our text by human wisdom, power and riches. In the case of Israel, this explicates why God gave the law before the beginning of the monarchy, and then sent the prophets (during the time of the monarchy) to enforce the awareness of the law that was being or could have been neglected, to protect the nation against selfishness and idolatrous political practices.⁵⁹

In comparison with the African situations, there are at least six lessons we can learn: (1) the true unifying and guiding element of any nation should not be the government itself but the law or the constitution. (2) In Israel, the law was above the government and it was not

⁵⁸ Brueggemann, *Old Testament Theology*, 274.

⁵⁹ Most scholars would date much of the law during the period of the monarchy, or even after the monarchy. However, as I have already stated in chapter one, this debate is not yet closed (and it might never be). For this research, I have adopted a more traditional view and have placed this law before the beginning of the monarchy, arguing that YHWH (who knew that monarchy could be problematic) could not have allowed human kings to start ruling without any guidance as we find in Deuteronomy 17.

made by the Israelite king to fit his selfish ambitions. (3) The law reflects YHWH's will in that it teaches both the fear of God, humility and social justice.⁶⁰ (4) Power must be used for the good of the community, and its use should be centered on the necessity to promote and defend life of the people against enemies of life in the society. These enemies include idolatry and social injustice in all their forms. (5) The nation should not rely on its riches, military power, and wisdom but on using these elements in the building of a just society. (6) The Church must work tirelessly to promote justice, love, self-denial, and righteousness, brief the fear of the Lord in the nation and not any exaggerated confidence in human realizations.

The Secret of True National Greatness: to Have Understanding and to Know YHWH (v.23)

Verse 23 is introduced by the particle **DN 'D**, rendered by "but" in most English translations. However, the

⁶⁰ I always think that it will be very interesting to compare the Mosaic Law with the constitutions in some of our nations to find out both similarities and differences between them. Moreover, I also realize from this study the crucial role that the Church can play in my country in the process of the making of the constitution. The making of the constitution should not be left to those who are in power (it was not so with Israel). The fact is that when most of our African political leaders come to power, one of their priorities is either to modify the constitution in order to fit it to their purpose or to suspend it and then rule by decree. We also understand why, in some countries like Kenya, people have been crying for the revision of the constitution because the current one does not really reflect the will of the people since it was made by a small group in power, in order to serve its own interests.

disjunctive **כִּי** **וְ** in this sentence does not only express the idea of opposition (the first element opposed to the second), but it also introduces an inner fundamental opening for a new behavior, a change of mentality, a new understanding of matters, and a new way of doing things (see other examples in Prov. 23:17-18; Deut. 10:12-13; Mic. 6:8; Jer. 31:29-30; 2 Kings 17:35-36, 38-39).

In addition, this disjunctive introduces the same verb **יִתְהַלַּל** (hitphael, jussive masculine, third person singular of the verb **הִלַּל**) as in verse 22. But this time, the verb is in affirmative form and directed not toward the self but toward YHWH. Elsewhere in the Old Testament, when the boasting is addressed away from self and directed toward God, it is called praise (Ps. 34:3; Jer. 4:2; Ps. 64:11). So, this means that in verse 23, not boasting about the self is the equivalent of boasting in (or praising) YHWH. In other words, as we read in the passage itself, the new idea introduced by the particle **כִּי** **וְ** used with the verb **הִלַּל** and YHWH as its complement is that the sole ground for human boasting is to have understanding (**שָׂכַל**) and to know YHWH.⁶¹

The verb **שָׂכַל** (hiphil infinitive absolute) with which the concept to know YHWH occurs can be used in qal with the meaning "to have success." But in this text (v.23), the verb is used in hiphil and has the following meanings: to understand (to have understanding), see, make wise, act with insight or devotion.⁶² This verb is often used in

⁶¹ The form "to know YHWH" is here composed of qal absolute infinitive of **יָדַע** with a first person singular pronoun **אֹתִי** (me; standing for YHWH himself).

⁶² Terence E. Fretheim, "שָׂכַל," in *NIDOTTE*, 3:1243.

wisdom literature and describes the attitude of those who listen⁶³ to and practice instructions of the wise. Their knowledge born from listening is understood as a gift from God (Ps. 32:8; Neh. 9:20), and is accompanied by God's presence and help (1 Sam. 18:14; 2 Kings 18:7). A knowledge born from listening to YHWH gives life (Prov. 21:16; 16:22); it is understood as an act of seeking God (Ps. 14:2; 53:3), of fearing him (Ps. 111:10), and of trusting him (Prov. 16:20). When applied to leadership, it means leading the nation under YHWH's leadership. What is more important for this thesis is that this understanding (שָׁמַע) is sometimes associated with the discernment of YHWH's interventions in history and the impossibility for idols to do the same (Pss. 64:10; 106:7; Isa. 41:20; 44:18).

To listen to YHWH, to understand what he wants (his will) and to apply it in his leadership is the substance of the knowledge of YHWH. This is what YHWH wanted of Israelite kings, and it is what he wants for all the kings/presidents of the world. I am making this argument about all the leaders (kings/presidents) of the world from the assumption that the Old Testament describes YHWH not only as the God of Israel but also as the key character and decisive agent in the public process of the whole history of humanity. In other words, YHWH is the real maker and

⁶³ John C. Maxwell and Jim Dorman, *Becoming a Person of Influence: How to Positively Impact the Lives of Others* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1997), 80-84. They list the following values of listening: it shows respect, it builds relationships, it increases knowledge, it generates ideas, it builds loyalty. This description focuses at the level of interpersonal human relationship, but it is also very important for the leader to learn how to listen to YHWH, in order to increase knowledge and become wise.

definer of what happens in the visible world of public power everywhere in the world.⁶⁴ Unfortunately, most of the kings in Israel/Judah thought that power could sustain itself willy-nilly, even if it practices endless self-aggrandizement and brutalizing self-indulgence. For example, the tradition of Jeremiah depicts king Jehoiakim as a model of the king who would not listen to YHWH and who believed that he had nothing to do with YHWH's word. In Jeremiah 36, Jehoiakim not only refuses to listen to YHWH's words (v.24), he also tears the scroll apart and burns it! By so doing, he is mistaken and thinks that the key factor in the maintenance of general well-being, prosperity, and security of the entire nation can be reduced to his own well-being (and that of his collaborators). It is this refusal of the Israelite kings to listen to YHWH that finally brought the debacle of 587 BC, when the temple, the monarchy, and the city of Jerusalem failed in the hand of enemies.

As far as Africa is concerned, it is obvious that extremely few political leaders in Africa have understood the need of relying on God in their leadership. On the contrary, most of them rely on idols. Wrong, for example, notices the fact that Mobutu and his collaborators consulted Senegalese *Marabouts* over every major decision.⁶⁵ It was believed in DR Congo that Mobutu's satanic religion, known as the *Prima Curia*, became the secret religion for

⁶⁴ For the relationship between YHWH and non-Israelite leadership, see Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 492-525. For more details, see also William A. Dyrness, *The Earth is God's: A Theology of American Culture* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1997).

most of the members of the government, especially those who were very close to the president. It was even said that one of the conditions for being appointed to one of the key positions in the government or in the party's central committee, executive council, and state enterprises was first to accept to become member of the *Prima Curia*. According to the testimony of many people who became members of that religion and who later on started denouncing it as Mobutu's regime was collapsing, one of the requirements for the membership of the *Prima Curia* was to drink human blood and to swear faithfulness for one's whole life to Satan, to Mobutu himself, and to the state-party.

Mr. Sakombi Inongo, one of the most faithful of Mobutu's servants in occultism, testified several times how Mobutu and other members of the *Prima Curia* had sold the nation to Satan himself. It is from his testimonies (recorded on tapes) that we have most of the information concerning the faith of the *Prima Curia*. The fact that DR Congo was sold or better handed over to Satan became so frustrating to Congolese (then Zairians) that whatever went wrong in the country was attributed to this fact, and this syndrome is still continuing until these days. For some people, this was also one of the implicit or explicit reasons for the change of the name Zaire to DR Congo because it was believed that as long as the country retained the name Zaire, it would continue to be ruled by Satan and there would be no change as far as the political and socioeconomic situation was concerned. At the beginning of the 90s, most churches reacted to Sakombi's testimony by

⁶⁵ Wrong, *In the Footsteps of Mr Kurtz*, 222.

organizing prayer meetings in order to deliver the country from Satan's hand.

Mobutu's successor, the late Laurent Désiré Kabila, could not have been that different from his predecessor. If he was not member of the *Prima Curia*, he must have been concerned with the same desire of self-aggrandizement and personality cult. One of the most hilarious things he did was the reappointment of the same Sakombi Inongo, the man who had built Mobutu's personality cult, as the minister for information and press. Kabila's goal was probably to start building his own name. Very soon after Kabila proclaimed himself president of the Republic in May 1997, Sakombi started marketing him as "Mzee" (a respectful Swahili word for "elder"), and posting huge posters of Kabila around the capital under the inscription: "Here is the man we need."⁶⁶ In this condition, it is clear that neither Mobutu, nor Kabila could have had time to think about God's way of leadership. In other words, our presidents have never had godly understanding. They have been working for their own glory, they have been listening only to the devil, to themselves and to those who come to praise them. Consequently, my argument is that Congolese people are today suffering from this lack of understanding of YHWH's way of leadership in their leaders as it was the case in Judah.

I am not claiming here that we necessarily need presidents who go to Church every Sunday and who proclaim publicly their Christian faith, commendable as that is. Rather, my argument is that YHWH's will is that every government leads justly, humbly and understands its

⁶⁶Wrong, *In the Footsteps of Mr Kurtz*, 290.

ministry as a service for others, that is, for the citizens. By serving the citizens without terrorizing, intimidating, taking away what belongs to them, and crushing them down, the leadership is actually serving (in the fear of) YHWH, the owner of the universe and the Lord of all lords. This is what to have understanding and to know YHWH means in this passage. And this is the only reason for true boasting in leadership according to Jer. 9:23. In other words, the claim I am making here is that power (political, economic, and military), and human wisdom cannot help any nation if they are not used according to YHWH's will.

I sum up this section by arguing that a leadership without understanding, as Jeremiah himself understands it, is a leadership that puts the nation or the society at great risk of disruption. This is what Jehoiakim (and many other leaders) did for Judeans, by making them work for him as slaves and by crushing the prophet Jeremiah who was trying to show him the godly way of leadership. This is what Zedekiah did by refusing to listen to YHWH and by trying to lead the country with purely human "intelligentsia."

In addition to the combination with שכל, the concept of the knowledge of YHWH in Jer. 9:23 is also associated with two other important elements: the formula אני יהוה (I am YHWH), and a group of three key terms (חסד משפט וצדקה) that are both objects of the verb עשה.

The two words אני יהוה (I am YHWH) is the formula by which YHWH introduces himself. It is believed to have its *sitz im leben* in the discourses of Exodus 3 and 6 where YHWH presented himself to Moses by revealing his name. In the context of these two texts (Exod. 3,6), YHWH introduces

himself to Moses in the formula **אני יהוה** as the one who is present in order to act, especially to deliver the suffering community in Egypt under Pharaoh. Said differently, YHWH's introduction to Moses as a deliverer articulates his resolute decision to intervene determinedly against every oppressive, alienating situation and power that distort a life of well-being. This definitely means that YHWH is more than a match for powers of oppression, whether sociopolitical or cosmic.

In this sense, many Old Testament scholars have recognized that YHWH is a salvation name, and that to know him as **יהוה** and the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob (that is the God who acts in history to fulfill his promise, to rescue the oppressed and to punish the oppressor⁶⁷) is to understand that this God will not tolerate injustice of any kind in any society. This same formula is repeated at the beginning of the Decalogue as a reminder to the people not only about the saving act of YHWH (Exod. 20:2; Deut. 5:6), but also about the place that YHWH should have in Israelite society.⁶⁸

Moreover, the repetition of the formula in Pss. 50:7; 81:11 combines both the mention of the commandments and the saving acts of YHWH in the history of Israel. Thus, the function of the mention of the formula **אני יהוה** in those passages was to call Israelites to faith, to trust in YHWH. In the same way, it is probable that the use of this

⁶⁷ Elmer A. Martens, *God's Design: A Focus on Old Testament Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1981), 15-17.

⁶⁸ On the application of the Decalogue on social life, see Walter Harrelson, *The Ten Commandments and Human Rights* (Philadelphia: Fortress press, 1980).

formula in Jer. 9:23 has the function of calling Israelites back to its traditional faith as set in the covenant. Faith in YHWH would help Israelite (leadership) to remain humble (by remembering how YHWH has been helping them all the time that they were helpless). It would also help them to put their trust in YHWH who is the true source of their power, wisdom (Deut. 4:6) and riches. Finally, to remember YHWH as the deliverer would also help Israelite leadership to keep in mind that YHWH hates injustice in the society and punishes whoever practices it. These are most probably the meanings attached to the formula *אני יהוה*. In this sense, the self-boasting condemned in verse 22 could be considered as a misplaced trust, a godless self-commendation that seeks to usurp the achievements of YHWH. When applied to politics or leadership management, it means to lead the country with no consideration for the law or YHWH's will. This is what not to know YHWH means.

The second element that helps us to understand the concept of the knowledge of YHWH is a group of three words *חסד משפט צדקה* describing YHWH's activity in favor of human kind. This triad is the object of the verb *עשה* (to do, to practice, to perform).

The first word, *חסד*, is difficult to translate in English. Carroll actually thinks that the word is virtually untranslatable.⁶⁹ D. A. Baer and R. P. Gordon define it as "faithfulness, steadfast love, or more generally kindness."⁷⁰ Their argument is that *חסד* is frequently used of the attitudes and behavior of humans towards one

⁶⁹ Carroll, *Jeremiah*, 247.

⁷⁰ D. A. Baer and R. P. Gordon "חסד," in *NIDOTTE*, 2:210.

another, and "more frequently (ratio 3:1), it describes the disposition and beneficent actions of God towards the faithful, Israel his people, and humanity in general."⁷¹ They also quote Glueck who argued that רָחַם is based on God's covenantal relationship with his people, and that רָחַם is the essence of the covenantal relationship between YHWH and Israel.⁷² It should only be noted that for the case of Israel and YHWH, while רָחַם does contain the idea of mutual demands, service and fear, it does not necessarily depend on Israel's faithfulness. In other words, though the root of רָחַם is in the covenant, it depended on the eternal faithfulness of YHWH alone.

Hence, in the Old Testament, we find several usages of the word רָחַם with the idea of YHWH's interventions to save people from disaster or oppression. These were particularly the cases of the Patriarchs (Gen. 24:12,14,27; 32:11); of the Israelites in Egypt and in the desert (Exod. 15:13; Ps. 136:10, 16); of the Israelites again during the time of the occupation of Canaan (Ps. 136:21); or during different attacks by neighboring nations (Pss. 136:16-20; 118). The word is also used in the promise of the dynasty to David and his descendants (2 Sam. 7:15; 22:51; 1 Kings 3:6; Ps. 89:25-29). Briefly, in general, the concept רָחַם is related to YHWH's aptitude to rescue those in destitution (Pss. 31:8; 32:10; 44:27; 52:10; 59:11; 66:20; 69:14, 17; 85:8; 107:8, 15, 21, 31).

From the above examples, it will not be an exaggeration to define רָחַם as a reaching down prompted by

⁷¹ Baer and Gordon " רָחַם ," in *NIDOTTE*, 2:210

⁷² Baer and Gordon " רָחַם ," in *NIDOTTE*, 2:210

love toward the needy in general. YHWH is the best example of this stooping and inexplicable generosity because he is capable of kind, gracious, invigorating, rehabilitative, sustaining, liberating actions towards those who need such actions. In the context of a nation, or a government, it is what I would call a "practical politics" that aims at working for those who are in need, at helping the helpless, at listening to the cry of those who are crushed down, at educating the nation toward love to one another. Morgan is one of the few scholars who understood well the transformative power of $\tau\upsilon\eta$ in a nation when every single member of the community practices it, but more particularly the leadership.

If we climb to the heights and imagine a nation wherein lovingkindness shall abound, and be the inspiration of life, we cannot escape from the conviction that such a nation would be strong indeed. Lovingkindness strengthens the things that remain, gathers all waste material and transmutes it into true wealth. Within the life of any nation, by the ministry of that lovingkindness, which is a stoop prompted by love toward all lack, in pity, patience and power, the true strength will be realized.⁷³

God alone knows how many African leaders practice lovingkindness and are aware that the strength of a nation does not come from political power but from YHWH's blessings because of the attitude of the leaders to bend down and meet those who are crushed not only by the oppression but also by their daily struggle for life. This was the attitude of Jesus and the whole program of his ministry on earth according to Luke 4. But in most of our countries, instead of being in service of the needy, our

⁷³ Morgan , *Studies in the Prophecy of Jeremiah*, 69.

leaders always tend to work for their own benefits and that of their close relatives. A simple example is the memorandum addressed to Mobutu by the leaders of the Church of Christ in Zaire (DR Congo) on 30 March 1990, in which they demonstrated what I would call the lack of TON in the country. For them all the good things of the nation were being enjoyed by a specific group of citizens: the powerful; while the common people were being denied access to such a privilege. Specifically, this is what the memorandum stated: "too many top civil servants behave very often in a selfish manner by enjoying privileges, funds, government lands, furniture and buildings."⁷⁴

However, it seems to me that here is where the challenge is most acute for the Church, where TON must be practiced first. But very often, Church leaders themselves are the first to be egoist, to hunger for luxurious life and forget that they are in the service of others. They forget that our call means a denial of ourselves for the service of others. Church leaders sometime think of their position as an opportunity for making profit. Kabongo-Mbaya quotes J.F. Bayart who, in his book, *Religion et Modernité Politique en Afrique*, criticized Congolese Catholic bishops for their sense of luxurious life while the great majority of common believers were living in utter poverty. This is how he elaborated his critique,

The Mercedes-Benz car has become the Episcopal vehicle par excellence, attributed to church leaders and elders and making them elites in the prominent places within the post colonial state. In 1970, the Catholic bishop of Lisala shared

⁷⁴ Kabongo-Mbaya, "Churches and the struggle for Democracy," 136.

this privilege with only two other dignitaries: the commissioner for territorial administration and a rich merchant.⁷⁵

True **חסד** cannot live together with the desire for personal aggrandizement as Bayart describes it in the quotation above. It was Jose Miranda who made clear that "knowledge of God is attentiveness to the needs of brothers and sisters."⁷⁶ In other words, the knowledge of God is observed through the practice of **חסד** (lovingkindness) in the society.

The two other words **צדקה** and **משפט** are used to express YHWH's intervention in order to maintain the integrity of the covenant people by protecting them against external attacks (Judg. 5:11; Deut. 33:20; Mic. 7:9f.; Pss. 9:4-7; 48:5-12; 89: 14-19), and by protecting the covenant people against internal oppression (Deut. 10:18; Isa. 11:4-9; 28:6-7; Pss. 7:12; 10:18. 43:1; 72:1-4; 99:4; 103:6; 140:13; 145:7, 17; 146:7; Job 36:6; Prov. 29:26; Jer. 12:1; 11:20; 23:6; 33:16; 22:11-13; 50:7).

Norman H. Snaith notices that it is incidental that in the Old Testament, **צדק** stands for justice. His argument is that **צדק** stands primarily for the establishment of God's will in the land, and only secondarily for justice. For him, and he is probably right, God's will is wider than justice.⁷⁷ In the context of a nation, **צדק** should probably

⁷⁵ Kabongo-Mbaya, "Churches and the Struggle for Democracy," 138.

⁷⁶ Quoted by Brueggemann, *Social Reading of the Old Testament*, 48.

⁷⁷ Norman H. Snaith, *The Distinctive Ideas of the Old Testament* (London: The Epworth Press, 1974), 70.

be used in relationship with all aspects of the administration of affairs in strict equity. It should encompass the social, legal, ethical, and religious life of a nation. As Morgan underlined it, "the true strength of a nation is found in its judgment, in its method of administration, if that method of administration be that of truth and justice and equity."⁷⁸ In using these three elements (truth, justice and equity), every government must recognize that social goods and social power are unequally and destructively distributed in the community, and that the well-being of this community requires that social goods and power to some extent be given up by those who have too much, for the sake of those who have not enough.⁷⁹

The last element that constitutes the true strength of a nation is *מִשְׁפָּט* (righteousness). I have already discussed this word in the second chapter. Suffice it to add here that for a nation to practice *מִשְׁפָּט* is to discover YHWH's direction for leadership. In other words, righteousness is conformity to YHWH in action because in him, there is "no iniquity, no crookedness."⁸⁰

Understanding, righteousness, loving kindness, and justice are divine leadership qualities. They do not cover all aspects of YHWH's leadership but they show YHWH's way of leading human society. This is why all these words complete the meaning of a single verb *עָשָׂה*: "to do, to practice, to perform." In other words, what defines someone

⁷⁸ Morgan , *Studies in the Prophecy of Jeremiah*, 69.

⁷⁹ See also Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 736-7.

⁸⁰ Morgan , *Studies in the Prophecy of Jeremiah*, 69.

is not what he says or what he says concerning who he is and what he can do, but what he actually does. To do what YHWH does or to lead as YHWH leads the nation is to know him. It is only when one knows him that he can boast. However, this boasting will not be directed toward the self, i.e., toward our achievement, our wealth, our power, but toward the true leader who is influencing the action of human leadership. This plainly reminds us of Paul who could say: "Follow me as I follow Christ." In the same way, Jer. 9:22-23 should become a call of Judean kings, priests and prophets as they urged the whole nation: "Follow us, as we follow YHWH in what he does, that is in righteousness, lovingkindness, and justice." In other words, wisdom, power and wealth must be used for doing righteousness, loving kindness, and justice in the nation. This is why verse 23 ends with YHWH's affirmation: "For in these things I delight" (כִּי־בְאֵלֵהֶם חִפְצָתִי). In other words, YHWH is the one who does these very things for the whole humanity. He has power beyond all measurement, but he uses it for our benefit; he has wisdom beyond our understanding but he uses it to lead the universe; he has wealth beyond our imagination but he uses it for the sake of the humankind. Consequently for the human leader, to do what he (YHWH) does is to truly know him.

In Jer. 9:23, the concepts צדקה and משפט go beyond the boundary of the covenant people to the (whole) world (בְּאֵרֶץ). Wisser quotes H.H. Schmid who argued that the mention of the word (בְּאֵרֶץ) here calls to mind the Biblical integration of the Canaanite concept of אֵל עֲלִיּוֹן (the most high God), sovereign over the whole world and protector of

the cosmic order expressed in the notion of justice (צדק).⁸¹ The use of this single word may be very important for us in that it helps us to realize that YHWH's חסד משפט צדקה are not only applicable to Israel, but to the whole world because the agent who really works in all things is God himself, and not the personal and impersonal powers of this world which we sometime think of as causes.⁸² But this aspect, though important, is beyond the scope of this study.

Summary: to Know YHWH and True Greatness

(1) As in the preceding two chapters, the term "to know YHWH" does not refer to any theoretical knowledge about YHWH. Rather, the concept has to do with how that knowledge is applied to practical (political) leadership of the nation. Here the verb עשה (to do, to practice, to perform) becomes a key word since YHWH is defined in the text not by who he is, but by what he does in Israel and in the whole world. In other words, YHWH is not known through any speculative and theoretical way but always through acts of social intervention and inversion that make possible human life in a situation where human existence has been threatened. However, unlike the two other chapters, Jer. 9:22-23 is not clearly related to any specific law in the Decalogue. It constitutes a kind of a summary of the two preceding chapters, and also a summary of what the leadership in Judah had become like toward the end of the existence of that nation.

⁸¹ Wisser, *Jeremie, Critique de la vie Sociale*, 215.

⁸² Dyrness, *The Earth is God's*, 37

(2) In my interpretation, I demonstrated that those who were boasting were not the poor or the common people but those who had position in the society. In other words, the people who thought of themselves as wise, powerful and rich and to whom the prophet addressed this critique were most probably the leaders, mainly political leaders but also military and religious leaders in the nation.

(3) From this understanding, it may be clear that Jer. 9:22-23 should be viewed as a summary of two opposed ideologies that characterized Judean society towards the end of its existence. On the one hand, verse 22 describes those who possessed authority in the nation (symbolized by wisdom, power and wealth) but who did not understand its true nature, and therefore, how to use it. As a consequence, they were using it without any reference to the one who is the source of that authority. What mattered for them was the exigency of the situation and their own benefit, but not how YHWH would like them to use it. In other words, they forgot that YHWH is the one who gives all power, wisdom and wealth for the benefit of the entire community. This was the rebellion and the refusal to know YHWH.

On the other hand, there was the covenantal way of using wisdom, power and wealth (authority) that stood over against and subverted the dominant understanding (ideology) of the exercise of authority. According to verse 23, this covenantal way is rooted in YHWH's actions. These actions are defined by the three words: lovingkindness, justice and righteousness. The leader who performs these three actions knows YHWH because he does his (YHWH's) will and has reason to boast, because his boasting has its root in YHWH himself. It is important to notice here that those who

understanding: the Lord Jesus Christ. In Brief, the failure of the Church in DR Congo is the failure to practice צדקה, משפט, and חסד.

(5) In the context of my country this also reminds me of the great responsibility of the Church to exercise her prophetic ministry and help the political leadership to understand the nature of its authority and use it for the benefit of each and every citizen, but exceptionally for those who need it the most: the poor.

(6) Every nation has something in which it glories, or in which it takes pride, for example military power, economic might, and the system of knowledge (the mastery of technology, education, etc). But the prophet Jeremiah was in open conflict with all these things because they had become a source of human pride. Military power is among the very things against which YHWH warned the Israelite kings in Deut. 17:14-20. The danger of relying on military power was primarily (political) idolatry, that is, the abandonment of the covenant, of trust in YHWH. YHWH wanted his people, the Israelites, to understand that their military strength lay not in the number or type of their troops or in any military cooperation with other nations, but in the strength and presence of their God in battle (see some examples of YHWH's wars for Israel in Exod. 14:1-31; Judg. 4-5; 1 Sam. 8). Other problems with the building of military power were that it would create internal insecurity and it would be very expensive for a small country like Israel, causing unnecessary poverty in the nation. In Africa we know of many countries where about 60% of the national budget goes for military expenses. This is a wrong understanding of the use of military power and it

must be denounced because it creates needless poverty in the nation.

(7) Another element criticized in the text and demonstrating the lack of knowledge of YHWH is the accumulation of wealth by the king at the expense of his subjects. The desire of such accumulation of wealth easily becomes a consuming passion and runs contrary to the true character of the ideal king (Jer. 22:13-19). Probably, this does not mean that the Israelite king should be a poor man, but the danger was the temptation of the king and his few officials to accumulate wealth at the expense of the citizens who would consequently become poor. Most of us in Africa and in DR Congo in particular, know of the leaders who would siphon millions of dollars out of their countries and fatten their personal accounts in Europe or elsewhere in the world, leaving their people without roads, without systems of communication, without schools, etc.

(8) Finally, to know YHWH is to listen to him, to understand what he wants (his will) and apply it to the leadership and to the direction for daily life. This leadership should include both the Church, public administration, and the family. In this sense, Jer. 9:22-23 is a call for Judeans to a new beginning, a return to the old way of the covenant, to the practice of discernment, whereby life is taken as evidence of demand and gift of YHWH.⁸³

⁸³ My argument is that the people of Judah and their leaders were somehow aware of the fact that they had left the right direction. Different reforms can be viewed as attempts to such a new beginning, a return to the covenant. Thus, the Bible tells of Asa's removal of the queen mother and her shocking Asherah cult object (1 Kings 15:9-24; 2 Chron. 14-16); of Jehosaphat's judicial reform (1 Kings

This text also shows us that wisdom, power and knowledge can be distorted and become a calculation of interest and advantage, and YHWH disappears as a critical principle. In the same way, true wisdom, power and knowledge disappear when people manage to make credible the practice of foolishness, the mistaken sense that they are autonomous and the measure of their own life. Instead of using wisdom, power, and wealth for YHWH's purposes (by practicing lovekindness, justice and righteousness), one becomes wise in his own eyes and self-referential. In this sense, wisdom, power and wealth become a self-deluding autonomy and a terrible revolt against YHWH. They become idols, self-serving, self-deceiving ideology. Ideology and idolatry always want to compel us to bow down to the work of our hands, to our knowledge and might, to our achievement, to our wealth, to our ethnic group (in the case of my country), and to our family so that we may worship them. This is true not only for a nation, but also for any society, any ethnic group, any institution, and any individual. This is probably what happened in Judah, this is also what is happening in my country. For Jeremiah this is what not to know YHWH means.

22:41-51; 2 Chron. 17:1-21:1); of Hezekiah's reform and attempt to revolt against Sennacherib (2 Kings 18-20); of Josiah's repair of the Temple and the renewal of the covenant (2 Kings 22-23; 2 Chron. 34-35); and finally of Zedekiah's attempt to follow the covenant by ordering that all Hebrew slaves be set free (Jer. 34:8-22). This also should motivate all of us that even the most corrupted leader knows somehow that what he is doing is evil. This can also explain why we have so much discrepancy between political discourse and praxis. It means that our leaders, knowing that they are wrong, try to show us in their propaganda that they can do what is right.

CHAPTER 5

KNOWLEDGE OF YHWH AND THE NEW COVENANT

This chapter analyzes the term "to know YHWH" in the context of the exile and in the perspective of a new covenant. Judgment has come to pass on the people of Judah because of their breaking of the covenant with YHWH, or in terms of this thesis, because of their lack of God's knowledge. Some of them already found themselves in exile and others were about to follow them. It was at that time that YHWH announced to his people that he would make a new covenant with them after they had broken the first one. However, despite this new situation and the promise of a new covenant, YHWH's requirement did not change: he still wanted his people to know him. In other words, despite the difficult situation that the people of Judah were undergoing, this chapter will demonstrate that relationship with YHWH was not possible unless they had a proper knowledge of him.

The two questions I will seek to answer in this chapter are: what does it mean to know YHWH in this new context? How will the people of Judah come to know YHWH in this new situation, after the judgment? In terms of the whole thesis, this chapter is an important turning point for Judah as a nation, for the ministry of Jeremiah as the prophet of YHWH, and a response to the preceding chapters. The prophet had hoped that the people would hear his call to repentance and turn from their social injustice (chapter two), idolatry (chapter three), and false concept of grandeur (chapter four) to YHWH, their God. But they did

not. The important question now remains: what will YHWH do with this failure? In this sense, chapter four will be considered as YHWH's response to the many problems of Israel.

There are two passages in which the concept to know YHWH is put in direct relationship with the exile and the new covenant: 24:4-7 and 31:31-34. This chapter will be divided into two sections according to these two passages. Each passage will be analyzed in detail, and the exegesis will emphasize both historical, social and grammatical elements that will help us understand the meaning of the knowledge of YHWH in this new situation.

Where possible, I will be using my context to understand Biblical texts under consideration, while also using the two Biblical texts to illumine my context. Each section will end with a summary in which I will seek to clearly define the term ידע את־יהוה as it is used in the passage analyzed. A general summary of findings concerning the knowledge of YHWH in the context of the new covenant with its implications for my context will end this study.

Promise of Redemption to the Judeans Deported with Jehoiakin (Jer. 24:4-7)

Translation

4. Then the word of YHWH came to me saying: 5. "Thus says YHWH, the God of Israel: Like these good figs, so I will consider as good the exiles from Judah, whom I have sent away from this place to the land of Chaldeans. 6. And I will set my eyes upon them for good, and I will bring them back to this land. I will build them up, and not tear them down; I will plant them, and not uproot them. 7. I will

give them a heart to know me because I am YHWH; and they will be my people and I will be their God, for they will return to me with their whole heart.

Historical and Literary Contexts

There are two opposed scholarly positions concerning the authenticity of Jer. 24:4-7 among modern scholars. On one side, there are those who consider it as belonging to a late, second edition of Deuteronomy written during and after the period of the Babylonian exile. This position is held by H.G. May¹, W.L. Holladay², J.P. Hyatt,³ W. Thiel⁴, S. Böhmer⁵, K.F. Pohlmann,⁶ and most strongly by P. R.

¹ H. G. May, "Towards an Objective Approach to the Book of Jeremiah the Biographer," in *JBL*, 61 (1942): 155. He argues that Jeremiah 24 is the work of Jeremiah's biographer who lived between 500 and 450 BC.

² William. L. Holladay, *The Root יוש in the Old Testament* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1958), 136.

³ James Philip Hyatt, "The Deuteronomic Edition of Jeremiah," in Richmond C. Beatty, J. Philip Hyatt and Monroe K. Spears (eds.), *Vanderbilt Studies in the Humanities 1* (Nashville: Vanderbilt University, 1951), 84. He strongly argued that the idea expressed in Jeremiah 24:4-7 does not accord with Jeremiah's ideas expressed elsewhere and that "it is difficult to believe that Jeremiah thought God's favor depended on whether ones were exiled or not, rather than upon repentance and obedience."

⁴ Jeremiah Unterman, *From Repentance to Redemption: Jeremiah's Thought in Transition* (Sheffield: Sheffield university Press, 1987), 58. He compares Jeremiah 24:7 with 1 Sam. 7:3; Deut. 30:2, 10; and 1 Kings 8:48 and comes to the same conclusion according to which the passage under consideration is deuteronomic.

⁵ Quoted by Unterman, *From Repentance to Redemption*, 58. Böhmer accepts 24:5 as authentic but thinks that verses 6-7 are late because of deuteronomic motif and formulas.

Carroll⁷. As one can read from their arguments, there are generally two main reasons for the rejection of the passage: its close relationship with Deut. 30:1-10; and the fact that the passage contains an attitude that would have been dominant at later times, and which considered the Jews who had gone into Babylonian exile and later returned to their land as the only true Israelites.⁸

On the other side, there are scholars who think that this text is indisputably Jeremianic. Among the supporters of this position, the following names can be given: J. Skinner, A. C. Welch,⁹ W. Rudolph,¹⁰ Y. Kaufmann, J. Bright, J. M. Berridge, S. Mowinckel, A.J. Volz, A. Weiser, G.

⁶ Quoted by Unterman, *From Repentance to Redemption*, 58

⁷ Carroll, R.P. *From Chaos to Covenant* (London: SCM Press, 1981), 202. His argument is that Jeremiah 24 has been reworked and designed to replace the Jerusalem community associated with Zedekiah in YHWH's affections with the exiles associated with Jeconiah, so it clearly emanates from that group.

⁸ There are, however, other different reasons given by different scholars as justification for the rejection of the passage as Jeremianic. For example, Hyatt ("The Deuteronomistic Edition of Jeremiah," 84) rejects the contrasting treatment between the exiles (God promises deliverance to them in vv.5-7), and those who escaped the deportation (God promises a severe judgment to this group in vv.8-10). For Hyatt, it is not possible to think of the deportees as good people and those who remained in the land as bad.

⁹ Adam Cleghorn Welch, *The Book of Jeremiah Translated into Colloquial English*, 3rd ed. (London: National Adult School Union, 1958).

¹⁰ See especially Wilhelm Rudolph, "Zum Jeremiabuch," in *ZAW* 60, No 1-4 (1944): 85-106 and also "Zum Text des Jeremia," *ZAW* 48 No 4 (1930): 272-286 in which he compares the text of Jeremiah in LXX and MT.

Fohrer, and more plainly Thomas M. Raitt.¹¹ In his book *A Theology of Exile: Judgment/Deliverance in Jeremiah and Ezekiel*,¹² Raitt enumerates what he calls six pivotal prose oracles of deliverance (24:4-7; 29:4-7, 10-14; 32:6-15, 42-44; 31:31-34; 32:36-41; 33:6-9), and argues that:

(1) these passages, taken together, represent the mind of Jeremiah as concerns Judah's future after it has gone into exile; (2) there is a strong probability that they are from a single source; (3) this source is Jeremiah together with his own first circle of faithful disciples.¹³

At this point, I only need to respond to the first argument (related to the close relationship of this passage with Deut. 30: 1-10) of those who reject this passage as Jeremianic, since the second (the fact that the passage contains an attitude that would have been dominant at later times) will be dealt with in the interpretation of the text. As far as the relationship between Jer. 24:4-7 and Deut. 30:1-10 is concerned, my own understanding is that whereas there are many similarities between the two texts, we also have many differences between them. For example, in Deuteronomy, YHWH's redemption is strictly conditioned by the repentance of the people (Deut. 30:1-2), while in Jeremiah (24:4-7), the concept repentance (expressed by the verb *נָשׁוּב*, "return") comes only at the end, after YHWH has already promised to restore the people to their land, after

¹¹ See a detailed discussion concerning the argument of most of these scholars in Unterman, *From Repentance to Redemption*, 58-61.

¹² Thomas M. Raitt, *A Theology of Exile: Judgment/Deliverance in Jeremiah and Ezekiel* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1977), 106-27.

¹³ Raitt, *A Theology of Exile*, 112.

they have already rebuilt it, and after he himself had given them a heart to know him. In other words, the repentance element in Deuteronomy is overshadowed by the divine mercy in Jeremiah. And this is theologically important, especially in the context of this thesis, as I shall seek to demonstrate in this section and in the whole chapter. Therefore, I am inclined to adopt a moderately conservative position, which holds that this passage comes from the prophet himself.¹⁴

Concerning the date of this oracle, it would not be incorrect to argue that 24:4-7 is to be located during the reign of Zedekiah, after the Babylonians have deported Jehoiakin and a good number of the people of Judah in 596 BC, as Jer. 24: 1 clearly indicates.

Structure

The internal structure of chapter 24 is clear. Holladay describes the passage as "a more elaborate example of a vision report than either 1:11-12 or 1:13-16."¹⁵

- (1) The announcement of the vision: v.1a ("YHWH showed me")
- (2) The transition: v.1b ("and behold")
- (3) The vision sequence (1c-10):
 - (a) the image: vv.1d-2 (two baskets of figs in front of the temple);
 - (b) YHWH's question to the prophet (v.3a)
 - (c) The prophet's answer (v.3b)

¹⁴ For the same position, see also J.G. McConville, *Judgment and Promise: An Interpretation of the Book of Jeremiah* (Leicester, England: Apollos, 1993), 11-26.

¹⁵ Holladay, *Jeremiah 1*, 656.

- (d) YHWH's oracle (vv.4-10):
 - (i) introduction (v.4)
 - (ii) the meaning of good figs (vv.5-7)
 - (iii) the meaning of bad figs: (vv.8-10)

This chapter is concerned with the interpretation of the last section of the passage, especially section (d), and sub-sections (i) and (ii).

Interpretation

Introduction (v.4)

Verse 4 constitutes an introduction to the entire oracle of verses 5-10. Craigie, Kelly and Drinkard notice that the passage is similar to 16:1 and that here, it serves "to move from the vision to the oracle interpreting that vision."¹⁶ In other words, this introduction links the vision in verses 1-3 with its interpretation in verses 5-10.

Good figs and their meaning (vv.5-7)

This section opens with an ordinary messenger formula: כה אמר יהוה אלהי ישראל "thus says YHWH, the God of Israel". Many commentators such as Rudolph, Holladay, McKane, Weiser and others consider this formula inapposite, and Holladay suggests that it should be deleted.¹⁷ Their argument is that in this passage, YHWH is disclosing his will to the prophet

¹⁶ Craigie, Kelly and Drinkard, *Jeremiah 1-25*, 358.

¹⁷ Holladay, *Jeremiah 1*, 658.

through a private visionary experience, for the benefit of the prophet alone, "and not a message which he is charged to communicate."¹⁸ In other words, a messenger formula usually introduces YHWH's message to the people (through the prophet) but not a private message to a prophet like in this text.

I can hardly agree with this argument; rather, my understanding is that the prophet is first of all an instrument for transmitting YHWH's will to the people. In this sense, it is hard to think that the whole message in this passage was simply given for the edification of the prophet alone, as all these commentators seem to suggest. On the contrary, as Craigie, Kelly and Drinkard also understand it, the historical context of this passage clearly suggests that the vision and the oracle contained in chapter 24 are directed to the last king of Judah (Zedekiah) and his people through the prophet.¹⁹ In this way, I do not see why the opening formula should be removed.

The message introduced by this messenger formula begins in verse 5b. It is about the explication of the figs mentioned in verses 1-3. In that passage, there were two kinds of figs: the very good figs (תאנים טבות מאד) and the very bad figs (תאנים רעות מאד). My interpretation is concerned with the analysis of the first ones, i.e., the very good figs now referred to in verse 5 simply as תאנים טבות (good figs). This explication occupies almost three verses (5b-7). But my analysis will also pay

¹⁸ McKane, *Jeremiah 1-25*, 608.

¹⁹ Craigie, Kelly and Drinkard, *Jeremiah 1-25*, 358.

attention to the bad figs since we cannot understand what the prophet says about the good figs without inquiring about what he thinks of the bad ones. The following questions will guide my analysis: Who are the good (and bad) figs? Why are they good (and others bad)? What is YHWH's plan for the good figs? What does he think about the bad ones? And why?

The first issue in the passage concerns the identity of the תאנים טבות (good figs). Verse 5b clearly states that they are the exiles from Judah (את גלות יהודה), whom YHWH has sent away to the land of Chaldeans. Almost all commentators have acknowledged that this passage is referring to the first deportation of 597 BC. The book of 2 Kings 24:10-17 reports that after the death of Jehoiakim, his eighteen year old son, Jehoiakin became king over Judah, but that he reigned only for three months before being deported by Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon. The queen mother, Jehoiakin's advisers, nobles, and officials were also deported with the young king. Jer. 24: 1 adds that Judean smiths and artisans were also among the deportees. For the king of Babylon, the rationale behind this deportation was both economic and political. Economically, the Babylonian king wanted to use the skill of Judeans who would be under his power. Politically, he might have hoped that with the removal of the upper sectors of Judean society, there would be no more rebellion coming from Judah to trouble his mighty kingdom.

Our African context informs us that during the time of war, while common people die in great number because they are unprotected, special targets of the enemy are generally the elites, the powerful and the rich because they are the masterminds of the society. In fact, most revolts in

Africa, having political motivation, come from this upper class (Jeremiah is showing us that it was the same in Judah). It is also for this reason that during the time of war, the elites are the ones who first leave the country and seek refuge in foreign lands. This happens very often, not only because they have money but also because they are the targets of the enemy. However, the big difference is that in this text, these powerful (or the elites) did not flee for their lives but were taken by force out of their country in order to go and serve/live in Babylon. Still, in both cases, those who are taken out (or those who flee) are members of the upper class, whereas those who remain in the land are generally the multitude of poor who are either ignored by the enemy (the case of Judah), or lack the means for fleeing beyond the borders (most cases in my country).

The second issue, maybe the most important, is about the appreciation of the two groups. In other words, why are the deportees good and those who remain in Jerusalem/Judah evil? Can somebody who is good be punished, whereas the other who is evil be left unpunished? How are we to understand this analogy?

Craigie, Kelly and Drinkard argue that this statement was issued as a correction to the misunderstanding of the people who were left in Jerusalem following the exile of 597 BC, and who were thinking of "themselves as the ones blessed and the exiles as the ones under judgment."²⁰ Wisser agrees with this idea and adds that this wrong theology might have been promoted by false prophets who could have been teaching those who remained in Jerusalem that with the punishment of the deportees, YHWH's wrath over Jerusalem

²⁰ Craigie, Kelly and Drinkard, *Jeremiah 1-25*, 358.

was over and that he would deliver the remnant very soon from the hand of Babylonians who were besieging the city. This would have reminded Judeans how YHWH delivered them from the threat of Sennacherib king of Assyria during the reign of king Hezekiah (Isa. 36-37).²¹

A careful analysis of the second argument will show that what was happening in Jerusalem was actually another rebellion against the king of Babylon who was controlling the city. If this is right, and I think it is, we have then to ask again the questions: "who were these people rebelling against the king of Babylon?" Have I not already stated earlier that one of the goals of the deportation was to quell revolt in Jerusalem, and that it is not common for the poor (like the ones who remained in Jerusalem after the first deportation) to mount a rebellion against a powerful foreign king?

We are informed that when Jehoiakin was taken into exile (2 Kings 24:11-16), he was replaced by his uncle Mattaniah, Josiah's third son. At that time, Mattaniah was twenty-one. Nabuchadnezzar changed his name to Zedekiah. But Zedekiah could not have been a good leader because he was not able to follow YHWH's recommendations uttered by the prophet Jeremiah. The latter recommended allegiance to Babylon as YHWH's will, but the king's advisors, who probably were pro-Egyptian (and consequently anti-Babylonian), encouraged by false prophets, urged him to rebel against Nebuchadnezzar (i.e., against YHWH's plan for Jerusalem). Therefore, the wrong thinking being condemned by the prophet was coming from the section of the elites

²¹ Wisser, *Jérémie, Critique de la Vie Sociale*, 228. This is also Brueggemann's reading of the text (cf. Brueggemann, *A commentary on Jeremiah*, 218).

who remained in Jerusalem after the 597 BC deportation. Leon Wood summarizes the situation this way:

A strong anti-Babylonian group in Jerusalem brought pressure for the revolt and urged Zedekiah to look again to Egypt for help. A new coalition was being formed of Edom, Ammon, and Phoenicia (Jer.27: 1b-3); and this Jerusalem group wished Judah to join. False prophets aided their cause in declaring that God had already broken the yoke of Babylon and that within two years Judah's captives would return home to Jerusalem (Jer.28: 2-4). In opposition, Jeremiah denounced this manner of speaking, declaring it false and urging continued acceptance of Babylonian lordship (Jer.27:1-22). Two other developments outside Judah helped fan revolutionary flames in Zedekiah's fourth year: Psammetichus II succeeded Necho in Egypt, and a minor rebellion was staged in Babylon itself.²²

This quotation describes well the situation that was prevailing in Judah during the period between the two deportations. It tells us that in Jer. 24:4-7, the prophet was not dealing with the poor people, but with a section of the elites who escaped the first deportation and who were still very active, trying to make alliances and counter-alliances for their safety, continuing to promote the official theology of falsehood which we talked about in the first three chapters, and which was destroying the nation. It is amazing to realize that these elites were not even able to learn from the catastrophic events that had just taken place in their nation. One could think that with the deportation of Jehoiakin and his team, false prophets could have been proved wrong, and Judeans leaders would have remained submissive to Babylonians and to YHWH, but it was not the case.

²² Leon Wood, *A Survey of Israel's History* (London: Pickering & Inglis, 1970), 375.

Zedekiah, the new king, was one of these elites. Jeremiah describes him as a weak and fearful leader (Jer. 38:19), unable to stand up against his nobles (Jer. 38:5), and unable to listen to YHWH and to take a decision that would have saved the nation. At a certain point in time, he indeed seemed to pay attention to YHWH's word by privately meeting Jeremiah, after he had released him from prison, and inquiring about YHWH's will (Jer. 37:17-21; 38:7-28). However, meeting Jeremiah privately was not only a sign of weakness for a leader like him, but also a clear lack of confidence in YHWH. Moreover, though he listened to Jeremiah's advice concerning the danger of rebellion against Babylon (Jer. 27, 37), he feared his pro-Egyptian advisors and was dragged by them into open revolt against Babylon (Jer. 38:5).²³

Furthermore, his nobles seemed to be divided between those who were for his rule and those who were against him. In the Congolese jargon, we would call the first group, "mouvanciers présidentiels."²⁴ Very often the "mouvanciers" are the people who exercise strong influence on the president/king's decision. In Judah, this whole situation became confused as his nephew, Jehoiakin (now in Babylon), was still regarded by many in Jerusalem as the legitimate king. Some among false prophets started announcing that Jehoiakin would come back very soon to occupy his throne again (Jer 27). Some indications seem to suggest that even

²³ See a good discussion in John H. Hayes and J. Maxwell Miller (eds.), *Israelite and Judaeen History* (London: SCM Press, 1977), 472.

²⁴ In 1990s this term was often used to designate political parties or even individuals who work for the president, in contrast with those who oppose the president's ideas and misconducts.

Babylonians viewed Jehoiakin as the legitimate king of Judah.²⁵ On the other hand, there would have been in Jerusalem those who had benefited from the deportation of their countrymen by inheriting lands and properties, and who would not have been happy to see Jehoiakin and the deportees come back to Jerusalem. According to Bright, this last group "apparently began to attach dynastic hopes to Zedekiah (Jer. 23:5),"²⁶ to oppose any hope for the speedy return of the deportees, to oppose loyalty to Babylon, to make alliance with Egypt, thinking that by so doing, they will probably resist a Babylonian assault on Jerusalem. These were actually the people I have referred to as "mouvanciers," who would have been against any resolution favoring allegiance to Babylon.

From the preceding paragraphs, it becomes clear that the death of Judah as a nation was a consequence of a lack

²⁵ John Bright, *A History of Israel* (London: SCM Press, 1984), 328. He writes that texts discovered in Babylon, which show that Jehoiakin was a pensioner of Nebuchadnezzar's court, call him the 'king of Judah,' while Jews in Babylon even reckoned dates from "the exile of King Jehoiakin" (Ezek.1:2). He concludes that many in Judah felt similarly and longed for his speedy return (Jer 27ff).

²⁶ This is how some came to read Jer. 23:5ff. I have already started that Zedekiah is a throne name of Mattaniah. This name (Zedekiah "צדקיהו") means "YHWH is my righteousness." Some commentators think that this throne name, which depicts Zedekiah as a righteous king, must have given some legitimacy to Zedekiah's reign against those who dreamed of the speedy return of Jehoiachin and other exiles. If such an idea ever existed in Judah, it must have been promoted by those who were pro-Zedekiah, i.e., the nobles (the "mouvanciers") who benefited from the deportation. The following documents have good discussion on this matter: J. Swetnam, "Some Observations on the Background of צדק in Jeremiah 23:5a," in *Bib* 46 (1965) 29-40; Wilhelm Rudolph, *Jeremia*. Handbuch zum Alten Testament (Tubingen: Mohr, 1947), 125-27.

of godly leadership. Zedekiah was a weak and a confused king, with no real power. We see others deciding for him and forcing him to act against his will and against YHWH. This appears more clearly when the king's collaborators returned the prophet Jeremiah to prison (Jer. 38:1-6), making the situation worse, after Zedekiah himself had released him (Jer. 37:17-21). King Zedekiah is even reported telling his officials concerning the arrest of Jeremiah (Jer. 38:5): "He is in your hands (...) the king can do nothing to oppose you (my emphasis)." One then asks the legitimate question "who really had power in Judah during the time of king Zedekiah?" Zedekiah's statement here shows the deep level of the disintegration of the national system of leadership, with a king who is not able to oppose the evil being done by his collaborators. In fact the monarchy itself should have been problematic, in terms of leadership, since most kings were not necessarily chosen for their potential capacity to lead, but simply because they were sons of kings.

The situation that I am describing here makes a great link between the first five chapters of this thesis, namely that the problem of Judah was the problem of its leaders who did not know how to lead the nation under YHWH's leadership. In chapter two (section four), I demonstrated how king Jehoiakim was so concerned by his own ravenousness that he neglected the welfare of the nation. In this particular chapter, there are at least three aspects that underline the weakness of Zedekiah: the lack of consistency and boldness, a power vacuum, and the lack of willingness to follow what YHWH says through his prophet. This situation became worse with the attempt to silence YHWH's voice by sending his messenger to death. Unfortunately, the

death of Jeremiah that these officials eagerly wished turned to be their own death and that of the entire nation. This is actually what it means not to know YHWH in this chapter and in the whole thesis, and this is also why this group of Judean elites were called bad figs in Jeremiah 24:1-3.

The issue of a power vacuum or the question who really owned power in Jerusalem during Zedekiah's reign, reminds me of the situation in my own country. During the last years of Mobutu's reign, most Congolese were asking the same question: Was Mobutu still in control of the Congolese leadership? Wrong insightfully describes how four generals in particular (Nzimbi Ngbale, Baramoto Kpama Kata, Eluki Monga and Mavua Mudima) had taken over after Mobutu had retreated to Gbadolite, his native village.²⁷ In 1991, when the Prime Minister elected by the NSC appointed new officials, the "Inseparable Four" got angry for not having been consulted over who should head the central bank and state enterprises, both sources of their illicit income. They then decided to send troops and tanks to surround the offices and to prevent the newly appointed chief executives from reaching their offices. When Mobutu was told what was happening, he summoned the four generals: "Either you free up those offices or *I resign*" (my emphasis).²⁸ Nobody would expect such a reaction from a dictator like Mobutu. He could have at least threatened to sack his generals as he

²⁷ Wrong, *In the Footsteps*, 255. In DR Congo, these four generals were referred to as the "Inseparable Four." They are all Mobutu's relatives. Nzimbi was his cousin and led the feared DSP (Presidential Special Division), while Baramoto was the head of another feared unit: the "Garde Civile."

²⁸ Wrong, *In the Footsteps of Mr. Kurtz*, 255.

has been consistently doing in the past. But it was clear that the very people whom he trusted had managed to take over, and that power had now shifted from Mobutu to his generals who were ravaging the nation for their own interest. Nzanga actually recalled how these four generals were happy that Mobutu had left Kinshasa. He remembered how they would come and make the president sign decrees, name heads of enterprises for their own benefit. In Gbadolite, Mobutu was spending his days outdoors, focusing his attention on clan disputes, village problems, handing out cash presents. He simply ceased to rule his country and became a tribal chief. It was this power vacuum that hindered any attempts for the reconstruction of the nation during the last years of Mobutu, since top military officials and other top politicians were busy filling their accounts (after the president himself had done the same for years), and preventing any attempt to have a new and responsible government. Here again, Wrong's remark is important:

Yes, Mobutu was brutal, ruthless and greedy. Possessed of the instincts of the neighbourhoud thug, he knew only how to draw out the worst in those around him. Most disastrous was the fact that he lacked the imagination, the sustained vision required to build a coherent state from Belgium's uncertain inheritance. *But if Mobutu traced a Kurtz-like trajectory from high ideals to febrile corruption, he did not pursue that itinerary alone, or unaided.*²⁹ (my emphasis).

²⁹ Wrong, *In the Footsteps of Mr. Kurtz*, 306. It will be important to add Nzanga's remark here: "when history judges my father, it will judge in detail." Nzanga means that all other people who plundered the nation with his father must also be judged.

The same question could have been asked at the beginning of the brief reign of Laurent Désiré Kabila. It is known that in his war against Mobutu's regime, Kabila was heavily helped by Rwanda and Uganda. After he proclaimed himself president of the republic on May 17 1997, he was forced to appoint a Rwandan soldier, James Kabarebe to command what had remained of the Congolese army. He also appointed another man, Bizima Karaha, as minister of foreign affairs. Up to this day, it is difficult to know whether Karaha is a Congolese or a Rwandan, but what is clear is that both Karaha and Kabarebe were more faithful to the Rwandan regime than they were to Kabila and to the Congolese people.³⁰ A serious incident was broadcast over foreign radios a few weeks after Kabila was sworn in as president: Tshisekedi, the respected Congolese opposition leader whom we thought would surely be appointed prime minister in Kabila's government, wanted to see the president and discuss with him some important national issues; but he could not because a group of officials, speaking *Kinyarwanda*, were "protecting" the president and preventing him from meeting with Congolese political and religious leaders. The true reason behind this was that foreigners, mostly Rwandans, had their own agenda in helping Kabila. It is clear that between 1997-98, Kabila had no real power and the country was being led by foreigners. In this situation, it is clear that Kabila's government could reach no significant achievement to help the nation. It is also clear that one would not expect peace in DR Congo led by foreigners who would not easily accept to go back to their own country. However, the difference between Kabila and

³⁰ Ironically, James Kabarebe is today the chief commander of the Rwandan army.

Zedekiah is that Kabila finally realized that he was making a mistake and that he needed to listen to his fellow Congolese rather than to foreigners. This is actually one of the immediate causes of the war that started in August 2nd 1998, and of the president's assassination in January 2001. The conclusion might be that confusion in leadership breaks down the nation, and that during a time of national crisis, there is a need to have a good, wise and strong leader who pays attention to YHWH's recommendation.

To go back to the text, I am now able to affirm that the bad figs referred to in Jer. 24:4-7 were the elites left in Jerusalem (including Zedekiah) who continued with the hope that they would use the temple as their refuge, that their king would work a miracle with his usual *intelligentsia* to defend the people against a new attack by Babylon. Briefly, they still had their usual own way of disobedience, of false securities to follow, and had hope of coming up with new plans that could help them survive without going through God's plan/punishment. Therefore, my argument is that it was this thinking, grounded in falsehood, that YHWH was rejecting in those who remained in Jerusalem after the 597 BC disasters, while looking at the people who had gone to exile as those through whom the new divine plan has started being accomplished.

In verse 6, God announces a series of promises concerning the exiles: first he promises that he would set his eyes upon them for good. The verb used in the portion of this sentence is שמתִּי, the qal, perfect of the verb שימ. It means to set one's eyes upon something. Setting one's eyes upon something can mean anything from simply neutral observation (Gen. 44:21) to looking favorably or with hostility. In this passage, the verb is clearly used with

the second meaning, i.e., to look favorably at the exiles³¹. As Brueggemann puts it, the exiles are now "presented as the object and recipient of God's gracious intervention".³²

Second, God promises to bring the people back to their land. Once again, I posit that the social, historical setting of this promise is exile. With this understanding in mind, my argument is that the promise of going back home was maybe the most important one for the hopeless deportees who were certainly living in utter despair at the moment this prophecy was voiced.

There is a general agreement among scholars that life for the Judean captives was relatively pleasant.³³ But this understanding of exile can become misleading if we ignore that the deportation was first of all YHWH's punishment. Jer. 24:1-7 was uttered during the first years of the deportation. This must have been a time of terrible suffering for the deportees. Adjustment takes time in a foreign land, especially when we know that the exiles left home under foreign military pressure, probably with beating and humiliation. This was a time of war, and from my

³¹ Sam Meier, "D'W", in *NIDOTTE*, 3:1238.

³² Brueggemann, *A Commentary on Jeremiah*, 218.

³³ Wood, *A Survey of Israel's History*, 385-86. He lists five factors to demonstrate that the deportees lived fairly well in Babylon: (1) some of Judah's own institutions (elders, prophets, priests) were maintained (Jer. 29:1); (2) the captives enjoyed freedom of movement in the land (Ezek. 8:1); (3) they had contact with those who remained in Judah (Jer. 29:25; 28:3-4); (4) they certainly had opportunities for employment; (5) they were permitted to live on fine, fertile land (Ezek. 1:1,3; 3:15, 23, etc.). See also Bright, *A History of Israel*, 3rd ed., 345-6; Joseph Rhymer, *The Babylonian Experience. A Way Through the Old Testament: 4 The Exile* (London: Sheed, 1971), 65-66.

experience, I know that nobody could have had time (or could have been allowed) to carry anything with him/her apart from the clothes they had put on when the enemy entered Jerusalem. Moreover, we do not have to confuse this situation with our modern way of living, whereby someone puts his/her money in an account and starts using it wherever he/she finds himself or herself. There was nothing like this.

I remember the situation of Rwandan refugees, especially Hutus, who flooded the eastern part of DR Congo in June 1994. At their arrival in our country, those who had cars and other precious items started selling them at a very derisory price. Some sold their luxurious cars for only two hundred American dollars or less. We have never seen such things before. We could not imagine a good and new motorcycle being sold at only sixty American dollars. Some went ahead to "sell" their daughters to local Congolese people with the expectation that the sons-in-law would help other members of the family with some food and shelter, and even with physical protection from hostile local population overwhelmed by the number of refugees and from the undisciplined and corrupted Congolese army which was abusing helpless refugees. Unfortunately, whatever they were able to sell was not enough to help them survive for a long time. At least, some of these Rwandans who were far from the battle line had time to cross the border with some of their belongings. I imagine that this was not the situation of the Judean deportees escorted by the Babylonian soldiers. From this picture of Rwandan refugees, I can argue that the situation of the Judeans might have been difficult at the beginning of the exile.

Furthermore, another aspect of suffering comes from the fact that Judeans thought of themselves as the people of the most powerful God, living in his temple in Zion. My argument is that, for the elites and the advocates of the long-trusted "official theology," the humiliation of being led captive in a foreign land, far from the temple (and therefore, from YHWH) was agonizing; it was both a moral and spiritual torture. Some would even start thinking that "their" YHWH had been defeated by the Babylonian gods. In addition, economically, these were the people who owned so many things in Jerusalem, who enjoyed good life but who now found themselves far from all these comforts. In this way, I doubt the simplistic argument that tends to state that Judeans enjoyed a good life in exile. This way of thinking needs to be analyzed again in order to discover how life was during the first years of the exile (when this prophecy was probably uttered) and what were the factors that helped them to slowly adjust in this foreign land after some time.³⁴ I then conclude that at the beginning of the deportation, any promise for YHWH's protection and a quick return was the most important thing for them.

One good example in the Bible that shows the plight of refugees is Psalm 137, composed most likely by one who was in Babylon among the exiles.³⁵ The opening stanza of the

³⁴ As one can read in my argument, I recognize that the people of Judah managed to adjust well in exile (can this be a part of YHWH's promise to set his eyes on the exiles?), but it will not be realistic that this adjustment came as easily as some might think. Otherwise, it could not have been a punishment from YHWH.

³⁵ This text might be located in the last deportation of 586 BC. But it does not make any difference, as long as it shows how strong the humiliation of the exiles was.

poem recalls how the Israelites refused to sing their sacred songs in Babylon for the amusement of their conquerors. These were enemies who had destroyed Jerusalem, who had looted and maybe destroyed the Lord's temple, but who then had the effrontery and cruelty of asking the Israelite refugees to sing to them a temple song.³⁶ With this poem, we cannot say that everything was all right for Judeans in exile. It is true that with YHWH's help, they indeed adjusted and most of them got richly blessed. But I would think of Judah in exile (especially at the time this prophecy was uttered) as essentially a community that grieved and longed for homecoming.

In the context of the first years of exile, a promise of home coming such as given in this passage could help the people of Judah to start understanding their situation in a new way, with a new hope. The exile would have been a time of evaluation of what had gone wrong in their thinking, in their action, in their understanding of life as the people of YHWH. However, it seems also that it was not only the understanding of their own situation that mattered, but also their understanding of (the relationship with) YHWH himself. In exile, people had no temple, no future, no

³⁶ I have never yet come across a theology of exile that deals with the whole Bible. Maybe a text like Psalm 137 can open a window to a possibility for such studies and help us to see that many people in the Bible (including the Lord Jesus) went into foreign lands and lived there as exiles or refugees. It is amazing to see that the very last book of the Bible was written by a deportee (Rev.1:9), and that this same book finishes with strong words of hope: "Come, Lord Jesus." Can this hope be understood first of all as the hope of the deportee himself before becoming our hope? Such studies can also help us understand the struggle and hope of those who endure the pain of being forced to leave their land.

government of their own, and no hope at all. They surely must have started realizing the falsehood of their prophets. When all human future and hope are gone, when life is totally out of human control, then people can start looking at YHWH as their only hope. Or to put it another way, in exile the deportees could meet YHWH outside the temple, and outside the "official theology" that has ruined the nation. This new attitude could have helped them to start coming back to YHWH their God before going back home. This is why, YHWH considered them as good figs and promised to set his eyes on them wherever they would be.

As I have already said, it is at a time like this, when one finds oneself in a foreign land as a refugee, when hope is totally gone, when all dependence on human possession, security, and self is gone, when nobody in the world seems to understand your situation, when sometimes death is preferred to life, that God's word starts becoming meaningful in our lives. It is encouraging for some of us to see that YHWH allowed this to happen to his chosen people, and that it was only after this horrible judgment that he promised to intervene and create a new community from among those who were rejected. This is a clear indication and a clear message for some of us in DR Congo who live in agony because of wars and their many consequences that suffering and exile are not the last word in YHWH's agenda for human beings.

Another promise to the exiles is expressed in a group of four verbs: "I will build them up (בְּנִיתִים), and I will not tear them down (לֹא אֲהַרֵס); I will plant them (נִטְעֵתִים), and I will not uproot them (לֹא אֲתוּשׁ)." Most commentators have noticed that the language here is reminiscent of Jeremiah's call narrative in 1:10 (see also

12:14-17; 18:7-9; 31:27-28). These verbs contain the double themes of judgment and restoration, "which according to Jeremiah's call were to be at the heart of his preaching."³⁷ However, it is important to note that in 24:6-7, the emphasis is now on the re-building (not the tearing down and the uprooting). But according to this passage and the whole context of the exile, this community must be rebuilt on the new basis, a new understanding of YHWH, a new relationship in the society.

YHWH's work begins where human beings fail. Here he intervenes at a very crucial moment, when all hope and all means of self-securing have been totally nullified. It is a period of utter despair, and YHWH has to work newness where no human being can see any possibility of this newness.

Verse 7 contains another important promise to the exiles. In this passage, God promises to give them a heart to know him. He adds that the exiles will be his people and that he will be their God, for they will return to him with their whole heart. In comparison with the first three passages analyzed above, this one is problematic and needs to be analyzed in more detail. The need for more emphasis on this verse is also justified by the fact that it is in this sentence that we find the term "to know YHWH," which is the object of this study. There are at least five questions that can guide us in the interpretation of the passage: What is the meaning of *ונתתי להם לב לדעת אתי* "I shall give them a heart to know me" followed by *כי אני יהוה* "for I am YHWH"? What does it mean to know YHWH in this new context? Again, what is the relationship between this sentence and verses 5-6? What is the significance of the

³⁷ Thompson, *Jeremiah*, 508.

formula והירלי לעם ואנכי אהיה להם לאלהים "they shall be to me a people and I shall be to them a God"? Is the subordinate adverbial clause כי ישבו אלי בכל לבם "because they shall return to me with all their heart" the condition for the re-unification of the people with YHWH or is it the condition for the entire restoration process?³⁸

In the sentence ונתתי להם לב לדעת אתי "I shall give them a heart to know me", there are three important elements: the verb ונתתי, the qal, perfect (plus waw consecutive) of the verb נתן (to give) used with two objects: לב (heart-a direct object) and להם (to them, i.e. to the exiles-an indirect object). This verb clearly depicts YHWH as the actor or the giver of the heart (לב) to the deportees. In the Hebrew vision of the world, the heart is the center of wills and actions. According to A. Johnson, "it is here that a man's real character finds its most ready expression."³⁹ On many occasions, Jeremiah condemns the people's failure as the act of their heart: "your own behavior and your own actions have brought all this upon you. This misery of yours is bitter indeed; it has reached your very heart" (4:18); "this people has a rebellious and stubborn heart" (5:23); "Judah's sin is engraved with an iron tool, it is carved with a diamond point, on the tablets of their heart . . ." (17:1).⁴⁰

³⁸ See also Unterman, *From Repentance to Redemption*, 76.

³⁹ A. Johnson, *The Vitality of the Individual in the Thought of Ancient Israel* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1949), 84.

⁴⁰ See also 3:17; 4:14; 7:24; 11:8; 17:9; 18:12; 22:17. Raitt, *A Theology of Exile*, 177.

Raitt argues that this type of saying is a measure of how far Jeremiah has moved toward seeing Judah's problem as intrinsic, and not merely extrinsic. He adds that this is a radical understanding of sin, and that it requires a radical conception of salvation. However, my understanding of the use of heart slightly differs from Raitt's. I see a shift of the use of the word "heart" in Jeremiah. The prophet seems to say that evil is not coming from the heart (as the center of wills and actions), rather it is reaching the heart (see for example 4:18; 17:1). In other words, in the book of Jeremiah, heart becomes the destination instead of the source. There is a kind of shifting sense of this word here. Jeremiah seems to depict a kind of society whereby corruption has become endemic and contagious, spreading in the whole society and reaching and corrupting all the members of the community. This is a social sin, not just an individual one. The heart is here seen as a store where all the dust (here spiritual and social evil) keeps accumulating. The picture is of a system that has worked its way to corrupt the entire society in a way that evil or sin is no longer a matter of individual misconduct but an institutionalized reality spreading all over the nation and reducing everyone to its service. In other words, evil becomes a system, a standard operating procedure and accepted behavior from which one can hardly escape. The consequence is that either one accepts this system and lives in this corruption or resists it and suffers or even dies. It is a society that has lost its sense of gravity, a society built on corruption and totally paralyzed and alienated by this same corruption. Such society has lost the proper sense of her self-worth and is only characterized by triviality. This is what the prophet

Jeremiah would call "falsehood" in this book. And I would add that this is a "national falsehood." As a consequence, it only produces mediocrity and confusion because each one is submitted to the tyranny of the belly, of the accumulation of wealth and material possession for himself, of self-aggrandizement. Such society lacks all the strengths and consistency for building its own future because its members are fighting one against another for selfish interests. In modern terms, it is a society in which trustworthiness and public duty cease to be defined as the norm that should characterize the society. In fact, this reminds us of Jeremiah's description of Judean society in chapter one in this thesis (especially Jer. 9:1-8; 5:1-6; 22:13-19) where everyone becomes a deceiver, a slanderer, an oppressor and where leaders are fighting for their own egoistical interests. Said differently, Judeans have devalued themselves. A social sin is indeed able to reduce a whole community to ruins. It is only here that one understands the exile as a punishment for the ruling class. YHWH has to "clean up" those who created and who were striving to maintain the evil system that ended up corrupting and destroying the entire nation.

This was also the characteristic of the Congolese society under Mobutu, whereby "*tout le monde devient corrupteur et corrompue (sic)*"⁴¹ (everyone becomes corrupting and corrupted). David J. Gould describes this evil of corruption in the Congolese society with the following words,

⁴¹ David J. Gould, "Patrons and Clients: the Role of the Military in Zairian Politics," in Isaac James Mowoe, *The Performance of Soldiers as Governors: African Politics and the African Military* (Washington: University Press of America, 1980), 486.

Indeed, corruption becomes the expected behavior, to the point where the civil servant not on the take is ridiculed by his family and subject to intimidation by those just above and beneath him on the "chain."⁴²

Gould also gives a good illustration of how evil can become contagious. He refers to the example of a young Congolese university graduate who was employed as an economic affairs inspector, and who confided to him how his superiors showed him the way to making \$2000 a month in illegal bribes although his official salary was \$120 monthly. The condition he was given, however, was that he would be offering substantial kickbacks to them.⁴³ This is an excellent illustration of how evil can be transmitted from one person to another, or of how people can be contaminated by the evil in their society. I would add that in the case of my country (and I guess many other African countries), as the example above shows, someone who refuses corruption becomes *de facto* the enemy of those working with him (both under and above him). This is probably how Jeremiah understood the situation in his own nation.

To go back to our text again, the giving of a new heart demonstrates YHWH's will to move very deeply in the transformation of his people (as a community). The punishment alone (in terms of exile) seems not to be enough to help Jeremiah's countrymen understand what has gone wrong. With the punishment, there is a need for supplementary actions and teaching to point the way toward a new beginning. Here, I can draw another analogy with the situation of my country and argue that the war situation in

⁴² Gould, "Patron and Clients," 486.

⁴³ Gould, "Patron and Clients," 486.

which the DR Congo finds itself right now might not be enough to help people automatically understand their situation and abandon evil. The fact is that the war has even become an excuse for many in the country to continue with their evil. While there are signs or at least hope that the war will be over one day, what is needed the most is to teach people, to re-educate them, to show them why the country finds itself where it is now, and what is needed in order to avoid this same situation in the future. In other words, there is a need to use the war situation with its consequences as an opportunity for a teaching that will impact the whole nation and bring out a new society with a new vision for the future. And my estimation is that nobody else can do the job better than the Church and theological institutions because they are able to understand more than any other institution the nature of the human being, the dimension of social evil and what is needed for a profound transformation of human heart. Therefore, there is an urgent need to formulate an appropriate theology and ecclesiology that clearly address these issues of social sin and its consequences for the nation. This would help us to come out of a painful era where Congolese Churches had heavily depended on theologies developed outside the nation and which lacked clear connections with challenges to transform human hearts and minds according to a clear vision of the future, a concern to promote the new spirit and a strong determination to build a new society. In most Churches in my country, teachers and preachers emphasize personal holiness, personal salvation, quiet time for prayers, etc, but they forget that sin can also have a social, national, collective dimension.

For the case of Judah, it needs to be underlined that, by their own effort, the people were unable to restore the relationship with one another and with YHWH. Again, in the context of the Near Eastern society, it did not lie within the vassals' power to institute covenant with their lords after they had broken it. Therefore, what was needed was a new kind of action to help them re-establish that relationship. What is totally new in this passage is that this new action was to be the initiative of YHWH alone, who is described as enabling his people to become more obedient to him and do his will. To be more obedient to YHWH and to do his will is what is being called in this whole thesis "to know YHWH". This is what YHWH found missing in Zedekiah, in most of the kings in Judah, but also in the entire Judean population.

I here put an emphasis on the word "enabling" to underline the change in the prophetic message. So far, the prophet has been urging the people to know YHWH; but now YHWH has intervened to help his rebellious people to know him. In other words, in 24:7, "to know YHWH" becomes God's initiative, and people's repentance is no longer the condition for the restoration of the relationship between YHWH and his people. And this initiative consisted of giving them a new heart. Commenting on this change in YHWH's requirement, Raitt writes what follows:

The weight of evidence seems to be that this is a new hope, a new level of God's promised saving activity. There are many types of expression about the heart in the Old Testament, but this is the first time that God promises to transform the heart of his whole people as part of a new and unconditioned scheme of salvation.⁴⁴

⁴⁴ Raitt, *A Theology of Exile*, 177.

The full result of a transformed heart is the acknowledgement of YHWH by the deportees as their God. This is probably what is expressed in the phrase **כִּי אֲנִי יְהוָה**. The problem with this portion of the sentence is whether **כִּי** should be translated by "that" or by "for/because". Holladay dismisses the sentence as a later addition to the text.⁴⁵ But the context of the sentence that underlines YHWH's authority and Judah's obedient subjugation seems to favor the second possibility. Thus, the fuller sentence would read something like this: "I shall give them a heart to know me, for/because I am the Lord." In this sentence, YHWH must be known (i.e. obeyed) by his people not "that he is God" (the people of Judah did know YHWH theoretically as their God), but "because he is God" who must be revered and feared. Some good illustrations of this argument are Lev.20:7: **וְהִתְקַדְשֶׁתֶם וְהִיִּיתֶם קְדוֹשִׁים כִּי אֲנִי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵיכֶם** "consecrate yourselves and be holy, because I am YHWH, your God." And Lev. 25:17 **וִירֵאתָ מֵאֱלֹהֶיךָ כִּי אֲנִי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵיכֶם** "and you shall fear your God, for/because I am YHWH your God." In these two passages, the phrase **כִּי אֲנִי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵיכֶם** does not simply give information on YHWH but underlines his authority and the necessary subjugation on the part of human being (Israelites) if a relationship is to be maintained between the two parties. In the context of the Ancient Near Eastern treaty, YHWH must be acknowledged as the master (or because he is the master), be given due respect, and be obeyed. In this way, covenant must also be understood as an obligation on the vassal's side. In Jer. 9:23 we also find another text in which the object **אֶתִּי** separates the verb **יָדַע** and the conjunction **כִּי** to emphasize God's authority and the

⁴⁵ Holladay, *Jeremiah 1*, 658.

requirement of obedience to him. Finally, though Ezek. 11:19-20; 36:26, 28 do not have similar sentence constructions (with **כִּי אֲנִי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵיכֶם**), they do emphasize the giving of a new heart in order that the people of Judah might fear/know the Lord.

I conclude this lengthy discussion by noticing with Unterman that there is a dynamic meaning of the concept to "know YHWH" in this sentence. Though the gift of a new heart, resulting in the knowledge of YHWH, is solely God's initiative, the content of that knowledge of YHWH has not changed. In other words, "knowledge of YHWH" will not become "a passive recognition but rather, a concrete activity, the people's obedience to YHWH's commandments."⁴⁶ Said differently, God will give a new heart to his people to know him, and the people will become able to aptly respond to YHWH in obedience, by acknowledging him as the Lord and by obeying his law. Thus, the passage shows a dynamic interaction between YHWH's action and people's response to him in total obedience. This is what to know YHWH means or will mean when the promise will be fulfilled.

Another important element in verse 7 is the promise found in the coordinate clause, **לִי לְעָם וְאֲנִי אֶהְיֶה לָהֶם לֵאלֹהִים וְהָיוּ** "and they shall be for me a people and I will be for them a God." Apart from this passage and 31:31-34, this formula and its variations are used in five other passages in Jeremiah (7:23; 11:4; 31:1; 30:22; 32:38) and in many other books of the Old Testament: Exod. 6:7; Lev. 26:12; Deut. 29:12; Gen. 17:7-8; Ezek. 11:20; 14:11; 36:28; 37:23, 27; etc.

⁴⁶ Unterman, *From Repentance to Redemption*, 80.

It is surprising to find that most contemporary commentators overlook this passage. Holladay⁴⁷, M. Weinfeld⁴⁸, and R. Smend⁴⁹ for example simply state that this formula is taken from legal terminology used in marriage and adoption ceremonies. One good attempt to deal with this sentence comes from Raitt. For him, this formula stands for the re-election of Israel and for perfect communion with YHWH. He holds that the first covenant was something imperfect and full of anxiety. There was always risk of breaking it and creating tension between God and Israel. But the promise here moves beyond the first covenant, it is "the accomplishment of that perfect communion between God and man which was always the ultimate goal of the inward part of covenant."⁵⁰ This is a totally new kind of relationship between YHWH and his people.

The newness of this covenant will be discussed at length in the next section. But there is something important in this passage that must be underlined. It is about a new beginning in the relationship between YHWH and his people. This new beginning is full of assurance and certainty. In other words, God chose to reestablish relationship with his people, not because they deserved his favor, not because they earned anything, not even that they were able to do any good thing to please him, but simply because of God's sovereignty. This is an act of totally unmerited grace. This passage reminds of Ezek. 37, which

⁴⁷ Holladay, *Jeremiah 1*, 262.

⁴⁸ M. Weinfeld, *Deuteronomy and the Deuteronomistic School* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1972), 79-81.

⁴⁹ R. Smend, *Die Bundesformel* (Zurich: EVZ, 1963), 26-27.

⁵⁰ Raitt, *A Theology of Exile*, 198.

describes a valley of dry bones that represented Israel during the deportation. It is a vision of death and lifelessness. But God creates a new thing from the dead nation and chooses to work with them again. What a hope for the people in exile! The same exclamation can be made for the case of my country, especially to hear that God does not look at a socially, politically, spiritually, and economically dead country as the people of this world do. YHWH always sees good things out of the dead ones. This should open the eyes of the Church in my country to realize that YHWH has a plan for his creation and that there is always hope from YHWH's perspective where people perceive only death.

However, I would not be very confident in agreeing with Raitt in talking about a re-election of Israel. From the image of Ezekiel 37, I would rather see a renewal of a relationship with the same people (who were somehow dead because of their disobedience) but who now are totally transformed by YHWH himself. The inner transformation will result in an ideal relationship, without anxiety and mistrust when both sides fulfill all the conditions of the covenant.

The last element in verse 7 is the causal subordinate clause כִּי־שָׁבוּ אֵלַי בְּכָל לֵבָם "because they will return to me with their whole heart." Here again, the most difficult element of the passage is the particle כִּי. Craigie, Kelly and Drinkard are adamant that the כִּי should be rendered by the conditional "if", so the sentence becomes "if they return to me with their whole heart." Their reason for the rejection of כִּי as causal ("for/because") is that,

Such a statement seems to run counter to Jeremiah's theological understanding and would represent an

people to wholeheartedly turn to him, to be transformed, and to walk in obedience to his commandments (despite the dire situation they find themselves in). This is what it means to "know him".

Again, in the context of my country, this passage also shows that there is hope beyond all human despair and judgment. Whatever people might think of a totally dead country, YHWH looks at it differently because he is able to give life to the dead nation already in exile as the text of Jeremiah 24 and the vision in Ezekiel 37 demonstrate. This means that the Congolese Church must continually see a new hope, and be encouraged that we are serving a God who gives new hope to those who are crushed down. But the real challenge that faces the Church in DR Congo with a membership of over 85% of the entire population is to formulate an appropriate theology and ecclesiology that clearly address the issues of social sin and its consequences for the nation. Such theology would look for ways to make the seed of the newness of the Gospel effectively grow in religious, social, political, economic life of every Congolese Christian. In this way, the Church can effectively use the Gospel as a transforming force for national change, for the restructuring of our thinking, our vision and our way of living.

Finally, it is important for Congolese to understand that YHWH is more interested in Israel as a community. He gives a new heart so that it might affect communal life. It is, therefore, important that the Congolese Church considers changing her message to touch both the individual and the communal dimensions of salvation. Such message would powerfully affect both individuals and the nation as a whole.

Knowledge of YHWH in the New Covenant (33:31-34)

Translation

31 Behold, days are coming, says YHWH, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah, 32 not like the covenant which I made with their fathers when I took them out of the land of Egypt, my covenant which they broke, though I was their husband, says YHWH. 33 But this is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says YHWH: I will put my law in their midst, and I will write it upon their heart; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. 34 And no longer shall each man teach his neighbor and each his brother, saying, "Know YHWH", for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, says YHWH; for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.

Historical and Literary Contexts

This passage is located in the section of the book of Jeremiah referred to as "The Little Book of Consolation" (chs.30-33), a term used to indicate that the subject of these four chapters has shifted from Jeremiah's ministry of proclaiming judgment through Babylonian invasions to concern with the future restoration of the people of God beyond the looming exile.

In the words of Brueggemann, the oracle of promise in Jer. 31:31-34 "is the best known and most relied upon of all of Jeremiah's promises."⁵³ However, he also adds the following negative observation concerning the interpretation of the same passage:

⁵³ Brueggemann, *A Commentary on Jeremiah*, 291.

Interpretation

Promise of a New Covenant (31:31-32)

The passage is introduced by the phrase הנה ימים באים "behold days are coming." This passage turns the hearers' mind toward the future, toward what YHWH plans to do for his people after the current disastrous events.

Carroll rightly recognizes that the whole passage is full of elements alien to the Jeremianic core. Unfortunately, this led him to dismiss the whole passage as non-Jeremianic.⁶¹ Probably what Carroll did not perceive is the use of the adjective חדשה "new", qualifying the word covenant in the sentence. This is truly a new element that posits a deep discontinuity between the past and the future, and draws a straight line between the first part of Jeremiah's ministry (before the fall of Jerusalem) and the second part (after the fall and during the exile).

Another new element concerning this covenant is that it includes both Israel and Judah ("I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah"). Wisser thinks, after Bright, that the phrase ואת־בית יהודה "and the house of Judah" is a late addition to avoid a misunderstanding that in this passage, the prophet is only referring to the northern kingdom by analogy to the poetic passages in Jeremiah's prophecy that deal only with

⁶¹ Carroll, *From Chaos to Covenant*, 217. I have already stated elsewhere that Carroll does not believe in a historical Jeremiah.

Judah.⁶² For Hans W. Wolff, the whole saying about the new covenant was initially promised to Israel and not to Judah, and that it was only after 586 BC that the promise given to Israel was applied also to the house of Judah by a new prophetic voice.⁶³

It is actually interesting to realize that God is still speaking about the two kingdoms even in the passage concerning the new covenant. It might also be true that the passage is a late editorial addition. But my argument will take another route and posit that the prophet might have talked about the two kingdoms here and then about only one kingdom in verse 33 ("and this is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel...") to signify that the past division between them (as the characteristic of the people during the time of the old covenant) is over and that the new thing he is going to make also concerns the unification of their divided communities. In other words, a literary reading and a stylistic focus on verses 31-34 can help us to see how God is moving from two kingdoms (v.32) to only one (v.33).

Therefore, God's plan for his people is that they might live in unity. The division of Israel into two kingdoms was not what God wanted, though he allowed it as part of his punishment of his recalcitrant people. I have already underlined that sin brings disruption/division in the community, but when God intervenes to bring change in the heart of his people, this change also affects the relationship at both individual and public level, and re-

⁶² Wisser, *Jérémie, Critique de la Vie Sociale*, 221.

⁶³ Hans W. Wolff, *Confrontations with Prophets* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983), 51.

creates unity. This idea of unity is very important for me and for my fellow Congolese who are living in a deeply divided nation. In the case of Israel, when God brings in the promised change, it will affect the relationships in the society and re-create a united and perfect kingdom. In other words, the new covenant will create a transformed society. By way of implication, I will carefully jump into the New Testament (and my own) context and claim that the transformation that should have been brought by Jesus Christ to millions of Congolese who claim to be Christians should also have positively affected their relationships with one another (toward unity) and with God. Said differently, we cannot claim to be Christians and not be able to live together in a harmonious nation. If this is not happening, then we should seriously question our understanding of the word/will of God. In the church, our preaching, our ecclesiology and our Christianity should not remain theoretical but they should have a clear and measurable social impact on the community where we are living and the whole nation. This point will be dealt with in detail in the interpretation of verse 33.

Commenting on verse 32, Thompson argues that the covenant believed to have been inaugurated between YHWH and his people at Sinai (Exod.19: 1-24) serves as a background to the announcement of this new one.⁶⁴ There are two relative clauses introduced by וְשֵׁנִי in this verse, and each is used to qualify the word (old/first) "covenant". The same clauses draw a strong contrast between the two parties that signed the וְבְרִית : on the one side, there was YHWH, the

⁶⁴ Thompson, *Jeremiah*, 580.

faithful **בעל** "master/husband",⁶⁵ and on the other side, there was Israel, the unfaithful vassal. This contrast is also underlined by the use of the pronouns "I" and "they/their".

In short, the passage highlights the fact that the first covenant has been broken. As a consequence, the faulty party had undergone the necessary sanction. In fact, the mention of Egypt in this passage rightly points out that unfaithfulness was a characteristic of Israel's history since its earliest days (since the deliverance from Egypt: Deut. 9:6-21; Judg. 2:1-3, 20), and that the whole history of Israel is one of breaking the covenant and even going after other gods. Carroll is right when, commenting on this passage, he states: "If ever an institution was created which was a complete failure from the beginning it must be the deuteronomistic covenant!"⁶⁶ A brief intertextual reading of some prophets will demonstrate this failure of the people of Israel in keeping the covenant: "You are not my people and I am not your God" (Hos. 1:9); or "sons have I reared and brought up, but they have rebelled against me (Isa. 1:8)"; "they have turned back to the iniquities of their forefathers, who refused to hear my

⁶⁵ The word **בעל** means "husband" or "lord". According to William T. Koopmans ("**בעל**," in *NIDOTTE*, I: 683), the imagery of **בעל** as husband "not only implies the ownership and authority that God has over his people, but God in his perfection exemplifies those characteristics of love, fidelity, and goodness that ideally ought to be evident from every husband." His conclusion is that the term **בעל** (Jer. 31:32) must not be mistaken to convey a sense of harshness but that the Old Testament imagery anticipates the New Testament fulfillment of Christ as the loving, sacrificial Lord of his bride, the church (Eph. 5:25-27).

⁶⁶ Carroll, *From Chaos to Covenant*, 217.

words; they have gone after other gods to serve them" (Jer. 11:10). Therefore, there was a need for a new covenant. But the sentence "not like the covenant which I made with their fathers (...) my covenant which they broke" clearly implies that the new covenant will be different from the first one and unbreakable.

Substance of the New Covenant (vv.33-34)

Verse 33 starts with the disjunctive כִּי (but), which is used to contrast the old and new covenants. The aspect of the contrast underlined here is in their mode of reception. The sentence נתתי את תורתִי בקרבם ועל לבם אכתובה "I will set my torah within them and I will write it on their heart" describes the method by which the torah will be transmitted from YHWH to Israel. Thompson rightly argues that heart here equals the will and mind.⁶⁷ The old covenant was written on something external like stone (Exod. 31:18; 34:28-29; Deut. 4:13; 5:22) or a book (Exod. 24:7), but the new one will need to be inward, that is, in will and mind. The ancient covenant was transmitted through an intermediary (Moses) and subsequently mediated through the prophets and the priests. But the new one will be transmitted directly into the heart of the people. Brueggemann understands the transforming power of the new covenant in this way:

The commandments will not be an external rule which invites hostility, but now will be an embraced, internal identity-giving mark, so that obeying will be as normal and as readily accepted as breathing and eating. Israel will practice obedience because it

⁶⁷ Thompson, *Jeremiah*, 581.

belongs to Israel's character to live in this way. All inclination to resist, refuse, or disobey will have evaporated, because the members of the new community of covenant are transformed people who have rightly inclined hearts. There will be easy and ready community between God and reconstituted Israel.⁶⁸ Unterman thinks of it as "an internal act, which takes place within the recipient and transforms the torah into an organic part of the individual."⁶⁹ Andrew G. Shead describes it as God's palimpsest, his over-writing an original sinful text with his words.⁷⁰ McKane calls it "a deep symbiosis of Divine Law (תורה) and human understanding of it..."⁷¹ Wolff describes it as a heart transplant: "the heart of stone which is impervious to impressions will be surgically removed, and a new heart of flesh, living and functioning, will be implanted instead."⁷²

Each description and explanation above, tries to say something about the nature of this new covenant, but I must confess that we are still speculating on what it will really look like. Nevertheless, there are two important points to be underlined in this passage:

Firstly, in Jeremiah 17:1, we read: "the sin of Judah is written with an iron stylus, engraved with a stylus point of hard stone." This statement describes the nature of the Judean society: deeply corrupted and impossible to

⁶⁸ Brueggemann, *A Commentary on Jeremiah*, 293.

⁶⁹ Unterman, *From Repentance to Redemption*, 98.

⁷⁰ Andrew G. Shead, "The New Covenant and Pauline Hermeneutics," in Peter Bolt & Mark Thompson (eds.), *The Gospel to the Nations: Perspectives on Paul's Mission* (London: IVP, 2000), 38.

⁷¹ McKane, *Jeremiah 2*, 820.

⁷² Wolff, *Confrontations with Prophets*, 55.

change. Now, YHWH will have to "surgically" (to repeat Wolff's expression) remove this unbelieving heart and replace it with a new one, which will enable a new relationship with one another in the community and a new life with YHWH himself (Jer. 31:31-34). There are two voices but also two kinds of societies described in these two passages: one is a society characterized by a deep corruption and a total decay, with no hope of change (Jer. 17:1). This passage actually summarizes our first three chapters where we saw the nation depicted as an exhausted country, heading toward its total dissolution, with all the symptoms of vitality disappearing one after another, until nothing is left but coldness, darkness, and corruption. With the exile in 586 BC, Judah did reach this dissolution. The other voice (31:31-34) is that of newness, where we see Judah renewed after its total exhaustion and dissolution. In other words, there is the voice of relinquishment of the old society that pretends autonomy, and that of the reception of a new one created by God and characterized by its obedience to YHWH. The old society is incarnated in the political claims of the Davidic dynasty, the ritual pretensions of the Jerusalem priesthood and temple, the public arrangements of power, practiced and trusted in the royal temple system of Jerusalem with its official theology.⁷³

After the relinquishment of this old society, YHWH's people are promised a new mode of social existence, a new society that is trustfully obedient to the norm of the

⁷³ See a good discussion in Brueggemann, *Hopeful Imagination*, 5.

covenant. Brueggemann again, summarizes the two worlds with these words:

The world is perceived under the twin aspects of relinquishment and receiving. That perception of reality is based in an unshakeable theological conviction: God's powerful governance is displacing the present idolatrous order of public life and is generating a new order that befits God's will for the world. This theological conviction is not rooted in political observation, economic analysis, or cultural yearning. It is rooted decisively in the notion of who God is and what God wills.⁷⁴

Secondly, as in 24:4-7, the writing of the torah will not be done on the hearts of scattered individuals. In fact, in Hebrew, the word heart in verse 33 is in singular with a plural pronoun⁷⁵ to signify that it will be a community matter, a corporate will and mind. Shead sees in this corporate will and mind the universality of the new covenant.⁷⁶ His argument can easily be judged as a rush to take this text out of its context and let it hastily speak for the New Testament community. Yet, different elements in the passage emphasize the fact that the writing of the torah in the heart will enable relationships that will create a harmonious community.

⁷⁴ Brueggemann, *Hopeful Imagination*, 4. However, to this quotation we need to add that the new order will necessary have an impact on both political, economic, cultural and religious aspect once Israelites return to their land. In other words, what happens in the heart must have socio-political (cultural) and religious effects.

⁷⁵ Among the works consulted for this thesis, only Holladay (*Jeremiah 2*, 198) and Shead ("The New Covenant and Pauline Hermeneutics") have noticed it; while all others rendered the word "heart" in plural.

⁷⁶ Shead, "The New Covenant and Pauline Hermeneutics", 38.

YHWH states that after the writing of the torah within the heart of Israel, he will become their God and they will become his people. This statement is reminiscent of the end of verse 32 that speaks of Israel breaking the covenant. Thus, in the covenantal language and in the context of Ancient Near Eastern society, the fact that one of the two partners broke the covenant put an end to the relationship. In this way, and according to the Near Eastern legal regulations, the people did cease to be YHWH's people (though YHWH himself remained faithful and did not stop being their master).⁷⁷ Thus, what was needed was the restoration of the relationship, as it ought to have been. Accordingly, the new covenant is about the restoration of a broken covenant, it is about the restoration of relationship between YHWH and his people. This passage particularly reminds us of the third chapter of this thesis where we also argued that the problem was a broken relationship between YHWH and his people with reference to the first three commandments in the Decalogue.

The writing of the torah in the heart will create solidarity in the community. Verse 34 states: "no longer they shall teach, each man his neighbor and each man his

⁷⁷ This goes beyond the ordinary understanding of the covenantal relationship in Ancient Near Eastern society. In that society, when one party broke the covenant, the relationship ceased to exist. But YHWH who called his people into existence would not stop being their God though they were no longer his people (since they put an end to the right relationship). This is why, we see him initiating a new relationship. In fact it is difficult to think of YHWH as an equal partner in the treaty. The fact is that he is God and consequently, he cannot be bound by human convention as Canaanites gods were. He is free to act as he wants and to change the course of history whenever he wants it.

brother." In the book of Jeremiah, all references to the neighbor and brother are negative. It is about telling lies, deceit, enslavement and perversion of YHWH's word: "Be on your guard each one against his fellow, and put no trust in any brother; for every brother is a deceiver and every friend a slanderer. Each man trifles his neighbor . . ." (9:3-8); "... but you turned about and profaned my name, and have taken back every one of you his male and female slaves, whom he had set free, to where they wished, and have compelled them once more to be your bondmen and bondwomen" (34:15-16). But 31:34 talks about a learning community, a transformed community, a community that is willing to know the Lord's way together and to grow together, though there will be no need of teaching one another about YHWH's instruction. This actually denotes an ideal community that YHWH wanted to create with Israel.

The passage, understood this way, speaks loudly to some of us coming from areas terribly affected by ethnic conflicts and clashes where even Christians are finding it very hard to live together as God's children. In my area, solidarity is mostly determined by ethnic origin, even among Christians. It is not uncommon to see some Christians traveling a long distance on Sundays in search of Churches led by pastors belonging to their ethnic group. In this way, several churches in my area are known as ethnic Churches. Many of them are breaking into pieces, and the causes of the division are mostly related to tribalism. Christian ministry becomes a rivalry between ethnic groups rather than collaboration. Sometimes, this rivalry is transformed into real clashes between members of different Churches. Even elections to Church offices have been terribly politicized. At times people use poison to

eliminate other Church leaders belonging to a rival ethnic group. It also happens that Christians as well as non-Christians, belonging to the same ethnic group, meet at night to make strategic plans for maintaining some of them in some leadership positions in the Church/denomination or for countering the election of another leader who does not belong to their own ethnic group. In this way, being chosen in Church leadership in some of our Churches does not very often reflect one's spiritual qualities, but it reflects the influence of different ethnic groups competing in the Church or the denomination. This is why leadership quality is often very low in most of our Churches and denominations. Jer. 31:33-34 clearly challenges us to live together and grow together as a community of faith. Here again, the restored relationship with YHWH is to be taken in an ethical sense in terms of a harmonious life in the community. Ethnicity or tribalism practiced in our Churches is a clear sign that something is still wrong with our Christianity.

As the result of the writing of the torah in their heart "they shall all know me." In this passage, the expression "to know YHWH" is to be understood in its technical use. It denotes a mutual legal recognition between YHWH as suzerain (Lord) and the Israelite community as servant after all conditions for the treaty have been met. In the Near Eastern context, this is an ideal relationship between the suzerain and his obedient vassal whereby, the vassal fulfills all the requirements given by his master and the latter provides necessary care and protection for his subject (see chapter two). In the context of the Old Testament, it also means that Israel

will perfectly know YHWH's will and will obey his law now written on their heart.

There has been a debate as to what the word torah refers to in this passage. G. Osborn⁷⁸ and W. D. Davies⁷⁹ reject the idea that the torah of the new covenant will be the same as the one given at Sinai. Duhm⁸⁰ accepts that in this passage, the word torah does designate the same law that was first given to Israelites at Sinai. However, for him this also means that verse 34 is to be considered as the work of a late editor (and rejected) because the idea of legalism contained in the law cannot fit in the concept of the new covenant as described in verses 31-34. I am inclined to disagree with both Osborn, Davies and Duhm. My understanding is that the word torah is indeed used in the same sense as the law in the old covenant, and that this use does not necessarily compel us to consider verse 34 as non-Jeremianic. It seems to me that our problem today is to think of the torah simply and solely in terms of legalism instead of considering it as YHWH's commandment in general.⁸¹ To my estimation, Dennis R. Bratcher is among the

⁷⁸ G. Osborn, *Torah in the Old Testament*, 155.

⁷⁹ W.D. Davies, *Torah in the Messianic Age and/or the World to Come* (JBL Monograph Series [1952], 26-28.

⁸⁰ Quoted by Unterman, *From Repentance to Covenant*, 99.

⁸¹ So also Unterman, *From Repentance to Covenant*, 100; W. J. Harrelson, "Torah," in *IDB*, 4:673b; B. Lindars, "Torah in Deuteronomy", eds. P.R. Ackroyd and B. Lindars, *Words and Meanings* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968), 117-36; J.L. May, *Hosea* (OTL, London: SCM, 1969), (on Hos.4: 6). My own assertion is that the Decalogue with its proposal for a just society (justice with God and justice with one another) should be included in whatever we understand by the word torah as YHWH's instruction. In

few who have found a good definition of the תורה that might fit this context:

... the OT concept of torah is a lifestyle of nurtured and nurturing relationship with God and others, subsuming every facet of life to a dynamic (growing) and joyful acknowledgment of God as supreme Sovereign and Lord of the earth. Torah is not primarily a book to obey or rules to follow; it is a path of walk, a way of life to lead. And yet that walk must authentically reflect the character of the God who has called people to walk it.⁸²

Therefore, according to Bratcher, torah is "primarily a relational concept, providing the community of faith an anchor point in God's grace from which it can live out its identity as the people of God."⁸³ Thus, my argument is that what will be different in the new covenant is not the torah but the way the restored community will be enabled to internalize it and then to externalize it in social forms that reflects YHWH's identity and grace. I understand the internalization of the torah in the community of the new covenant as the value principles that will structure the people's thought, guide their action, and form their worldview. In other words, torah should have become an Israelite culture, their way of daily life in all its aspects. In fact, this is what is needed even for our society. If we want change in our nations, we must let Christian principles and values guide our thinking, our

fact, it will not be wrong to see the Decalogue as a "summary" of that divine instruction.

⁸² Dennis R. Bratcher, "Torah as Holiness: Old Testament 'Law' as Response to Divine Grace" in *Christian Resource Institute*, 2002. Available from <http://www.cresourcei.org/torahholiness.html> >

⁸³ Bratcher, "Torah as holiness," 2.

mentality and our action. Christian prayers should not remain simple recitation, and songs in our Churches should lead us to our inner selves to guide our daily activity and thinking. In brief, our vision must be in conformity with biblical values. Whatever we do as Christians must reflect our Christian value. This is how torah is to be understood in the context of the new covenant, and this is what to know YHWH means.

The new community will also be characterized by a common, shared access to the "knowledge" of the torah, which evidences a fundamental egalitarian commitment in the community. The text states that all (כולם) of them shall know YHWH in the same way. Put differently, knowledge will not simply be the privilege of the powerful and the rich as it was in the Israel of the old covenant, and as it is in most of our societies today. Commenting on this passage, Brueggemann writes,

On the crucial matter of connection to God, the least and the greatest stand on equal footing. No one has superior, elitist access, and no one lacks what is required. All share fully in the new relation. All know the story, all accept the sovereignty, and all embrace the commands.⁸⁴

This paragraph makes a lot of sense to me, especially when I am looking at it from my Congolese perspective. People who have power know that knowledge is indeed power. Their children attend the best universities outside the country, whereas poor citizens have no option but to send theirs to local universities with very poor infrastructure, and where they are taught by hungry professors (in fact, nowadays only a few Congolese have access to post-secondary studies, mainly because of war, poverty and corruption). The

⁸⁴ Brueggemann, *A Commentary on Jeremiah*, 294.

powerful know that by giving the best education to their children, these same children will come back to replace them and in that way, they will maintain the corrupted system in the nation. Knowledge is therefore the privilege of a few people in the land. In the church also, most of those who get scholarships for higher theological education are the bishops' and superintendents' children or their relatives. The reason is that they are expected to go back and replace their parents to perpetuate their control in the church administration. And very often, this is a source of tension and even division in the church. But in the community of the new covenant, knowledge will be democratized. The church should follow this example in empowering all church members, where possible, for the ministry. But who does not know that democratizing knowledge in the community is a threat to all who preside over the establishment?

The last statement in verse 34 concerning YHWH's forgiveness is introduced by the conjunction 'D ("for"), in the sentence "for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more." The problem with this statement is that it comes at the end of the section, after the prophet had already described the character of the new community under the covenant. The logic would suggest that the issue of forgiveness be dealt with before the people enter the new covenant (i.e., a new relationship) with YHWH. The question then becomes: should the phrase "for I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more" be restricted to the actions described in verse 33 and a section of verse 34 as a once-for-all-forgiveness, or should it mean that forgiveness is an ongoing feature of the new covenant? In other words, will YHWH forgive the

iniquity of his people before he writes his torah on their heart and before they come to know him, or will forgiveness of iniquity be a long process during the period of the new covenant? It seems to me that forgiveness has to come prior to the events described in verses 31-34 concerning the new covenant. It is in fact this forgiveness that will allow newness in the relationship. Put differently, the forgiveness spoken about in this passage will probably take place after judgment and before the initiation of the new relationship between YHWH and his people. In this way, the new community will always remember that they belong to YHWH by grace because of forgiveness. In other words, the new covenant community is a forgiven community. Wolff rightly claims that the forgiveness of sin is the bedrock and the cornerstone of the new covenant.⁸⁵

The concept of a forgiven community is important for the church today, especially for our people in DR Congo. We are in the church because we are a forgiven people. In the same way, what should characterize us in the church is the practice of forgiveness. This might mean that our attitude toward each other should not be a resentful, careful management of old hurts but an authentic yielding of the past for hope. By forgiving one another, and making peace with one another, we will be able to demonstrate that we truly belong to the new community of the redeemed people, redemption that we got through the blood of Jesus, which sealed the beginning of the new covenant (Lk 22:20; I Cor 11: 25). Understood this way, all Christians should be aware of the fact that they are both members of a forgiven and a forgiving community.

⁸⁵ Wolff, *Confrontations with Prophets*, 59-60.

For most of us, the reality of being a forgiving community sounds like something impossible to achieve, even for genuine Christians. Here is one of the reasons: At least 60,000 people have been savagely killed in my province alone since 1998.⁸⁶ This is mainly a result of ethnic conflicts. Some politicians belonging to mainly two rival ethnic groups in our area are recruiting, training and arming thousands of young people to constitute ethnic militia. The primary aim is to protect the tribe against repeated attacks by the other rival tribe, since there is no government controlling the area. But foreign armies occupying our land, mainly Ugandans, two other factions of rebels controlling our area, and other politicians have used these militia to fight against one another and they have managed to incite them to destroy even other ethnic groups that do not have problems with them. This has created indescribable sufferings and terrible unrest in the area. As I am writing these lines, I have received news that at least 60% of the population has left Bunia (the headquarter of my district) and have gone to seek refuge in other areas; at least 2000 members of two ethnic groups were brutally killed by one of these ethnic militia, on September 5, 2002. Eleven pastors (with their families) and around 550 members of our denomination got killed that day. This is only one example of what is happening. What does it mean for those who escaped these killings to worship with members of the other ethnic group whose militia entered their villages to kill them? Will forgiveness be possible? How long will it take for people to start forgiving one

⁸⁶ Amnesty International, "UN Must Take Urgent Steps to Prevent Genocide." Available from <http://allafrica.com/stories/200210170156>).

another? How affected is the church in this situation? Will the church be able to take the challenge and help Christians to forgive one another and remember that we are a forgiven community and must remain a forgiving community? What kind of nurturing should be adopted to help Christians live together as a forgiven community? This is actually a shaking ground for the Church, mainly in my area,⁸⁷ and this is the challenge ahead of us. What makes the whole matter worse is that, in the process of national reconciliation and re-unification that has now started in some provinces of my country, the tendency is to ask people to forget the past, to integrate those militia in the national army without judging them for the wrong they have done. Some of the politicians who have created all these sufferings are now in Kinshasa, the capital city, negotiating with the central government and seeking ministerial posts. This is why they always tend to establish a false reconciliation by trying to deal with the history of violence in our area by suppressing its memory. My understanding is that this is a very wrong way of dealing with the problem of violence. There can be no reconciliation without justice. Robert J. Schreiter agrees with me when he says,

The first form of false reconciliation tries to deal with a history of violence by suppressing its memory. By not adverting to the fact that violence has taken place, this approach is supposed to put the violent history behind us and allow us to begin afresh. Not surprisingly, this kind of reconciliation is often called for by the very perpetrators of violence who, either having seen what they have done or having

⁸⁷ I guess that this is the same challenge that the Church is facing in Rwanda, Angola, Congo-Brazaville and many others countries that have experienced many years of civil wars.

realized the potential consequences of their actions, want to get on to a new and different situation. They want the victims of violence to let bygones be bygones and exercise a Christian forgiveness. While reconciliation as a hasty peace bears a superficial resemblance to Christian reconciliation, it is actually quite far from it.⁸⁸

As Schreiter notices, the problem with this kind of reconciliation is that it is called for by the same people who have planned this violence. In this way, this same violence tends to become a cycle, a system. From my experience, there are at least three reasons why the Church must reject this kind of hasty reconciliation: (1) it forgets the suffering of the victims; (2) it refuses to uncover and confront the causes of the suffering; (3) it does not take the violence away, but it only postpones it. Finally,

Reconciliation involves a fundamental repair to human lives, especially to the lives of those who have suffered. That repair takes time-time that can make the participants feel insecure, but necessary time nonetheless for beginning a new life.⁸⁹

It is here that the Church in my area can play a great role of reconciliation. This statement gives way to more questions. Which church? Has not the church herself been negatively affected in one way or another by the conflict? In other words, has not the church in my area become part of the problem? I noted somewhere in this thesis (chapter

⁸⁸ Robert J. Schreiter, *Reconciliation: Mission & Ministry in a Changing Social Order* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1992), 19. See also Robert J. Schreiter, *The Ministry of Reconciliation: Spirituality & Strategies* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1998), especially the second part entitled: elements of a strategy for reconciliation (pp.105-130).

⁸⁹ Schreiter, *Reconciliation: Mission & Ministry*, 21.

two), how a local chief took one of the bishops to court for supporting tribal militia belonging to his ethnic group. I also noted how the Vatican had to decommission the Catholic bishop of Bunia diocese for his probable involvement in the bloody ethnic conflict in my area. These two cases might indicate that some churches in my area might not be used as instrument of change in the society. However, I also must recognize that these Churches have resources (theological, social, etc.) for enabling reconciliation, but only after they have recognized and acknowledged that they too are part of the problem.

Finally, what to do in the process of reconciliation very much depends on the nature of the conflict and the kind of people we are dealing with. This means that it will be difficult to draw a general strategy for reconciliation that would work everywhere. However, what is important for the Church in DR Congo is that it must fight against a Christianity of ignorance in all its forms and help Christians to understand salvation in Christ from a new perspective of total transformation of hearts and mind for the building of a new and peaceful society. The Church must also help Congolese Christians and the entire nation to stop living in a tribal false self-conscious that promote only division, death, privatization of Churches and Christian denominations. Instead, there is a need to build a social order organized spiritually in creative solidarity and liberating love in the image of Christ himself. This is the new community that can bring hope of renewal in our nation.

I will summarize this passage with reference to the knowledge of YHWH in five points:

(1) Knowledge of God in Jer. 31:31-34 is synonymous with the perfect knowledge and practice of the torah. This torah will be written on people's heart and then be externalized in social practices.

(2) This knowledge of YHWH will be a corporate knowledge, given to the whole community, to affect relationship between the people and their God and between one another. In relationship with God, knowledge will create a faithfulness that was missing in the old covenant. As a result, the whole community will know YHWH, "from the least of them to the greatest." The community that knows YHWH is also the one that lives in perfect internal harmony. This is the kind of the society that YHWH wants to create on earth.

(4) This knowledge of YHWH will also be democratized, i.e., every member will know the Lord. It will no longer be the privilege of the powerful or the rich alone who use their knowledge to overpower others. Instead, the community of the new covenant will be a learning community, a community that strives to grow together in the knowledge of YHWH, i.e., in being right with God and with one another.

(5) In my Congolese context, knowledge of YHWH must create unity, love, forgiveness and the desire to live together and grow together. In other words, we must learn to go beyond sacralizing our tribe and our selfish interests and strive to create a harmonious community. Our claim that we know YHWH while we are still killing one another and while we are still filled with hatred for one another is a lie. This is simply a sign that our heart has not yet been transformed and that we have not yet known the Lord. This point is also an invitation to all, even those who have been victims of violence, to demonstrate that we are able

to forgive those who have wronged us. This is the power of Christian life, "the power of forgiveness over retaliation, of suffering over violence, of love over hostility, of humble service over domination."⁹⁰

Summary

I have already defined the term "to know YHWH" at the end of each of the two passages. What remains is a short summary in terms of implications for my context.

(1) Exile was intended to help the people of Judah to correct their falsehood and come back to the right knowledge of YHWH. In this sense, suffering and exile were a liberating experience for them. In the same way, God might not be looking at the war situation in my country as we see it. From God's perspective, these wars and sufferings might be used to liberate us from our idolatrous practices, our corruption beyond all human correction, our violence, our deep hatred for one another, our selfishness, and our ethnic divisions. Sin does bring disaster like exile and war! This does not sound very good for myself and for many of us, but according to Jeremiah, it does not have to. This liberation from evil and the awareness that YHWH expects faithfulness, love, forgiveness, and unity from each one of us as a community is what Jeremiah is calling to know YHWH.

(2) Exile probably created brokenness in the people of God. Their conception of God must have totally changed and YHWH could not continue to be taken for granted. God could not

⁹⁰ Bediako, "De-Sacralization and Democratization," 9.

continue to be held captive in Zion; he was able to send his people away and meet them outside the temple, after nullifying their falsehood. The lesson here is that it is a wrong theology which claims to control YHWH instead of letting him control us. Our situation in DR Congo looks very much like the Israelite exile. In fact, millions of Congolese people are literally living outside their country as a result of war in their land. Few have managed to adjust well in foreign lands, but others are still suffering in different refugee camps, and still others are being used and abused as slaves or housemaids in different places. These years of war and destruction should help us to change our understanding of God and view him as the one who would not endlessly tolerate our evil. But not everybody sees it this way. Some continue to condemn God as the one who allowed this suffering on innocent people. Still others continue to condemn Congolese political leaders who were too corrupted and finally brought this calamity on the nation. I guess that this was the same attitude with some of the Judeans who were deported. However, according to Jeremiah, the most important step for us is not to condemn God, but to question our past in terms of our relationship with one another as a community (be it in the Church or in different communities), and in terms of our relationship with God himself. This is why I think that the Church must work hard to help Congolese people understand that we are all responsible in one way or another of what happened and that we now must work together to bring in change for a better Congo that knows (fears) YHWH.

(3) Jeremiah's preaching to the exiles was a kind of pastoral care to encourage them to continue in the way of

YHWH even as deportees; to help them learn that God's love was not absent when events spoke judgment. Exile is an extremely discouraging event and the exiles needed to see God as present as much in punishment as in times when things were positive. What this means for me is that the Church must care for the people during a trying time. Many people would not understand why YHWH has forsaken them in terms of not stopping the war and protecting their relatives who were/are victims of this same war, but it needs strong, mature Christians who can teach the nation that all ruin, and loss, and national decay are due to the fact that we have forgotten YHWH, or that we have adopted a knowledge of him which is not adequate, but that in our suffering God is not absent, though it is difficult to realize this.

(4) Forgiveness creates newness in the lives of people and a transformation of their heart to know YHWH and serve him with a genuine mind. Members of a forgiven community know YHWH (obey his commandments) who has forgiven them and they make every effort to forgive one another. This is the teaching that the Church in Congo and everywhere in Africa should promote, especially after so many people have died as a consequence of war and ethnic clashes. As Christians, we belong to the new covenant community; a community that is called forth by YHWH himself and that should be characterized by love for one another and forgiveness for one another as YHWH himself has forgiven us through Christ. The history of my country teaches me that forgiveness and true love for one another are the most lacking ingredients to help Congolese live together. It is unfortunate that the Church itself is badly divided on an ethnic basis. Therefore, there is an urgent need to raise strong

Christian leaders with a new vision for unity, forgiveness, and selflessness.

(5) Our covenantal hope does not need to be kept only in the believing community but must be articulated in the entire society that we are serving. Since we know for sure that this world will one day be liberated to become a community that covenants with God, that lives in peace, that distributes its produce (including knowledge) equally, that values all its members, that rejects all kind of acts which destroys unity, and that forgives one another, there is an urgent need for the Church in Congo to articulate, anticipate and practice the transformation that is sure to come. Then our prayer "let your Kingdom come on earth" will become a true expectation for all believers. This expectation would contaminate the whole Congolese society. Then we will live in a different Congo while waiting for the fulfillment of the new covenant!

CHAPTER 6

A SUMMARY OF THE USE AND MEANING OF ידע את־יהוה IN JEREMIAH

This chapter is a summary of the four preceding chapters. It seeks to put together and clarify two particular aspects of my thesis: how the term ידע את־יהוה is used in the whole book of Jeremiah and the meaning of this term according to the eight passages analyzed in the four chapters. These aspects have already been analyzed in the interpretation of the eight passages, but the importance of this chapter is that it puts all the different usages of the term ידע את־יהוה together and seeks to understand both the form of its appearance and its meaning. The first aspect of this study will be an intertextual interaction between the eight passages already dealt with in this thesis in order to discover how Jeremiah used the expression ידע את־יהוה. The second part will try to respond to the main question asked at the beginning of this thesis concerning the proper understanding of the term ידע את־יהוה.

The Use of ידע את־יהוה in Jeremiah

The Forms of Occurrence

This section attempts to analyze different forms of the term ידע את־יהוה as they are used in the eight passages interpreted in the preceding chapters.

In Jeremiah 4:19-22, the term אֹתִי לֹא יָדְעוּ "me, they do not know" is used in verse 22, at the end of the prophet's groaning (vv.19-21) and immediately before the announcement

of the coming disaster because of Judah's disobedience (vv.23-31).

In 5:1-6, the forms **לא ידעו דרך יהוה** "they do not know the way of YHWH" in verse 4, and **כי המה ידעו דרך יהוה** "for they know the way of YHWH" in verse 5 are used after a failure to find someone who does justice and who is honest (v.1), and after noticing that everybody in Jerusalem lives by **שקר** (v.2). The second form in verse 5 occurs immediately before verse 6 in which the prophet issues a severe judgment against sinful Judeans. This judgment is introduced by the particle **עליכן** "therefore" at the beginning of verse 6.

In 9:1-8, **ואותי לא ידעו** "and me, they do not know" is found in verse 2, and **מאנו דעת אותי** "they refuse to know me" is used in verse 5. In both passages, they immediately come after long lists of Jerusalem's sins. **מאנו דעת אותי** in particular, immediately precedes the judgment against Israel. Here also the judgment is introduced by the particle **לכן** "therefore" at the beginning of verse 6.

In 22:16, the question **הלוא-היא הדעת אותי** "is not this to know me?" is used at the end of verse 16, before the condemnation of king Jehoiakim. There is a slight difference here in that in verse 18, the prophet gives another short list of evil committed by the king before stating judgment in verse 19. Here again, the judgment is introduced by the same particle **לכן**.

In 2:4-13, the verb **ידע** is used with a personal pronoun suffix **ני** (instead of **יהוה**) in **לא ידעוני** "they did not know me". The construction **לא ידעוני** comes after a very long list of accusations against the fathers and the priests:

They (your fathers) went far from me?

They went after vanity . . .

They (the priests) did not say . . .

You defiled my land,

You changed my heritage into an abomination
Immediately after verse 8 (where we find the term **לֹא יָדְעוּנִי**), the accusation becomes more precise and is now directed against three specific groups of leaders: those who handle the torah, the shepherds and the prophets. The particle **לִכֵּן** is used in verse 9, but it introduces a **רִיב** (a contention), not a judgment, between the people of Judah and YHWH.

In 9:22-23, we have the construction **וַיֵּדַע אֹתִי** ("and he knows me"), which is similar to the form used in 4:22; 9:2,5; 22:16. However, unlike all other passages, Jer. 9:22-23 is not directed against any specific individuals, and it also does not directly relate to the law or the covenant. Therefore, the particle **לִכֵּן** is not used with **וַיֵּדַע אֹתִי** because there is no accusation in terms of judgment in this passage. Moreover, the term **וַיֵּדַע אֹתִי** in 9:23 is completed by the formula **כִּי אֲנִי יְהוָה**.

Finally, in 24:4-7 we have the construction **לְדַעַת אֹתִי** "to know me" and in 31:31-34 **דַּעוּ אֶת־יְהוָה** "know YHWH". These constructions with **אֶת** are similar to the ones we find in 4:22; 9:2,5; 22:16. But these two passages lack **לִכֵּן** to indicate that the judgment against the people of Judah is absent in these passages too. Like in 9:23, we also have the formula **כִּי אֲנִי יְהוָה** completing the term **לְדַעַת אֹתִי** in 24:7. The analysis of the structure of the eight passages leads to the following conclusions:

(1) The dominant form of the term "to know YHWH" is **אֶת יְהוָה יָדַע** which appears in 4:22; 9:2, 5; 9:23; 22:16; 24:7, and twice in 31:34.

(2) In three passages (5:1-6; 9:1-8; 22:16) the particle **לִכֵּן** is used with **יָדַע אֶת יְהוָה** to introduce judgment on Judah because of the lack of knowledge of YHWH.

(3) In one passage (2:4-13), לכן is used with ידע את יהוה to introduce a ריב "contention" (but not a judgment). The significance of this change in the use of לכן to introduce a ריב instead of judgment will become clear in the next section.

(4) In four other passages (4:19-22; 9:22-23; 24:4-7; 31:31-34), the formula ידע את יהוה are not associated with לכן and therefore, do not contain judgment.

(5) In the passages containing judgment, the expression ידע את יהוה always occurs at the end of the list of Judah's evil deeds, and immediately before the pronouncement of divine punishment. This might suggest that all the evils found in Judah (at least in these passages) are due to the lack of the knowledge of YHWH, and this lack of knowledge is the reason for the people's punishment, which is always introduced by לכן.

The Development of the Term ידע את יהוה in Jeremiah

The thesis of this dissertation is that the people of Judah were judged and punished for their lack of the knowledge of YHWH. But the fact is that the people could not have been judged and punished unless there was a time when they were urged by the prophet "to know YHWH" or to repent for their lack of the knowledge of YHWH. In other words, the question can be put this way: is judgment the only theme repeated all over the book of Jeremiah or is there any progression from a stage dominated by one theme, like the call to repentance, to a following stage in which other emphases on the judgment took prominence? To put it differently, how does the theme ידע את יהוה circulate in the book of Jeremiah?

Does the prophet begin only with the condemnation message? Has there been any time when the prophet's message was not a judgment for the lack of knowledge?

This is a delicate issue because the book of Jeremiah is a complicated one in terms of clear structural division.¹ However, this book is also unique in that the prophet's ministry was very long, perhaps extending over forty years and spanning the reign of the last five kings of Judah (Josiah, Jehoahaz also called Shallum in Jeremiah, Jehoiachim, Jehoiakin or Coniah, and Zedekiah). Moreover, textual indications demonstrate that the man from Anathot lived during the last and most difficult days of his nation, culminating with the disasters of 597 and 586 BC. My argument is that these historical details, backed with literary analysis, can help a careful reader to attempt a reconstruction of the broad outlines of stages in the development of the message of the prophet. My primary concern is to attempt to locate each of the eight passages on a historical-theological scale showing the evolution of the relationship between YHWH and Judah. My assumption here is that the relationship between the two parties did not deteriorate at once, but that there was a development in which one can perceive the decline of the knowledge of YHWH in the covenanted community, decline that finally brought judgment on the nation. I will pay particular attention to the structure of the expression *ידע את יהוה* as analyzed in the section above, since I believe that these structures contain elements that will guide this analysis.

¹ For the detailed discussion concerning the structure of the book of Jeremiah, see chapter one above.

My understanding is that seven of the eight passages can probably fit well into five different stages in the ministry of Jeremiah:²

Call to Repentance in Early Days (2:4-13)

Though it is difficult to assign any precise date for this passage,³ it is possible that it may be one of the earliest oracles of Jeremiah (see chapter 3). There is no judgment in terms of punishment (לֹא יִדְעוּנִי is not used with לֹא), instead the prophet uses the verb לָוֶה (a lawsuit) to contend with his people.

The emphasis of the message is on the apostasy of the people of Judah, the abandonment of their first love to go after idols. YHWH is described in the passage as pleading with his people to come back to him, and that he is ready to pardon their unfaithfulness (see also 3:21-25; 4:1-4, 14; 13:15-16). In his plea, he is reminding them of the good things he did for them (he brought them up from the land of Egypt v.6). He is also showing them that he lacks nothing, that he cares (v.6) and that his people have no reason not to come back to him, i.e., "to know him."

In 2:1-3, the prophet uses a marriage metaphor to show Israel's good relationship with her husband (YHWH) in the

² One particular passage (9:22-23) does not contain clear indications to allow me to locate it with confidence on this scale.

³ In chapter 2, I argued that this prophecy must have been delivered at the beginning of Jeremiah's ministry, before Josiah's reformation (622 BC), and that the mention of idolatry might reflect in part, Judah's vassal status to a foreign power (Assyria), and the practice of idolatry that had grown up under Manasseh.

past. But in 4-13, the language of the covenant is creatively adopted with the idea of violation of a treaty or covenant between YHWH and his vassals (Israel) now used as a secondary metaphor to demonstrate the problems in the relationship between the two parties: "but when you went in, you defiled my land and changed my heritage into abomination" (v.7b). But what is important for this analysis at this level is that the image in this passage suggests that what is being described here is not a legal process where sin requires punishment, but rather a relationship that needs to (or can still) be healed.

In this passage, the lack of the knowledge of YHWH is defined in terms of idolatry. But as I said earlier, this lack of knowledge has not yet become a reason for the immediate punishment. The prophet's message to Judah is: "return to YHWH, your God and 'know him' as you did in the past/desert."

Vision of Disaster and Announcement of the Coming Judgment (4:19-22)

In this passage, the use of **אֹתִי לֹא יָדְעוּ** "me they do not know" is associated with a strong vision of disaster on Judah and a strong feeling of pain in the prophet:

My anguish, my anguish! I agonize!

O, the walls of my heart!

I cannot keep silence.

You have heard the sound of the trumpet,

O, my soul, the sound of war!

There is a hint of the coming judgment, but the prophet does not express it clearly (there is no use of **לָכֵן** in the passage). He uses highly poetic language and takes the pain

of the disaster to come on himself. Here the prophet identifies with his people and starts suffering for them before they have suffered the real disaster. This is a clear indication that the transition starts here. As a prophet, Jeremiah has already seen the danger to come before the people could perceive it. He even started suffering for them before the actual judgment comes upon the people. This poetry is a strong warning that people must watch because a danger is approaching. The prophet's message here can be summarized as: "be careful, a terrible judgment is coming if you do not change and come back to (know) me."

In my interpretation of this passage, I located it shortly after Josiah's death, during Jehoiakim's reign and some years before the first invasion of 597 BC.

No Sign of Repentance Despite the Last Opportunity Offered: Therefore, Judgment is Sure (5:1-6)

This passage indicates that there is no sign of repentance, though verse 1 shows that there still was a door open for the people to come back (" . . .if you can find a *person* who strives to be honest, *so that I may forgive her*"). This is the last minute call, or the very last opportunity for the people to acknowledge their evil and come back to their God before he closes the door. Moreover, the fact that in verse one YHWH asks for only one person who seeks justice is a clear indication that the situation has become desperate.

However, the remainder of this passage (vv. 2-6) clearly demonstrates that despite earlier calls to repentance and earlier corrections, people made their faces

harder than rock, they felt no pain, they refused to repent (v.3). We can sense here a progression from a call to repentance at the last minute, to a sign that people would not listen to YHWH's voice. There is also a hint that the prophet himself is discouraged because of the people's negative attitude.

Here Jeremiah uses *לא ידעו דרך יהוה* "they do not know the way of YHWH" with the particle *לכן*. For the first time, *לכן* is used to introduce judgment and not just a lawsuit as was the case in 2:4-13. In other words, as a consequence of the people's failure to know the way of YHWH, they now must be punished. In this single passage, the image of the prophet changes from a person who still had a very little hope that the people would come to know YHWH (v.1) into a prophet who has completely given up on his own fellow citizens. YHWH himself is angered by the people who have failed to give him opportunity to pardon them. Raitt rightly notices that in this passage, "God's pathos speaks through his emotion, and we begin to sense that Judah has inexorably been brought a step closer to its doom."⁴ The prophetic message here can be summarized as: "because you have rejected YHWH's call to repentance, you must now be punished."

In chapter 2, I argued that the phraseology of verse 5 ("let me go to the noblemen, and speak to them...") can well be applicable to the time when Baruch read the contents of Jeremiah's first scroll to the courtiers and then to king Jehoiakim (36:10-26). Therefore, the troubled time during the reign of recalcitrant king Jehoiakim, more precisely

⁴ Raitt, *A Theology of Exile*, 42.

during the autumn of 601 BC, might fit well the context of the passage.

Judah Must Bow to the Babylonian Devastation
(9:1-8; 22:13-19; 9:22-23.)

The prophet is now convinced that the repentance phase of his ministry was a failure. He is deeply discouraged, and he has no illusion that the people will ever come to know YHWH again. In 9:1, YHWH is ready to leave his people (and their temple, and their falsehood). The fact that YHWH wants to leave or has actually left his people makes the situation of Jerusalem very desperate. Jerusalem is precious because it is where YHWH lives. But the repeated abomination in the holy city causes God's removal. With this departure, there is also the absence of his protective presence. This is a proof that the gift of life can fully be experienced only where God's power is present. The whole community is corrupted (not just the leaders). An important question in 9:8 shows that punishment is inevitable: "On a nation like this, shall I not avenge myself?"

The particle **לֹכַן** is used with **וְאֹתִי לֹא יָדְעוּ** "and me, they do not know" in 9:2, and with **מֵאֲנֹן דַּעַת אֹתִי** "they refuse to know me" in 9:5. This leads to the pronouncement of the judgment: "I am going to refine and assay them" (9:6). More important for this study, YHWH asks himself a question in verse 6c of the same chapter: "For what else can I do because of my people?" The answer is simply nothing apart from punishing them. Or, I have tried by all means but I failed, the best way to help them is to destroy them with a more severe judgment.

Finally, in 22:13-19, the accusation is against a specific king (Jehoiakim) who refuses to know YHWH. This text presents a particularity in that it does not deal with the disaster coming on the nation, but on a particular individual. It is clear that the failure of the nation as a whole was first of all the result of the failure of the leadership. And a text like this can open a window so that we can understand why the nation was going to be destroyed. The prophet pronounces a severe judgment on king Jehoiakim (as he did on the nation as a whole in 9:1-8) because of his failure to rightly exercise his power, and thus demonstrate his knowledge of YHWH. הלוֹא-הִיא הַדַּעַת אוֹתִי "is not this to know me?" is used in 22:16 to contrast Jehoiakim with his late father Josiah, who "knew YHWH." Here again, the judgment is introduced by the same particle לִכֵּן used after a demonstration that what Jehoiakim was doing proved that he did not know YHWH.

I am tempted to put 9:22-23 at this level.⁵ My justification is that the tone of the passage seems to be pessimistic; it seems to describe a state of total discouragement. The passage looks like a conclusion to the

⁵ I repeat here what I have already said that this is one of the most difficult passages to classify with confidence in the book of Jeremiah. I recall here the fact that Bernhard Duhm treated it as theologically unimportant because it is a "harmless insignificant saying" (see chapter 3). This is probably because it is not easy to assign it to a particular period in the ministry of the prophet. However, my interpretation demonstrated that the text under consideration is not a harmless saying but a powerful critique of leadership in Judah toward the end of the kingdom. And Jer. 22:13-19, which criticizes the leadership of a particular king (Jehoiakim), can match well with this passage, although 9:22-23 lacks some literary components (for example לִכֵּן) to make it a clear judgment oracle.

critique of leadership, when it became sure that the corrupted leadership in Judah had led the nation to a state of annihilation. Though I remain open to the fact that 9:22-23 could be used to criticize any government in Judah and not only at the end of the southern kingdom, my argument here will be that the passage fits well in the context of the end of the reign of king Jehoiakim (see also 22:13-19), and that of Zedekiah.

Restoration of Israel Who Will Fully Know YHWH after Judgment (24:4-7; 31:31-34)

The main theme in these two passages is the reversal in the fortunes of both Judah and Israel. The passages demonstrate that judgment in terms of exile gives way in the end to a salvation characterized by a perfect knowledge of YHWH in the new covenant. The mission of the prophet is no longer to uproot and to pull down, to destroy and to demolish (1:10), but to announce that YHWH will build them up, and will plant them (24:6). In other words, judgment gives place to grace, exile to restoration to the land, social injustice to harmonious social life, and finally the lack of the knowledge of YHWH to the full knowledge of YHWH (24:4-7; 31:31-34).

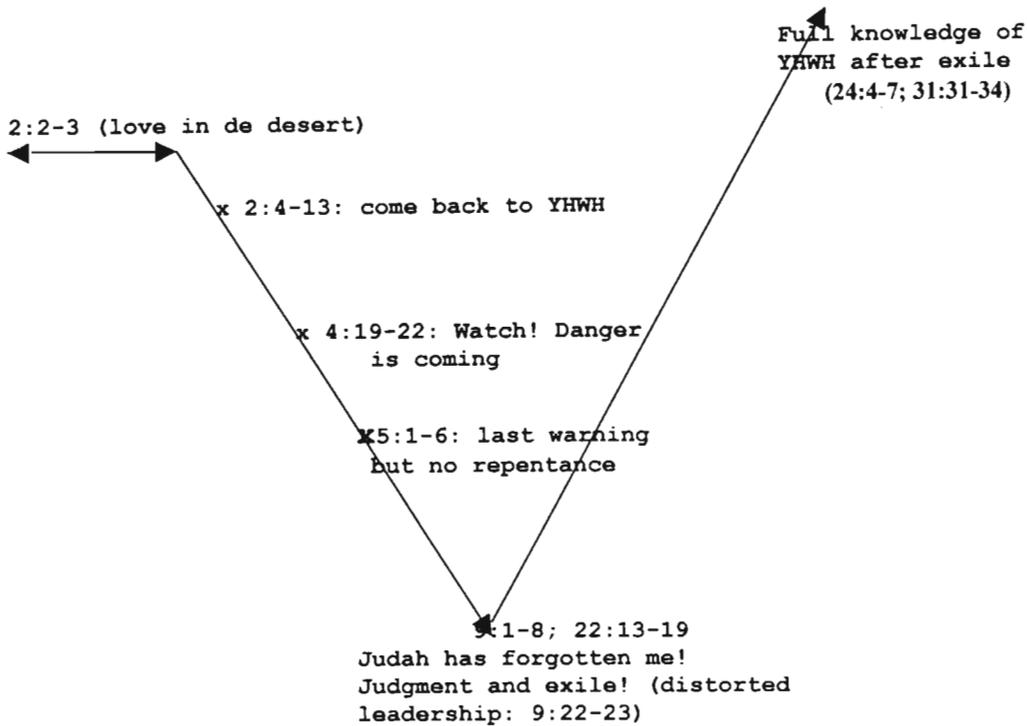
In the traditional analysis of these passages, YHWH's grace to deliver his people from the exile and to bring them back to the land for a new covenant seems to be the leading theme of these two texts. But a careful reading of these two passages might reveal more than just YHWH's grace, love and election. My understanding is that the most important point here is the knowledge of YHWH. In other words, everything that takes place in 24:4-7 and 31:31-34

does so in order that the human participants may "know me, that I am YHWH" (24:7), and that "all of them shall know me from the least of them to the greatest" (31:34). This is the point here and this might be said to be the main theme of the whole book of Jeremiah.⁶ Or if one may put it differently, YHWH's acts do not occur for their own sake, but rather they are directed at human beings to effect acknowledgement of YHWH in them. Put differently, YHWH's knowledge is not a means but an end of everything he does for or to his people. To be more accurate, judgment, restoration or liberation are subordinate to the knowledge of YHWH. In fact YHWH does not need a people for the sake of having them, he does not deliver his people from many dangers for the sake of helping them, but he is concerned with people who know him, who obey him, who honor him, and who are faithful to him. What is at stake is the relationship between YHWH and his people; it is YHWH's name that must be known and obeyed in the society and in the whole world through Israel (Judah).

Finally, there are three basic elements in these two passages: deliverance, transformation and relationship. The bottom line is relationship between YHWH and his people. In other words, deliverance creates transformation, which produces a new relationship, i.e., the people know their Lord.

⁶ Many commentators think of repentance as the main theme of the book of Jeremiah (Wisser and Bright). But it seems to me that insistence on repentance shows that there is disobedience, hence, the lack of the knowledge of YHWH. Or if one may put it differently, if people could have repented, this would have led them to "know YHWH." So the end of the road is not to repent but to know YHWH.

In conclusion, the knowledge of YHWH is the fundamental purpose of all that occurs in the book of Jeremiah between YHWH and Judah, and even between YHWH and the nations (10:23-25; 16:19-21). I can represent the movement of the theme of the knowledge of YHWH in Jeremiah on the graph as follows:



The graph above can be read in at least two ways:

The first reading reveals that the eight passages analyzed in Jeremiah can be classified into two blocs indicating two different periods in the history of Judah/Israel as a nation:

There is a period characterized by the negativity in the relationship between YHWH and Judah (2:4-13; 4:19-22; 5:1-6; 9:1-8, 22-23; 22:13-19). This is the pre-exilic

period when the rebellious Judah persistently⁷ refused to respond to YHWH's goodness with obedience. Said differently, this was a period when Judah refused to know YHWH. As a consequence, YHWH decided to apply the covenantal curse against the vassal. This curse consisted of nullifying the disobedient people through the exile.

Another period (24:4-7; 31:31-34) is characterized by a potentially positive relationship between YHWH and his people. This new relationship is rooted in YHWH's initiative and inclination to restore Israel and to re-establish a new partnership with his people after they had undergone the necessary punishment.

The second reading is an intra-intertextual⁸ analysis of the theme to "know YHWH," which also reveals that there

⁷ Brueggemann (*Theology of the Old Testament*, 434), argues that it is possible to see all of the Deuteronomistic history, Joshua through Kings, as lawsuit that indicts Israel for her persistent rebellion and points to the exile as the legitimate judgment pronounced on the basis of the indictment. He also adds that this perspective on the Deuteronomists was suggested by the early work of Gerhard von Rad, *Studies in Deuteronomy* (London: SCM Press, 1953), 74-91. His conclusion is that this view is strengthened if we regard Deuteronomy 32 as a model from which the larger history is composed.

⁸ Alice Jardine, "Intertextuality," in Thomas A. Sebeok (ed.), *Encyclopedic Dictionary of Semiotics* (NY: Mouton de Gruyter, 1986), 38. According to Jardine, the term "intertextuality" was first used in 1966 by Julia Kristeva to express the fact that "every text is constructed as a mosaic of citations, every text is an absorption and transformation of other text." The relationship between different texts can also be observed within the works of the same author, either different books of the same author or different parts of the same book by the same author. This is called intra-intertextuality or inner-intertextuality, and this is what I am dealing with in this section of the thesis. See also Julia Kristeva, *Desire in*

are at least one major variant and one constant⁹ related to the theme to know YHWH in the book of Jeremiah:

The covenant as variant

In the book of Jeremiah, Israel's life is rooted in and shaped by the covenantal relationship that YHWH has initiated and to which Israel should have responded in trust and obedience. As Brueggemann puts it, "covenant requires of Yahweh a practice of faithfulness and steadfast love, an enduring engagement with and involvement for Israel."¹⁰ At the same time, the covenant generated for YHWH a people who would continually seek to obey his commands and demonstrate this obedience in their daily life. In other words, for Israel, religious reality should have been constituted and generated by actual, sustained, concrete, and communal practice as agreed upon in the covenant. I demonstrated throughout this thesis that this strict obedience to God's commands is what it means to know YHWH in the book of Jeremiah.

However, as faithfulness to YHWH diminished in Judah, covenantal relationship was broken. In concrete terms, this

Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1980); Tzvetan Todorov (ed.), *French Literary Theory Today: A Reader* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982).

⁹ In intertextuality, a "variant" is an element (theme, concept, actor, etc.) that changes from one section of the book (or from one book) to another, while the term "constant" designates an element that does not change, or that remains constant throughout the book or books.

¹⁰ Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 297.

meant two things: the removal of protection from YHWH (the suzerain) and the punishment of Israel (the vassals). In Israel, everyone was supposed to know that when YHWH was disobeyed or affronted, he had to punish. The punishment for disobedience in Israel was rooted in these covenantal sanctions.¹¹

In the passages analyzed in this thesis, the prophet accuses the people of Judah of breaking the covenant by being foolish, stupid, by lacking understanding, by being wise only for doing evil (4:22), by being characterized by falsehood, deception, pretense and fraud (5:2-3a), by being adulterous and treacherous (9:1b-2), by abusing political power (9:23; 22:13-14), by defiling the land and changing YHWH's heritage into abomination (2:7b), and finally by forsaking YHWH, the fountain of running waters and by hewing out for themselves broken cisterns (2:13). All these descriptions define a totally corrupted community that had ignored, and therefore had broken or terminated the covenant made with YHWH. They also explain what the term "not to know YHWH" means in the book of Jeremiah.

Judgment for the breaking of the covenant is expressed in a variety of terms: a disaster is coming soon (4:19-21); a lion from the forest will smite Jerusalem, a wolf from the desert will destroy her, a leopard keeps watching over the city (5:6); the people will be refined and assayed (9:6); Jehoiakim will be buried with a burial of an ass (22:19). It was made clear in my interpretation that, apart from the last case, all other forms of punishment express the idea of the destruction of the nation. In the context

¹¹ The complete lists of these punishments, to which Israel has agreed in its covenant oath, are found in Lev. 26 and Deut. 28 (1 Kings 8:33-53; Amos 4:6-11).

of the Near Eastern society, punishment was the clear indication that covenant has been violated and terminated.

The change to or the variation of this theme intervenes in Jer. 24:4-7 and 31:31-34, where YHWH announces that he will make a new covenant with his people. This is a signal that the old one was broken and no longer functioned. The characteristics of the new covenant are described as follows: it will be unbreakable, written in the (new) heart of the people (instead of the stone), and it will allow all of them to "know YHWH." Thus, in the book of Jeremiah, the covenant is a variant.

The law as constant¹²

In the book of Jeremiah, the requirement of YHWH remains the same throughout. If the people want to maintain relationship with him, they must follow the law. There is no shortcut; and the content of the law does not change. Neither does YHWH promise to give a new one. Thus, as I have already argued, what will change in the new covenant is not the law, but the way YHWH will enable his people to internalize and follow this same law.

I will summarize this section as follows: for Israel (Judah), the law was the standard by which to live as a

¹² Two more minor themes in the eight passages that I have analyzed and which can be considered as constants are "the people" and "the heart." The whole book is dealing with different generations of the same people in their relationship with YHWH. In the same way, though Jeremiah 24:7 states that the people will be given a heart to know YHWH, Jeremiah 31:33 clearly indicates that in the new covenant, the law will be written upon their (same) heart. Therefore, these two texts seem to suggest a transformation of the same heart rather than its removal.

community of faith. Covenant was the agreement between YHWH and Israel, according to which the latter accepted to live by the standard of the law. Knowledge of YHWH is the ultimate result of life lived by the standard (law) stipulated in the agreement (covenant).

The Meaning of ידע את יהוה in Jeremiah

From the analysis done up to this point, I am now able to give what I consider to be a fairly satisfactory definition of the expression ידע את יהוה in the book of Jeremiah according to the eight passages analyzed. In one sentence, to know YHWH can be defined as "to recognize the covenantal traditions as normative and to accept to follow them for a harmonious relationship with YHWH and with one another in the society." What is needed is now the analysis of the core element in my definition: "covenantal traditions." In the book of Jeremiah, covenantal traditions refer to the following three aspects:

The Remembrance of YHWH's Mighty Acts of Liberation of Israel in History

This is particularly clear in 2:4-13: YHWH delivered his people and brought them up from the land of Egypt (2:6a); he guided and cared for them in the desert (2:6b,c); he gave them a fertile land (2:7). From these facts, Israel's reaction should constantly have been to ask the question: Where is YHWH? (2:8). Unfortunately for Israel, this fundamental question was never asked. This is why Jer. 2:4-13 strongly condemns the sin of forgetfulness, of not remembering, of not saying. What should have kept the faith

of Israel is the proclamation (the saying) of the goodness of YHWH, the recalling of history, i.e., mighty acts of liberation from Egypt and from all other dangers the covenanted people faced in the land to which YHWH brought them. Therefore, to know YHWH is to constantly remember and proclaim who he is, what he has done for his people (in the past), and what he wants from them (in the present). Leslie C. Allen notices: "remembering God is often a dynamic phenomenon that leads to the situation of the believer or the believing community being transformed . . . Recalling God's past saving work becomes a bridge from a grim present to a blessed future."¹³

Several passages in the Pentateuch recommend Israelites to retell to their children the story of God's deliverance from Egypt. Thus, in Deut. 6:20-25, we read the following:

When in time to come, your son shall ask you saying: what is the meaning of the testimonies and the statutes and the judgments which the Lord our God commanded you? Then you shall say to your son: We were slaves of Pharaoh in Egypt. Then the Lord brought us out from Egypt with a strong hand. And the Lord provided great and calamitous signs and wonders against Egypt, against Pharaoh, and against all his household before our very eyes. Then he brought us out from there, so that he might bring us in to give to us the land, which he promised to our fathers. And the Lord commanded us to do all these statutes, to fear the Lord our God, for our own good always, to keep us alive at this very day. And we shall have righteousness, if we are careful to do this whole code of law in the presence of the Lord our God, just as he commanded us.

This passage reveals the essence of the covenant, and it is the core story the covenanted people should have kept for

¹³ Leslie C. Allen, "יָדָר" in *NIDOTTE*, 1:1102.

the things Israel has said that are acts of disloyalty and disobedience."¹⁴

Jer. 31:32 also repeats the story of deliverance of Israel from Egypt ("not like the covenant which I made with their fathers in the day when I took them by their hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt"). Finally, the three words *חַסֵּד מִשְׁפָּט צְדָקָה* used together in 9:23 also allude to YHWH's intervention in history on behalf of his people. Thus, Brueggemann is right when he suggests: "getting the story [of YHWH's mighty acts] straight was a primary responsibility for the well-being of the community, and even for the security of the state."¹⁵ In this sense, historical memory should have established the continuity of the new generation with the crucial events of the past. Or as Brevard S. Childs puts it: "memory plays a central role in making Israel constantly aware of the nature of God's benevolent acts as well as of her own covenantal pledge."¹⁶ In this way, to remember is to participate in a dynamic relationship that links the present with the past, and the present fissure in the relationship of YHWH with his people is a result of Judah's failure to understand the past saving acts of her God.

In addition, I will argue that the failure of Judah was not only to understand the past saving acts of her God, but also to understand it rightly. It seems to me that there were different interest groups in Judah who

¹⁴ Brueggeman, *Texts that Linger*, 3.

¹⁵ Brueggemann, *Texts that Linger*, 4 (parenthesis not original).

¹⁶ Brevard S. Childs, *Memory and Tradition in Israel*, 51.

The Necessity for Israel to Establish a Just Society as Witness to YHWH's צדקה "Justice", משפט "Righteousness", and חסד "Steadfast Love" (9:22-23; 5:4-5).

In the first point of this section, I indicated that these words (חסד משפט צדקה) are also used together in 9:23 to allude to YHWH's intervention in history on behalf of his people. In the same way, YHWH wanted this character to be reflected in the Judean society. Said differently, these words indicate what should characterize Judah as a community that experienced the saving acts of YHWH in their history. This gives content to the covenant.

Thus, the expression ידע את יהוה in the book of Jeremiah is nothing else than a total claim by YHWH on every single aspect of the life (both social and religious) of Judah as a community. How people lived in Judah on a daily basis, in relationship with YHWH himself and with one another, mattered a lot for the Lord, since this daily life demonstrated the level of the people's commitment to him. It is in this way that when Jeremiah talks about social issues, he does so in the light of the knowledge of YHWH. For example, whoever wronged his neighbor was condemned as having wronged not only his/her fellow citizen, but YHWH himself (4:22; 5:4-6; 9:2-5).

Social justice was also to be maintained in the exercise of political power (22:13-19). Kings and all those who had authority had to exercise their leadership rightly. Any abuse of power or authority was considered as a rejection of YHWH's authority and had to be condemned. In this way, it becomes clear that all power and authority in humans is delegated, and that only YHWH possesses absolute power. The Israelite king was supposed to know this truth more than any other king in the world.

Another important aspect of this expression "to know YHWH" is that the members of the community could learn this knowledge; it was not something impossible, too far above their understanding, or simply legalist. In other words, there was a cognitive aspect in ידע את יהוה, which reveals and discloses the God who creates, orders, guides, and sustains life in all its different aspects. This is underlined by the use of the expression "to know YHWH" associated with sapiential words like: למד "to teach" (31:34); בין "to have understanding" (4:22); שכל "to look, to have understanding" (9:23); יאל "act foolishly" (5:4); אויל "to be stupid" (4:22); סכל "to have no understanding" (4:22); חכם "to be wise, able" (4:22).

This association of ידע את יהוה with sapiential expressions (showing a cognitive side of knowledge) may reveal at least three things in Judah (Israel) as a society:

Firstly, it demonstrates the importance of primary socialization. By this I mean that the family or the clan was a decisive socializing agent, which helped the child to grow into the fear of YHWH, by showing him/her the right choice in daily life. It was the family or the clan that first inculcated the covenantal horizon into the child. This horizon had to be passed on from one generation to another without interruption.¹⁸ Commenting on this socialization, Brueggemann writes:

¹⁸ The book of Judges might indicate that there were times when this primary socialization was neglected. We read this in Judg. 2:10 that after that whole generation had been gathered to their fathers, another generation grew up, who knew neither YHWH nor what he had done for Israel. The question one might ask is: what happened so that one whole generation might not know YHWH? It is not the task

Much of the socialization is done through direct imperative, but some of it is done, especially in a folk society, by oft-repeated sayings that make linkages that become accepted givens. The givens of this mediation, which provide for the child a plausibility structure, concern both buoyancy of Yahweh's creation and the severe limitations against destructive behavior.¹⁹

Secondly, it reveals the existence of wise men as the nation's (kings') advisors. 2 Samuel 16-17 shows that Israelite kings had advisors and counselors who were consulted for all important national issues. The Bible does not give their number but, Norman Whybray suggests that,

there was an intellectual tradition of learned, skilled persons in ancient Israel who operated in a variety of ways throughout society, in order to shape learning and also to impinge upon public policy formation and implementation.²⁰

Apart from kings' advisors, and in the light of African traditional society, my argument would also be that there

of this research to answer the question, but the passage does underline that somewhere and somehow, there was a neglect in the covenantal education of the new generation by the parents. A good example of a successful primary socialization is found in Jer. 35:5-10, where we see a highly disciplined social group (the Rechabites) who strictly followed the instruction given by their ancestors on how to live in the promised land.

¹⁹ Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 682. See also Carole R. Fontaine, "The Sage in Family Tribe," in Leo G. Perdue and John G. Gammie (eds.), *The Sage in Israel and the Ancient Near East* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1990), 155-64.

²⁰ Quoted by Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 684. It is possible that this tradition of publicly oriented wisdom included many persons acknowledged to be wise.

probably were many people in the larger Israelite society acknowledged to be wise and mediators of YHWH. These wise people spoke, thought, interpreted the world according to covenantal theology, and worked to order social and religious life in the light of YHWH's will. Such wise people could have been very prominent in pre-monarchical Israel, but I also posit that the monarchy would not have suppressed all of them.²¹

Thirdly, it shows that wisdom could have been distorted in at least three ways:

By traditionalism: learned wisdom could have become a kind of tradition that was to be repeated and recited without critical reflection or without attention to new, demanding social experience. Jer. 31:29-30 is a good example that a traditional tribal saying must be kept in check in the light of new religious and social realities.

By legalism: The clearest illustration of a legalistic distortion of wisdom is found in the book of Job. Job's friends refuse to take into account any new situation and stick to their absolutist principle, according to which Job's suffering is a result of his sin, since wisdom stipulates that a righteous person could not have suffered that way.²²

²¹ An example of the existence of wise men in the monarchic society is the sad story of Naboth in 1 Kings 21. Though these were corrupted elders (a proof that wisdom could have been misused), it is, nevertheless, a proof that they still existed.

²² See a good discussion of this aspect in Rainer Albertz, "The Sage and Pious Wisdom in the Book of Job: The Friends' Perspective," in Perdue and Gammie (eds.), *The Sage in Israel and the Ancient Near East*, 243-61.

By opportunism: There was always a danger of transforming wisdom to tailored advice and counsel to fit one's own interest, or to fit the interest of a particular class (mostly the powerful). I demonstrated in chapter four of this thesis that in Israel, wisdom could have been used to enforce and maintain a corrupted political system.

Conclusion

My analysis of the eight passages has shown that the expression **אֵת יְהוָה יָדַע** is a concept used to describe the relationship between YHWH and Judah as a covenanted community. All aspects of life in Judah were to be guided by covenantal principles. In other words, the life of Judah as a nation was made possible only through a right relationship with YHWH. In such a relationship, there was no separation between the social and religious aspects of life. Complete commitment to YHWH (in terms of total obedience and social justice) and national security went hand in hand, as did unfaithfulness and judgment.

This study has also shown that the expression **אֵת יְהוָה יָדַע** in the book of Jeremiah is a dynamic concept. As the people's knowledge diminished, YHWH's protection was also removed until the whole nation was destroyed, and the people taken into exile. However, there is a promise that after the exile YHWH will initiate a new relationship which will enable the people of Israel to know him fully. In this sense, I have argued that YHWH's acts do not occur for their own sake, but that they are directed at human beings to effect acknowledgement of YHWH in them. In other words,

YHWH's knowledge is not a means but an end of everything he does for or to his people.

This study has also shown that Jeremiah did not come up with a new concept in his preaching, but that his ministry was a reminder of the covenantal traditions that the people of Judah had forgotten or distorted. Finally, in the political realm, the message of Jeremiah, especially his message concerning the new covenant, might well remind us of the Kingdom of God that will be characterized by total שלום when all kinds of injustice in society will be wiped out, and when there will be a perfect (knowledge) relationship between YHWH and his people. In this sense, I can well argue that Jeremiah preceded John the Baptist and Jesus himself in his announcement of the Kingdom of God.

CHAPTER 7

LOCATING MY HERMENEUTICS: AN EVALUATION AND SOME RECOMMENDATIONS

This chapter is a reflection on the hermeneutical process used in this interpretation. It seeks to locate my methodology in the whole spectrum of African Biblical hermeneutics. It attempts to answer three important questions: What did I do with Jeremiah as a text in order to arrive at the result that I have reached? Where does my methodological process fit in the vast body of African Biblical hermeneutics? What are some of its strengths and shortcomings, and what should be done in the future in order to define it more clearly and strengthen it for a better result? These three questions are consistent with one of the goals set from the beginning of this work when, in the introduction, I concluded the section on the methodology by stating that there will be a need to come back to my discoveries, to look back again to my driving map from the destination side, and reflect on what has happened during the whole interpretative process. This is unusual for a work of this nature, but this unusualness might also show the newness of the process in which I am engaged with many other African Biblical interpreters.

A Flashback at My Hermeneutical Process

Four Guiding Questions

The whole process of interpretation was guided by four fundamental questions: (a) What is the meaning of this

particular text in terms of its original religious, political, socio-cultural, and economic context? (b) What does this text tell me for my context? Or which meanings does this particular text, read from my context, generate? (c) Which situation, in my context, approximates the Biblical text under consideration that can help me to understand this text? Or, how can my religious, socio-economic and political contexts help to illuminate this text? (d) What does the church need to do in DR Congo, in the light of this analysis of the text?

The advantage of using these four questions at the same time throughout my textual analysis was that it helped me to work with both the Biblical context and my Congolese context at the same time. This allowed a direct and easy movement from (Biblical) text to the interpreter's context and vice versa. In addition, this interplay between Biblical context and my context helped to recognize both differences and similarities between the two contexts. This recognition of similarities and differences helped to avoid an unwise transposition of the Biblical context to my contemporary context.¹

In traditional western exegesis, the rule is to deal only with the Biblical text, or where it is allowed (in most African theological seminaries that are still following western patterns), the two contexts are dealt with differently, the interpreter's context coming only at the end of the study, in the last chapter called

¹ Clodovis Boff, "Hermeneutics: Constitution of Theological Pertinency," in R. S. Sugirtharajah (ed.), *Voices from the Margin: Interpreting the Bible in the Third World* (New York, Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1991), 14. Boff would call this unwise transposition a "hermeneutics improvisation" or a "bricolage."

"implications." But my study shows that there is no real need for separating the two. In fact, it seems to me that in using the two contexts at the same time, it is possible to go the other way round, and use the interpreter's context to draw out what may have been the implication(s) of a particular text for the community of those who produced it.

One of the greatest differences between my methodology and traditional methodologies that separate the text from the present context is that this methodology helped me to discover that the interpreter's context can also illumine the Biblical context. Most often, when I could not understand a particular Biblical passage, or where none of the standard commentaries consulted in this study was able to help me understand (or answer my question concerning) a particular passage, my context proved to be very useful. In this way also, my context was not only a passive object to be illumined by the Biblical text, but it was used both as an object to be studied and a subject of this study.

Another important point at this level is that this interpretation is supported by a fairly solid exegesis, which took into account the historical context, literary genres, rhetorical conventions, idiomatic expressions, and style of different texts that I was interpreting. A good exegesis helps to avoid what I have called an unwise transposition, whereby a text is taken out of its primary context and is used by the interpreter as a pretext to say what he/she wants to say, not what the text might have meant. This exegesis, in particular, helped me to respond to the first question, the one that deals with the probable meaning of the texts selected for this study. My argument here is that if one regards the text as the word of God, as

I do in this interpretation, one then has "a duty to understand first what the text says before applying or claiming its meaning for one's own context."² As Teresa Okure further argues,

First, therefore, the social location of the interpreter does not deprive the text of its fundamental (that is, divine) meaning. Rather, it furnishes the hermeneutical questions that are brought to the text in order to discover new meanings latent in the text, as does the wise scribe (Matt 13:52), meanings that can challenge and give fuller life to the reader. The social location cannot ask of the text answers to questions it never asked itself. To be fruitful, reading from a given social location must be a faith exercise. It is this faith that guarantees fidelity to the word of God spoken in the text. As I have stated elsewhere, this last point is important. Insofar as the Bible is the book of a faith community, spread across history, any reading that lacks this faith dimension has missed its point or at best is incomplete.³

An Intuitive Reading of the Text

Another particular aspect of this study is that for many cases, the reading of my context in the Biblical text was instinctive, spontaneous, especially when there was a clear connection between the text and my context. In other words, the interpretation of some Biblical texts easily reminded me of what was happening in my context. For most cases, it was only after this spontaneous recognition of similarities with my context that I went to look for cases in written

² Teresa Okure, "Reading from This Place: Some Problems and Prospects," In Fernando F. Segovia and Mary Ann Tolbert (eds.), *Reading from This Place: Social Location and Biblical Interpretation in Global Perspective* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), 56.

³ Okure, "Reading from This Place," 56-57.

books since the kind of work I am doing here requires bibliographical references. In this way, my guess is that most Congolese, both scholars and ordinary readers, would not have a problem in coming to similar conclusions (for most cases) as I did in this study (even though they might not have access to the same materials used in this research) because we are sharing the same experience. This is the autobiographical dimension of my interpretation. In fact, I will go a step further and recognize the communal dimension of this autobiographical reading. This means that the autobiographical aspect that appears in this work is not an individual experience but the experience of a community, the Congolese community.⁴ This is particularly true for those contexts that present clear similarities between Judean social, economic and political contexts with my own context.

This intuitive reading might demonstrate to us that one of the best ways of doing Biblical scholarship in contextual perspective is to study the text from inside the interpreter's context. In this particular case, I do not claim that the interpreter must necessarily be a Congolese like myself or an African, but that for a contextual reading of Biblical text, the life-experience of the interpreter or a good knowledge of the context might produce a good interpretation. I can even extend this

⁴ An article written by Osayande Obery Hendricks ("Guerrilla Exegesis: 'Struggle' as a Scholarly Vocation: A Postmodern Approach to African-American Biblical Interpretation," in *Semeia* 72 [1995] 73-90) would be classified in this category. In this article, Hendricks shares the bitter experience of his people living in a racist community. In this way, his experience is an experience of his Black community and his writing is a communal autobiography.

reflection and argue that the community itself, from its own experience, can be a good interpreter of the Biblical text. This is why, I think that African Biblical scholars are right to strive for new directions in Biblical interpretation from African perspectives, and from inside their context. This is why also, it becomes very important to encourage a communal reading of the Scripture in order to come to a fuller understanding of the word of God from a particular contextual perspective. To interpret these texts as I have done here with the Congolese common people who struggle daily with all kinds of social, economic and religious evils described in these pages could make a great difference and would have helped me to discover things that I would not.⁵ In fact a great section of the Bible itself can be understood as a book of the community of faith, not a book of individuals, though we have it today as the product of single authors.

A Reflection on my Intuitive Reading

I also realized that it was necessary to deepen my intuitive reading by taking time to think on it and ask some important questions like: "why are things the way they are now in my context?" And to a less extent, "why are things the way they are described in Jeremiah (Judah)?" For example, it was not only important to realize intuitively (that is from my life-experience), that the Protestant Church was not able to produce an alternative consciousness during the period of Mobutu, but it was also necessary to

⁵ Though I am talking about reading the Bible with common people in my community, I need to underline that this thesis was not concerned with actual Bible study.

think about the reasons of that failure. Again, it was easy (almost intuitively) to discover that during the last two decades, all our Protestant theological institutions in DR Congo were not able to produce great thinkers. But a profound reflection was needed to discover the reasons for this failure. One advantage of reflecting critically on our intuition is that it helps us to discover that some phenomena, which appear very simple on the surface, have their root in religious, social and economic systems of the society. Thus my hermeneutics consisted of reading critically both the Biblical text and my context.

Conversing with other African theologians who had done similar research also deepened this reflection. The writings of some theologians like Kâ Mana, Philippe Kabongo Mbaya, J.N.K. Mugambi, Kwame Bediako, etc., were of particular importance for a clearer understanding of my context. I also realized that it was not enough to converse only with theologians, but that other specialists in different fields like journalism, politics, economy and sociology who have done research in the African context with a focus on DR Congo could help me to understand my context better. The result of this conversation was that my reading of the Congolese context moved from a mere intuitive level to become a critical study, refined by other people's readings of the same context. It is only from this interaction with others that I was able to formulate some recommendations for the church in DR Congo.

Recommendations and Constructive Suggestions

Another aspect of my methodology is that my interpretation of each passage refuses to end with the

intuitive and reflective reading of the text; rather it contains suggestions to the Congolese Church (and society) in terms of what can be done. These suggestions are integrated in the interpretation itself and summarized at the end of each section together with the definition of the term "to know YHWH" as understood from the interpretation. These suggestions are a product of both my understanding of the Biblical text from my context and the understanding of my context in the light of Biblical text. These suggestions also make the interpretation of each text complete by itself in that I felt no need of having a different chapter (implications) at the end of this work, in which I would interact with my context again. My interpretation also demonstrates that interpretation should not be "neutral" or "innocent," that is, just as an academic exercise. Its aim should always be the spiritual or social transformation of the community. Ernst M. Conradie and Louis C. Jonker are right when they argue that,

in biblical interpretation we often discover that the biblical text is not merely interesting but that it has the potential to turn our lives upside down. It may in fact become an instrument used by God to speak to us anew.⁶

An Advantage of this Hermeneutics

One clear advantage of this hermeneutics, as I see it, is that this work can easily be converted to a book that can be useful both for the church, the academy and the society at large. This can be done by removing some scholarly details that would look unnecessary and also some

⁶ Ernst M. Conradie and Louis C. Jonker, *Angling for Interpretation: A Guide to Understand the Bible Better* (Bellville: UWC Publications, 2001), 92.

technical (Hebrew) terms. The latter can also be transliterated or in some cases, translated into the language of the reader. Such revised version should make some aspects of social, historical, political, economic, religious and cultural dimensions of the biblical text and the reader's context clear as they appear in this interpretation. This would help the reader to see God at work both in the past (Judah) and the present (his/her own context). It would also help the reader to realize how the Church has failed to effectively minister to the nation, and to see what is needed for the Congolese Church to become a transforming power in the nation. It seems to me that this should be one of the aims of most of our scientific works.

My argument is that this particular aspect might point to a great difference between this thesis and most theses written by Africans in western theological institutions. My assessment is that some of these dissertations can hardly be converted to books readable by most African ordinary readers,⁷ because the great majority of them are either too technical or do not deal with the African context at all.

The most recent and probably the only research so far on PhD dissertations written by African scholars, north of the Limpopo River, has just been produced by Knut Holter.⁸ In this book, the author seems to agree with the fact that explicit reference to the African context is absent in most

⁷ I use the term "ordinary readers" here to mean "non-theologians" in general, but not "illiterates."

⁸ Knut Holter, *Old Testament Research for Africa: A Critical Analysis and Annotated Bibliography of African Old Testament Dissertations, 1967-1990* (New York: Peter Lang, 2002).

dissertations written by Africans in western institutions or even in African universities that are still following the western patterns of doing exegesis:

One group has a comparative approach: the dissertations here make use of comparative methodologies that facilitate a parallel interpretation of Old Testament texts and motifs and supposed African parallels.... This strategy is typical of the latter two decades of the period under investigation (1980s-90s), and it allows for an Africanizing interpretation of the Old Testament; *though, one can hardly say that Africa is being made the explicit subject of the interpretation.* Another interpretive strategy within this group is to use Old Testament texts and motifs as resources for interpreting African experiences and concerns. This strategy, it has been argued, is reflected throughout the whole period (1960s-90s); however, as it tends to use typical western Old Testament interpretation as its tool for analyzing Africa, *it allows to a less extent than the previous strategy for an Africanizing interpretation of the Old Testament.*⁹

The last group of these dissertations is of particular interest for my comparison here because of its use of exegetical methods in the interpretation of the Biblical text. Concerning this group, Holter has this to say (all emphasis are mine):

Another group has an *exegetical approach*, and the dissertations in this group make use of historical or literary interpretations of Old Testament texts and motifs. *This group reflects the broad thematic and methodological spectrum of traditional, western Old Testament scholarship.* However, it has been argued that many of these dissertations, too, allow for an Africanizing interpretation, in the sense that the texts and motifs that have been chosen are often related to experiences and concerns within the African context of the researchers.¹⁰

⁹ Holter, *Old Testament Research for Africa*, 110-111.

¹⁰ Holter, *Old Testament Research for Africa*, 110-111.

There are two important things to note in this last quotation concerning dissertations that use exegetical approach: (1) this group reflects the broad thematic and methodological spectrum of traditional, western Old Testament scholarship. It is known that this scholarship is normally characterized by the exclusion of the interpreter's context in the exegesis. This kind of exegesis generally stops with what the text meant (exegesis), and refuses to go beyond this level. It seems to me that the reason for this kind of "neutrality" might be that Biblical scholarship in western institutions (especially in exegetical works) is mainly, if not exclusively, dominated by questions generated by the academy rather than the real context of the community of faith. This is why they tend to be philosophical rather than addressing the real life situation of the community of faith.¹¹ This is what Gerald O. West has characterized as a "professional paradigm."¹² Put differently, their

¹¹ There are some few exceptions like Walter Brueggemann, who has a clear orientation toward the community of faith in most of his works, though his American context comes in sometimes only implicitly. Two other works in the area of ethics that can be added here are: D.A. Knight (ed.), *Ethics and Politics in the Hebrew Bible* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 1995) and J. W. Rogerson & al. (eds.), *The Bible in Ethics: The Second Sheffield Colloquium* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995).

¹² Gerald O. West, "Mapping African Interpretation: A Tentative Sketch," in Gerald O. West and Musa Dube (eds.), *The Bible in Africa: Transactions, Trajectories and Trends* (Leiden: Brill, 2000), 38 [29-53]. Comparing African Biblical scholarship to its western counterpart, West argues: "African Biblical scholarship is different, operating as it does within paradigms that are only partially professionally constituted." For me, this is good

theological reflection is done for the academy, for specialization, for professionalism and not primarily for the Church.¹³ (2) According to Holter, the Africanness of these dissertations is reflected only in the fact that the texts and motifs that have been chosen are often related to experiences and concerns within the African context of the researchers.

However, the question one would ask Holter is to know whether the motif or the intention alone is enough to make an interpretation "African." For me, the answer would be "no." Though I am not reviewing Holter's book here, my argument is that a careful reader could expect him to become more radical concerning this last group of researchers who use exegetical methods. The issue should not be of intention. The reader does not need to guess, but to see how much a work explicitly allows for the African context. This is what we are now fighting for. Therefore, it might not be wrong to contend that in this observation, the author (Holter) has overstated his argument and that the right thing would be to recognize that the western schools and those who follow their methodology do not really allow African researchers to interact with their context, especially in exegetical works. I say this for at

news as long as African scholars maintain a good balance between their academy and the nurturing of the community at large.

¹³ I am not here claiming that these philosophical and theoretical issues very often addressed by western scholars are not useful at all. The usefulness of some of them can be seen in addressing some important textual and linguistic issues that we some time overlook. But I am here concerned with the burning issue of relevance for our faith and the transformation of the community that should be the focus of African scholarship.

last two reasons: Firstly, in most cases and especially in America, topics are chosen after at least one year of coursework for those who are directly accepted into doctoral programs. This would challenge Holter's argument that most topics chosen are from the researchers' experience, though I recognize that some of them do indirectly reflect African experience in their choice.¹⁴ I would also argue that professors have a strong influence on students in terms of orienting them to choose a particular topic. This is obvious for most of us. Moreover, the great majority of western supervisors interested in exegetical approach do not accept interaction with Africa in the dissertation itself (except for clear comparative works). This is the same even in most European universities. Secondly, I read at least three dissertations written by my former African lecturers (T. Habtu, D. Carew and D. Kasali) of Nairobi Evangelical Graduate School of Theology (Kasali's dissertation is in the field of the New Testament). There is nothing that looks African in these three works, apart from the names of their authors.¹⁵ And

¹⁴ When I recently applied at Trinity International University (formerly Trinity Evangelical Divinity School) in Chicago for my PhD, I was not even asked to give the title of a prospective topic I would like to write about. This was probably because they knew that I would first have to sit for two years of coursework before I started writing my proposal. This is totally different from my present context in which I am writing this thesis. In fact, one of the conditions of my admission at the University of Natal was to present an acceptable proposal for my research. This means that my topic was chosen from my home country, from my context. I actually came to the University of Natal with an already written proposal.

¹⁵ Dr. Habtu's dissertation is not exegetical as such, but he himself told me that the American system does not

this can be said of many other dissertations written especially in Europe and America, and which use historical-critical or literary methodologies in their exegesis. Thus, I will contend that, with few exceptions, and apart from purely comparative studies, dissertations using an exegetical approach, written in most western institutions do not take the African context into account. Where it does, it simply "serves a minor role in the form of an appendix or a practical application."¹⁶ In this sense, my dissertation helps to demonstrate that the African context can be and should be integrated into exegetical works as much as possible, while using current relevant scholarly interpretative resources in Biblical studies.¹⁷

allow interaction with the African context in purely exegetical works, except when the dissertation is clearly comparing two contexts (Biblical and the interpreter's context).

¹⁶ Holter, *Old Testament Research for Africa*, 100.

¹⁷ I recently experienced the real struggle of some African Biblical scholars when I visited a professor in one of the Universities in South Africa who is writing a commentary on Ruth as her contribution to the African Bible Commentary project. She told me that her commentary has been severely criticized by one of the editors because she did not include exegesis. When I went to Nairobi, I met the editor, who was my professor and mentor. He also complained that his own work on Proverbs was criticized because his colleagues estimated that it was too exegetical and lacked the African contextual ingredients to make it really African. The professor writing on Ruth was probably trained in Southern Africa where the emphasis is on the contextual interpretation and not very much on exegesis, while the other professor writing on Proverbs is the product of western universities where the emphasis is on what the text meant (exegesis) and not on contextualizing the scripture. It seems to me that there is a real need to find a way of integrating the two aspects. And this is what I have tried to do in this dissertation. This also opens the window to

Inculturation Hermeneutics and my Methodology

It is easier to describe my methodology than to locate it in current African Biblical hermeneutics. The main reason is that, for the moment, there is not one single defined and accepted African Biblical hermeneutics. It is only now that some scholars are in the process of defining it, and this process might take some time. My perception is that most scholars trained in the western system still have difficulties in understanding what African Biblical hermeneutics is all about. Some of them have been trained for many years in the system, and the only model of interpretation they know is the one that has been offered to them during these years.¹⁸ This presents real difficulties. It seems to me that there is a real need of conversion. This conversion will involve abandoning what we have thought as "universal" and "standard" to embrace

show me what the forthcoming African Bible Commentary will probably look like.

¹⁸ A reading of Holter's introduction in *Old Testament Research for Africa*, might be helpful here. For example, on page 6, he refers to S.O. Abogunrin of Nigeria who laments that "many of those scholars who were trained in the West tend to develop a feeling of inferiority and, on their return to Africa, they regard themselves as ambassadors for certain western schools, rather than participants in the building of an African Biblical scholarship." On the same page, he also refers to Justin Ukpong, who points out that African Biblical scholars, in most cases, have been trained in the West, which means that they have been trained to read the Bible through an interpretive grid that has been developed in western culture." He finally quotes B.A. Ntreh of Ghana (page 7), who also complains that African Biblical scholars have accepted the western approaches in which they were trained as universal.

something different. It will also mean taking risks in fundamentally molding what we have learned in the western system in order to make something totally new out of it. This might be an extremely difficult exercise for those who are advanced in age, who might not be willing to start something new. But this risk also concerns our reputation as we think that since we have abandoned the western standard, we might become inferior to our western colleagues. There is a need of looking at our (future) African Biblical hermeneutics not as a sub-standard, but as a "different" hermeneutics.

Fortunately, there are now a few scholars who have accepted this risk and work toward giving shape to African Biblical hermeneutics. Some of them have gone steps further in studying and classifying the developments of Biblical interpretation in Africa. One of them is the Nigerian scholar, Justin Ukpong.¹⁹ The evaluation of my methodology will essentially be done against some of his works which are relevant for this section.²⁰

According to Ukpong, African Biblical interpretation can be divided into three phases:²¹ Phase I (1930s-70s) is characterized as reactive and apologetic. It focused on

¹⁹ We might also add the classification done by Holter with a special focus on the Old Testament in Knut Holter, *Yahweh in Africa: Essays on Africa and the Old Testament* (NY: Peter Lang, 2000), 9-25.

²⁰ Here I will refer to particularly two of his works: Justin Ukpong, "Developments in Biblical Interpretation in Africa: Historical and Hermeneutical Directions," in Gerald O. West and Musa Dube, *The Bible in Africa*, 11-28; and "The Parable of the Shrewd Manager," in *Semeia* 73 (1995) 189-210.

²¹ This summary is a paraphrase of some sections from Ukpong's "Developments in Biblical Interpretation," 11-28.

legitimizing African religion and culture in response to the widespread condemnation of African religion and culture by the Christian missionaries in the 19th and 20th centuries. The main method used during that phase was the comparative method.

Phase II (1970s-90s) is characterized as reactive and proactive. It emphasizes the use of the African context as a resource for biblical interpretation, dominated by an inculturation-evaluative method and liberation hermeneutics. The inculturation approach was expressed in two models: the Africa-in-the-bible studies and evaluative studies. The liberation approach was expressed in liberation hermeneutics, black theology and feminist hermeneutics.

Phase III (1990s) is characterized as a proactive stage. The methodology developed in phase II is carried forward here, but with a new orientation. One aspect of this new orientation recognizes ordinary African readers (i.e., non-biblical scholars) as important partners in academic Bible reading, and seeks to integrate their perspectives in the process of academic interpretation of the Bible. The other aspect of this new orientation, apart from recognizing the role of the ordinary readers, seeks to make the African context the subject of interpretation of the Bible.

Though it would be difficult to classify my work with exactness in these phases, it seems to me that according to Ukpong, this study would fit somewhere between the second and the third phase, more precisely under the second phase, in the general approach that he calls inculturation hermeneutics, especially the evaluative approach, which is concerned with what a particular biblical text or theme has

to say in the critique of a particular issue in the (African) society or in the church's life, or lessons that can be drawn from a Biblical text or theme for a particular context.²² Ukpong further claims that this kind of "study involves analyzing the Biblical text and pointing out the challenge it issues to the context or drawing its implications for the context."²³ He also adds that another aspect of this inculturation hermeneutics is to approach a theme or a text from an African perspective in order to offer some fresh insights into its meaning even though the tools of interpretation still remain western.²⁴

It will be difficult to adequately appreciate Ukpong's theory in the light of my work since I do not have access to most of the works (written by other Africans) that he mentions as illustrations of his classification. However, suffice it to say that, in my analysis, I was not only concerned with the evaluation of my context from the Biblical text. In fact there are two main things I attempted to do at the same time in this study: I sought to understand and to define the term "to know YHWH" in Jeremiah, while at the same time, trying to read and understand my own context through my interpretation of the selected passages. Thus, my study was not attempting to understand only my context in the light of the Scriptures, but it was trying to understand the two contexts at the same time: Judean and Congolese. Moreover, by understanding

²² Ukpong, "Developments in Biblical Interpretation," 17.

²³ Ukpong, "Developments in Biblical Interpretation," 17.

²⁴ Ukpong, "Developments in Biblical Interpretation," 18.

what was going on in these two contexts, I was also comparing them and letting one illuminate the other on the basis of their knowledge or lack of the knowledge of YHWH. This is the basic, though slight, difference with Ukpong's understanding of the evaluative method. In this sense, this study might also be characterized by Knut Holter as a comparative study,²⁵ and in this particular case, the two methods (evaluative and comparative) do not necessarily exclude one another. However, it should again be stressed that my concern, as stated in the introduction, was not only to understand my Congolese context as is done in most studies of this kind, but to understand both contexts (Biblical and Congolese), though I cannot deny that in most of my interpretations, more space was given to the Biblical context than to the analysis of my context. One justification for this would be that it takes time and space to uncover a meaning of the Biblical text than to talk about my context. The other justification would be my own hesitation about the length of space my context should occupy in a work like this.

Nevertheless, in the light of my study, I have found at least three critiques of Ukpong's categorization of different methods and his own understanding of inculturation hermeneutics. (1) This research has demonstrated that Ukpong's critique according to which the basic weakness of evaluative study does not give attention to social, economic and political issues²⁶ is not always correct. My estimation is that I have given enough

²⁵ Holter, *Old Testament Research for Africa*, 87-100.

²⁶ Ukpong, "Developments in Biblical Interpretation," 19.

attention to religious, political and socio-economic issues in both Judean (Biblical) and my context. This shows that the "old" evaluative or comparative method can be re-oriented to include issues (political, socio-economic, etc.) that are very important today in theological discussion. This might show that we do not need to accept all the tools of interpretation developed in western schools as standard, but that some of them can be modified and adapted to our context in order to become useful for our African focus in Biblical interpretation. At the same time, this re-adaptation would also help African Biblical scholars to avoid the temptation of simply brushing aside all the methods developed in the West. (2) Ukpong tends to include all contextual theologies in his inculturation hermeneutics.²⁷ It seems to me that this is not quite correct. David Tuesday Adamo, who can be considered as one of Ukpong's disciples as far as inculturation hermeneutics is concerned, argues that "African culture is part and parcel of African cultural hermeneutics,"²⁸ and that this African cultural hermeneutics is synonymous with contextual hermeneutics.²⁹ My major contention is that all contextual hermeneutics are not necessarily inculturation

²⁷ I understand inculturation hermeneutics as a Biblical method that pays particular attention to the cultural context of the interpreter.

²⁸ David Tuesday Adamo, "African Cultural Hermeneutics," in R. S. Sugirtharajah (ed.), *Vernacular Hermeneutics* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999), 69.

²⁹ Adamo, "African Cultural Hermeneutics," 68. In most of his writings, Ukpong himself easily generalizes his inculturation hermeneutics to include all categories of contextual studies.

hermeneutics, but that the latter (which seeks to interpret the Biblical text from a specific cultural context) is part of contextual hermeneutics. Some examples can be drawn from my thesis. In different sections, I dealt with dictatorship, corruption, and different aspects of social injustice under Mobutu's regime. I do not think that these elements constitute aspects of Congolese culture. My argument would be that all experiences (present and past) constitute our context in the interpretation but not necessarily our culture. In this way, I will argue that inculturation hermeneutics is part or a branch of (but not synonymous with) contextual hermeneutics. Thus, when Ukpong writes about his inculturation hermeneutics that "the basic hermeneutic theory at work is that the meaning of a text is a function of the interaction between the text in its context and the reader in his/her context,"³⁰ he is talking about contextual hermeneutics in general, not only inculturation hermeneutics. I will end this argument with John Riches' important remark according to which, it is "important neither to divorce culture from its wider context *nor simply to subsume it under economic, social, and political categories.*"³¹ (3) In another paper,³² Ukpong argues that the starting point of inculturation hermeneutics has to be the reader's (or the interpreter's)

³⁰ Ukpong, "Developments in Biblical Interpretation in Africa," 24.

³¹ John Riches, "Interpreting the Bible in African Contexts: Glasgow Consultation," in *Semeia* 73(1995), 185 [181-188]. (My emphasis).

³² Justin Ukpong, "Rereading the Bible with African Eyes," in *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa*, 91 (June 1995): 5.

socio-cultural context. I will discuss this point in detail in the last section of this chapter, but here I just want to point out that this argument might be an unnecessary limitation. The interpreter can start either with the text or with his context. Determinant factors are the interpreter's consistency, criticality, creativity, awareness, engagement, and the nature of the question he wants to address. My interpretation started with the Biblical text, yet my understanding is that I managed to interact well with my context. Having said all this, I would like to underline that Ukpong's seminal works on African Biblical hermeneutics are a very good starting point and no serious student of the Bible should ignore them if we finally want to take our context seriously in our interpretation. However, we also need to accept that there still is much to do in terms of adapting, developing and refining this methodology for practical use. One of the areas where this adaptation is needed for practicality is to find a way of reducing the many stages proposed by Ukpong if we want, for example, to use his methodology in producing a whole commentary on the Bible. This should be done without losing the meticulousness that characterizes his interpretative method.

Some Recommendations

There is no doubt that African Biblical scholarship is aware of its desperate needs to come up with a clear methodological approach for interpreting the Bible. I also take it for granted that most, if not all African Biblical scholars, long for contextual Bible interpretation, after having realized that tools for Biblical interpretation

developed in the West need to be adapted to the context of Africa. For example, an area where this adaptation is needed is in the use of historical criticism. For me, the greatest weakness of this method is that it creates an unnecessary gap between the exegete and the interpreter (or the expositor) and between the scholar and the preacher. I have shown in my thesis that it is possible for the scholar to introduce a dynamic interaction between the Biblical text (in its original language) and the interpreter's context. In this way, the exegete or the scholar can also (and should) become an expositor or a preacher because what becomes important is not only the recovery of the hidden original meaning of a text or a doctrine, but the concretization of this meaning in the (new) context of the interpreter. By doing this, the African scholar would be able to demonstrate his/her capacity of making something new from the received method. This newness would be seen in a kind of fusion between Biblical scholarship and the struggle for the transformation of African community.³³ And this new method becomes his/her method and not a western method. This is an additional proof that the academy can work for the service of the community or the Church.

³³ Jonathan A. Draper, "Reading the Bible as Conversation: A Theory and Methodology for Contextual Interpretation of the Bible in Africa," in *Grace & Truth: A Journal of Catholic Reflection for Southern Africa* 19/2 (2002) 12-24. He would call this process of fusion between Biblical Scholarship and the struggle for the transformation of the community an "appropriation." For Draper, this appropriation is a process of owning the Word, accepting its meaning (discovered from the interpreter's community), and taking responsibility for it. The result of such appropriation would be the change in behavior and action in and through the community of faith in society.

The same can be said of some literary approaches (new criticism, formalism, rhetorical criticism, narrative criticism, structuralism, deconstruction, etc), especially the assumption that literature and history are mutually exclusive categories. It seems to me that it is important to pay attention to the text as I have tried to do in my interpretation because the Bible is itself a text. But when this attention becomes excessive to the point of excluding, for example, the questions related to historical background, then some forms of literary criticism must be rejected, since a particular historical period within which a text was produced is helpful in order to show to the interpreter and the community the kind of the society that produced a particular text. This is also what I have tried to do in my interpretation.

Therefore, we must appreciate the effort of many Africans who are now working toward this new vision. For example, Ukpong not only describes what others are doing or trying to do, but he is among the many who are now engaged in this struggle to lead the way in developing an African Biblical hermeneutics. Gerald West is helping interpreters to integrate ordinary readers as partners in Biblical interpretation,³⁴ Jonker attempts to show how we can come to a communal interpretation of the Bible,³⁵ and the list continues.³⁶ One needs also to realize that this new African

³⁴ West, *Academy of the Poor*.

³⁵ Louis, C. Jonker, "Toward a Communal Reading of the Bible," in Mary Getui, Knut Holter and Victor Zikurantire, *Interpreting the Old Testament in Africa* (New York: Peter Lang, 2000), 77-88.

³⁶ I would also like to recognize the effort of many feminists in Africa. The reason I do not mention them very

hermeneutics has many faces. This is legitimate because different scholars have different focuses and interests according to their field of specialization, and the religious, social, economic, and political questions that they want to address in their communities. However, with all carefulness, I would argue that apart from few scholars, mainly in Southern Africa, who have a clear idea on how to go about this contextual interpretation, many have yet to find their way. Even with these few scholars who have attempted to formulate their hermeneutical methodologies, none would wish to claim that his/her articulation is a definitive interpretational statement. In this last section of my thesis, I would like to make two important recommendations about what I see as an important task before us, as African Biblical scholars in the light of my own interpretation. I need to make it clear that my intention here is not to give a dogmatic procedure that cannot be changed. Rather, I want to end this chapter by discussing two specific points, which I consider as a clue for the beginning of an African Biblical hermeneutics: the issue of starting point, and the relevance of our hermeneutics for the community of faith and for the continent as a whole.

Starting Point or/and Guiding Questions

In most of my readings, it became clear that one of the major issues of concern for African Biblical scholars seems to be the question of starting point. Most interpreters

often in my thesis is that I still have to read their many works, understand their understanding of the word of God and take my own stand in the light of their diversity.

agree that for a contextual interpretation, one has to start from his/her own context and not from the Biblical text. However, my fear is that many are talking about this starting point without a deep reflection on what it involves and without knowing exactly how to go about it. I have shown in this work that the most important element for the interpretation might not be the starting point but a (set of) guiding question(s) one has to bring to the text. It is this (set of) question(s), when well formulated, which constitutes the true guide of the interpretation because it keeps the focus of the interpretation process on the text and on the contextual issue(s) that the interpreter wants to address. These questions also enable the interpreter to make a close and thorough reading of the text, and bridge the gap between the text and the context of the interpreter, or to use Gadamer's language, they help to make a fusion of horizons.³⁷ For example, those who work in contextual Bible study know well that an inappropriate and inconsistent question to a text means a failure for the whole process. What this means is that we cannot ask of the text a question that it does not address. In the same way, it is also possible to ask of a text questions that have no relevance for the community, and the interpretation becomes contextually irrelevant.³⁸ I think that Conradie and Jonker are probably right when they argue that the choice of a

³⁷ Quoted by Ernst M. Conradie and Louis C. Jonker, "Determining Relative Adequacy in Biblical Interpretation," in *Scriptura* 78 (2001) 451.

³⁸ A clear guide on the issue concerning the choice of our questions is Gerald O. West, *Contextual Bible Study* (Pietermaritzburg: Cluster Publications, 1993), especially pages 62-74.

point of departure cannot guarantee and cannot be used to determine the relative adequacy of the interpretation.³⁹ In another publication, they become more assertive by claiming: "perhaps the point of departure is not all that crucial. You may simply start with either the text or the context. It is far more important to maintain the dynamic interplay between the two."⁴⁰ To maintain the dynamic interplay between the text and the context is an important issue in the interpretation. However, the two authors do not help us to clearly find out how to do it. This is where I think that the issue of guiding questions comes in. My argument will be that this set of questions should be composed in a way that can help to connect Biblical (con)text with the interpreter's context. In other words, it is this set of questions that should help the interpreter to engage the horizon of the text, that of the context and allow a great interaction between the two horizons, one shedding light on the other. Thus, my estimation is that a proposal for a Biblical African hermeneutics should start with this issue of guiding questions. Scholars engaged in reading the Bible with ordinary readers are already doing this. It is this set of questions that will indicate whether the interpreter has to start with the Biblical text or his context, and the reason for doing this. Thus, I posit that the starting point alone, though important, should not be a big issue, and that African Biblical interpreters should rather start their interpretation by thinking and reflecting on the

³⁹ Ernst M. Conradie and Louis C. Jonker, "Determining Relative Adequacy in Biblical Interpretation," 449.

⁴⁰ Ernst M. Conradie and Louis C. Jonker, *Angling for Interpretation*, 87.

questions they want to address to the text, questions that can help their interpretation to be relevant for their African contexts. In other words, the interpretation of each text or each book should start with some of the following questions: What do I want to do with this text (or book)? What is the issue that I want to address? How will I go about it? What is the result I am aiming at? What will be its relevance for my community? How can this text help me to understand my context? How can my context help me to understand this text? What is the need of my community? I must confess that this point needs more elaboration, but I definitely see it as one of the important aspects in the elaboration of our proposal for an African Biblical hermeneutics.

The Aim of Contextual Biblical Interpretation

Another issue related to the first one is the question of the aim of the interpretation. Most African Biblical scholars have equally come to the conclusion that their interpretation of the Bible must be engaged because the received interpretations of the Bible from western scholars and missionaries are not very helpful for our communities. As I have already stated elsewhere, this is due to the fact that the received western (missionary) interpretation is characterized by the so-called "objectivity," "impartiality" and "neutrality." It is now proved that such interpretation cannot adequately address the issues we are struggling with in the continent. This means that guiding questions as a tool for this interpretation should not be intended to lead to timeless neutrality and ideological abstraction. Nor should they intend to answer only

objective, academic⁴¹ or philosophical answers. Such questions would be useless and only produce papers intended to promote the academy and their writers. Engaged Biblical scholars do not first work for their own promotion but for the transformation of the community, though this promotion automatically comes through their engagement (and not their pursuit of it) and their hard working. It is also important to note that this transformation of the community must start with the transformation of individuals. In this process, the interpreter can become a facilitator, i.e., someone who enables others to understand the word of God and appropriate it to their own situation. Therefore, the temptation of reading the text objectively and neutrally for professionalism must be abandoned because it is not helpful for the Church in Africa. This demonstrates that the meaning of any Biblical passage can only be retrieved and used for the transformation of life when it is read from a concrete situation. Right from the beginning of this thesis, my argument was that the transformed Church in Africa south of the Sahara where Christianity constitutes the great majority of the population would probably lead to a transformed continent. But the true power of transformation is very often hidden in the text and must be brought to light. It is only a good contextual

⁴¹ For example, the debate concerning the historical Jesus, Moses, Jeremiah, etc., should not be our priority (though we cannot ignore them). This does not mean that we are left behind in "highly qualified" academic debate, but the issue is that of priority. There are pressing issues in the continent that must be addressed. The Bible was not written for academic debate, but to address real life situations of a particular time. Both the importance of Christianity in Africa and the deep crisis our continent is undergoing demand of us that we make of Christian faith a life-changing religion.

interpretation of this Biblical text, guided by well-formulated questions, that has the power to disclose the text and render it a powerful tool for the transformation of individuals and community. This is why I have been arguing in this thesis, that a contextual approach is the key to the recovery of the word of God. Such interpretation makes biblical scholarship a formidable resource for recovering forgotten, neglected and absent voices in the Bible.⁴²

It remains to be tested how this can help us to open up new perspectives and questions which can lead to paradigm shifts in scholarly academic readings. This also poses the question of identity in African Biblical scholarship. As I have already argued elsewhere, African Biblical scholars do not need to think of their work as a sub-standard because of the lack of participation in highly academic debates, but as a scholarship born in a different context. My understanding is that if we work hard and together, we will indeed be recognized by others scholars. It is only with this consciousness that we can become more assertive and make our contribution not only in the African continent, but also worldwide.

My final comment is that a truly African Biblical hermeneutics will be born from the synthesis of different proposals written by different scholars interested in Biblical interpretation in Africa. For the moment, there is a need to encourage one another, establish networks, and exchange different ideas. This network and exchange of ideas among scholars will help us to avoid absolutizing our

⁴² Gerald O. West, *The Academy of the Poor: Towards a Dialogical Reading of the Bible* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999), 67.

research interest as we discover that there are many more fields to be explored. In this way, by talking to each other as partners in a common cause, we can mutually challenge and correct each other's enterprise. This will not only enhance our task, but also widen our horizons to other hermeneutical possibilities.⁴³

⁴³ R.S. Sugirtharajah, "Postscript: Achievements and Items for a Future Agenda," in R.S.Sugirtharajah (ed.), *Voices from the Margin*, 443.

CHAPTER 8

CONCLUSION

The goal of this thesis was twofold: to study the term ידע את־יהוה (to know YHWH) in order to understand its meaning in the book of Jeremiah and to find out whether the study of this term has some relevance for the Church in DR Congo. Eight of the ten occurrences of the term ידע את־יהוה were selected for this study and grouped into four contexts in which they appear: the context of social justice (4:19-22; 5:1-6; 9:1-8; 22:13-19), idolatry (2:4-13), self-aggrandizement (9:22-23) and the new covenant (24:4-7; 31:31-34).

Several lessons can be learned from this study. One of them is that Jeremiah's life and ministry were deeply involved with religious, social and political events in his country. He lived during the most difficult days of his nation and, as YHWH's messenger, he had a specific message from God for both the people and the leaders of Judah concerning the causes of the decay of the nation. For Jeremiah, the primary cause of this decay was a breach in the relation between YHWH and his people, especially political and spiritual leaders who failed to keep the nation in the right relationship with their God. This breach came about as a consequence of a broken covenant between YHWH and Judah, or as a result of not following the law. In the book of Jeremiah, not to know YHWH means to refuse to abide to the covenant or to refuse to follow YHWH's law. In the passages selected for this study, this rejection of the covenant or the lack of knowing YHWH is manifested at two levels.

The first level is the area of social justice. In Jeremiah, Judah is depicted as a society collapsing under its own corruption. Four of the eight passages (i.e., fifty percent) condemn Judah as a community that has abandoned its vision. Judah or Israel in general was a community called forth by YHWH to demonstrate YHWH's justice through its just social shape. Said differently, Israel was a holy nation or a nation set apart by YHWH to serve as a counter example to other oppressive nations around. The law was set to guide Israel as a nation in the accomplishment of this mission, and the covenant was the agreement between YHWH and Israel according to which the latter accepted to live by the standard of the law. This is why many writers rightly recognize that in these four passages, the offenses that Jeremiah is condemning in Judah are nothing else than the failure to follow the Decalogue, especially the second table of the Decalogue that speaks about the well being of Israel as a community. Thus, in the second chapter, an intertextual reading of 4:19-22 showed that to know YHWH means to encourage the oppressed, to defend the cause of the fatherless, to plead the cause of the widow and to maintain justice in the courts. In 5:1-6, the lack of the knowledge of YHWH was manifested in the total lack of honesty in the relationship between different members of the community and a superficial spirituality that was in contradiction with the way they lived daily. In 9:1-8, the list of evil deeds of the community is summarized in one single word: falsehood. This word was defined as a dearticulation of the reason, the corruption of the whole attitude of a community in its global orientation and the consequences that follow such an attitude in the society. In 22:13-19, Jehoiakim is condemned for abusing political

power by oppressing the powerless. He forgot that his power was delegated, and that it was given for a specific purpose, i.e., to maintain justice in the society. But Jehoiakim understood his leadership in terms of possessing wealth, enslaving his subjects for his personal projects, and using this power to protect himself and his system by crushing all the opposition voices, including YHWH's voice. This is what we called political idolatry.

The interpretation of these four passages helped me to understand the situation in my country; to discover that it is because our Congolese Christianity is still very superficial that it has not been able to help us build a coherent and unified community both at local and national level. The Church failed to help Congolese understand their Christianity as a way of living responsible life as citizens. Our Christianity remains an outward religion and our Christian service a prestige, a way of surviving in a country which is undergoing severe crisis. This is why, the DR Congo as a nation has collapsed despite its claim to have the largest Roman Catholic community in the continent, the world's most influential francophone Protestant movement and the continent's biggest independent Churches. The reasons for its collapse are almost the same as in Judah: too much corruption, selfishness, the abuse of power by the political leaders and the failure of spiritual leaders to help civil rulers to properly use their power. Thus, though we claim that we know YHWH, according to Jeremiah our knowledge of YHWH in DR Congo is not adequate.

Second, the people of Judah are accused of idolatry, of abandoning YHWH and going after other gods in order to serve them. This accusation is found in Jer. 2:4-13, which constitutes our third chapter. Here the accusation is

linked to the crisis of memory, the loss of the capacity to think the past and to actualize it. This past is linked with what YHWH has done in history to help his people. According to Jeremiah, this past should have been constituted as a fixed recital of YHWH's sovereignty that was indispensable for Israel's life. The more Judah forgot about YHWH, the more she distanced herself from covenantal obligations and the more she became useless, vanity, nothing.

Four specific groups of leaders are to be blamed for this forgetfulness: the priests, the scholars, the shepherds and the prophets. These were leaders who neglected their responsibility and exercised their duties without any consideration for the covenant. Instead of establishing a kind of accountability between themselves that could have greatly helped them to lead the nation under the covenant, they created a corrupted system that led the nation to idolatry. There was a kind of conspiracy between these leaders to build up a system that disoriented the whole nation. This probably led to a misreading of history and to a misunderstanding of the right decision to take during the time of national crisis. Instead of crying to YHWH during the time of crisis, these leaders went after other nations (and therefore, after foreign gods) for help. By so doing, they were compelled to make allegiance to foreign gods and to break the covenant. This was a terrible affront for YHWH. And this is what not to know YHWH means in this passage. I also noted that this worship of foreign gods should have had negative implications (social, spiritual and economic) in Judah as a community. My argument was that the transgression committed in this chapter was against the first table of the Decalogue, i.e.,

against the law that regulates the relationship between YHWH himself and his people.

In the context of my nation, I linked this particular passage with the failure of the Protestant Church (Eglise du Christ au Congo) which played the game of the dictator and failed to lead the people toward a right understanding of the cause of the decay of the nation. By so doing, the Congolese Protestant Church actually enhanced the power of the dictator to destroy the nation. This also rendered the Protestant Church culturally irrelevant and politically unable to help the nation stand against the force of destruction. My conclusion there was that it becomes dangerous for the nation when religious leaders become more concerned with the standing of their religious institutions rather than seeking to make the Church relevant to the context and to confront regimes over policies which are disastrous for the society at large.

The fourth chapter (9:22-23), which is a critique of Judah's leadership toward the end of the existence of this nation, summarizes this vision of justice with YHWH and with one another in the community by showing that those who had power (authority), wealth and knowledge in the nation would have used them for establishing and maintaining justice, lovingkindness and righteousness instead of boasting because of this power, wealth and knowledge. In this way, the powerful would have been doing what YHWH himself desires for every human society, i.e., using his power, wealth and knowledge to help those who are in need and to maintain a just society. A leader who does these things can rightly claim that he/she knows YHWH because he/she uses his/her power, knowledge and wealth according to YHWH's plan or according to the covenant (for Judah).

From this short passage, I also demonstrated that it was the failure to practice this justice, righteousness and lovekindness both in the Church and in the civil government that brought chaos to DR Congo.

The fifth chapter is YHWH's response to the failure of human leadership to know him. Put differently, this chapter is a response to the failure described in the first three chapters of this thesis. This response has two important aspects: judgment and restoration. YHWH sends his people away (especially the leaders) and destroys the corrupted system in Jerusalem. He sends them into exile so that he can meet them outside the corrupted system that they had established in Judah. Nevertheless, after this judgment comes YHWH's grace. He promises to forgive them and restore them by giving them a new heart, which will enable his people to know him better, i.e., to be obedient to the new covenant that he will make with them.

At this point, I noted at least two important points for the Church in DR Congo, especially in the present context of civil wars: (1) there is hope beyond all human despair if we put our hope in YHWH. This hope is rooted in the character of God who is able to forgive and give life where human beings see only death. (2) Congolese Christians should know that they belong to a forgiven or a new covenant community. In the same way, what should characterize us in the Church is the practice of forgiveness and not a resentful and careful management of old hurts. All these are lessons that the Congolese Church must learn and teach her members.

The sixth chapter attempts to do two things: to give a summary of the development of the use of the term to know YHWH in the book of Jeremiah according to our passages, and

to summarize the meaning of the term to know YHWH in the eight passages.

Concerning the development of the use of the term ידע את־יהוה in Jeremiah, my interpretation can be summarized as follows: there was first a call to repentance in terms of obedience to the covenant in the early days (2:4-13), followed by a vision of disaster and announcement of the coming judgment (4:19-22) because the people of Judah refused to know YHWH. Since there was no sign of repentance in Judah, judgment became the only option (5:1-6) in terms of the Babylonian devastation (9:1-8; 9:22-23; 22:13-19). However, after the disaster (in terms of the exile), YHWH promises to restore his people and give them a new heart to fully know him (24:4-7; 31:31-34).

Concerning the second point, I also found out that the term ידע את־יהוה means to recognize the covenantal traditions as normative and to accept to follow them for a harmonious relationship with YHWH and with one another in the society. My argument was that these covenantal traditions have the following meanings: YHWH's mighty acts of liberation of Israel in history (2:4-13); YHWH's prerogative as the sole God of Israel (24:4-7; 31:31-34), and the necessity of Israel (Judah) to establish a just society as witness to YHWH's justice, righteousness and steadfast love (4:19-22; 5:1-6; 9:1-8; 9:22-23; 22:13-19).

Chapter seven returns to my methodology in terms of evaluating it and giving some recommendations for doing African Biblical interpretation. The need for this chapter is justified by the fact that African interpreters are in the process of developing their hermeneutics and that this thesis is an attempt in this process. In this chapter I made a few suggestions to help African Biblical

interpreters in their struggle to find a new way of doing contextual Bible interpretation. For example, I argued that the choice of a point of departure alone may not guarantee and may not be used to determine the adequacy of the interpretation as some interpreters think, and that the most important aspect of the interpretation is to maintain a dynamic interplay between the text and the context through guiding questions. I also argued that in the face of current African socio-economic, political and religious crisis, the ultimate aim of African Biblical interpretation should not be the promotion of the scholar and the academy but the transformation of the community. However, in this chapter, I also recognized that a "pioneering" project of this kind is likely to have its flaws, and I was aware of the fact that my methodology needs improvement. Nonetheless, I also strongly thought that somewhere someone needed to start something. And this is what I have done. I will be happy to see others improving my imperfections and making something better from what I started here. In this way, this thesis would have served a useful purpose.

As a way of conclusion, I would like to add some important points concerning my Congolese context. This thesis pointed out several causes of the disintegration of DR Congo as a nation and what the Church can do to help for the rebuilding of the country. However, my arguments were limited because this thesis was not primarily on the causes of the decay of DR Congo, but on the study of the term "to know YHWH" in Jeremiah. I also limited my study to only two main religious groups (Roman Catholic and Eglise du Christ au Congo). Still, it seems to me that from this study, there is a way of deepening my reflection and expanding different arguments contained in this thesis in order to

find out how our Christianity can become a mainspring of a new vitality for the transformation of hearts and minds for the building of a new and better nation. In other words, there is an urgent need to help Congolese Christians understand their salvation in Jesus Christ as a seed for political renaissance, economic restoration, cultural renewal, moral regeneration, and the spiritual revitalization of the nation.

In the sections below, I will make a few other suggestions for more reflections about the role that the Church can play in DR Congo. These reflections come from my strong conviction on the fact that despite its weaknesses, Christianity in DR Congo is well equipped to flourish for more years to come and to continue making more impact on the lives of people. This is clear from the fact that in the face of current war situation, and regardless of the deep crisis in the country, the Church in DR Congo has not stopped from making more converts and growing steadily. Thus, because of the high number of her members and also because of her potential unifying power, the Congolese Church might become the most efficient weapon for change. However, this will not happen unless Christians become mature enough, obedient to the word of God and strive to practice their faith in their daily struggle. Concretely, this will involve the change of our mentality, of our worldview and of everything that hinders us from living a harmonious life guided by God's word. In other words, the true challenge facing the Church in DR Congo is that of nurturing her members to grow and reflect the Christian values in every aspect of their lives. This will require a strong involvement of Church leaders to train and help Congolese Christians to resist things like corruption,

individualism, hatred, tribalism, and all kind of civil irresponsibility, which characterize our society today. In this way, Congolese Christians will live as mature and responsible citizens. In fact, this responsible life as citizens is what Jeremiah was probably prescribing as one of the solutions for the healing of Judah, and this is also what it meant to know YHWH in the book of Jeremiah.

In order to be able to accomplish this task, I think that all the Churches (Roman Catholics, Protestants, and other independent groups) should abandon what divide them and consult one another for concrete social projects. Such consultations should have at least four objectives: First, to study all the causes of the present crisis at local, national and international level. This should also include the causes of negative image and the underestimation of our own capabilities that we have built about ourselves. To my knowledge, there are no serious studies that cover all aspects (social, economic, cultural, religious and political) of our crisis in DR Congo. Second, to make every effort to find out strategies for the struggle against all the negative forces (spiritual, socio-political and economic) that have paralyzed our society both at local and national level. Third, to find a way of training all members of the Church to understand more clearly and from Biblical perspectives, all the evils that have ended up dehumanizing them in DR Congo. This training should go beyond simple preaching on Sundays and it should follow a clear social project for the nation. Fourth, to organize Christian communities for new activities and new strategies at all levels (spiritual, social, political, cultural and economic) for the renewal of the nation. Such organization should be conceived in a way that it can bring about

tangible, ambitious and realistic projects in all major areas that are vital to the development of our society today. This also means that different pastors and bishops should learn to reorganize their pastoral ministries and design different projects in order to help members of the Church to fight against the spirit of dependence, passiveness, vagueness, pessimism and irresponsibility. The Church in Congo should not forget that to train all her members for action is to mobilize at least 85% of the entire population for the change.

I also noticed that in our Churches, there is little understanding of politics as a system and a weak understanding of social evil/sin. Greater knowledge of these phenomena can help avoid irrelevant and naïve responses to political and social issues. Thus, the Church should not concern herself only with pressures to be numerically successful, but she must also encourage deep thinking, political and ethical teachings from Biblical perspective, and an interpretation of the Bible that deeply speaks to their context. On top of it all, I would repeat that the Church has a great responsibility of organizing and training her lay members, because these are the people who will directly implement these Biblical teachings in the area of social and political actions. In this way, the Church would have assured direct Christian participation in the process of the transformation of the society. One clear example is that it is important to teach Christians involved in politics to make every effort to go beyond sterile frictions between members of opposing political parties for the sole objective of coming to power to become rich, as it is happening today in my country. Instead, they must learn that they are responsible for the promotion of a

real social project for the integral and constant renewal of the whole nation. Such projects for the promotion of community development, democracy and peace in our nation should become one of the major topics of reflection in our seminaries, Churches and Christian universities. One should for example think about developing a reflection on the political role of the Bible, on the distinction between morality and legislation, on developing a Biblical theology of justice, of political power, etc.

In the area of economy, Church leaders should also be able to understand issues related to the economic system of the nation. With this understanding, they should be able to encourage Christians to work for an economic system that reflect Biblical values. This requires a deep reflection and an understanding of economy in the light of God's word. Questions like: Why do we find ourselves where we are economically? What really happened with the economy in our nation? What is needed for the change in this chaotic economic situation? Which actions should we take as Christians to stop this economic disaster? Is there any teaching in the Bible concerning all these economic issues? New subjects related to economy, community developments, management and business administration should also be introduced in our seminaries, Bible schools and Christian universities so that Christians might be able to understand these issues that have been for long considered as secular. It seems to me that one of the reasons for which we find ourselves in chaos in DR Congo is the neglect of these "secular" areas by the Church.

It is my conviction that the crisis in DR Congo may find a lasting solution if the Church (re)organizes herself and understands her mission as the implementation of Jesus'

mission for the world: the announcement of the coming of the Kingdom of God with its vision of the new heaven and new earth. This prospect of new earth and new heaven should lead to a new understanding of our salvation in Christ as a constant restoration of our relationship with God, with one another and a new understanding of our life and ministry as responsible citizens, striving to reconcile every aspect of our life as individuals and community with Christ, the King and the Lord. In this way, the work of the Holy Spirit in the life of each Christian would not be understood only in terms of leading us to heaven but as the power which enables us to transform our society now and here. In this way, we will bring hope in a chaotic nation like DR Congo, and we will claim that we know YHWH as Jeremiah understood it.

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