



## Daniel Jeremy Silver Collection Digitization Project

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### **MS-4850: Daniel Jeremy Silver Papers, 1972-1993.**

Series III: The Temple Tifereth-Israel, 1946-1993, undated.

Sub-series A: Events and Activities, 1946-1993, undated.

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Adult Institute, Great Trials of Jewish History, "Jeremiah," lecture  
by Rabbi Richard C. Hertz, 1965.



The Great Trials

The Temple  
Rabbi Hertz

February 12, 1965

I'm not quite sure myself how to respond to the very gracious invitation, particularly the introduction, of Dr. Levin's, but I do want to say what a privilege it is for me to be here and take part in this most impressive course in adult Jewish education on the Four Trials of Jewish History. It was about fifteen years ago that I spoke here, not in this beautiful auditorium, but in the room next door, since you've remodeled and modernized so beautifully and it is truly a privilege to be here. I speak in this vein because I am so conscious since I've been in the Temple today

the Prince of the Pulpit has gone to his eternal reward. I was here with you last year to pay my final respects at that service. I became because I, like so many of the other younger rabbis in America looked up to him in awe and in reverence, as the master craftsman of the spoken word. He was the north star by which I set my compass as a rabbi. Often over the years I've had him in Detroit and always he came with the same gracious acceptance to bring the prophetic message of Judaism. That great wondrous wealth of knowledge, the solid scholarship, the excellence of standards, the eloquence of pleading for the love of tradition. When I say (Hebrew) his memory is a blessing, a living blessing, blessing all of you who come here and sense his living presence.

It is a particular joy for me to come back here and see the son, Rabbi Daniel, so capably making his own way and leading this great and historic congregation, this cathedral synagogue of America and aided by his two , Rabbi Milton Matz, and Rabbi Lawrence Forman, I as your neighbor, can surely say that this Temple, the Temple, can only go from strength to strength.



The subject chosen not by me, but for me, The Case of the Subversive Prophet, Jeremiah. It's probably the only joke in the whole lecture tonight because this is not a very funny lecture nor even a very funny subject. It's a very serious one. I want to say that it's not a very easy subject to deal with for Jeremiah is like a prism - you can see many colors and many reflections. What makes the Book of Jeremiah so fascinating, so important is its deeply personal character. Here we get an insight into a Prophet's inner life. Jeremiah was a sensitive spirit, a dreamy lyrical poet by nature. In him, Hoshaiiah speaks again. His convictions drove him to a life of action. He had to announce the impending doom of a whole nation, but he could not reconcile himself to it and he grieved over the oncoming tragedy. His was a gentle soul who had to make enemies by speaking the truth as he saw it. Yet he could not steel himself against the hatred of the very people whom he had to denounce. Scattered among his public addresses are personal confessions. Fragments, so to speak, of a spiritual diary unexcelled of its esthetic beauty, and out of the loneliness of the sorrowful night was something new and wonderful. This is what I want to talk to you about tonight. About how this lonely prophet Jeremiah, this man for whom religion was a personal experience in communion with the divine, could have cried out "Thy oh God knowest me, thou seest and tryst my heart toward Thee" and he hears the Divine answer coming with the reply "I am with thee, to save thee and deliver thee sayeth the Lord". Who is this man? What kind of a person was he? What was his life's story? What happened? How did he get into trouble? How could he have ever become a subversive prophet? Jeremiah was a gentle, sensitive, melancholy man. A yearning for affection, for love, for all the comforts of home and a normal life and yet impelled by a prophetic fire within him, to antagonize people, the very people he loved and who had to be undermined in their national existence. Kings imprisoned him, associates reviled him, the mob cried for his blood, often he cursed his fate, but he stood his with magnificent courage. He never lost faith in the goodness of God



or in the justice of God's decree and out of his suffering came a new understanding of God. His intense emotionalism was great strength for it brought him into close personal contact with God. He felt close to God. He came to the realization that an individual fellowship - a personal relationship with God was possible. God had not chosen nations, he had chosen individuals. God was in every man's heart. God was in every form of nature. He was the Divine man, his presence in each individual linked all men in kinship and made them brothers. What's the story?

Well, Jeremiah was born of an old priestly family in , a little village ~~of~~ about an hour's walk from Jerusalem. His real mission began when international difficulties overwhelmed the little kingdom of Judah. Egypt, sweeping up toward the Assyria of the empire of the two rivers of the north, attacked Judah. Killed King Josiah, took possession of the country. It in turn was soon overwhelmed by Babylon which succeeded, coming out of the north and once again this tiny little kingdom which so often through history was to be nailed between the skimmer and

of Egypt and Babylon, like a vise squeezing in between the

and the . Judah was caught between these two and this is the way Jeremiah then came with his message. Jeremiah attacked King  Person for his lavish living, for his tolerance of foreign paganism, for his indifference for social concerns. In the twenty-second chapter of the Book of Jeremiah, Jeremiah spoke out this way "Woe unto him that buildeth his house by unrighteousness, And his chambers by injustice; That useth his neighbour's service without wages, And giveth him not his hire; That saith: 'I will build me a wide house And spacious chambers', And curreth him out windows, Shalt thou reign, because thou strivest to excel in cedar? Did not thy father eat and drink, and do justice and righteousness? Then it was well with him. He judged the cause of the poor and needy; Then it was well. Is not this to know Me? saith the Lord. But thine eyes and thy heart Are not but for thy covetousness, and for shedding innocent blood, And for oppression, and for violence, to do it. Therefore thus saith the Lord concerning Jehoiakim the son of Josiah, king of Judah: Thy shall not lament for you: 'Ah my brother!'



or: 'Ah sister!' They shall not lament for you: You shall be buried with the burial of an ass, Drawn and cast forth beyond the gates of Jerusalem." Jeremiah insisted that little Judah, wedged between these two giant nations of Egypt and Babylon, could only find salvation only by ~~xxxxx~~ remaining outside of entangling alliances and international coalitions. He preceeded President Washington's farewell address by twenty-five hundred years. Jeremiah could not believe that the holy city of Jerusalem was impregnable or that it could not be destroyed and so Jeremiah became the most unpopular man in Jerusalem. Priests derided him, Patriarch denounced him, mobs threatened him. When the king renounced his authority and prepared for war, Jeremiah continued to be a pacifist propagandist. He became a subversive prophet. Thrown into jail, he wrote out his sermons which he preached and sent them to the king. King                      destroyed them in anger. Jeremiah rewrote them, elaborated on them - continued to preach his almost treasonable doctrines. We read in the twentieth chapter of Jeremiah, a special sermon that he wrote for the king. "O Lord, Thou hast enticed me, and I was enticed, Thou hast overcome me, and hast prevailed; I am become a laughing-stock all the day, Every one mocketh me. For as often as I speak, I cry out, I cry: 'Violence and spol'; Because the word of the Lord is made A reproach unto me, and a derision, all the day. And if I say: 'I will not make mention of Him, Nor speak any more in His name', Then there is in my heart as it were a burning fire Shut up in my bones, And I weary myself to hold it in, But cannot." Jeremiah had to preach. He had to cry out - this is a burning fire within him, that would give him no peace. Jeremiah prophesized that Judah would fall. It was                      to continue.                      , the supreme God of the universe would have to refashion his work for Judah had failed God. Jeremiah advised his people to go and watch the humble potter, to see how he worked with clay. How he fashions and refashioned the clay and that gave him an idea for a sermon. In the famous eighteenth chapter of Jeremiah, he wrote "The word which came to Jeremiah when the Lord saith, 'Arise, and go down to the potter's house, and



there I will cause thee to hear My words.' So I went down to the potter's house, and, behold, he was at his work on the wheels. And whensoever the vessel that he made of the clay was marred in the hand of the potter, he made another vessel, as seemed good to the potter to make it. Then the word of the Lord came to me, saying: 'O house of Israel, cannot I do with you as this potter? saith the Lord. Behold, as the clay in the potter's hand, so are ye in My hand, O house of Israel. At one instant I may speak concerning a nation, and concerning a kingdom, to pluck up and to break down and to destroy it; but if that nation turn from their evil, because of which I have spoken against it, I repent of the evil that I thought to do unto it. And at one instant I may speak concerning a nation, and concerning a kingdom, to build and plant it; but if it do evil in My sight, then I repent of the good. Now therefore do thou speak to the men of Judah, and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem, saying: Thus saith the Lord: Behold, I frame evil against you, and devise a device against you; return ye now every one of you from his evil way, and amend your ways. But they say: There is no hope; but we will walk after our own devices, and we will do every one after the stubbornness of his own evil heart.'" No, the potter inspired him to a great sermon but the people wouldn't listen. And though the potter was often obliged to do his work over and over and over again until the clay proved to be what he wanted. It was in this case to no avail. Jeremiah had to flee. He had to flee to a cave and there his selfless disciple borrowed. Wrote down his sermon and his messages. Later on when read the addresses in the Temple and the scrolls were read before King Jehoiakim, they were torn to pieces. They were burned and again Jeremiah would dictate his messages anew. Fortunately for us, the records of no doubt made possible the present Book of Jeremiah. In the thirty-sixth chapter of the Book of Jeremiah we hear how the whole story was taken down and ultimately became this Book in the Bible. "And it came to pass in the fourth year of Jehoiakim the son of Josiah, king of Judah, that this word came unto Jeremiah from the Lord, saying: 'Take thee a roll of a book, and write therein all the words that I have spoken unto thee against Israel, and against



Judah, and against all the nations, from the day I spoke unto thee, unto this day. It may be that the house of Judah will hear all the evil which I purpose to do unto them; that they may return every man from his evil way, and I may forgive their iniquity and their sin.' Then Jeremiah called Baruch the son of Neriah; and Baruch wrote from the mouth of Jeremiah all the words of the Lord, which He had spoken unto him, upon a roll of a book. And Jeremiah commanded Baruch, saying: 'I am detained, I cannot go into the house of the Lord; therefore go thou, and read in the roll, which thou hast written from my mouth, the words of the Lord in the ears of the people in the Lord's house upon a fast-day; and also thou shalt read them in the ears of all Judah that come out of their cities. It may be they will present their supplication before the Lord, and will return every one from his evil way; for great is the anger and the fury that the Lord hath pronounced against this people.' And Baruch the son of Neriah did according to all that Jeremiah the prophet commanded him, reading in the book the words of the Lord in the Lord's house." But even if Jeremiah was speaking to Baruch in that cave, writing down on scrolls of parchment, the words that the Master had spoken, King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon was sweeping down out of Babylon upon the little western world, bound for his conquests of Egypt to the south. Little Judah was on the way, separating Nebuchadnezzar from his real goal - Egypt. Tactically Judah had to be destroyed. Judah was in the way. Nebuchadnezzar could not afford to leave an unruly independent state ~~in~~ <sup>at</sup> his rear. And so Judah was overwhelmed. The king, the leading citizens, the priests, the leaders of the people, were all transported leaving only a helpless, hapless remnant under the rule of Josiah's youngest son Zedekiah. Jeremiah, the once subversive prophet, because he defied royal policy, not turned to give advice to the exiles carried off into Babylon. He offered them solace and comfort. He assured them that a remnant would spring up from them ~~and~~ in God's own time, that would bring about a resurrection of Jewish life. He evolved the philosophy of Jewish integration. He was the first integrationist. He was the first man to



say "integrate yourselves into the life of the community where you live". And he wrote a famous letter. In the twenty-ninth chapter of the Book of Jeremiah he wrote to those captives and in far off Babylon saying this: "Thus saith the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, unto all the captivity, whom I have caused to be carried away captive from Jerusalem unto Babylon: Now here this - Build ye houses, and dwell in them, and plant gardens, and eat the fruit of them; take ye wives, and beget sons and daughters; and take wives for your sons, and give your daughters to husbands, that they may bear sons and daughters; and multiply ye there, and be not diminished. And seek the peace of the city whither I have caused you to be carried away captive, and pray unto the Lord for it; for in the peace thereof shall ye have peace." That was probably as profound a philosophy of Jewish life for a Diasporas civilization as was ever evolved in three thousand years of Jewish history. For wherever our people have gone, down to this present moment in Cleveland, our people have followed the words of Jeremiah. They have sunk their roots in the city in the state. They have prayed for the welfare for the city ~~of~~ and the state and they have become a part of it.

Meanwhile the people of Judah, however, would have had to make themselves worthy of rehabilitation. In Jerusalem Zedekiah was trying to free himself from Babylonian control but it was in vain. Jeremiah knew it. He protested very dramatically. Martin Luther King had nothing on him. Jeremiah walked through Jerusalem with a yoke on his shoulders to illustrate what would soon happen ~~if~~ to Judah if it adopted the suicidal policy of resistance to the mighty battle. Babylonia, Jeremiah believed, was the instrument of divine retribution against Judah. The yoke was torn off. Jeremiah was spat upon. Still he persisted. Nebuchadrezzar swept down again upon the city, determined to end the resistance of this stiff necked people of Jerusalem. For more than two years the city was surrounded, reduced in every desperation. Jeremiah continued to preach doom. He denounced the gallant defenders. He was cast into a vile sistern. A sistern like a well, to die. He



was rescued by an Ethiopian officer named Ebedmelech. But still he would not keep his peace. For two and a half years Jerusalem was finally taken and utterly destroyed, Zedekiah was blinded, his son executed, the rest of the survivors dragged off to Babylon and when Jerusalem was taken and destroyed and a few had fled to Egypt, Jeremiah then white with age and suffering was dragged along and finally stoned to death by his infuriated people for continuing to preach doom and destruction. That was the life story of Jeremiah. The statesmanship of Jeremiah, the subversive prophet was not, however, his most important contribution. Rather, running all through his writings are these confessions taken down by Baruch, his devoted secretary, laying bare ~~his~~ <sup>the</sup> conflicts of his inner life, his doubts, his fears, his hopes. He went far beyond his predecessors in his conception of God. To them, God had made a bond with Israel and Israel had to be holy to be worthy of that bond. But to Jeremiah, God was more personal. That bond was with each individual. Not with the nation but with the individual. They shall all know me from the least of them to the greatest said Jeremiah. But Jeremiah became the prophet of personal religion. Personal religion. His career was as inspiring as Jeremiah did not so much teach religious truths as to present a religious personality. Prophecy had always taught us truths. But Jeremiah suffered and the patience with which he bore them ~~and the~~, his doubts and the faith with which he triumphed over them embodied the finest spiritual qualities of his people.

Now the Prophets were extraordinarily complex people. They were supreme individualists. All of these prophets of the Bible, intensely patriotic even though they had to denounce the nation and threaten it with destruction. Some of them were considered subversive. All of them were innately religious. Even though they despised the forms ~~of~~ <sup>which</sup> current religious practices of those days had taken. They tried to substitute plain, moral for the elaborate ceremonial and formal rituals that they found. They were guardians of the individual and of the national conduct. Poets of statesmanship. They were the walking



conscious of the people. Completely fearless. Pursuing theirsel<sup>f</sup>~~ves~~ appointed tasks, they were men who walked alone. The Prophets spoke from inspiration derived from the barren soil, the stony mountains, the gaping ravines. They heard the voices of God. These Prophets, these men like Jeremiah, were not to be confused with the quacks, with the fakers who had preceeded themselves and also had called themselves prophets. Always there had been sayers and soothsayers who thought that they had clairvoyant powers to interpret dreams or to speak of the dead. For example, the Bible has several examples of those. Do you remember when Saul was seeking his father's loss , he risked to consult the and interviewed the spirit at the on the eve of his last battle. A very famous and with the spirits of the dead. No, the prophets we are speaking of here of a moral that preceeded the eighth century Before the Common Era who were not concerned with the predictions of things to come or with the working charms or the miracles. They were very much related to the reformation of a ~~the~~ moral order and or raising the standards of moral righteousness. For the Prophets to do the will of God, to do the will of God was to make human life better. That was their message. That was their function. God is and He is righteous and . The purpose of mankind, the reason why we are here is to carry out God's purposes for the world and this means to right the wrongs that men do. Some day they will all be vital. Some day evil will be at the end but meanwhile doom and redemption become their message. Now when you think of Jeremiah, and for that matter all of the Prophets, you have to remember that the ideas of the Prophets were not a system of thought. There is no attempt of Jeremiah to give a coherent account of God and man, and nature of man and the world. Jeremiah was not a . He was not interested in explanations, not even of the contradictions that he was perpetually emphasizing between what men do and what they want, between God's and man's power to thwart Him. Jeremiah gave no definitions. No formulas. All he did was to assert that the utmost majesty and grandeur of which language is capable, that the



purpose behind the universe is good, that man can help, or man can hinder its fulfillment. Therefore, Jeremiah's words still have meaning. They do not analyze, they do not explain the forms of consciously systematic ideas. Other lesser men would get such ideas from them and take infinite pains to explain them. The Prophets were not teachers. They were discoverers. Discoverers of something that was hidden. No logical commentary would add force to what 'mean ye, that ye bind ~~ye~~ the faces of the poor'. No argument is required to prove the truth that in the burden <sup>of</sup> ~~in the valley of the shadow of death~~, no one needs to defend the injunction, judge the fatherless, plead for the widow because such words stand out by themselves. They are, they never were out. Thousands of years leave them the same. Time does not touch them. Their truth is true always and the words in which they embodied of what they say of men's dreams forever stirred the desire to make that dream live. When we come together and try to understand the meaning of the words of Jeremiah, or for that matter, of all of the Prophets, I think there are three prophetic ideas illustrated by Jeremiah but the change the course of Judaism and indeed of the world. Three ideas. Let's take a few moments to spell these out. The first of the great prophetic ideas that laid the foundation of the Hebrew Prophets, and particularly of Jeremiah was the concept of the reality of God. The reality of God is the basis of their preaching. And the Prophet Jeremiah summed it up in the ninth chapter when he said "Thus saith the Lord: Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, Neither let the mighty man glory in his might, Let not the rich man glory in his riches; But let him that glorieth glory in this, That he understandeth, and knoweth Me, That I am the Lord who exercise mercy, Justice, and righteousness, in the earth; For in these things I delight, Saith the Lord." Jeremiah believed that God was in dwelling in every person, present in every man. What the theologians called the doctrine of humans, and Jeremiah therefore preached that by heeding God's presence, man can feel the presence of God and promote His Divine purposes. This idea that God was present in every human heart, was a distinct contribution that changed the thinking of the world. No



longer was there any occasion for an indirect method of approach, through somebody else, through some intermediary, through some sacrifice. Communion with God was to be obtained not by mystic rites, not by priestly mediation or sacrifice but by personally. Personally living up to the Divine promptings within one's self and aspiring after <sup>a</sup> life of harmony with God - in a word by righteous, moral, living.

So righteousness was to be realized as the bond which can bring man closer to God and <sup>the</sup> morality - from that time on became the object and end of religion. Moral perfection became the religious idea. For this idea, Jeremiah drew upon the social message of Amos, of Hosea and Isaiah. Jeremiah denounced social injustice, as did Amos. Like Hosea, Jeremiah was concerned over the worship of foreign paganism. Like Isaiah, he denounced the sacrificial rituals and cults in his famous ~~sermon~~ <sup>Temple</sup> sermon, which I'll tell you about in a moment. This conviction that God was present in man, all of the great Prophets - and especially Jeremiah. This was the basis of ethical monotheism. We hear about ethical monotheism. What is it? Rightly defined, ethical monotheism is essentially this idea that changed the course of history. That it is in man's moral nature that religion has a truce. That it is from the spiritual, not from the material word that the idea of the Divine flows into man's soul. That it is the sense of right and justice <sup>assurance</sup> innate in man that brings him ever new ~~insurances that~~ of the existence of God and of his control of the universe. Now, we in our day have so long accepted the idea that God demands righteousness. This is an old story, you say. But don't forget, in the days of Amos and Hosea, the the days when Jeremiah confronted the king, this was a startling new doctrine, perhaps as revolutionary as nuclear physics is today or the computer revolution. The true greatness of these men like Jeremiah, lay not in their superficial aspects but in the development of their idea of God. You can see then that the Prophets, and especially Jeremiah, did not prophesize smooth, easy things. Their concept of history entailed the consequences which they did not hesitate to accept. It made them critics of their own people, their visions of a righteous God and the demands of his righteous purposes threw a lurid light upon the



self-seeking and motley wickedness which made up so large a part of their time, as indeed, it does of ours. Jeremiah survey the nation objectively in its lack of conformity to the will of God. He came not by chance, not by , but he was convinced of this because of Israel's sin. Note that the Prophets, and this includes Jeremiah, did not primarily blame others. They blamed their own people and this is astonishing. Astonishing for the ancient world because it set a pattern that was to become characteristic of Jewish life throughout the early ages of its dispersion. For the Jew, misfortune has been a call to penitent and reform. To spiritual regeneration, an inward . What other people, I ask you, ancient or modern, ever blamed themselves for the trouble and tragedy that befell them. What other nation ever preserved for posterity the literal record, the literary record that would say for all of history, it's our fault, we have sinned, let's not alibi, let's not blame our troubles upon others, let's admit that we're wrong. We have sinned. We have sinned against God by dealing treacherously with . Did you ever hear of any nation with pride or chauvinism to take such a ~~perk~~ point of view? Israel did just that. So imbued with the reality of God and its corollary ethical monotheism that the history of the world was changed by this idea that the Prophets of Israel . The second great idea that the Prophets contributed, and especially Jeremiah, which changed the course of human history, was the idea that God required ethical monotheism. Righteous living. This is implicit in the doctrine of ethical monotheism - that God requires righteous living. Perhaps the bed rock of prophetic religion is to be found in Jeremiah's own words. In the twenty-second chapter of the Book of Jeremiah, Jeremiah cried out "Woe unto him that buildeth his house by unrighteousness, And his chambers by injustice; That useth his neighbour's service without wages, And giveth him not his hire; That saith: 'I will build me a wide house And spacious chambers', And cutteth him out windows, And it is ceiled with cedar, and painted with vermilion. Shalt thou reign, thou who art the King? If one practices justice



and righteousness, if one champions the cause of the poor, then it will be well with thee. This, indeed is to know me, saith the Lord.'" But the people of this time didn't believe him. The people of this time believed otherwise. They thought that anyone that brought the appropriate sacrifices to the Temple in Zion would be saved. For this Jeremiah denounced and as blind illusion and in probably the most famous sermon that was ever given, the famous Temple sermon of Jeremiah. He denounced the immorality of the nation and called for social justice. The famous seventh chapter of the Book of Jeremiah - his Temple sermon. Imagine hearing a sermon like this in the Temple today. "The word that came to Jeremiah from the Lord, saying: Stand in the gate of the Lord's house, and proclaim there this word, and say: Hear now the word of the Lord, all ye of Judah, that enter in at these gates of worship the Lord. Thus saith the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel:" Now comes the sermon. "Amend your ways and your doings, and I will cause you to dwell in this place. Trust ye not in lying words, saying: 'The temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord, are these.' Nay, but if ye thoroughly amend your ways and your doings; if you execute justice between a man and his neighbour; if ye oppress not the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow, and shed not innocent blood in this place, neither walk after other gods to your hurt; then will I cause you to dwell in this place, in the land that I gave to your fathers, for ever and ever. Behold, ye trust in lying words. Will ye steal, murder, and commit adultery, and swear falsely, and offer unto Baal, and walk after other gods whom ye have not known, and come and stand before Me in this house, and say: 'We are delivered', that ye may do all these abominations? Is this house, whereupon My name is called, become a den of robbers in your eyes? Behold, I, even I, have seen it, saith the Lord." You can imagine how the people liked hearing that. They wouldn't listen. They felt he was outraging their religious sensitivity. They condemned Jeremiah as being subversive and blasphemous and so only with the aid of a devoted secretary, Baruch, did he manage to go into hiding. In these days there is a great deal of discussion about the . A most electrifying discovery and yet



one thinks of a discovery and perhaps an equally dramatic fashion of another scroll, of a scroll that was discovered some fifty years after Isaiah's death, when the Temple was being repaired and the high priest sent this scroll to the king with a message that he had found it in the Temple and that it was a book of law of the Lord given by Moses. The king received it with much reverence, and summoned all the people. He read it aloud and that scroll, by the way, is believed to have been the Book of Deuteronomy, composed by the priestly shortly before it was ostensibly discovered. The Book of Deuteronomy contained an important document. A fundamental document that prosperity and riches come to the good as a reward from God and that poverty and misfortune are the punishment for doing wrong. This was an ancient belief. Not so ancient. A lot of people still believe it today. In its essentials, the Hebrews of old shared it with other peoples. The Prophets attacked it. They attacked this doctrine because they set themselves against an idea that was basic to the thought of the times. When they declared that to be poor and wretched was not the result of God's anger, but a passport to His favor, they were turning the world upside down. The priestly doctrine was that to obey God is the way to security ~~xxxx~~ and ease and that to disobey God would be the way to calamity. This was expressed over and over again ~~xxx~~ much in biblical literature. In fact the same philosophy you'll find in the Book of Job. You remember the time when the three friends of Job came to sympathize with him. Job you will recall was struck down. Deprived of all of his worldly goods. Affected with boils, stripped of everything and in all his misery, his three friends come forward. They tell him that because he is wretched, he must have sinned. Some consolation. Being wretched above all others, he must have sinned more than all the others put together for no one innocent dies in misery, they said. If a man is good, he'll be protected. If he's bad, he'll roast in Hell. But, Job, you will remember, repudiated this doctrine. He voiced the belief of the Hebrew Prophets that God moves in mysterious ways. Jeremiah didn't believe that either. Jeremiah would not buy what the friends of Job were trying to say. He believed that the



question of divine justice, the oddesy, as it is called in theology, was to be answered differently. Wherefore that the way of the wicked prosper, wherefore are all basic that deal very treacherously. To Jeremiah, religion was a personal experience with God. Jeremiah's answer was that God's presence was the supreme blessing and this is denied the wicked and thou say it only to the pure of heart. In the twelfth chapter of Jeremiah, he reasons this way: "Right wouldest Thou be, O Lord, Were I to contend with Thee, Yet will I reason with Thee: Wherefore doth the way of the wicked prosper? Wherefore are all they secure that deal very treacherously? Thou hast planted them, year, they have taken root; They grow, yea, they bring forth fruit; Thou art near in their mouth, And far from their reins. But Thou, O Lord, knowest me, Thou seest me, and triest my heart toward Thee;" You see, the Prophets contributed this revolutionary idea in religious thought. That righteous living meant to the Prophets like Jeremiah (A) whatever God is, we must be like Him. If he is righteous, we must be righteous. If he is holy, we must be holy. If he is <sup>greatest</sup> ~~greatest~~, then we must be <sup>greatest</sup> ~~greatest~~. If we truly reverence a God of this character, then must we build our lives upon those rich ethical qualities that belong to the essence of his heart, and (B) unless we do this, unless we strive to be like Him, we do not truly worship Him. All of our outward forms of worship are ~~an~~ an offence, an offence against God unless there is true and deeper worship of obedience. That deeper worship is not to be found in the worship of the cult. This is where many people think that Jeremiah opposed ritual. Did the Prophets oppose ritual? Not exactly. Not exactly. Ritual has value only when it was the organ of the worship of the Lord, not when it was a substitute for that <sup>wor</sup> ~~worship~~. When God was outwardly honored by a stately ritual by men who had rejected God from their hearts, then was that ritual an offense, an abomination. Just a hallowed pretence. Jeremiah pleaded for obedience to the will of God. "I will put my law in their inward palms and in their heart will I right it," he said. "And they shall teach no more that every man is neighbor and every man is brother, saying No the Lord,



for they shall know you, saith the Lord". You see, then, the religion of the Hebrew  
 quid pro quo  
 Prophets was no ~~quick exchange~~. You be good to me, I'll be good to you. It remained

for the unknown Prophet of the exile, Deutero- Isaiah, to hold up scorn for the  
 Kippur

Yom Reformed Jews so that every day of atonement, at the most solemn point of our  
 holiest of holy days, you will hear his words read as the Haftora portion that you  
 remember so well. They seek me daily, they take no delight in approaching God, they  
 say 'see us thou, how we have fasted. But thus saith the Lord: Is it such a fast  
 that I have chosen? The day for a man to bow down his head as a bulrush, And to  
 seek sackcloth and ashes under him? Wilt thou call this a fast. Is not this the  
 fast that I have chosen? To undo the heavy burden, And to let the oppressed go  
 free, To deal thy bread to the hungry, And to bring the poor that are cast out of  
 thy house? But when thou seest the naked, thou cover him," No, to worship God  
 was to do what God commanded, not just think about it, not just to believe about  
 it, but to do something about it. To do something about justice and mercy and  
 compassion.

to the Prophets had very little to do, for something done in  
 the Temple. It had everything to do with what is done in the heart. With man's  
 action toward his fellow neighbor. There was no ~~in~~ conceivable form of worship that  
 could bring men in relation. The only thing was something to do.

I've talked about two ideas, let me quickly go to the last of the peril of faith.  
 I've talked about the reality of God of instilling in every human heart ethical  
 monotheism. Of righteous living, a second idea demanded by the universal God who  
 demanded not outer ritual but inner piety of good deed. And thirdly, the peril of  
 faith in God's ways is justice in weighing mercy and truth and loving kindness.  
 It was to the prophetic tradition more than to any other source that western  
 civilization owes its noblest concept of the moral and social obligations. Jeremiah  
 though rebelling and denouncing the king, had loves his country. Could in that sense  
 could hardly be called subversive, or disloyal. He loved his people. He had so  
 much compassion for them that he grieved over the gloom and the doom that he himself  
 had to predict. These then, were the lonely solitary Prophets. Their strength,



their strength was that they had the vision, the courage to speak these hard things. Successful men. <sup>No,</sup> ~~known~~ they were not successful men by our standards. Today they were a failure. But the visions of justice and mercy and holiness made them the lightening rods which are first cut by the fire of God. Their minds were sensitized to receive the impressions of divine law. The Prophets made their profound contribution then. Jeremiah's great contribution, as I see it, was the power of personality. His direct personal experience ~~and~~ in confronting <sup>kings</sup> ~~things~~ and commoners alike revealed a unique personality as close to God as any Prophet ever came. To carry on the unfinished tasks of prophetic religion. To translate these ancient tasks, these ancient but eternal ideas into contemporary society. To apply eternal truth to events. This is the unending function of modern Judaism in doing the will of God. That is why it is worth our while to come together on these four Friday nights and consider in the great trials of Jewish history. To appreciate the case of Jeremiah. To understand and appreciate the ideas for which he sacrificed so much and to gain some of the foundations of all western religions and especially our own Reformed Judaism. For these voices, these spirits of Jeremiah. These were mankind's first and foremost spokesman for God.