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Interpretation of Covenant in Four Pre-Exile Prophets: Amos, Hosea, Proto-Isaiah, Jeremiah

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Interpretation of Covenant in

Four Pre-exilic Prophets:

Amos, Hosea, Proto-Isaiah, Jeremiah.

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate School
(Department of Theology)

of

LOYOLA UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO

by

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INTRODUCTION.

The dawn of pre-exilic prophetism in the eighth century ushered in a new era in Israel's history. These prophets were of epochal significance because they revitalised the concept of covenant with such daring implications and illuminated the notion of Yahweh's covenantal relationship with Israel within the context of personal, historical and national events that they summoned Israel to a profound apprehension of the character of God and to a new standard of morality. This unprecedented religious thrust was of paramount importance because it prepared Israel to buffer and absorb not only the political and military shocks of the historical period to be considered but also disciplined her for the religious crises of the exilic period (586-537), during which she developed an acute awareness of the spirituality of her religion and the universality of her mission.

This thesis is intended to demonstrate that an interpretation of covenant in Amos, Hosea, Proto-Isaiah and Jeremiah is basically the revelation of the character of God progressively apprehended by his covenant people.

The covenant which Yahweh initiated with Israel connoted a special relationship which was the essential medium of the divine self-communication. The election status was a privilege by which Israel developed from a capricious and unpredictable notion of the wilderness deity to a deeper knowledge of, and intimacy with God. The prophets were the heralds and custodians of the covenant.

It has been pointed out that "the Semites had always known that Baal meant possessor, for they used it in that way, as well as for the
name of a god. There is not the slightest trace, however, of the word Yahweh being a term for something. Yahweh occurs only as a name.\textsuperscript{1}

The prophets enriched Israel’s understanding of the name Yahweh by declaring his attributes and they imploringly urged Israel to honor the covenant by a faithful response to that gratuitous hesed which is intrinsic to the nature and attributes of God.

Although the covenant is intermeshed with history, and unfolds in this context, it is yet distinguishable from the latter by the implications of this peculiar relationship that characterised Israel’s existence. This dissertation attempts the task of focusing on that personal relationship. It represents a basic shift by placing the emphasis where it inalienably belongs, on persons and relationship. This is the core of revelation, that God confronts man and through the encounter man becomes uncomfortably aware of some aspect of the divine character and of his corresponding insufficiency in the context of Israel’s covenental solidarity.

In the development of this subject, attention will be given to the concept of covenant and the foundation it provided for the prophetic tradition. Consideration will be given to the exercise of the prophetic office against the background of the contemporary history and the turbulent political and military climate of the era. The voices of the prophets will be heard above the cries of anguish from the pressures of social injustice, and the melodious Temple music that failed to conceal the perfunctory religious acts of a people whose heart was far removed from Yahweh. The prophetic voices will enjoin loyalty to the covenant by a new life-style in conformity with the revealed will of God.
I wish to record my sincere thanks to my academic advisor, Rev. Stephen Yonick, O.F.M., for his guidance, and to the faculty of the Department of Theology - Revs. Joseph Mangan, S.J., and Brendan Mc Grath, O.S.B., to name but a couple, for their insights and kind suggestions.

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To the Provincial Elders' Conference of the Moravian Church, Eastern West Indies Province, I am grateful for the release from pastoral duties to pursue graduate studies.

I proudly acknowledge the many acts of kindness and the encouragement of my mother, Mrs. Vivian Holder, and my sister-in-law, Mrs. Zereda Phillips.

The typing of the first draft of this thesis has been vigorously and meticulously pursued by my sister, Mrs. Rubina Harvey, despite the many responsibilities of her home. The patience and kind assistance of her family are equally appreciated.

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MAY GOD BE PRAISED.

God's choice of Israel to be his people accelerated the process of his divine revelation with profound significance. The Old Testament indisputably clear that the divine election was grounded not in the goodness or merits of Israel, but in the sovereign love of God, and in the exercise of his prerogative and initiative. The Deuteronomic editor is uncompromising in his emphasis, "For you are a people sacred to the Lord, your God; He has chosen you from all the nations on the face of the earth to be a people peculiarly his own. It was not because you are the largest of all the nations that the Lord set his heart on you and chose you, for you are really the smallest of all nations. It was because the Lord loved you....." (Deuteronomy 7:6-8).

Koehler points out that "God's saying to Israel through Moses 'I am Yahweh' and Israel's consequent knowledge 'Our God is called Yahweh' and 'we are the people of Yahweh' (Exodus 6:2-7) constitutes the foundation of revelation."  God's imparting of his name to Israel that commenced an indissoluble union, a covenantal relationship between the two parties became the medium of divine revelation for Israel's apprehension of the character of her God Yahweh.

Eichrodt\(^2\) holds that the doctrine of divine election must be understood as an expression of the historically conditioned relation of Yahweh to his covenant community. That relationship must be deliberately distinguished from any natural or physical bond, which being permanent, would be of no special significance to the process of time. Belief in a divine act of choice at a particular period of time in history, on the other hand, gives to time special significance as the context of divine
action and human response. It also provides direction to history.

Revelation is thus particularised and made concrete without in any way limiting its universality and permanent validity. The personal manifestation of God to men living in time necessarily takes place at a point in space and time. Consequently, places as Sinai-Horeb, Zion, the hillsides of Tekoa, etc., assume significance. Apart from their historical importance as the locus of revelation, encounter and response, these place-names no longer have real meaning in tradition.

The characteristic feature of the covenant were the decisive acts of God in the process of self-communication. Yahweh distinguished himself as an unconquerable deity in contrast to the many gods in Egyptian religious culture. His indomitable acts were basic to his nature.

"I am that I am" (Exodus 3:13-14) may convey the significant affirmation, "who I am my works will demonstrate." The Sinaitic covenant is therefore grounded, not in an abstract concept of election propaganda but in the concretization of that inscrutable love of Yahweh so sovereignly demonstrated by an act of liberation from Egyptian servitude.

There are several covenants in the Old Testament, e.g. those with Adam, Noah, Abraham. Some scholars hold that the divine economy begins with Abraham and reaches its climax in the death and resurrection of Christ. In the continuity of the divine action in history, it manifests the unity and universality of God's design.

Another view summarily stated is that "there is basically one essential covenant doctrine in the Old Testament pointing to Moses and Mount Sinai...." I am inclined to espouse this latter view as expressive of my own position.
"The traditions of Israel's beginnings are not easy to disentangle", says Scott, "but it may be confidently affirmed that the story of Moses, the Exodus and the Sinai covenant is the necessary foundation of the historically conditioned theology of Israel." He further observed that four strands of evidence point back to this conclusion. Two of these are:

1. The testimony of the main historical tradition that Israel's worship of Yahweh as a God of distinctive character began at Sinai (Horeb) where a federation of tribes - an ancient Israelite amphictyony - became Yahweh's people through a covenant mediated by Moses.

2. The character of the berith or covenant which, in historic times, served as a kind of national constitution. The formulation of religious obligations so insistently expressed in social ethics is a significant feature of the covenant tradition and the pedagogy of the prophets.

The berith with Yahweh established a community with special characteristics, a mutual interest, a common life and a concerted will. "Israel became ideally a 'people' in the strict sense of the Hebrew word עמי, which means those who together form an entity, a whole, and whose members are united by fellow-feelings as brothers and comrades." The covenant is, therefore, a societary relationship, one with the people and not with individuals.

The word covenant occurs in theological and non-theological usage. The Hebrew form is יְנֵר כּוֹנָן, and it is rendered as Συμφωνία in the Septuagint. It means an agreement, entente, bargain, arrangement, treaty or covenant. The rendition chosen would depend on the character of the
understanding that has been reached. Classification of the usages of *berith* in non-theological contexts falls into three categories: (1) between parties of unequal status, (2) between equals, (3) private circumstances. However, since our primary concern is an investigation of the word in its theological function we need linger no longer at this point.

It becomes apparent from an examination of the contexts in which *berith* appears that it is not a static concept. Its usage strikingly indicates Israel's expanding comprehension of the nature of the covenant and of the character of the major partner or giver.

The word *berith* occurs with the verb הָרִית and means "to cut a covenant" (Genesis 21:27).\(^9\) Yahweh is the one who concludes the covenant. Israel, on the other hand, is not compelled to enter into the covenant. She is free to accept or reject (Joshua 24:15, 21-22).

A development is noted in Genesis 6:18. Here Yahweh establishes or institutes a covenant. In this respect, the lordship and sovereignty of Yahweh's will is given greater prominence. The verb יָרִית used here adds greater force to the statement. "In these, the authoritative, constraining, initiating will of God receives still clearer expression."\(^{10}\)

Later, Yahweh gives, יִתֶּן, a covenant (Genesis 17:2). There is the growing reduction of the importance of the other partner, Israel. Israel was understanding her rightful place in the covenant scheme.

Koehler appropriately remarks that "one should not overlook this change in usage, and the sequence of which we have noted, and which corresponds to the course of history, for this change indicates that the covenant or agreement form was more and more found unsuitable to represent the relationship between Yahweh and Israel. When Israel is
brought into a covenant with Yahweh, the one aspect of the connection is clearly expressed, namely, that of the mutual obligations; but the 'other' aspect - the fact that it is an entente between two partners, who enter into it of their own free will and decision, detracts from the exclusive action and dominion of God and is therefore questionable. The questioning produces the change in meaning.¹¹

This background of the covenant is important for our understanding of Israel's progressive apprehension of the character of God. It now becomes necessary to look inquiringly at the exodus from Egypt. This examination would uncover three essential perspectives that had immeasurable consequences for the history of God's revelation. These areas of concern are the liberation event, the reality of the covenant, and the notion of solidarity.

Israel had endured in bondage the agonies of Egyptian oppression and a great leader had been raised up and sent to deliver them. The call of Moses, his commission, and the mighty acts performed in Egypt attest the activity, power and reality of the divine being Yahweh.¹² The destruction of the eldest children of Egyptian parentage and the "pass-over" of Israel by the "sign of blood" were events ostensibly declaring divine manifestation and preparing Israel for the covenantal encounter at Sinai. Political liberation from physical indignities had been achieved by escape from Egypt and the miraculous crossing of the Sea of Reeds. Political and physical freedom had paved the way for an awareness of moral obligations and spiritual realities which the eighth century prophets loudly proclaimed. The experience of divine deliverance from Egypt and its consequent significance under-
girded the prophetic kerygma and enlightened it by imparting historicity and validity. The prophets constantly harped back to this experience, and Plataras observed that “whenever Israel sang of Yahweh’s mighty deeds, it was always Yahweh’s victory over Pharaoh at the (Red) Sea which stood in the first place as the saving deed par excellence....This was the event which was etched most deeply into Israel’s memory. If there was any one event, any single point of time which could be said to mark the beginning of Israel’s faith in Yahweh, it was the victory over Pharaoh.”

Noth refers to this narrative (Exodus 15:1-19) as “the Reed Sea Hymn” expressing thanksgiving for deliverance.

The liberation event would be incomplete without the sequel of the covenant-making. The terrifying storm theophany at Sinai was the external sign of the presence of Yahweh at the enactment of the covenant. The liturgical narrative of Sinai contains three essential elements: (1) the recital of the divine activity, (2) the divine proposal, (3) the covenantal response.

Firstly, the rehearsal of the mighty deeds accomplished by Yahweh in defense of his people. The recital was done by Moses speaking in the first person. “You have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles’ wings and brought you to myself......” (Exodus 19:4).

Secondly, the divine proposal clearly indicated that Israel had an option at Sinai. Her election was not thrust upon her since she was permitted to exercise freedom of choice. “Therefore, if you will obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my own possession among all peoples” (Exodus 19:5).

Thirdly, on the basis of the proclamation of the Ten Commandments
or the Decalogue which summarised the divine demands, Israel responded positively to the covenantal proposal. "All the people answered together and said, All that the Lord has spoken we will do" (Exodus 19:8). Israel had thereby committed herself to undeviating loyalty to the covenant. The polemic of the prophets is that Israel failed by deliberate acts of transgression to sustain the covenant.

The cultic ceremony at Sinai by which the covenant was formally brought into existence is narrated in Exodus 24. Moses took half of the blood of the ritually slain animals and poured it on the altar and he threw the other half over the people to symbolise "the establishment of a solemn community of life between them and God. Thus the sharing of life in the covenant between God and Israel was symbolised by the sharing of life in the form of blood."16 The blood ritual was followed by the eating of a sacred meal in the very presence of Yahweh. Later, when Israel had conquered part of Canaan, the community gathered at the Shechem sanctuary to renew the covenant which was established at Sinai (Deuteronomy 27; Joshua 24).

The Sinai covenantal experience contributed greatly to the sense of unity and solidarity among the tribes. They emerged as a community with a single deity Yahweh and a common destiny. The corporate personality or societary concept of the covenant played an important role in the formulation of primitive religious beliefs. In their struggle with the primordial issues of sickness, suffering, and the mystery of death, Israel was unable to relate these to the sphere of Yahweh's activity because Israel, as a community, was built on an amphictyonic structure and she continued to survive regardless of the number of
individuals who had died. The sin of one member of the community was the dilemma and tragedy of the entire community. "The Old Testament appears to see sin in a double perspective: objectively, as a breach of the order of creation; and subjectively, as a broken relationship between God and man. These two aspects frequently coincide." 17 Suffering was the consequence of sin, and therefore Israel's calamities were occasioned by the arrogance and sin of its members. Similarly, salvation was perceived only in the context of the community. The personal fate of the individual was completely submerged by concern for the vivification of the community as a whole. The individualism of Jeremiah was a severe blow to this conventional belief. 18

However, prior to the era of the classical prophets, Israel's covenantal awareness had already been subjected to the course of events called the occupation which occasioned great transformations.

Israel, with the life-style of wandering Amorites accustomed to the patriarchal nomadic existence, had now advanced in their journey to possess the land of Canaan. With the prospect of a settled existence here, Israel was also confronted with several major religious questions. The Canaanites worshipped El and Baal 19 who possessed the land and were responsible for its fertility and the production of bountiful crops. What connection had these gods which were worshipped under large trees and at high places with Yahweh?

The general conviction was that the agricultural life of the Canaanites was not the domain of the protector deity Yahweh. It was not within his power to grant prosperity, property and security in this new situation, and so Israel, in these innovative circumstances, had to struggle with cardinal issues integral to the covenant relationship.
Could Yahweh be equated with Baal? Is his status subordinate or superior? The Baals had proven their ability and competency in Canaanite religion, and fertility rites were part of the cultic ceremonies. What resulted seems predictable. Israel’s tendency was to incorporate impressive aspects of Canaanite religion into her own worship. This syncretistic trend was an attempt to relate to the perplexing problems of a civilization that was more developed than hers. Some were seduced by devotees of the native gods and engaged in sacred prostitution at Canaanite high places and shrines.

The long years preceding the advent of the eighth century prophets had not greatly altered the religious picture. During the monarchical period, the marriage of Ahab to Jezebel, a Sidonian princess, revived Baal worship and gave it royal support. The encounter on Mt. Carmel between Elijah and the priests of Baal narrated in 1 Kings 18 indicate that Baal worship was still widespread and prestigious. In the prophecies of Jeremiah towards the close of the historical and prophetic period under consideration, the prophet assailed the allegiance being shown to Baal and spoke disparagingly of the leaders and leadership in Judah at that time (Jeremiah 2:8).

Yahweh was still in covenant with his people. This everlasting relationship from the divine perspective had been reaffirmed by the Davidic covenant, and Jerusalem, a monumental symbol of the divine presence and promise, had been established.

The message of the prophets must be heard against this covenantal background indicting Israel of adultery, idolatry, unfaithfulness, social injustice, external religious practice and other covenantal breaches.
Chapter 2

THE PROPHETIC PERSPECTIVE

The canonical prophets, who untiringly endeavored to guide the destiny of their people by a divine mandate, were neither anti-social dissidents nor community drop-outs who could not impressively accommodate themselves to the evolving cultural, political, economic and religious patterns of life in a new age. They were rather men who, by their call, apprehended the divine nature, and, by their commission, disclosed that character and disrupted the Sitz-im-Leben, namely, the prevailing life-situation that was solidifying into a menacing conventionalism in denial of Yahweh’s covenantal claims.

Both etymologically and historically, it may be affirmed that the prophet was not necessarily a foreteller of future events but a forth-teller of the word of Yahweh. The classical formula, "Thus says Yahweh", introduces prophetic oracles and is motivated by an essentially divine and irresistible compulsion. The connotation of this formula accords with the Greek word προφητής from which the English word is derived, and means one who speaks for another, or especially for the gods. The corresponding Hebrew word נוֹרֵעַ refers to one who communicates the divine will.\(^1\)

Pfeiffer points out that "in the history of the religion of Israel, the importance of the reforming prophets cannot be overestimated. It was they who made of this religion something unique at the time both in itself - its tenets and institutions - and in its influence."\(^2\) This uniqueness, beginning with Amos, may be asserted as their reception of divine revelation that unmasked the nature and will of Yahweh. They proclaimed him to be a God of righteousness and love, of holiness and
justice, and therefore possessing a distinct moral character. Consequently, he demanded of his covenant people a new ethical norm expressive of their intimate knowledge of him.

Prophecy in Israel developed from humble origins to the emergence of men of great spiritual stature and moral integrity. The earliest reference to the prophet may be cited in 1 Samuel 9:9: "Formerly in Israel, when a man went to inquire of God, he said, 'Come let us go to the seer'; for he who is now called a prophet was formerly called a seer" (ro'eh). It seems apparent, therefore, that the word "seer" was used to designate a person with special religious and inspirational qualities. Such an individual was distinct from another class of persons who functioned in groups or bands and operated at high places as prophets (1 Samuel 10:5-6). Kraeling holds that "Israel then had only seers when it came into Palestine. The probability is that the Hebrews became acquainted with a new type of inspired person, called a nabi, through the Canaanites."³

Pfeiffer's view is that a progressive refinement can be observed in the prophetic movement. "The bands of ecstasies in the time of Samuel became the mouth-pieces of the deity, beginning with Elijah and Micaiah, the son of Imlah...... All in all, the revolutionary message is what distinguishes the great prophets from the average members of the prophetic fraternity."⁴

There are three phenomena that are common to the religious and psychological experience of the prophets.⁵

**Inspiration:** Each prophet received his message and authority from Yahweh with whom he sustained a direct personal relationship. His polemic against conventional covenantal breaches was motivated by the
divine will and even the content of his denunciations was divinely inspired (Jeremiah 1:7-10). Who dared to challenge the legitimacy of the divine "I" even when it prognosticated disaster of the greatest magnitude? (Amos 3:2; 4:9-11; 5:21-23). Yet Israel showed clear contempt and unreflecting impenitence on every occasion.

The Israelites believed that inspiration resulted from spirit possession. When Saul met with a band of prophets coming down from a high place with harp, tambourine, flute, and lyre in a dancing, frenzied mood, "The spirit of Yahweh came mightily upon him...." (1 Samuel 10:10). The impression of a physical inflow or seizure of the spirit seems unavoidable. To the ancient mind, feats of abnormal valor or displays of herculean strength were associated with inspirational capacities conferred by the gods. Semitic thought was unable to draw from the resources of psychological research that elucidate many, otherwise, baffling phenomena.

The Call: The prophet's assurance of an intimately personal relation and communication with Yahweh had its origin in the divine call. The practice of seeking out the divine intention or occasion the manifestation of divine power by occult means indicates the conviction that there is a God who controls the affairs of men on earth, and it is therefore of primary importance to ascertain his will and to be in a right relationship with him. The reforming prophets rose far above ancient customs of seeking to discover, through divination and esoteric methods, the pleasure or indignation of the deity to undertakings. The situation that confronts us reflects the reversal of initiative action. They were the victims and servants of a divine encounter unactivated by the contagious, frenzied characteristics of the bands of prophets. At this higher stage in the development of Israel's religion, there is recognisable an increased
utilisation of the mental faculty and a greater dependence on the senses of audition and perception. Basic to the reception of divine phenomena was the conviction that there was a God who revealed himself and who possessed them for his purposes. These prophets were keenly aware of the arresting might of the self-communicating Yahweh. Jeremiah agonizes and soliloquizes, "If I say, I will not mention him, or speak anymore in his name, there is in my heart as it were a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I am weary with holding it in, and I cannot" (Jeremiah 20:9; cf. 15:17).

Heschel contends that "the prophet feels himself placed not only above other members of his own society; he is placed in a relationship transcending his own total community, and even the realm of other nations and kingdoms. The measure of his superiority is that of universality. This is why the essence of his eminence is not adequately described by the term charisma. Not the fact of his having been affected, but the fact of his having received a power to affect others is supreme in his existence. His sense of election and personal endowment is overshadowed by his sense of a history-shaping power."6

The call of the prophet was not an elevation to a status of privilege but, through an act of divine favor, he was elected for a task.7 His call is therefore closely interwoven with the unfolding purpose of God in covenant relationship with the community of his sovereign choice. The consciousness of his responsibility both to Yahweh and to the covenant community, of which he was an integral part, burdened his heart. The awareness that he was a person in whom Yahweh confided his plans and purposes must have been a staggering and discomforting experience.
"Surely, the Lord God does nothing without revealing his secret (םודח) to his servants the prophets" (Amos 3:7). The Hebrewםודח used by Amos is elsewhere employed to describe the divine assembly for consultation between the Lord and the celestial beings who serve him. All the great prophets had this experience of a divine call which was irresistible. The prophetic call always displayed the phenomena of ecstasy, vision and audition.

Von Rad discussed, at great length, the prophets' call and reception of revelation, their freedom and their conception of the word of God. He observed that in the call to be a prophet, an individual was personally addressed by Yahweh and as a general rule, this was associated with another factor, the vision, by which the ambassador of the Word became keenly aware of the will and purpose of Yahweh in an extremely vivid manner. In the Old Testament, there is no instance where a vision is not immediately followed by an audition. The purpose of the vision was not to disclose knowledge of a concealed transcendent world but to acquaint the prophet of coming events and their spiritual and temporal significance in a national and historical context. There is a consensus of opinion that the visions andauditions experienced by the prophets had their impact on them from an external reality, and it was invariably sudden and without premeditation. In the case of Ezekiel, although of post-exilic importance, yet he reflects the peculiarities of a person who is awe-struck and overcome by extreme shock (Ezekiel 3:5). The frequency with which a prophet received revelational impulses after his initial call is disputable, but his total commitment to the divine imperative sensitized him to covenantal abuses in the contemporary situation.
Windward argues that it would be contrary to the evidence to deny the importance of ecstasy in the experience of some of the canonical prophets, but it would also be an error to exaggerate it. In the reception of revelation, the personality of the prophet was not disregarded but was raised to an unprecedented range of intensity through a sublime encounter with Yahweh that equipped it as a medium of divine revelation. The ecstatic states of the eighth century prophets were not of a wild and orgiastic type, but of a moral and personal character.

Von Rad contends that "the idea that the prophets were 'ecstatics', once widely accepted, is now out of favor, for the concept of ecstasy has proved to be too general and imprecise." Contrary to the view of some scholars that, while in the ecstatic state, his self-consciousness disappeared and his own will suspended so that he functioned as the instrument of powers external to his own personality, von Rad holds that this diminishes the importance of the event of the prophet's reception of revelation. Moreover, he resists comparisons of the prophet's experience with certain forms of medieval mysticism, "for even in their most sublime experiences the mystics always remained within the limits of the accepted dogmas of their own day, whereas the prophets, precisely in their inaugural visions, were led out to new vistas of belief." More important, however, than the intriguing psychological processes at work in revelation, is the fact that their unusual forms were never ends in themselves. Of over-riding significance was the commissioning character of the encounter and its transforming impact. Events, previously insignificant to the prophet, now assumed an ominous appearance viewed against the background of the divine purpose that governs the universe of
men and nations. The prophet becomes intensely aware of his personal involvement in the universal designs of Yahweh.

Freedom: It seems incongruous, from the nature of the prophetic call and the compulsive element in their preaching, to speak about the freedom of the prophet, and yet it must be asserted that in the pursuance of their vocation and the discharge of their obligations in obedience to the divine command, they enjoyed a freedom that transcended the phenomenal world order.

The concept of freedom cannot denote or permit uncontrolled license or an unchecked expression of the individual will in complete disregard of the interests of the community. Freedom par excellence can only be relative since its enjoyment is conditioned by altruistic concerns because by its very nature, it is realisable only within the circumference of the community of interests. Moreover, the covenant community of Israel owed its existence to the supreme acts of Yahweh in history. By His free choice, the Israelite tribal confederacy was welded into national status with a united purpose and destiny. As Anderson puts it, "In a broad sense, prophecy arose in connection with God's revelation in the Exodus; for, .... God not only delivered his people from servitude, but raised up a leader to proclaim the meaning of that historical experience."

Prophecy and community are therefore, not only closely united but there is the incomprehensible element of divine intervention by which Yahweh was shaping the course of events in fulfilment of His eternal purpose. Any concept of freedom must inevitably contend with this strikingly innovative element in the corporate experience. The ferment of interacting elements in the complex national situation during the monarchy could not have been arrested because national leaders and people alike continued
to ignore the reality of the third dimension, the regal power of Yahweh over the affairs of men and kingdoms. Prophetic freedom was realistically full freedom because it recognized the surpassing importance of this dimension. Moreover, they understood that dimension, not in isolation or ascetic withdrawal from the community but, in the freedom of relation and timely utterances of reprimand.

The freedom enjoyed by the prophet is observable in both his call and preaching. Proto-Isaiah’s experience is a novel example of the freedom that was implicit in the divine call. In his vision of the immaculate glory and resplendent majesty of God, he was deeply conscious of the yawning chasm that separated the divine Being from sinful man. In his transcendence, intermediary beings communicated between Him and finite man. In this moment of intense exaltation and awe, he heard the question put by Yahweh to the assembled council, and in exercising his personal freedom, he voluntarily offered himself as a messenger and servant in response thereto (Isaiah 6). The opportunity to decline was as much a part of the freedom of his call, as the decision to respond.

In the preaching that followed the call of the prophet, there are several examples in the life of Jeremiah that point in the direction of prophetic freedom. In 15:16 he exclaims, "Your words were found, and I ate them; your words became to me a joy, the delight of my heart; for I am called by your name, O Lord God of hosts." Here we get a glimpse into the heart of the prophet and we feel with him the experience of bliss that radiated from his prophetic consciousness. Such an experience arises, not from the yoke of an involuntary surrender but, from the paradox of freedom. Obedience to the divine call is the source of his
pleasure and it is in that sense an irresistible compulsion.

The struggles and conflicts that assailed Jeremiah during a life-long ministry are further evidence of his freedom. If the alternative to obedience did not exist, then tensions are hypothetical, and the struggles of his heart illusory. "If I say I will not mention Him, or speak anymore in his name, there is in my heart as it were a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I am weary with holding it in, and I cannot" (Jeremiah 20:7-9; 23:9). "While it is true that the accounts given by Isaiah and Jeremiah are the only direct evidence of the large measure of free choice allowed to the prophet in the whole matter of his call, there is no reason to suppose that these two cases were different from the rest."

Prophetic preaching consisted primarily of verbal communication, although there were also symbolic acts that dramatically attracted the attention of disinterested hearers of the Word (Isaiah 20:1ff; Jeremiah 27:2ff). However, the concept of the word was much deeper than a theoretical indication or designation of objects. The word possessed a potency in itself and in the flight of its existence to the hearer. This belief in the concrete power of the word was grounded in man's conception of the world as a unified entity.

The clear and emphatic distinction that 20th century man attempts to make between spiritual and material phenomena was inconceivable to ancient thought, and therefore to their life-style. Life is such a complex of interpenetrating elements so delicately intermeshed, that equilibrium is disrupted by disharmony between the spiritual and the non-spiritual. Whiti in African traditional religions observed: "Religion permeates into all the departments of life so fully that it is not easy or possible al-
ways to isolate it."\(^{13}\) The spiritual and the physical worlds are intertwined in the closest structural manner conceivable. Consequently, it was impossible to differentiate between word and object, idea and actuality, real and phenomenal. It is conceivable, therefore, that every word would be held to contain something of its object because objects possess form and are distinguishable only by the word that names it. By the word, objects came into being and possessed significance by the word-name (Genesis 2:19). Creation was by the utterance of the word (Genesis 1:1ff; John 1:1ff; *dabar* and *logos*). Magic or esoteric practices were possible because of the power inherent in the word. In the realm of the cult and in the rituals of blessing and cursing, a dynamism is perceivable in the word in ancient religions.

From this fertile plain of meaning and significance, Israel grew to perceive the mysterious capacity inherent in every word of Yahweh. Moses admonished his people for thinking Yahweh’s word to be void (Deuteronomy 32:46-47; Isaiah 55:11). Therefore, whenever the prophets prefaced their utterance with the prophetic formula, "Thus says Yahweh", that oracle was no empty pronouncement originating with the prophet, but the independent, indomitable and definitive word of Yahweh. Its authority was absolute and, although its consummation may be distant, it was nevertheless certain.

The word of Yahweh was the life of the community, for man does not live by bread alone but by everything that proceeds out of the mouth of Yahweh (Deuteronomy 8:3; Amos 8:11ff). For the continued survival of the community, the word of Yahweh was indispensable.

Another idea closely related to the preceding is that the word of Yahweh was perceived, whether in salvation or in judgment, as the real
motive-force and creator of Israel's history. Life, history and prophecy were essential aspects of the same reality, Yahweh's covenant with Israel. In history, Israel was liberated for a new life in covenantal obedience to the word of Yahweh. The prophets spoke the word of Yahweh, and by them, God revealed his nature and will to his chosen community in a series of astounding and convincing events.
Chapter 3

AMOS: THE COVENANT OF RIGHTEOUSNESS

Amos was the first of the great eighth century prophets to revitalise the covenant concept by the impressive emphasis he placed on the righteousness that God demanded of his covenant people.

The Hebrew word zedakah (righteousness) is chiefly forensic in its primary associations. Smith points out that "the Hebrew always thought of the right and the wrong as if they were to be settled before a judge. Righteousness is to the Hebrew, not so much a moral quality as, a legal status."

Fortman derives the concept from "the fundamental idea of conformity to a norm, an idea developed in the juristic, ethical and theocratic realism." Common to the view of both scholars is that the word was nourished in legal circles, but Fortman perceives in its evolution, the designation of a level of conduct to which individuals ought to conform for positive reasons. Amos endeavored to redirect attention away from the prohibitions of the early period to a social standard of behavior exemplifying the special relationship that existed between Yahweh and Israel. In a theocratic society, there must be the right relationship between fellowmen grounded in the righteousness of God.

It was a time of tremendous economic prosperity in Israel when Amos appeared on the scene of national history. Under Jeroboam II, Israel had been able to reassert her territorial integrity and had recaptured some of the land which had been lost since Solomon's reign. Lo-debar and Karnain had been taken. Damascus was no longer a crucial threat because the growing might of Assyria had already subdued her. However, Assyria had been unable to extend her conquests further at that time,
but by 745 B.C. after the death of Jerobeam, the great Tiglath-Pileser had ascended the Assyrian throne. It was during this period of peace that Israel had consolidated her national wealth. This apparent opulence had occasioned the social excesses of the decades.

Amos lived in the village of Tekoa in the Southern Kingdom, but his message was delivered in the North. This was an interesting factor in that the prophet was aware, not only of the pollution of religious and social life at three main centers: Jerusalem, Samaria and Bethel, but it also shows that the service for which God calls his servant cannot be delineated by national and geographic boundaries. Moreover, when he addressed the Northern Israelites about their traditions and transgressions, though detached by nationality, he did not do so as an outsider, but as one who was intimately concerned and involved in the declining spirituality.

There on the plains and hills of Judah, Amos spent his days tending the sheep and being fully exposed to the forces of nature. There "in the overwhelming solitude of this wilderness he felt the presence of God in a way his ancestors once had when they staggered through the wilderness of Sinai towards the Land of Promise......but the shepherd of Tekoa saw aspects of this God that others failed to see at times." For this unknown shepherd, the call was irresistible. "The lion has roared, who will not fear? The Lord God has spoken, who can but prophesy?" (Amos 3:8). From natural phenomena perceived in the course of his daily occupation, Amos was impressed by the majesty of God. This majestic Being, although he may be remote, is as close to his people as Amos himself was to the realities of nature. In his proximity, the
moral life of the nation was repulsive to the very nature of his being, as God.

The five visions narrated in Amos 7:1-9; 8:1-3; 9:1-4 record a drama between Yahweh and Amos played out in the deepest solitude. God, in the righteousness of his being, was about to punish his people (the vision of the locusts and the judgment by fire) because they had deviated greatly from the vertical point indicated by the plumb-line. The consequences of their transgressions were disclosed by the vision of the basket of fruit which conveyed the grim reality that "the end has come upon my people" (Amos 8:2). The devastation is already an accomplished fact, and yet there is the element of an unrealised event that will be so complete, none shall escape. This was no longer the charismatic, mantle-bearing succession of cultic prophets, but an individual into whose personal experience God had broken through with a disarming and shattering power that called and commissioned him to declare His lofty purposes.

The fact of the end and the judgment was an unmistakably clear emphasis in the message of the prophet. But this insistence on the divine wrath can have meaningful significance only if it is interpreted against the background of the covenantal relationship between Yahweh and the nation. Von Rad holds that "since Amos was a Judean, we must assume that he took his stand on the election traditions of the South, those attaching to David and Zion......We have no understanding of Amos' preaching at all unless we note the way in which he over and over again comes to grip with the election concept, and how it was the nerve of a great part of his message." For Amos, the covenant was perceived as
revealing the righteous nature of God; doom and wrath were consequently
the inevitable manifestations of that righteous power of God.

Yahweh’s covenant with Israel was Amos’ dominant concern. Israel
had been chosen not for privilege and honor, but for her role as a
medium of God’s revelation. By her response to the demands of God’s
covenant, she would truly be God’s chosen people manifesting the nature
of the being of God, and thus be saved from imminent destruction.

Israel’s sins lay in her tragic violations of the simple legal tradition,
and also in the externality of her religious practice. There is no doubt
that there must have been persons who, from the earliest times, committed
breaches of the law. These violators would have been punished as individ-
uals. Now, however, there is this terrifying pronouncement of the
prophet that Israel, as a nation, stands in judgment before God.

The corporate aspect of Israel’s obligation to the divine covenant
received a new emphasis by the prophet. Israel, as a nation, will pay the
inevitable consequences for the transgressions of her members. This is
a tremendous idea based on the societary concept of Israel’s election as
a people to observe and sustain the divine covenant through her obedience
to the known will of Yahweh revealed in the traditions of the law. The
covenant and the law became so inextricably joined that contempt for the
law was clearly covenantal disregard. It was probably a part of the
irony of Amos’ kerygma that the commandments which were occasioned by and
associated with the salvific act of Yahweh in Israel’s exodus from Egypt
and with his faithfulness and love were now the very unit of measure-
ment of Israel’s disloyalty to the covenant and the harsh reality of
her condemnation before God. There was, therefore, a remarkable de-
parture from the earlier cultic prophets and seers whose actions and mes-
sages were characteristic of blessings, but for the eighth century suc-
cession of prophets the revelation of Yahweh contained in their messages
was one that seemed to augur inevitable disaster.

The conviction of Israel's divine election in the mind of Amos
stretches through the centuries of ebb and flow in the covenantal rela-
tionship back to the experience of the exodus. The unmitigated saving
act of Yahweh is the foundation of the covenant. God had intervened in
a decisive manner in their historical past, but the exodus could not be
entirely relegated to the past since it was a living experience in their
present existence. It impregnated their apprehension of God who
"brought up the whole family of Israel from the land of Egypt" (Amos 2:10;
3:1; 9:7). This experience is inseparable from the covenant established
at Sinai. It is that which reinforces it and gives it relevance.

Every privilege carries with it the gravity of a corresponding re-
sponsibility. Yahweh's choice of Israel was not because of an inherent
goodness that she possessed and by which she had earned or merited the
honor to be in a special covenantal relationship with God. Rather, her
election was the gratuitous act of God in choosing her for a unique rela-
tionship with Himself. "You only have I known of all the families of
the earth" (Amos 3:2), vividly expresses Israel's passionate conviction
that she was the elect of Yahweh. In this context, the concept of know-
ledge is charged with a great potency of meaning. Its implications
mirror the significance of Genesis 4:1. It is experiential and refers
to the intimacy of the marriage bond and signifies knowledge based on an
immediacy of contact and felt experience. The nature of Israel's elec-
tion was of this intimate covenantal quality.

The task that confronted Amos was to interpret God's covenant in the light of that revelation and prophetic call to give it contemporary significance for the well-being of Israel. "The greater part of Amos' message must, then, be ascribed to his own pondering on the situation which he saw before him. He had first to put his own stamp on everything he had learned from Yahweh, for it constantly needed interpretation, ad hominem." "What is even more important," continued Von Rad, "is that intensive intellectual process which must have followed a revelation."7 My conclusion is that he interpreted the covenant implications to express the righteousness of God. Sin was perceived as rebellion against the righteousness of a just God. The prophet is emphatic in his denunciation of Israel's sin as rescinding the covenantal relationship with Israel's righteous God because there was not the right interpersonal relationship or the right responsive attitude to the divine will. Amos affirmed the verdict of Yahweh, "They do not know to do right" (Amos 3:10). This is the very heart of the problem and the paving of the way for a new covenant.

The state of the national life constituted a denial of that righteous will of Yahweh. It was this ostensible "lack of social justice, this false dealing in business and bribery in the law courts, that Amos saw that the Israelites no longer had any right to call themselves the chosen people, that they had broken the covenant of Sinai, and would reap the consequences."8 There was a consuming pre-occupation with, and unreflecting enjoyment of the material prosperity that Yahweh had bestowed during the years of political peace. Amos 2:6-8 impressively relates
the perversion of justice and the social corruption that were the symptoms of national decay. "Thus says the Lord, for three crimes of Israel, and for four, I will not revoke my word; because they sell the just man for silver, and the poor for a pair of sandals. They trample the heads of the weak into the dust of the earth, and force the lowly out of the way. Son and daughter go to the same prostitute, profaning my holy name. Upon garments taken in pledge they recline beside any altar; and the wine of those who have been fined they drink in the house of their god." It is certainly, therefore, not an astonishing fact that Amos agonizingly implored, "Let justice overflow like waters, and righteousness like a perennial stream" (Amos 5:24). The tempo of the nation had sunk to a very low level evidenced by luxurious living, sensuous indulgence, the greedy oppression of the poor and the denial of justice.

Alves declares, "What shocked Amos even more was the hypocritical religion coupled with this corruption......People brought the regular offerings to the shrines not in devotion, but in self-righteousness and pride publishing abroad how good they were (Amos 4:4-5). This facade of religion without the morality that should be the natural outcome of worship could never please God." There was the annual round of festive observances but clearly devoid of deep spiritual content. The mass of Israel was more concerned with ritualistic practice than religious conviction. In their comfortable familiarity with God they reflected contentment, and they projected him as existing for the purposes of man. Such an attitude to worship was in itself a travesty of the righteousness of God.

Amos was confident that Israel's sins will occasion her inevitable
destruction. Catastrophe was the unalterable consequence of national corruption. The rural phraseology in which the prophet couches his message makes his sentence apparent. The roar of the lion presupposes that he has cornered his prey; the capture of a bird follows the set of a trap; the sound of the trumpet is the signal of a besieged city (Amos 3:3ff). In like manner, the unrighteous acts of Israel will bring their appropriate consequence.

That disaster was certain to befall Israel forms an integral part of the concept of the covenant relationship. The covenant was not a refuge in which Israel could seek shelter from the blasts of the impending devastation. It could not be used as a blanket to conceal the heinousness of Israel's sins from the vision of the Lord, for "the eyes of the Lord God are upon the sinful kingdom" (Amos 9:8). The problem here is that Israel conceived her covenantal status as an immunisation against divine catastrophe and as a guarantee that ensured the continued prosperity of the nation regardless of her failure to observe the conditions that loyalty to the covenant imposed upon her. Maly noted that "God's continuing protection was implicitly conditioned by His people's response. That response, in Amos' time, was not being made. And the prophet warns them that just as they had once met God in the wilderness years ago, they should prepare to meet Him again, but the meeting will not be one of salvation but of judgment."10

Succinctly, Amos seems to be making the irrevocable statement that because Israel stands in a special relationship to God doom will be the penalty for her sins. "You only have I known,.....therefore, I will punish......" (Amos 3:2) and again, "The eyes of the Lord God are upon.... and I will destroy it" (Amos 9:8). The stern reality of his righteous
will seem to make destruction an inevitable consequence.

A very strong element in Hebrew religion was the belief that God who had intervened in their early history to save his people will intervene one day to bring salvation history to its climax. However, the manner and form of this intervention remained unclear and the time was unknown. Some looked forward with yearning expectation to the day when God would vindicate the cause of Israel by destroying her enemies and would establish the new Jerusalem resplendent in glory and with bountiful blessings, in fulfilment of his covenant. But how mistaken they were!

It is perceivable therefore, that when Amos began to proclaim his message, it was at first received with jubilation because he announced what they delighted to hear. As they listened to his polemic against foreign nations, he seemed to champion the cause of Israel and to undergird her feeling of security and rightness in the sight of God. From Amos 1:3 to 2:5, the announcement of judgment on Israel's neighbors is introduced with the formula, "For three transgressions, ..... and for four", and then, in climactic rise, he moved from Damascus to Philistia, to Tyre, to Edom, to Ammon, to Moab and finally to Judah before descending on Israel. Jubilantly they listened to the judgment of fire that will fall upon these nations. Even Judah, his own native kingdom was not excluded from the fire of God's purifying love, a symbol of his righteousness.

Then to the horror of his Israelite hearers there came the divine roar against Israel and an articulation of her sins. It was clear in the mind of Amos that Israel had abrogated the covenant. Then he reproached Israel for the eager anticipation with which she awaited the coming "day of the Lord." This will not be a day of light that accords
with traditional messianic and eschatological belief, but rather it will be a day of gross darkness. The tragedy will be as severe as a man escaping from a lion is met by a bear, or while taking refuge in a house is bitten by a serpent. Because you have exonerated yourselves from all responsibility for not observing the covenantal injunctions, you should also cease to covet the approaching day of the Lord, a day of utter desolation for transgressors.

For the prophet of the covenant of righteousness, political history and divine activity could not be arbitrarily divorced. History was, indeed, the very vehicle of Yahweh's revelation and salvific act, and in the political currents of the time Amos perceived the judgment of God. The Biblical writer does not demonstrate how to write about an "historical event" according to 20th century standards of historical criticism. However, he does offer the student of the Hebrew scriptures a very fine example of how the Hebrew genius gave meaning to an "event" by means of a religious interpretation of history - what the German analysts called Heilsgeschichte. The ascendance of Tiglath-Pileser to the throne of Assyria in the year after the death of Jeroboam was, in the eyes of the prophet, a potent omen of divine significance. Israel's inevitable doom drew frightfully closer. It is true that the name of Assyria was not mentioned by Amos, but in his vision of the divine indignation it is clear that Assyrian military might was a dominant image (Amos 6:2; 5:27). "Therefore I will cause you to go into captivity beyond Damascus...."
The threat of captivity is real because the nation will not "seek good, and not evil, that you may live" (Amos 5:14-15). Survival is dependent on the national moral choice.
However, even more striking is the inexorability between the deeds of Yahweh and the approaching events. The calamitous events of history will be precipitated by the will of Israel’s God, and in the divine plan they have already occurred. The fate of Israel is sealed only because of her reckless advance and covenantal disregard. With remarkable clarity Amos draws attention to the divine "I" of historical events: "I smite the winter house" (Amos 3:15); "I take you into exile" (Amos 5:27); "I pass through the midst of you" (Amos 5:17); "I rise against the house of Jeroboam with the sword" (Amos 7:9); "I destroy it from the surface of the ground" (Amos 9:8). The end is complete.

Yet there is the trace of a possibility that somehow, some may be saved through the graciousness of Yahweh (Amos 5:15). The nation deserves unspared annihilation, but there is yet the gleaming penetration of hope, "I will not utterly destroy the house of Jacob (Amos 9:8)." Here lies the paradox in the divine Being expressed in covenantal relationship. At this point, it is only in its germinal stage but it will be developed to a mature level in the preaching of Hosea and Proto-Isaiah.

Israel had forgotten the inalienable character of the divine righteousness and by vitriolic pronouncements Amos sought to arrest their attention and possibly reverse the course of history, but they were to no avail. Amos pleaded, "Let justice roll down like waters and righteousness like a mighty stream (Amos 5:24)." The covenant had been violated, and of this incontestable fact Israel had been made aware, but the rebuttal Amos received at the royal sanctuary at Bethel may be indicative of the national rejection of the prophet’s proclamation. It is but a superb irony that Amos
had been accused of a seditious offence by the priest Amaziah (Amos 7:10-12), while the king, and his people whom he represented stood condemned for treason before the divine tribunal. The kingdom of Israel can tolerate no more of this contemptuous message; "hasten to the land of Judah (your own country) and there earn bread." Israel was strongly indignant at the divine rebuke by a Judean shepherd and consequently her doom would be swiftly executed.

In Amos' kerygma there is evidence of the force of that divine encounter in the context of his personal experience and the covenantal implications that he clearly discerned for the nation of Israel. The emphasis he placed on the righteousness of the divine nature is indeed the grounding of religious morality in the very nature and being of God. His successors further developed the concept of covenant and nature in the light of their unique experiences, and in this sense they were of epochal significance. Our interpretation of covenant has a bizarre unfolding of the divine nature with which it intermeshes. Neither can be intelligently understood in exegetical isolation from the other. Covenant is the vehicle for the divine self-communication and that revelation is perceivable in the dynamic acts of God as he repeatedly intervened in the history of succeeding generations with incalculable consequences. The covenantal proclamations of Amos and his pre-exilic successors dealt staggering blows to the Israelite awareness of their God and disrupted the conventional covenantal consciousness.
That Israel was poised on the brink of total disaster was the earnest conviction of Amos. There was, however, despite the passionate appeals of Amos, no change for better in the national attitude. Instead, the situation continued to deteriorate, and this conclusion is adequately supported by the prophecies of Hosea whose ministry coincided with the uncertainties and predicaments of the last stages of the existence of the Northern Kingdom prior to its decisive defeat by the Assyrians in 721 B.C. There is no evidence that the prophet was still on the scene when the predicted climax engulfed the nation.

Unlike Amos, Hosea was a native of the North and there is an emotional sensitivity and a deep feeling of intimate involvement that are characteristic of his covenant concept. Von Rad declares that "his preaching, more than that of any other prophet, is governed by personal emotions, by love, anger, disappointment, and even by the ambivalence between two opposite sentiments." In Hosea's thought, we soar to lofty heights in our vision of the tension in the heart of God and made manifest in the vicissitudes of covenantal relationship. This is an extremely bold development in the prophetic tradition but one that is warranted by the circumstantial facts. To this glow of divine insight we shall have to return, because we must first seek to grasp an understanding of the national image which Hosea was constrained to denounce.

Following the death of Jeroboam II, the Northern Kingdom was politically unstable and insecure. Israel was governed by a speedy succession of six kings during the short span of about 20 years. The strength of the nation
eroded rapidly by political intrigues and party rivalry. Violence and assassinations are the unpleasant memories that linger in a study of the period. These factors were, however, the external symptoms of a chronic national disorder, the violation of the covenant.

Hosea seemed to gravitate in favor of a theocracy because he had become disenchanted with the poor performances of human kings who had done their best to frustrate the attainment of a lasting peace and a blooming economy. Monarchical abuses had wrecked the very foundation on which the nation had once been firmly established. Hosea was unwavering in his conviction that "they made kings, but not by my authority, they established princes, but without my approval" (Hosea 8:4). The pomp and luster of the infrequent coronation ceremonies could not blind Hosea's vision of eternal reality. Yahweh was not pleased. In fact, He abhorred the empty display of religious significance in the anointing and crowning of kings. The decaying state of the Israelite nation was apparent and its doom will be swift and complete because God himself had now rejected them. "I give you a king in my anger, and I take him away in my wrath" (Hosea 13:11).

The kings of Israel were but false symbols. Yahweh was still in absolute control of the nation's destiny and in his sovereign will and judgment the nation will suffer for the mockeries and abominations of her kings.

Israel sought security in external alliances and alternated between Egypt and Assyria for military protection and political integrity in preference to reliance on Yahweh. Israel had realised her impotence in the face of Egyptian and Assyrian military might, but in a policy of diplomatic and military alliances with these nations a deeper problem arose. These nations were the worshippers of strange and false gods and an alliance
would be to equate their gods with Yahweh. The story of Jesebel and Melkart in the time of Ahab comes to mind. The total well-being of the nation will be undermined by such foreign alliances and the special relationship with Yahweh will be dissolved because Israel's loyalty is pledged to Yahweh alone. In her overtures with Egypt and Assyria, Israel was "like a dove, silly and senseless" (Hosea 7:11). Israel's only hope of survival lay in her trust of Yahweh and in its absence downfall and doom would be the harsh fate of the nation. Mal. indicates that "in attributing their downfall to the failure to trust in Yahweh, Hosea speaks from the conviction that goes deeper than that formed by natural arguments but which does not, for that reason, contradict the latter."^2

Another grave problem that severely perplexed Hosea was that religious enthusiasm was void of spiritual content. Idolatry and syncretism were everywhere evident. "The calf of Samaria" was a monumental offence to God. Had Israel forgotten the mighty acts of Yahweh in the course of her long history? Does she not remember the golden calf during the Aaronic administration and the grief it occasioned? Has she no regard for the first and second injunctions of the Decalogue: "You shall have no other gods but me"? "You shall not make in my likeness any graven images"? On the calf, Hosea poured vitriolic scorn, "The work of an artisan, no god at all, destined for the flames - such is the calf of Samaria!" (Hosea 8:6).

Combined with these blatant acts of idolatry was her involvement in diluted Yahwism, pagan religious practices which had been incorporated into the worship of the true God. The dissolution of Patriarchal Yahwism in the Canaanite fertility cult was really the abandoning of the covenant as well. The worship of Yahweh cannot accommodate or be blended with other
gods which do not really exist. They are but the fantastic creations of the Israelite mind in its deliberate attempt to replace Yahweh with illusory objects and to ignore the implications of the covenant. This is religious adultery.

There is evidence too that several of the covenantal violations articulated by Amos were still a cause for concern. In 4:1-2, Hosea relates the divine accusation against Israel: "Hear the word of the Lord, O people of Israel, for the Lord has a grievance against the inhabitants of the land; there is no fidelity, no mercy, no knowledge of God in the land. False swearing, lying, murder, stealing and adultery; in their lawlessness, bloodshed follows bloodshed."

Further information is also contained in Hosea 7:8-8:6. In 7:14 it is noted that their prayers are insincere, and their religion is materialistic being concerned only with ensuring bountiful harvests, and not with obedience to the covenant. Although their fortunes, in the past, were determined by providential care yet now they have rebelled against the divine One. Israel will realise before long that both Egypt and Yahweh have deserted her. Then, in her destitution, a claim to privilege as the chosen community will be to no avail (Hosea 8:2). Israel is now a fragmented and infirm nation filled with deceit, like a bow that cannot shoot straight (Hosea 7:16). In this vulnerable state of national existence, Israel can sound the alarm of the trumpet because she has transgressed the covenant and despised the law (Hosea 8:1).

It is in this international context that we must view Hosea's personal experience of an unfaithful wife. There has been much discussion of the pericope containing the account of the marriage of Hosea (Hosea 1-3), and
scholars hold different views that emerge from their exegetical investigations. Von Rad insists that we must "interpret the much-discussed pericope containing the symbolic representation of his (Hosea’s) marriage as an account of a prophetic symbolic action, that is to say, as a part of his preaching...." The other primary view holds that from the perplexing experiences of his personal marriage, Hosea perceived the unquenchable love of God for Israel based on his own passionate love for his faithless and adulterous wife Gomer. Von Rad asserts, "The primary thing was not an intimate personal experience, but Yahweh’s command to perform a symbolic act."

If Von Rad’s position is accepted, it would seem to swallow up or considerably reduce the important element of the prophet’s personal love which is the very heart of his message. Hosea would then be acting on the divine instructions without regard to his bitter experience or personal ambitions, but to symbolise and dramatise God’s love for Israel. Moreover, the view that the prophet’s personal experience illuminated his understanding of God’s love for Israel would be consistent with our cognition of the other pre-exilic prophets in their grasp of the contemporary significance of the covenant within the context of personal experience and divine vocation. It seems that it was from personal experience in a covenantal perspective that the prophet became intensely aware of God’s nature as love incomprehensible and unexcelled in majestic splendor and in retrospect, caused him to redeem his wife.

Heschel insists, "The marriage of Hosea was no symbolic representation of real facts, no act of recreating or repeating events in the history of Israel or experiences in the inner life of God. Its meaning was not objec-
tive, inherent in the marriage, but subjective, evocative. Only by living through in his own life what the divine consort of Israel experienced, was the prophet able to obtain sympathy for the divine situation.6

Further, the claim that "the meaning of the marriage was to teach through demonstration" has to be discountenanced. "The facts to be dramatised were the following: betrayal by the wife, the naming of the children, the repudiation of the wife, the taking her back, and perhaps also the sorrow of the prophet. Publicly to dramatise a wife's adultery comes close to popularizing infidelity, and the moral didactic effect of such a dramatization would be highly questionable."7

Heschel considers that "the idea which lies behind this parable of marriage derived from the doctrine of the covenant between God and Israel is entirely plausible."8

Again, accepting this exegesis that the stories narrated in chapters 1 and 3 refer to the same woman who was not necessarily of depraved moral character but one who participated in the Canaanite fertility rites, and further, that the accounts represent an actual event in the life and experience of Hosea and were not simply of allegorical significance, then the idea of covenant is re-energised. Attention would be attracted not only to a single unifying strain running through the pre-exilic prophets of perceiving Yahweh's word for his people from both the horizon of world history and internal political and moral corruption, but also from their own unique experience of the sovereignty of the covenant God of Israel in their peculiar personal circumstances.

It must therefore be advanced that it was undoubtedly in the intimate confines and innermost depths of his own human soul where he felt keenly
the bitter struggles between love and rejection, the divine and the human, that Hosea could have dared to project the sublime paradox of the duality of opposing forces in God's own heart or probably more fittingly expressed, that divine love in its remedial outreach may assume the quality and function of wrath. It was against this background of personal crisis and impending national disaster in judgment that the prophet heard the contemporary word with irresistible force. So Hosea, from the experience of a broken family covenant is led to a profound awareness of the extent to which the divine covenant had been jeopardized and even annulled by the presumptuous acts of the nation that had been elevated to covenantal status by the condescending love of Yahweh.

The prophet, like his predecessor, associated the covenant with the exodus "from the land of Egypt" (Hosea 12:19). The instrument of this deliverance was the prophet Moses by whom Yahweh brought Israel up from Egypt (Hosea 12:13). Israel’s relationship with Yahweh was not an abstract concept, but had as its foundation a concrete event in history by which Yahweh's love for Israel was amply demonstrated (Hosea 11:4). This hesed expressed Yahweh's steadfast loving-kindness to his people in the salvific episode. On Israel’s part, hesed signified the response of loyalty to that unmerited favor but Israel failed to observe the moral will of Yahweh expressed in Torah. She became disloyal and, like a deceitful wife, she forsook Yahweh and engaged in illicit relationships with other paramours. This national infidelity to Yahweh, Hosea expressed by the symbolic names he gave to the children of Gomer. The first child he called Jezreel, the scene of a bloody massacre in Israel. This name would occasion painful recollections for Israel and sensitize her to the possibility of a divine
recurrence. The second child was named Lo-ruhamah, that is, unloved or
unpitied, and signified that Yahweh's compassion was exhausted and the
national end in sight. Israel continued to play the harlot and Hosea
was led to call his third child Lo-ammi, that is, not my people. Israel
could no longer claim the honor and privilege of being the chosen people
of Yahweh. She had withdrawn from the bonds of covenantal relationship.

As an antithesis to the spirit of harlotry, Israel must possess the
knowledge of God. Their deeds do not permit them to return to their God.
The spirit of harlotry is within them, and they know not the Lord. They
have dealt faithlessly with the Lord, for they have borne alien children
(Hosea 5:4, 7).

Hosea's primary accusation against the Northern Israelites is that
they do not know God. He frequently uses the verb yada, to know, and
dath elohim, knowledge of God.9 Here knowledge does not imply an intel-
lectual grasp of the object of inquiry. Its meaning denotes affection,
inner engagement, personal attachment and dedication. In the compass of
Hosea's thought of the God-Israel relationship, knowledge is conceived in
terms of marital love, desertion, and the hope of a new betrothal.
Heschel declared that "dath elohim does not connote a knowledge about God,
but an awareness of God, a sensitivity for what concerns Him, a concern for
the divine person, not only for the divine will; a concern that involves
inwardness as well as action."10 Israel is absorbed in idolatrous worship,
and consequently, Hosea affirms, "There is no loyalty ('emeth), no love
(hesed), and no knowledge of God in the land" (Hosea 4:1).

The judgment of God was provoked by a broken covenant. Political
promiscuity and religious idolatry were the crucial elements in Israel's
apostasy. Monarchical usurpations and military revolts filled Hosea with horrified consternation and evoked his condemnation in caustic language, "A vulture is over the house of the Lord" (Hosea 12:1). The process of perversion had already begun, though to Israel there was abundant delight and satisfaction occasioned by the repeated coronations which seemed to augur a brighter national future. While Israel perceives a bright ray of hope, Hosea voices the divine lament, "all their kings have fallen, and none of them calls upon me" (Hosea 7:7). The misery and suffering that raged in the Israelite nation were due to the failure to recline in Yahweh's love.

The central manifestation of that love and omnipotence was so indisputably demonstrated in her history that purity of heart and sincerity of purpose to the covenant should have been her supreme objective, "You know me God but me, and besides me there is no savior" (Hosea 13:4). The imagery of matrimonial love is clearly discernible in a monogamous setting. Yet Israel's devotion has now shifted from Yahweh to the cult of Baal.

The influence of Canaanite religion that fertility of the land and abundant harvests were caused by the local gods of the land seemed to be a motivating factor. In association with the people of the land she had conquered, Israel began to worship the Baalim rather than the Creator of heaven and earth. "She did not know that it was I who gave her the grain, the wine and the oil, and I lavished upon her silver and gold which were used for Baal" (Hosea 2:8). It is the gravity of this mistaken identity that haunts the thought of the prophet. Can it really be that Israel knows not her consort? In conjunction with the foregoing, she has made a covenant (bargain or commercial agreement) with Egypt where oil is trans-
ported, and also with Assyria (Hosea 12:1). Israel can maintain the purity of her religion only by imposing restrictions on her choice of international partners. Assyrian and Egyptian deities could not be accommodated in Israel without denying that sacred trust implicit in the covenant and being unfaithful to the marriage covenant of divine love. The charges against Israel are overwhelming, "Therefore, I will be to them like a lion, like a leopard I will lurk beside the way. I will fall upon them like a bear robbed of her cubs. I will tear open their breast and there will I devour them like a lion, as a wild beast would rend them" (Hosea 13:7-8).

Their calamity will be severe because "they in their land, violated the covenant; there they were unfaithful to me" or "they, like a man, have broken the covenant" (Hosea 6:7; If adam is translated as a place-name, there is no record of the precise historical event to which the reference is alluding). Israel had acted deceitfully, uttering mere words and with empty oaths had made covenants. She recited forms and creeds in a vain response to my covenant. Such perfunctory acts are sterile, so judgment springs up like poisonous weeds in the furrows of the field (Hosea 10:4). The nation will now be swallowed up in exile, "They shall return to the land of Egypt, and Assyria shall be their king because they have refused to return to me" (Hosea 11:5, cf. 8:13). Hosea, unlike Amos, mentions Assyria by name.

Again, unlike Amos, Hosea's mission was not to announce doom, but to effect return and reconciliation. His prophecies reverberate with a weird note of tenderness, that indispensable element of love in the divine rebuke, so that the dialogue between Yahweh and Israel produces the desired effect of mirroring the pathos in the heart of God. The covenantal relationship, as
it dramatically unfolds, really reveals the attributes of the divine nature. In gentle tone Hosea pleaded, "Return, O Israel, to the Lord your God, for you have stumbled because of your iniquity" (Hosea 14:1). Yahweh's love and compassion for Israel remained so intense that even the outrageous acts of covenantal violation could not permanently sever that unique relationship. "It is Hosea who flashes a glimpse into the inner life of God as he ponders His relationship to Israel. In parables and in lyrical outbursts the decisive motive behind God's strategy in history is declared." History consists not of a blind succession of fateful events, but is the medium of divine revelation. In history the fulness of the inner life of God was manifested by the Incarnation. Hosea seems to foreshadow this unprecedented event by his focus on the tension in the divine Being. The pathos of repugnance occasioned by covenantal breaches and the immeasurable force of pure love reflect the core of the problem. Israel deserves nothing but violent destruction. Even the priests were culpable for failing to teach the knowledge of God (Hosea 4:6). Yet the positive aspect of a sheer selfless love is remarkable in its prominence. It was in his perception of what seemed like diametrically opposed forces in the nature of God that the prophet was constrained to utter words of eternal significance, "How shall I give you up, O Ephraim? How shall I surrender you, O Israel? How can I make you like Adamah? How can I treat you like Zeboim? My heart is turned within Me, my compassion glows like a flame. I will not again destroy Ephraim, for I am God and not man, the Holy One in your midst, and I will not come to destroy" (Hosea 11:8-9).

In this struggle, love prevailed for Yahweh is God and not man. This is the very essence of the divine Being, a God of love whose majesty is offended
by moral concupiscence and sin, but whose love is reconciling and re-

storative.
Chapter 5

ISAIAH: THE COVENANT OF HOLINESS

The prophecies of Proto-Isaiah (Chapters 1-39) are concerned primarily with the course of historical events taking place in the Southern Kingdom of Judah. However, it is of interest to observe that the total situation was not entirely unfamiliar. The same type of people are recognisable, as in the North, with vain political aspirations and a conceited self-confidence, common religious failings and the denial of social justice.

There was, nevertheless, a remarkable and important monumental difference. The Temple of Jerusalem, that great center of religious and civic pride and with impressive soteriological significance, stood impressingly as a stern reminder of Yahweh's covenantal relationship with his people. It was the symbol of the ark and the visible shekinah where Yahweh dwelt and communicated with his people. This magnificent structure was held to be indestructible and promoted a false sense of security. One can almost feel the vibrations and hear the re-echo from the great throng of festive worshippers who faithfully crowded the building to participate in the religious ceremonies and to shelter under the protection of a 'taboo' notion.

Another significant feature prevailing in the South related to political succession and assured the continuation of the Davidic dynasty through ascendance based on lineage. It was a striking contrast to the charismatic leadership that existed in the North and it contributed positively to the political stability that was more evident in the South than in the North.

Amos and Hosea had stressed the implications of the covenant perceived from their apprehension of the nature of God. His righteousness and love
had motivated them to action. Isaiah, pursuing the covenantal emphasis, was astoundingly aware of the holiness of God.

Isaiah's call to the prophetic ministry of the chosen people of God was conceived in a vision, and it is impressively narrated in Isaiah 6. The transcendent in the majesty of the "Lord of hosts" filled him with utter amazement: "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory" (Isaiah 6:3). He was acutely aware of the holy Being who had revealed himself to him. He was awe-struck by the splendor of the experience and the reality of the interrogation: "Whom shall I send....?"

In self-surrender, Isaiah committed himself to the appalling task of the prophetic ministry in a perplexing period of struggle and crisis in the history of Judah's existence as a politically independent structure.

The vision of Isaiah of Jerusalem occurred in the year that king Uzziah died (783-742 B.C.), and was concurrent with the ascension of Tiglath-Pileser to the throne of Assyria. This vision encompasses covenantal notions that are of interesting importance. It is likely that this theophany occurred in the temple of Jerusalem or that its significance brought the temple into the prominence of the prophet's perception.

Micah, his Jerusalem contemporary, had already voiced the divine disapproval of a temple religion divorced from social justice and with great audacity had proclaimed its destruction. "Therefore, because of you, Zion shall be plowed like a field, and Jerusalem reduced to rubble, and the mount of the temple to a forest ridge" (Micah 3:12). The temple had a long religious and chronological development recalling the earthen altar, the ark of the covenant, the tabernacle of the wilderness wandering, the shrine and the Aaronic priesthood. Could it, in the covenantal decree and
providence of Yahweh, be devastated? More concretely, would God forsake his people and abandon his earthly abode? For Isaiah, the centrality of the temple in the context of his vision could not have been without striking significance.

Isaiah's visionary experience added a new dimension to the progressive apprehension of the nature of God, the attribute of holiness (Isaiah 1:4, 5:16). Koehler points out that "it was only slowly and comparatively late that the idea of holiness was transferred to God himself. The first in the Old Testament to make a point of calling God the Holy One is Isaiah."\(^2\)

In Hosea, God calls himself the Holy One because he is Lord of his own will. Consequently, he does not execute the fierceness of his anger by destroying Ephraim. Here holy connotes the independence and freedom of divine sovereignty whose decision is incontestable.

In the pericope of Isaiah 6:1-13 "holiness is the opposite of sinfulness. God is holy because he does not tolerate sin, he uncovers it, he rebukes it, refuses to connive at it, punishes it or atoning for it forgives it. Sin separates a person from the holy God."\(^3\)

The root meaning of the Hebrew word qadesh is to cut off, to be separated from. It denotes separation from the profane or the ritually unclean. Yahweh is holy to the superlative degree. In fact, he was the Holy One far removed from the realm of sinful beings with whom he communicated through intermediaries. It was the responsibility of the chosen people to endeavor to approximate the level of holiness akin to the Holy One not by "vain oblations" (Isaiah 1:11-15), but by a transformed way of life in obedience to the covenant (Isaiah 1:16-20).

Isaiah's vision also supports my thesis of covenant and call in that
he comprehended the mystery of a divine summons and vocation from the self
communication of Yahweh, but particularised by the uniqueness of his per-
sonal experience and the military and political crises precipitated by
the international situation that seemed to present a constant threat to
Judah's security and survival as a nation in Palestine. For him, Yahweh
was Lord of history and history was the vehicle of his self-revelation to
the people of the covenant. This chain of thought runs through the pro-
phetic tradition, and in Isaiah it becomes evident. "The prophets are
publishers of the divine will. However varied their motives, their con-
cerns and their commissions, they always speak of what God has done in past
history, of his judgment on events of present history, and what he announces
for future history.....In the prophets, the Day of the Lord becomes the epi-
tome of history, when all the past and all the future will be seen to run
together into one meaningful unity" (Isaiah 5:12,19; 7:7; 8:10; 22:11).

It has been prudently asserted by many Old Testament scholars that the
first chapter of the Book of Isaiah contains many of the salient points of
the prophet's contention. In verse 1, he is introduced and placed in the
perspective of history. Then verses 2ff. immediately present the contro-
versy and nature of the divine accusation with the inevitable judgmental
consequences. The covenant focus gleams through the text from verse 2
where there is an unmistakable reference to the covenant people, "I have
nourished and brought up children, and they have rebelled against me."
This theme has the familiar echo of his predecessors of the Northern King-
don. The graciousness of God has been repeatedly blasted by the rebellious
acts of his people who do not know and do not consider (v.3). A graphic
caption for the news media of Isaiah's day may be arrestingly stated, "Cove-
naints are shattered" (Isaiah 33:8). Yet the astonishing fact is that Yah-
veh's choice of Israel as the elected people and faithful remnant is reaf-
49
firmed with eschatological overtones (Isaiah 10:21; 30:20).

In the judgment of Isaiah, the preservation of the divine covenant is
the decisive element in the determination of international policy. It was
the age of Assyrian military might, and Tiglath-Pileser III (745-727 B.C.)
cherished as one of his principal aims, the subjugation of Syria, and Pales-
tine. As his combat manoeuvres developed in extent and intensity, the
rulers of the many small states in the region were terrified and sought to
establish an anti-Assyrian coalition to halt the Assyrian aggression, while
the Phoenician coastal cities and several states in Asia Minor hastened to
pay tribute. Pekah of Israel and Rezin of Syria allied to defeat the
Assyrian military terror, and they attempted to coerce Ahaz of Judah to
join in the combined resistance. His unwillingness to unite his forces
with those of Pekah and Rezin caused the Syrian-Ephraimite war. Ahaz was
in a state of panic, threatened on one hand by the Pekah-Rezin siege, and on
the other, by Tiglath-Pileser's belligerent expeditions extending to Philis-
tea, disturbingly close to Judah's border. Noth summarised the situation
appropriately, "Ahaz was extremely hard-pressed and fearful in Jerusalem.
In this situation, Ahaz decided,... against the urgent insistence of the
prophet Isaiah that he should trust quietly in his God (Isaiah 7:1-17), to
enlist the aid of the mighty and he sent a 'present' from the temple and the
palace treasury in Jerusalem to no less a personage than Tiglath-Pileser him-
self, with an offer of surrender and a request for help against his enemies
Aram and Israel (2 Kings 16:7-9)." 5

This passage from Noth is pregnant with significance. King Ahaz re-
jected the advice of Isaiah and thereby placed the nation on perilous ground. There was an avowed trust in the greatest monarch on earth in preference to Yahweh, and the temple treasury had been despoiled to court his friendship. It was a flagrant denial of Yahweh's power to liberate, a contradiction of Israel's history in retrospect, and a hasty withdrawal from the obligations of the covenant under military pressures.

Heschel observed that the menace of a diluted Yahwism was realised. In 732 Ahaz, during a visit to Damascus to pay homage to Tiglath-Pileser, saw an altar which he ordered and installed in the temple at Jerusalem (2 Kings 16:10ff.), and also made changes in the arrangements and furniture of the temple in imitation of the pattern of the Assyrian cult. Such changes were an "acknowledgement of Assyria's greatness in the realm of religion and was a public recognition of the power of the alien god."

The covenant with Death (28:14-22) is illuminated if related to this conflict or to overtures with Egypt. It was a severe reproach of Israel and a stern condemnation of her lethal acts. It clearly enunciates the prophet's urgent covenantal concern. This blatant satirical expression is but a harsh contrast to the Davidic covenant which guarantees life, and comparable with earthly protectorates which ensure death. Israel's future was inherent in her covenantal choice.

The Interpreter's Bible holds that this reference may be to sheol, god of the underworld, or to the Canaanite mot, or to the Egyptian Osiris, or to the Assyrian Asshur. However, the point remains valid that Israel, in her futile attempts to strengthen and secure the national image, was desperate in her efforts to contract covenants in defiance of Isaiah's stern warning and in open rebellion against Yahweh. One could feel the pangs of a
national crisis gripping Judah, and the feeble thrusts in every direction to restore confidence and embark on a program of reconstruction. Israel's refuge is discoverable only in her faith in the justice and righteousness of Yahweh (Isaiah 36:4-7; 37:10). This point would be further developed at a later stage of this thesis.

By 721 B.C., the fate of Israel had been sealed. Ephraim succumbed to the siege of Sargon II and existed no more as an independent nation.

This course of events showed the fatality of a policy that deviated widely from the divine covenant and confirmed the prophetic pronouncements of Isaiah's precursors in the Northern Kingdom. It was, for Isaiah, incontrovertible evidence of divine judgment and the doom that would befall Judah.

Empires are founded, linger and vanish from history, and rulers emerge, tarry and disappear from the mortal scene. Tiglath-Pileser had died and Ahas had been succeeded by his son Hezekiah. He soon began to reap the fruits of his father's folly because the nation was teeming early with dissatisfaction from the yoke of Assyrian imperialism and internal agitations were unceasing that gave momentum to the redirection of international policy. Hezekiah was encouraged to join with the strong and united government of the Twenty-second Dynasty of Egypt in an ambitious anti-Assyrian offensive.

Isaiah again intervened and drew attention to the futility of dependence on Egypt. He cautioned, "The Egyptians will help in vain, and to no purpose, therefore have I proclaimed concerning this: their strength is to sit still" (Isaiah 30:7). To attract attention to the perilous state of affairs prevailing in the nation and to emphasize the decisive nature of his message, the prophet walked about the streets of Jerusalem attired in scanty garb.

This would be a stabbing reminder of the Egyptian slavery from which they had
been liberated and the immaturity or insanity that any scheme of alliance would seem to make ostensible. It appears that Hezekiah heeded the prophet's counsel and did not take any active part in the 711/713 B.C. anti-Assyrian hostilities.

However, about 10 years later, Hezekiah was in close diplomatic friendship with Babylon's Merodach-baladan and negotiating again a compact against Assyria. Egyptian participation had been assured and it seemed that these three great powers could at least venture with some measure of confidence to defeat Assyria and terminate the submission to which so many states had been subjected by force. Isaiah denounced the powerful plan of the trio with flaming anger and had predicted the fall of Assyria (Isaiah 32:22-29). Jerusalem will survive, not because of a change of heart in Judah but, because of the goodness of God who will grant a respite. In 701, the end of Jerusalem seemed immediately in sight when a disastrous pestilence infected the invading Assyrian army and caused king Sennacherib to retreat.

The primary and inescapable fact observable in the course of these historical events is that the divine covenant is the guiding principle of action. In the unfolding of history and the developing concept of the significance of the covenantal relationship, there lay the self-revelation of the nature of God. Early notions of his character as whimsical and unpredictable in its relationship with men were undergoing radical change. The element of mystery was not eliminated, but assumed a greater significance when perceived from the dimension of those positive attributes of his nature: righteousness, love and holiness in necessary tension with their opposites.

With respect to the social life and the religious profession of the
nation, Isaiah was as vociferous as his Northern precursors. The long period of peace and prosperity enjoyed during Uzziah's sovereignty had engendered a false sense of security and nourished the injustices and vice that flourish in the fertility of a vibrant economy. Isaiah was horrified by the mistaken assumption that their current prosperity must be the seal of divine approval of their high level of national commitment to the covenant with Yahweh. It was an illusory presupposition. One of the Isaianic oracles extracted from the earliest period of his ministry is the famous "Vineyard Song" in chapter 5. It describes the caring love that a farmer has for his vineyard and the disillusionment he feels when its yield is unrewardingly poor. He must consider the decision to uproot and destroy it. Then, with dramatic irony, Isaiah declared, "The vineyard of the Lord of hosts is the house of Israel, and the men of Judah are his cherished plant; He looked for justice, but see, oppression! For righteousness, but behold, distress!" (Isaiah 5:7). His Judean audience is ruffled by his chiding.

A theology of the land in relation to the covenant is a significant feature here, and is further developed in the text of 24:5. In Isaiah 5, the vineyard yielded a crop of wild grapes. The produce of the vine manifested a disorder that was basic, and traceable beyond the vine itself to the land. There was a deep-rooted malignant infirmity in man, at the very core of his being, and to this Jeremiah will focus attention when he emphasizes a covenant of the heart.

In Isaiah 24:5, "The earth lies polluted under its inhabitants, for they have transgressed the laws, violated the statutes, broken the everlasting covenant." Isaiah seems to be reflecting on the terrible consequences of sin that have despoiled the earth, ruined fertility and corrupted nature.
He seems to be referring to the cosmic covenant with Adam, and the judgment of the deluge. The close connection between man and land, תַּנָּר and יָוִינ, is observable not only on ethnological and etymological grounds, but also from the fact that the evil deeds of men would seem to pollute the land, impair the cosmic cycle and precipitate a crisis in nature. "God said to Noah; The end of all flesh is threatened, for the earth is filled with violence through mankind. Behold, I will destroy them with the earth" (Genesis 6:13).

It would appear that the age of women's liberation had already been conceived by the prophets. They unhesitatingly identified the women for their full share of culpability with respect to the disavowal of the statutes of Yahweh. Amos swooped down on them as "cows of Bashan" (Amos 4:1). Isaiah, in a mood of mingled lament and threat, spoke of the vain pride of the "daughters of Zion" (women of Jerusalem) 3:16-23. The prophetic condemnation was pronounced on the entire nation. No one was excusable.

Leslie, in his book, The Prophets Tell Their Own Story, succeeds in reproducing the social climate of the Judean situation which was so similar to that of Israel. It was the firm opinion of Isaiah that "the contemporary religion of my fellow country-men in its crass materialism and shallow magic was leading straight to social anarchy and chaos." Social disabilities in public life were symptomatic of covenantal repudiation (Isaiah 5).

Scott underscores the same point. "The prophets' quarrel with their existing social order was that it did not enshrine and sustain the human and social values integral to Yahwism, but on the contrary destroyed them. "Seek good and not evil, that you may survive", said Amos (5:14), and Isaiah uttered a similar appeal, "Cease to do evil, learn to do good, pursue justice...." (Isaiah 1:16-17). The Torah had assumed a formidable place in
the total national life of Judah and its violation was a transgression of Yahweh.

Essential to the faith of Israel was a continuing and living response to that marvellous act in salvation history by which Yahweh liberated and claimed a people for his personal possession. But the heart of Israel, as the center of her affection and love had become so frigid in response to Yahweh that conventional religion had deteriorated to a sterile mechanical performance that induced the agonizing lament of Isaiah, "And the Lord said: Because this people draw near with their mouth and honor me with their lips, while their hearts are far from me, and their fear of me is a commandment of men learned by rote; therefore, behold, I will again do marvellous things with this people, wonderful and marvellous; and the wisdom of their wise men shall perish, and the discernment of their discerning men shall be hid" (Isaiah 29:13-14). This was an epoch-making utterance of Isaiah and it laid the foundation for Jeremiah’s new covenant. The life of Israel throbs in a single national heart in covenantal relationship with Yahweh and disruption of the covenant by provocative and violent acts can only precipitate a national catastrophe (Isaiah 5:25). Some scholars hold that Isaiah, unlike Jeremiah, did not predict the destruction of Jerusalem.9

The issue that now requires some elucidation is the relation of the covenantal concept of holiness to the national ethic. Isaiah’s vision of this holy God in inaccessible splendor was a revelation of the nature of God and the demands of his holy will. This revelation of holiness made Isaiah acutely aware of the sinfulness of his being and the widening gulf it extended between himself and the covenant God of Israel. The Davidic covenant now stood in jeopardy because of Judah’s iniquity: "Oppression, violence,
debuchery, greed, theft, dishonesty, lust for power, callous inhumanity, faithlessness to trust", enumerates Scott. Such unholy deeds had marred the intimacy of covenantal relationship and were, indeed, a blunt affrontal to the character of Yahweh. Holiness and sinfulness are diametrically opposed, and the solution of the problem haunted the mind of the prophet. Judah was unheeding and unrepentant, and it was inconceivable that God, in his glory and majesty, could abandon the norm in national affairs which was grounded in the covenantal relationship or arbitrarily exonerate Judah from her obligations.

Heschel succinctly states that "Isaiah holds out two hopes for mankind. One is immediate, partial, historical: 'A remnant will return!' The other is distant, final, eschatological: the transformation of the world at the end of the days." The concept of the remnant is an important theological perspective in the conviction of Isaiah. Maly observed that "in its special technical sense it refers to that part of Israel which will escape God's judgment of destruction and which will thus be the necessary instrument of continuing salvation." The belief in the escape of a righteous remnant from divine judgment is reflected in the early narrative of the deluge that preceded the covenant with Noah. In Isaianic thought, the remnant that will survive the disasters of history will comprise those who have conformed to a standard of conduct beyond the ritual injunctions of a holiness code (Isaiah 33:15). Thus, in a convincing and uncompromising mode there was the growing awareness of the notion of ethical monotheism, and the peculiar implications it held for the covenant people. Ethical norms had significance for the people of God only because of the deepening apprehension of the nature of the divine
Being. He alone is God, the holy One was the clear emphasis of Deutero­Isaiah a couple generations later during the exilic period. The foundation had been laid by his precursors.

The prophet was resolutely convinced that a remnant will be preserved as God's living sign and demonstration of hope for his people (Isaiah 8:18; 10:21-22). In expressing this conviction, he symbolically named one of sons Shear-jashub, a living testimony to his confidence in the continuing existence of the covenant. Beyond the immediate hope for a remnant is perceivable the ultimate hope of transformation in the Day of the Lord.

Isaiah's contribution to the apprehension of God's revelation was remarkable. He affirmed that the moralisation of the concept of holiness could only revolutionise the national ethos because it attracted attention to the manifestation of the holy will of Yahweh in righteousness. His teaching may be partially expressed in the striking language of 5:16,

Yahweh Zebaoth is
exalted in judgment (mispat),
and the holy God shows Himself
holy in righteousness (zadakah).

Knight states with penetrating insight, "Righteousness represents the unspeakable holiness of God when it enters into the sphere of human life.... Thus, God's righteousness is revealed to Israel, not purely in ethical terms, but rather in terms of fellowship with Him. And since God's fellowship is a redemptive one, his righteousness comes virtually to be his saving activity."15 Here we see a combination of the great thought-forms characteristic of Amos and Hosea developed significantly to reveal the divine nature and activity in its covenantal outreach.
Chapter 6

JEREMIAH: THE COVENANT OF THE HEART

Jeremiah advanced beyond the covenantal categories of his predeces-
sors and asserted the pivotal importance of a new element, a religion of
the heart.

The prophet Jeremiah was born in the village of Anathoth sometime to-
wards the end of the long reign of Manasseh, and he began his ministry
about 626 B.C. Like his precursors, his background and call cannot be
divorced in an attempt to interpret his unique covenantal emphasis. His
home-town was only about 3 miles north-east of Jerusalem and his father
Hilkiah was a priest. The mental process, by which the vision was perceived
and its significance gained, was conditioned by his religious nature and the
pious hopes he must have entertained for Israel's future. Moreover, the
international situation and the national policy of reform promoted by Josiah
would have contributed their force to the milieu of the times in which he
lived and prophesied; those fateful years to the close of the history of the
Southern Kingdom in 586 B.C.

The narrative of his call (chapter 1) took the form of a dialogue; God spoke, Jeremiah answered, and God spoke again. His religious conscious-
ness was so sensitized that the audition of the divine voice pierced his
own heart, and unlike Isaiah's appreciation of his own sinfulness and un-
worthiness, and of God's awesome holiness, Jeremiah's visionary spirit re-
coiled within him at the assignment of being prophet to his nation, for he
lacked the art of rhetoric and the content of the prophetic proclamation.
The validity of his election is reinforced by the assuring words of the
divine voice commissioning him for the prophetic function he agonizingly
performed. In the words of Anderson, "Jeremiah identified himself with his message in a more personal way than any other prophet.... His career was intimately tied up with the tragedy of Jerusalem, a tragedy that was intensified by the very words he felt compelled to speak in the name of Yahweh. The wound of his people cut deeply in his own heart prompting him to mix with his prophecies of doom, outcries of agony and grief. (Jeremiah 8:18-22)."²

The covenant looms brightly in the Deuteronomic reformation instituted by king Josiah. However, before giving consideration to this, we may note the content of Jeremiah's early preaching during the years between his call and the Deuteronomic reformation. The pericope (Jeremiah 2:1-4) contains a series of oracles which reflect Israel's commitment to the Mosaic tradition. Jeremiah recalls the great event of Israel's past experience, the exodus and the sojourn in the wilderness. Inherent in this remembrance was the covenant to which Israel, as Yahweh's bride, was wholeheartedly faithful. It should be carefully noted that Jeremiah in 2:1-3 uses the word hesed which is characteristic of Hosea's thought, and the overtones are also reminiscent of this Northern prophet. Anderson declared, "The affinities between the second chapter of Jeremiah and the prophecy of Hosea are so striking that we may conclude that Jeremiah knew and was influenced by Hosea's message, which by that time had become the possession of the Kingdom of Judah."³

The chapter is introduced with a recital of the covenantal love-affair and the steadfastness of Israel to her spouse during the desert period. "I remember the devotion of your youth, your love as a bride, how you followed me in the wilderness, in a land not sown. Israel was holy to the Lord, the firstfruits of his harvest. All who would destroy him would be held guilty;
punishment would come to them, says the Lord" (Jeremiah 2:1-3). Then, in sharp contrast to the past, Israel during the occupation and settlement in Canaan was unreflective of the mighty acts of Yahweh and his continuing providence. She spurned his love and was unfaithful to the covenantal bond (2:4-8). In 3:20, the marriage symbol is prominent in its allusion to Israel as the deceitful wife who has acted treacherously. Consequently, there is the drama of divorce proceedings in 3:1-15 because the backsliding wife, Israel has committed adultery. She has prostituted with other gods. "As a faithless wife leaves her husband, so have you been faithless to me, 0 house of Israel" (Jeremiah 3:20). Israel stands condemned for her reproachful infidelity and covenantal lawlessness.

The other metaphor used by Jeremiah to indicate the covenantal relationship and unfathomable depth of love that Yahweh had for Israel was the father-son relationship. "I thought how I would set you among my sons, and give you a pleasant land, the most glorious among the nations. And I thought you would call me, my father, and would not turn from following me" (Jeremiah 3:19; 31:9). Israel, as a son, despised the admonition of Yahweh and became delinquent by pledging loyalty to heathen gods. The guile of Baal devotees had enchanted them and had led them astray.

Viewed from the analogy of the husband and the wife, or the father and the son, Israel's behavior was enigmatic to the prophet for no other nation had ever repudiated its deity with such Judean ingratitude. Even more frustrating to the prophet was the ignominious choice that Israel had exercised. Her sin was two-fold before the celestial tribunal. "Be appalled, 0 heavens; at this, be shocked, be utterly desolate, says Yahweh, for my people have committed two evils: they have forsaken me, the fountain of living waters,
and hewed out cisterns for themselves, broken cisterns that can hold no water” (Jeremiah 2:12-13). “It was as if Jerusalem had rejected a supply of fresh water in order to store up water in cisterns that were no better than sieves.”

The material in chapters 1-3 already present a crisis, and reflect the sorrow and anguish of Yahweh. “A great hope was Israel”, says Heschel, “the firstfruits were a foretaste of a harvest of blessing. But as time passed, God’s hope was dashed. The people deserted their redeemer and worshipped instead ‘the works of their own hands’ (Jeremiah 1:16). God’s pain and disappointment ring throughout the book of Jeremiah. What a sublime paradox for the Creator of heaven and earth to implore the people so humbly, ‘What wrong did your fathers find in me, and pursued what is worthless and became worthless?’ (Jeremiah 2:5).”

Jeremiah is already at the crux of the problem of estrangement and broken relationship. Anderson holds that Jeremiah “protested against the syncretism that had all but erased the distinctive elements of Israel’s faith. He called for a reformation, not just a superficial reform of traditional rites, but a reformation that begins in the heart, the seat of men’s loyalties and affections. He called for a ‘circumcision of the heart’, for a breaking up of the fallow ground that had encrusted the life of the people.” In a time when Israel’s sacred past was neglected and forgotten, the Mosaic faith of the ancient wilderness was revived with new depth and power through the message of Jeremiah.

Winward observed, in answer to the inquiry in respect of Jeremiah’s attitude to Josiah’s reform, that “he is not explicitly associated with the reform movement, either in the book of Jeremiah or in the history books of Kings and Chronicles.” In anticipating the tone of the reform and setting it in
perspective in relation to Jeremiah, tentative reasons are being suggested for Jeremiah's surface involvement in the Deuteronomic reformation.

The position of Anderson would be that Jeremiah, in the 5 years that span the period between his call to the prophetic ministry and the discovery of the Deuteronomic scroll that gave direction to the reform movement, had already come to the conclusion that the quality and nature of the national reform would effect neither a firm reconciliation to Yahweh nor initiate a period of prosperity and blessing for which the masses yearned. In Jeremiah's vision, the ambitious reforms of Josiah would be no more than a panacea for the many disabilities inherited from the long perilous reign of Manasseh. Only a change that was personal and from the heart could restore the covenantal relationship to harmony in the divine destiny.

Kraeling, in considering Jeremiah's rear rank approach to the reformation, notes that before Josiah instituted Deuteronomic measures of reform, he sent trusted advisors to inquire of the Lord; they went to a prophetess named Huldah. Why not to the prophet who had so powerfully assailed the prevailing apostasy? Was it because Jeremiah was considered an outsider, a Benjaminite? Was it because action in promulgating the reforms had to be confidential before opposition could crystalize? Moreover, there are several allusions, in sayings of Jeremiah, which may be construed as revealing his dissatisfaction with the Deuteronomic code. Jeremiah 8:7-8 may be cited in which he asserts, "My people know not the ordinance of the Lord," and to which the community replied, "We are wise, and the law of the Lord is with us." Such arrogance betrayed the correctness of Jeremiah's affirmation and the inner weakness of the reform.

Winward suggests that Jeremiah would certainly have been sympathetic
with some of the aims of the Josianic reform: the suppression of idolatrous worship and immoral customs, the insistence on justice for the poor, the renewal of the ancient covenant. He holds the view that Jeremiah was commanded by Yahweh to proclaim the principles of the reformation by itinerant preaching. He cites 11:6-8, but it is questionable whether these instructions are related to the covenant associated with Josiah's reformation or the deeper covenantal concept that is the feature of Jeremiah's message. "Proclaim all these words in the cities of Judah, and in the streets of Jerusalem! Hear the words of this covenant and do them." This divine impulse he obeyed. "Therefore, I brought upon them all the words of this covenant which I commanded them to do, but they did not." It appears that the latter view may be the more probable.

The Deuteronomistic historian portrays Manasseh as the arch-villain of the Davidic succession of kings. They hold him responsible for seducing the people to indulge in greater evil than the surrounding nations (2 Kings 21:9), and the consequences of his long reign 687-642 B.C. provoked Yahweh to anger and precipitated his judgment on the nation (Jeremiah 15:4). He seems to have reversed the religious reforms implemented by Hezekiah. Whether these accusations are justifiable or the work of redactors is not an issue. The point is that Josiah now seeks to redirect the course of events in the national interest and there would seem to be rousing enthusiasm, and endorsement of the program of reform. To this end the historian records, "Before him, there was no king like him who turned to the Lord with all his heart" (2 Kings 23:25).

Josiah embarked on his program of national reform about 629 B.C. amidst the resurgence of nationalism and the ardent desire for political
independence. "He expanded his influence into the territory of the former Northern Kingdom which had become the Assyrian provinces of Megiddo and Samaria. Evidently, Judah's aspirations to restore a united kingdom under a Davidic king was intensified by the political situation of the day, and Josiah was eager to translate this nationalistic dream into reality." The religious phase of this reform included repairs to the temple of Jerusalem presumably to remove all traces of Assyrian and other alien cultic symbols from the temple imposed during the short reigns of weak Davidic kings during Assyrian international suzerainty. During these operations, a remarkable discovery was made in 621 B.C. when a manuscript, "the book of the law" (2 Chronicles 34:15) was found and read to the king by his secretary, Shaphan.

This important discovery was authenticated by the oracular response of Huldah who declared that because of the violation of the words of the book, Yahweh would swiftly execute his judgment on sinful Judah. At this point, Josiah, in despair, immediately summoned the people to the courts of the temple for a ceremony of covenantal renewal. The scroll was read to the great assembly and the king and people covenanted to perform all its words.

"This ceremony calls to mind the story in Joshua 24 about the convocation 'before God' at Shechem, the ritual of covenant renewal, and 'the book of the Torah of God' in which the Shechem covenant was recorded. It also recalls the ancient covenant ceremony in Exodus 24:3-8 when Moses read to the people the book of the covenant." Josiah now vigorously pursued his reform program by intensifying current efforts and broadening their scope. The centralisation of worship in Jerusalem and the cleansing of the temple deserve further consideration.
The purging of Yahwism of alien elements and the purification of the temple were pursued with greater thoroughness. The worship of the Canaanite deities Baal and Asherah, and the Ammonite Milcom, as well as the Assyrian astral cult were prohibited. Sacred prostitution, child sacrifice in the valley of Hinmon, and other pagan practices were discontinued. Objects which were sacred to the worship of foreign gods found in the temple, for example, the horses dedicated to the sun worship and the astral altars on the roof were destroyed.

The reform centralised worship in Jerusalem and ordered the destruction of sanctuaries and high-places in Judean rural districts. This widespread reform extended as far north as the temple at Bethel, and it seems that Judah is clearly asserting her territorial integrity and military confidence by penetrating into Assyrian occupied land, previously the Northern Kingdom.

The prophet Jeremiah could perceive beyond the far-reaching Josianic reforms the spiritual poverty of the masses. The externality of the reformation could not effect the interiority of a spiritual transformation that Jeremiah envisaged, and he became increasingly impatient and disillusioned with the popular movement. The Deuteronomic reformation served to validate the truth of his conviction that the reform was superficial and concerned with externals. "The centralisation of worship at Jerusalem was not an unmixed blessing," contends Winward, "It increased the power and pretensions of the priesthood, and engendered in the people a false sense of security. God dwelt in the temple in their midst and all was well (Jeremiah 7:14). Like the sanctuary, the written word could also be the object of a misplaced confidence."
Judah was treading unwarily on treacherous ground. The unification of religious life at the Jerusalem temple and the priority given to torah in the human situation cultivated unfortunate developments in the area of worship. The antithesis between law and heart is apparently alluded to by Jeremiah. "Circumcise yourselves to the Lord, remove the foreskin of your hearts" (Jeremiah 4:4). God's will seemed to be crystalizing in the religion of a book. The formality of religious observances and the innocuous quality of spiritual practice received a new impetus with the promulgation of Deuteronomistic legislation that was discernible to the prophetic vision and spiritual insight of Jeremiah to be inglorious dramatizations of repentance. He pondered the sinfulness of Judah and the deeper implications of the covenant relationship.

"It is one of the characteristics, and one of the great glories of Israel's prophets that they saw every crime as unique, just as they saw every evidence of God's hand as a sign of a unique intervention." Malv further insists that, "The here and now of this sin had a horrible reality about it that fell full force upon the prophet and made his mind reel at the thought of it. This was no abstract notion to be neatly tabulated under the category of sin. This was the deliberate action of a flesh-and-blood Israelite raising his clenched fist defiantly against the Lord."15 Judah had militantly declared that she was innocent. Jeremiah implored, "Only acknowledge your guilt that you have rebelled against the Lord your God" (Jeremiah 3:13,25). Judah's daring determination incurred the divine wrath, "I will bring you to judgment for saying, I have not sinned" (Jeremiah 2:35). Sin could not be tolerated as simply a legal omission in pursuance of a Deuteronomistic utopia. Unhesitatingly the prophet, disenchanted with the
Jesianic reform, abandoned hope for he possessed a deeper vision for the covenant people.

By virtue of the covenant the community became the people of Yahweh, and God's compassion possessed the magnitude of his wrath, so that even in the act of committing the vilest sin the community remained the special elect of Yahweh. Repulsed, yet not dispossessed. Again and again the emphasis resounds, "my people" (Jeremiah 6:14; 23:2f.; 30:3).

But why should the people of Yahweh's peculiar choice engage in wanton and monstrous acts of covenantal violation? The cause of the problem was deeply rooted not in the community per se, but in the individual.

Affirmed Jeremiah, "I, the Lord, search the mind and try the heart to give every man according to his ways, according to the fruit of his doings" (Jeremiah 17:10; 11:20; 20:12). Jeremiah is now on the verge of proclaiming the concept of a new covenant theme. The heart, the center of human affection and love, was degenerate and necessitated renewal.

To Jeremiah was revealed the timeless words of the Lord: "I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah..." (Jeremiah 31:31ff.). The Mosaic covenant at Sinai was untenable. Judah can be redeemed only through the institution of a new covenant.16 "I will place my law within them, and write it upon their hearts; I will be their God, and they shall be my people" (Jeremiah 31:33). The primary distinction between the Sinaitic covenant and this renewed covenant was that the latter motivated action from internal compulsion through inner transformation. Unlike the old that enslaved by scrupulous observance of minute legal details, this conferred freedom expressed in a spontaneous love of God. The lamentation of Jeremiah in the name of Yahweh, "For my people
are foolish, they know me not; they are stupid children who have no understanding" (Jeremiah 4:22), will no longer originate in Israel's lack of knowledge or denial of the intimacy with Yahweh. The dominant feature of the new covenant was a relationship that was personal in experience and divorced from the imperative externality of the law.

The individualism of this covenant was inescapable. "But Jeremiah did not advocate an individualism detached from the traditions of a people separated from the covenant community." Personal faith was nourished and strengthened by the corporate experience of the community. Inextricably linked with the notion of personal faith was the theology of divine forgiveness (Jeremiah 31:34).

This further introduces the cardinal theme of this thesis, the character of God. "The modes of prophetic sympathy are determined by the modes of the divine pathos (Jeremiah 8:18-9:1; 14:20-21). The pathos of love and the pathos of anger awake corresponding tones in the heart of the prophet. In his confessions, Jeremiah allows us to obtain a glimpse of the fervor of love, as well as of the raging of anger against the people." This pathos was illuminated and conceivably developed by the new quality of intimate fellowship that the new covenant inaugurated. This covenant was a reality not of knowledge about God, but a deeper knowledge and apprehension of the personal God who possessed the contrite hearts of men. It was a manifestation of the living God who, although retaining his holiness and transcendence, was yet immanent and personally loved and communicated with the members of his covenant community. Consequently, the ground was created for man's glorying in the revealed character of the eternally loving God of whom Amos, Hosea, and Isaiah had testified.
The proclamation of this new covenant did not reverse the course of history. The sound of the trumpet had already been heard (Jeremiah 4:19-21). In 609 B.C., Josiah was killed in battle against Egypt and the reform came to an abrupt end. Egypt now exercised international control and the kings of little Judah were puppets of Egyptian might. Political instability and heathen worship were again the cause of national decay. By 605 B.C., at the battle of Carchemish, Babylon became the military power and the end of Judah was not distant. The exhortations and pronouncements of Jeremiah sound aloud at a time of impending national catastrophe. Jerusalem fell to the advancing Babylonian army in 598 B.C. after a siege of several months. A large part of the population was deported.

Disastrous political policies continued and vacillations of loyalty between the great military powers and unheeding disobedience to the covenant precipitated the final crisis. The pagan Chaldean army executed the divine anger and judgment of Yahweh (Jeremiah 21:1-10) in 589-587 B.C., and the covenant people were taken into exile.

However, beyond this final tragedy and doom lay the covenantal purpose and divine destiny of the chosen people. The very nature of Yahweh's character manifested in his divine activity affirmed the constancy of his love and the redemptive quality of his justice.
CONCLUSION

The focus of this thesis illuminates a disagreement with Von Rad who insists that "contrary to popular misconception, the prophets were not concerned with the being of God, but with future events which were about to occur in space and time - indeed, in Israel's own immediate surroundings."\(^1\)

The point of contention here is that the scholar seems to be making an arbitrary division between the course of events in the history of Israel and the revelations of God. As has been pointed out in the development of this dissertation, history is the vehicle for the unfolding of the divine nature. Yahweh's character, as a God who intervened and saved his people, was an uncritical and puerile appraisal of Yahweh's activity. The immaturity of Israel's early beliefs is perceivable only in relation to the developing doctrine of God and his universality, of which Israel became increasingly aware by the exilic period.

But in a more personal sense, Yahweh's covenant with Israel placed her in the privileged status to attain an intimate knowledge of Yahweh, and therefore, to come to a full apprehension and realization of his being. Complementary to the concept of privilege that the covenant conferred was the proclamation of the prophets that Israel stood under the judgment of God in direct relation to the extent of her privilege. In this covenantal relationship of privilege and responsibility, the prophetic pre-occupation was unlikely to be with events, except in the ultimate sense, as part of the total revelation of the divine nature.

Beyond space and time, and the existence of a people whose only qualification for divine favor was the incomprehensible hesed of Yahweh, must be
seen the absolute and ultimate reality which connotes for christian theism, belief in a personal God. The events that occur in time and with spatial delineations have significance for man only because of the character of God. The purpose and will of God for mankind have their source of existence in the reality of the divine character.

Even if an immediate concern of the prophets was with events, their gaze at, and preoccupation with deeper reality were even more sensational. Hosea grappled with the problem of love, that elusive reality that transcends time and space. Amos and Isaiah struggled with the justice and holiness of God, and against this background future events became intelligible to their prophetic consciousness. In Jeremiah we see a partial resolution of the conflict by the announcement of the renewal of the covenant. Here, the realm of physical events is entirely obscured by the new intimacy that encompassed the characteristic concepts of his predecessors.

Moreover, to say as does Dr. von Rad\(^2\) that the pre-exilic prophets showed "an astonishing lack of interest in what Yahweh looked like" is indeed the mystery and treasure with which the christian religion is endowed. This alleged lack of interest reflects the incomprehensibility and invisibility of God who reveals himself. The interest of the prophets is perceivable in their concern with the attributes of Yahweh, rather than what he looked like because the qualitative nature of their relationship with him was interwoven with their concept of his nature, purpose and will.

This thesis has surveyed the scene of three centuries of prophetic activity in response to the Sinaitic covenant and the transmission of the word of Yahweh to his people. It is the conviction of the writer that the interpretation of the covenant is uniquely the revelation of God and the
progressive apprehension of his character through the vicissitudes of history and community existence in covenantal perspective.

The prophetic doctrine of God was a spectacular advance beyond earlier notions of God's being. The spiritualization of Yahweh and the moralization of his character accelerated revolutionary changes in the compass of Israel's beliefs about God and the divine government of the universe. The belief that Yahweh was housed at Sinai or Jerusalem and was limited in his activity by national boundaries or developed civilisations was threatened (Isaiah 6:3; Jeremiah 23:24). God was ubiquitous or omnipresent and his vision pierced every hidden place. The concretization of a spiritualized doctrine of God was further consolidated by the destruction of Jerusalem and the events of the exile.

The growing belief that Yahweh was indisputably moral led to an urgent re-examination of the dictum: my country, right or wrong had a guarantee of divine protection. Now the prophets declare that Yahweh is God of Justice for its own sake and not in league with any community at the expense or denial of his righteous judgment (Amos 9:8; Isaiah 30:18). His activity in the universe in relation to Israel was in consistent harmony with his moral character. His love and moral holiness were ostensibly manifested in response to the intercessory pleadings of the prophets when Israel appeared on the verge of being engulfed by international hostilities and the turbulence of her own internal situation (Amos 7:1-6; Jeremiah 18:20).

It is necessary to salvage the character of God as asserted by the pre-exilic prophetic movement, in an effort, not simply to enhance the personality of the prophets but to recapture the vision of God and enthrone his character with its inherent demands on the new covenant people of the kingdom of God.
FOOTNOTES

Introduction

1 Ludwig Koehler, Old Testament Theology, p. 41.

Chapter 1

1 Koehler, op. cit., p. 60.


3 Koehler, op. cit., p. 42.


7 Martin Noth, The History of Israel, p. 88.

8 Scott, op. cit., p. 24.

9 The word berith is related to the root brh which indicates food and eating. The original idea of covenant probably developed from the covenant meal; hence, the characteristic phrase "cut a covenant" suggests the cutting-up of food for the covenant meal. The ritual of covenant-making was also observed by cutting an animal in half, and then, the parties to the covenant will pass between the two parts of the animal which were laid opposite each other. It implied the acceptance of a solemn vow and a kind of self-imprecation of a curse, should either party violate covenant. Another practice was the smearing of the contracting parties with the blood of the ritually slain animal. McCarthy, op. cit., p. 3; Gerhard Von Rad, Genesis: A Commentary, trans. by John H. Marks, The Old Testament Library, Westminster Press, Philadelphia 1956, p. 181; The Interpreter's Bible, vol. 5, Abingdon Press, New York 1956, pp. 1057-1058.

10 Koehler, op. cit., p. 63.

11 Ibid., pp. 63-64.


13 Ibid., p. 165.

14 Noth, Exodus: Commentary, p. 123.

15 Jakob Jocx, The Covenant: A Theology of Human Destiny, pp. 31 ff.; Noth,
Chapter 2


4. Pfeiffer, op. cit., p. 128.


10. Ibid., p. 41.

11. Anderson, op. cit., p. 190


Chapter 3


The authenticity of the oracle against Judah (Amos 2:4-5) is disputed primarily on two grounds. Firstly, Amos regarded the peoples of both the Northern and Southern Kingdoms as a single family (Amos 3:2), and therefore, an independent denunciation of Judah is suspect. Secondly, the language reflects idioms of a later period, e.g., "rejected the law," and "despised his statutes," betray Deuteronomic influences.

The concluding verses of Amos (Amos 9:8-15) are an appendix to his work. They reflect a later historical period, for they speak of great desolation, of the house of David as fallen and Israel apparently in exile. These verses were undoubtedly added by a scribe following the fall of Jerusalem in 586 B.C. 

Chapter 4 

1. Von Rad, op. cit., p. 140.
2. Heschel, op. cit., p. 56.
3. Ibid., p. 54.
4. Ibid., p. 57.
5. Ibid., p. 60.
6. Ibid., p. 61.
7. Ibid., p. 62.
8. Ibid., p. 63.
9. Ibid., p. 64.
10. Ibid., p. 65.

Chapter 5 

Chapter 6


2 Anderson, op. cit., p. 327.

3 Ibid., p. 305.

4 Ibid., p. 306.

5 Heschel, op. cit., p. 123.


7 Winward, op. cit., p. 128.


12. Ibid., pp. 307 ff.
13. Ibid., p. 308.
15. Maly, op. cit. p. 112.
17. Ibid., p. 350.

Conclusion
2. Ibid., pp. 38 ff.
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APPROVAL SHEET

The dissertation submitted by Rev. Rudolph A. Holder has been read and approved by members of the Department of Theology.

The final copies have been examined by the director of the thesis and the signature which appears below verifies the fact that any necessary changes have been incorporated and that the dissertation is now given final approval with reference to content and form.

The thesis is therefore accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.

August 4, 1973
Date

[Signature of Advisor]