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A THEOLOGY OF PSEUDOPROPHETS: A STUDY IN JEREMIAH

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A large corpus of material on false prophets is contained in the book of Jeremiah. This material furnishes opportunity for understanding the theological perspective from which these pseudoprophets spoke and acted. The question is: What theological conceptions did they hold? A survey of recent prophetic and pseudoprophetic research indicates that analysis of historical contexts and audience response helps to answer the question. The present proposal is that a tentative reconstruction of pseudoprophet theology can be developed if attention is given to: (1) audience response, (2) origin of pseudoprophets' revelations, (3) characterization of pseudoprophets, and (4) pseudoprophet quotations. Accordingly this analysis indicates that pseudoprophets held to a "Para-Covenantal" theology built on hopes attached to the temple and the dynasty. Jerusalem's existence was without condition and Mosaic Covenant infractions were of no consequence. They spoke only in part of Yahweh's covenant with his people. Thus, due warning is given those who speak or hear only a part of God's revelation to man, an error too prevalent in contemporary speaking and hearing of God's Word.

* * *

WHILE the term *pseudoprophet* has its origin in the LXX, so numerous are the mentions of these prophets who oppose Yahweh's work and will that the term ψευδοπροφήτης serves as a meaningful title for such persons.¹ From a survey of the OT record there is clear indication that false prophets persisted throughout Israel's history. This fact, along with the diametrical opposition to false prophets by canonical prophets, the complex problem of distinguishing between true and false prophets, and the belief that

¹Concerning the LXX translators' usage of ψευδοπροφήτης on ten occasions, J. L. Crenshaw, *Prophetic Conflict* (BZAW 124; Berlin: de Gruyter, 1971) 1, says: "In ten places the attack by one prophet upon another was so severe that the Septuagint translators used the word *pseudoprophetes* to translate *nabi*."

understanding the theological conceptions of false prophets enhances understanding of canonical prophets, raises the question: What theological conceptions did pseudoprophets hold?

Though the length of this paper prohibits a complete treatment of all OT references to false prophets, the book of Jeremiah furnishes the necessary data to begin answering the above question. Several reasons may be cited for this selection. This book contains a volume of material on false prophets, enough data to make a judicious, if cautious, analysis. Further, an especially sharp contrast between true and false prophets is presented, cursorily indicated by the fact that of the ten times the LXX translators used *ψευδοπροφήτης*, nine are in Jeremiah.² Still another reason for selecting this book is that the rapidly changing international political climate of Jeremiah's time seemed to demand religious explanations for Judah's precarious situation; one would expect to find such explanations, and one is not disappointed. Both true and false prophets offered explanations, and these provide further material for answering the questions regarding the theological conceptions of false prophets.

If the book of Jeremiah is to be utilized as suggested above, the text of the book must be taken seriously. Gerstenberger's pessimistic judgment that the "facts and figures" are not necessarily identifiable with "historical events" must be abandoned.³ Admittedly, a number of textual questions arise in this book, but they certainly do not warrant the judgment of Gerstenberger.⁴

As already indicated, the international climate of Jeremiah's day was stormy. While a detailed history of Jeremiah's day would serve no particular function here, Klein's summary seems to be consistent with the international political picture:

Jeremiah lived at a time when the principal roles in the monotonous drama of Middle Eastern politics were changing hands in quite unexpected ways. Old powers were too exhausted to bear the weight of

²The ten references (MT) where the LXX uses *ψευδοπροφήτης* are Jer 6:13; 26:7, 8, 11, 16; 27:9; 28:1; 29:1, 8 and Zech 13:2.

³So E. Gerstenberger, "Jeremiah's Complaints: Observations on Jer. 15:10-21," *JBL* 82 (1963) 393, gloomily observes: "Jeremiah is looked upon as a religious genius, the champion of personal, inner, and spiritual religion. The basic fallacy of this viewpoint is the presupposition that the 'facts and figures' in Jer. are identical with 'historical events,' or, that they, at least, permit easy access to that which 'really happened' during Jeremiah's lifetime."

⁴For a discussion of textual matters relating to Jeremiah see the following: C. von Orelli, *The Prophecies of Jeremiah*, trans. J. S. Banks (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1889); J. Bright, *Jeremiah* (AB 21; Garden City: Doubleday, 1965); E. C. Rust, *Covenant and Hope* (Waco: Word, 1972); J. G. Janzen, *Studies in the Text of Jeremiah* (HSM 6; Cambridge: Harvard University, 1973). As an example of a recent treatment of this subject see E. Tor, "Exegetical Notes on the Hebrew Vorlage of the LXX of Jeremiah 27 (34)," *ZAW* 91 (1979) 73-93.

events, and new powers were eagerly responding to the invitation of chance. The effect of these conditions was sharply felt in Syria and Palestine.⁵

For Judah all this meant essentially was that while Assyrian supremacy was gone (612 B.C.), it had been replaced by the menacing threat of Babylonian-Egyptian tensions.

A better perspective of pseudoprophet theology will be gained through an understanding of recent false prophet interpretation. This brief survey will be the concern of the first section. Thereupon will follow an appraisal of the pertinent data from Jeremiah. In the final section, the conclusions of this study will be presented.

RECENT INTERPRETATIONS OF PSEUDOPROPHETS

General observations

Several observations help to illumine recent commentary on pseudoprophets. Prophetic research in general has moved about three centers of concern: the man, the message, and audience response reflecting popular religion.⁶ While all three of these areas are related, the chronology of their popularity as centers of research is in the order given above.

Hölscher emphasized that all prophecy was ecstatic, and Lindblom posited the notion that ecstasy was the central factor in understanding prophecy.⁷ Emphasis of this sort necessitated that the prophet as man be the focus of research in order to articulate prophetic phenomena. Mowinckel concluded that, whereas earlier prophets had emphasized their prophetic movement as being prompted by the Spirit of Yahweh, later prophets stressed the importance of receiving the Word of Yahweh. By this assessment Mowinckel suggested that in the later prophets the true could be distinguished

⁵W. C. Klein, "Commentary on Jeremiah," *ATR* 45 (1963) 122.

⁶Crenshaw, *Prophetic Conflict*, 5ff. Note also the discussion of Rust, *Covenant and Hope*, 104.

⁷Note *ibid.*, 7; C. Westermann, *Basic Forms of Prophetic Speech* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1967) 21-23; J. Lindblom, *Prophecy in Ancient Israel* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1965). In connection with focusing attention on the ecstatic experience of prophecy, E. J. Young, *My Servants, the Prophets* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1952) 164-65, concludes: "That the prophets were ecstatics was not first suggested by Hölscher. Before him, men like Giesebrecht, Knobel, and Stade had advanced the same idea. The view, however, is really much older. We shall probably find the first presentation of it in the writings of Philo. In his discussion of Genesis 15 Philo identifies sleep which fell upon Abraham as an ecstasy. This ecstasy, he says, may take different forms. It may be a madness which produces mental delusion (*paranoian*). It may be extreme amazement at sudden and unexpected events. On the other hand it may be mere passivity of the mind, but in its best form it is a divine possession or frenzy . . . such as came upon the prophetic class."

from the false because the former, recipients of Yahweh's Word, were rational guides leading the nation to right actions (those consistent with Yahweh's nature and demands). The false were possessed of the frenzied (i.e., irrational) Spirit of Yahweh and therefore were inadequate for presenting Yahweh's demands rationally.⁸

A number of scholars concentrated their efforts on the message. The awareness of prophetic speech forms became the chief product of this investigation. The lineage of this development of speech form research can be traced through W. W. Baudissin, C. Steuernagel, G. Hölscher, H. Gunkel, H. Gressmann, J. Lindblom, L. Koehler, E. Balla, R. B. Y. Scott, H. Wildberger, J. Hempel, H. W. Wolff, and E. Würthwein.⁹ In recent years, this area of research has proven fertile. Men such as D. R. Hillers¹⁰ and K. Baltzer¹¹ have concentrated their efforts on the treaty orientation of prophetic literature. So prevalent has been this concerted attention to the covenantal nature of the literature that R. E. Clements has sounded a warning against overemphasis: because the traditions lack unity, the covenant theme cannot be traced throughout the prophets.¹² On the other hand, N. Habel has concentrated on the form of the call narratives.¹³ In all, considerable attention has been given to the prophetic message.

A relatively new concept in the arena of prophetic research has been the idea that audience response was conditioned by the tenets of popular religion. Crenshaw believes that research in this area will yield a great deal of new information for better understanding of the prophets,¹⁴ and indicates approval of A. S. van der Woude's call to attention to the important nature of prophetic quotations and quotations of false prophets.¹⁵ These quotations provide an avenue of

⁸See S. Mowinckel, "'The Spirit' and the 'Word' in the Pre-Exilic Reforming Prophets," *JBL* 53 (1934) 199-227.

⁹At least this is the reasoned judgment of Westermann, *Basic Forms of Prophetic Speech*, 13-89.

¹⁰D. R. Hillers, *Treaty-Curses and the Old Testament Prophets* (BibOr 16; Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1964) 1-89. See also F. C. Fensham, "Common Trends in Curses of the Near Eastern Treaties and *Kudurru*-Inscriptions Compared With the Maledictions of Amos and Isaiah," *ZAW* 75 (1963) 155-75.

¹¹K. Baltzer, *The Covenant Formulary* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1971) 1-180.

¹²R. E. Clements, *Prophecy and Tradition* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1975).

¹³N. Habel, "The Form and Significance of the Call Narratives," *ZAW* 77 (1965) 297-323.

¹⁴Crenshaw, *Prophetic Conflict*, 13. Note, however, the opinion of A. Johnson, *The Cultic Prophet in Ancient Israel* (Cardiff: University of Wales, 1962) 50-51.

¹⁵See A. S. van der Woude, "Micah In Dispute With the Pseudoprophets," *VT* 19 (1969) 245, where he reasons: "Is it at all possible to give a somewhat exact description of the theologoumena through which pseudo-prophetism exercised its influence on the religious life in Jerusalem and Judah at the close of the eighth century B.C.? Needless to say, if we could trace these theologoumena, we would be in a position to fathom the

insight into the religious views held by the general populace. Crenshaw's research led him to conclude that

It is only as one becomes familiar with the voice of the people that he can understand false prophecy. . . . The following will seek to show that the *vox populi* is characterized by: (1) confidence in God's faithfulness, (2) satisfaction with traditional religion, (3) defiance in the face of prophets who hold a different view, (4) despair when hope seems dead, (5) doubt as to the justice of God, and (6) historical pragmatism.¹⁶

Specific tendencies

These three areas of concern (man, message, and audience response) in prophetic research have produced corollary responses in treatment of the pseudoprophets.¹⁷ These have come in the form of three specific tendencies: (1) a denial of valid objective criteria for distinguishing false from true prophets, (2) an attempt to understand false prophets on the basis of the historical moment of the prophetic word, and (3) a belief that distinguishing false from true prophets requires an analysis of the nature of audience response conditioned by the leading tenets of popular religion.

The first of these tendencies is seen in the work of J. Hempel who "denied the validity of the criterion of fulfillment in distinguishing true from false prophecy."¹⁸ Non-fulfillment of prophetic utterance was not necessarily an indication of false prophecy; it was only a new occasion for the prophet to apply the traditional message in a new way. The issue is not so much, then, the nature of prophetic utterance as it is the prophet's ability to adapt.¹⁹ In this way Hempel concentrated on the man, not so much the message. Von Rad agrees in principle with Hempel's position, for in discussing Jeremiah's encounters with pseudoprophets he concludes:

Deuteronomy too tries — not very successfully — to draw up objective criteria by means of which the false prophet might be recognized (Deut. XVIII.21). The contradiction between prophet and prophet,

spiritual climate against which the pre-Exilic canonical prophets made their stand. In general it can be said that the pseudoprophets subscribed and conformed to the established order not only politically but also in matters of religion."

¹⁶Crenshaw, *Prophetic Conflict*, 24.

¹⁷Ibid., 13.

¹⁸Ibid., 14.

¹⁹Cf. *ibid.*, 15, where Hempel's position is analyzed accordingly. "It was this 'aliveness' of the spoken word and readiness of the prophet to adapt a previous word to a new situation that prompted him to deny that the lack of fulfillment of a prediction was in itself proof of false prophecy."

each speaking in the name of Jahweh (cf. Jer. XXVII. 4, XXVIII. 2), must have been particularly confusing in the final period of the Monarchy. . . . The falsity [i.e., of the prophets] cannot be seen either in the office itself, or in their words themselves, or in the fallibility of the man who spoke them. It could only be seen by the person who had true insight into Jahweh's intentions for the time, and who on the basis of this, was obliged to deny that the other had illumination.²⁰

Von Rad's judgment also characterizes a second tendency, an attempt to understand false prophets on the basis of the historical moment of the prophetic word. The prophetic word is either weal or woe, depending upon any given cultic adaptation of traditional oracular material for a specific historical context (moment of history).²¹ Thus Overholt contends "that to be true the message of a prophet must proclaim Yahweh's will in terms appropriate to the concrete historical situation in which the prophet finds himself. . . ."²² How were prophets to be evaluated (in light of truth or falsity) if not "in the dual light of an affirmation about their religious heritage and a knowledge of the historical situation in which they lived?"²³ A religious heritage must, therefore, always be interpreted in light of a changing historical context.

Overholt's understanding, while certainly agreeing in many respects with von Rad's, also brings to the foreground a third tendency in recent treatment of false prophets — a belief that distinguishing false from true necessitates an analysis of the nature of audience response conditioned by the leading tenets of popular religion. "We find," contends Overholt, "that when two apparently equally compelling prophets of Yahweh were in conflict, the key to the resolution of the problem lay in an interpretation of the people's religious heritage."²⁴ Crenshaw has attempted this type of interpretation and suggests that there were six leading tenets which characterized popular religion.²⁵ Surely if no valid objective criteria exist for differentiating false and true prophets, and if a true prophet is such because his message matches Yahweh's will to a contemporary context, then of necessity the historical context in which the message was spoken must be understood. The voice of the people as reflected in

²⁰G. von Rad, *Old Testament Theology* (2 vols.; New York: Harper and Row, 1965), 2, 210, n. 27 (words in brackets are added). Others who agree in principle with Hempel and von Rad are Crenshaw, *Prophetic Conflict*, 110-11, and T. W. Overholt, "Jeremiah 27-29: The Question of False Prophecy," *JAAR* 35 (1967) 241-49.

²¹This is the judgment of Crenshaw, *Prophetic Conflict*, 15, based on von Rad's article, "Die Falschen Propheten," *ZAW* 53 (1933) 109-20.

²²Overholt, "Jeremiah 27-29," 248.

²³*Ibid.*

²⁴*Ibid.*, 241.

²⁵See, above, 81.

prophetic literature should then help explain the given historical context and should supply the principle by which a pseudoprophet could be detected.

Summary observations

The foregoing survey indicates that scholarship has made a number of contributions to understanding pseudoprophets, namely, recognizing the importance of analyzing the various historical contexts in which both false and true prophets spoke and underscoring the notion that audience response will help greatly in understanding the false prophet.

However, this survey also brings to light several deficiencies. Much of recent scholarship has labored under a less than adequate view of the biblical text.²⁶ While many aspects of contemporary understanding of pseudoprophets have been covered, one issue that has received little attention is an analysis of the actual components of pseudoprophet theology.²⁷ This is true especially in the case of the book of Jeremiah, a book very interested in pseudoprophets.

In order to discover the theological tenets of these prophets, an adequate method is necessary. The statement and finds of this method are the concerns of the following.

TENETS OF PSEUDOPROPHET THEOLOGY

A suggested methodology

A tentative reconstruction of pseudoprophet theology²⁸ can be developed if the following methodology is employed: analysis of (1) the audience response, (2) the origin of the pseudoprophets' supposed revelations, (3) the characterization of pseudoprophets in the text, and (4) pseudoprophet quotations.

Before moving directly to the audience response, a word must be said about the fact that Jeremiah's book ranges over many years, with a number of historical and political changes. Perhaps a variety of changes in the theological systems employed by false prophets are to

²⁶Cf. the observation on the importance of taking the text of the Bible seriously (p. 78) with the views of the Bible held by those such as von Rad, *Old Testament Theology*, vol. 2; Crenshaw, *Prophetic Conflict*; and Overholt, "Jeremiah 27-29"; to name a few.

²⁷Two who have made notable attempts, though from different perspectives, are van der Woude, "Micah In Dispute With the Pseudo-prophets," and J. T. E. Renner, "False and True Prophecy," *Reformed Theological Review* 25 (1966) 96-104. To be sure, numerous others have made at least a partial attempt to deal with actual theological tenets of pseudoprophetism.

²⁸Theology is here understood as that corpus of religious ideas which together express a distinctive religious perspective.

be found. However, as one moves through the history recorded in the book, he discovers a remarkable similarity among the pseudoprophets' theological views.²⁹ Therefore, it is possible to talk in terms of this book yielding a picture of the components of a *unified theology* of pseudoprophets. Furthermore, a definition of a true prophet is needed. True prophets may be regarded collectively as those

. . . persons whose entire life-style (words *and* actions) was submitted to God's purposes and empowered by the Spirit and who served variously as (1) God's channel of revelatory information to the subjects of the mediatorial kingdom, (2) exhorters of obedience to mediatorial kingdom regulations, and (3) pointers to the coming Messiah whose work would merge the rulership of the mediatorial kingdom and the office of God's spokesman in that kingdom into one person.³⁰

Audience response

The nation of Judah responded in a number of ways to prophetic utterance (of whatever type) and to the changing historical situation. For present purposes the concern with audience response is at points where it may help in illuminating the religious state of the nation and thereby cast light on the theological formulations of false prophets.³¹ Audience response may be categorized in two ways: by actions and by words.

²⁹Certainly, however, there were several types of false prophets throughout Israel's history; see Young, *My Servants the Prophets*, 125ff., and J. B. Payne, *The Theology of the Older Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1962) 56, who says: "In actuality, Israel had, by Ahab's time, become plagued with false prophets. These, in turn, fell into three major categories. There were Jezebel's outrightly pagan prophets, who served Baal and Asherah (I Kings 18:19); there were the hypocritical charlatans of Ahab's court (22:6, 7), prophets for pay, a disgrace to the name of the Lord (Micah 3:11; cf. Amos 7:12); and there were sincere prophets, who were well-meaning but still revelationless, and hence mistaken (I Kings 13:11-18)."

³⁰R. Manahan. "Prophetic Office in Historical Perspective" (unpublished Th.M. thesis, Grace Theological Seminary, 1977) 135-36.

³¹For a recent discussion of audience response to Jeremiah's utterances see W. J. Horwitz, "Audience Reaction to Jeremiah," *CBQ* 32 (1970) 555-64, where he describes his methodology: "In this paper we have tried to discover what can be learned about Jeremiah by examining the source most contemporary with him, the responses of his audience." An article by D. R. Hillers, "A Convention in Hebrew Literature: The Reaction to Bad News," *ZAW* 77 (1965) 86-90, also helps detail audience response by drawing attention to Ugaritic parallels to bad-news reactions in the OT prophets, Jer 6:22-23, 24; 49:23, and 50:43 especially being noteworthy. But T. Overholt, "Jeremiah 2 and the Problem of 'Audience Reaction,'" *CBQ* 41 (1979) 262-73 cautions that "the consistency between the quotations and the prophet's message might well be explained by his own conscious construction of his speeches: on the basis of his experience Jeremiah may have selected from, altered, even created 'audience reactions' to serve as foils for his indictment of the people."

A survey of the book of Jeremiah indicates several features of the actions of the nation. On at least two occasions the book illustrates the religiously deviate ways of the nation by picturing them as "well-fed lusty horses, each one neighing after his neighbor's wife" (Jer 5:8) and "as a well keeps its waters fresh, so she keeps fresh her wickedness" (6:7). The actual situation which gave rise to these illustrations is that the people refused correction from Yahweh (5:3), refused to repent (8:6), closed their ears against Yahweh's word (both king — 36:23; 37:2-3 — and subjects — 7:13, 25-27) filled the temple complex with contemptible things (7:30-31), did not speak truth (6:28-30; 7:28; 8:6; 9:2-6), and sacrificed to other deities and served them (7:18; 12:6; 13:10; 18:15; 19:4; 32:29; 44:16-18). However, these characteristics do not necessarily distinguish the people of Jeremiah's day from those of a prior era. The nation's spiritual history had been marred by numerous spiritual degradations.

But there are several features of the people's actions that seem to characterize Jeremiah's day in particular. While the people had served other deities, as noted above, they were nonetheless engaged in offering sacrifices to Yahweh (6:20).³² One of the judgments the people seem to have made is that physical sacrifice (to whomever it may be made) has a direct relationship to welfare and misfortune. In Jer 44:16-18 is recorded an audience response (both by action and word) to Jeremiah's statement to the Jews living in Egypt. Yahweh's word through Jeremiah was that sacrifice to other gods had brought the outpouring of God's wrath (44:2-14). But the claim of the people is that sacrifice to other gods brought prosperity and lack of sacrifice to these same deities brought misfortune (44:16-18). Therefore, they concluded, a continuation of pagan sacrifice was required. On an earlier occasion (11:15) Yahweh had indicated that sacrifices to him were not enough to avoid a coming judgment. Sacrifice alone would not keep Jerusalem safe. To the very end, though, the people (there were some deserters to Babylonian forces — 38:19; 39:9) from the king down had held that Jerusalem would not fall (37:1ff.). All of this was maintained in spite of obvious breaking of Yahweh's covenant with this people (11:10; 17:19-23; 43:4, 7). Yahweh's contention with his people was that covenant breakage was the reason for judgment (11:1-8).

From the above description two patterns emerge. The popular conclusion was that good (weal) and misfortune (woe) were condi-

³²Both T. Laetsch, *Bible Commentary: Jeremiah* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1952) 87, and C. F. Keil, *The Prophecies of Jeremiah* (Biblical Commentary on the Old Testament; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1950), I. 145, comment on this point. Keil says: "The people had no shortcoming in the matter of sacrifice in the temple; but in this service, as being mere outward service of works, the Lord has no pleasure, if the heart is estranged from Him, rebels against His commandments."

tioned upon externals (i.e., sacrifices). The popular misunderstanding was that weal and woe were not necessarily the outworking of Yahweh's covenantal promises.

To be added to the above material on audience response are the numerous quotations of the people. An analysis of these passages yields the following assertions. To be expected is the obstinate refusal of the people to follow in Yahweh's will (6:16, 17; 7:10; 18:12; 22:21). In addition, there is indication of an attachment to externals — the temple (7:4), the religious functionaries (18:18), and the law (8:8). In these cases there is a confidence in the very *presence* of these objects. In some way these objects attest to a higher religious truth. What is especially striking in the audience quotations is the material on Jerusalem's continuance and Yahweh's faithfulness. Clearly the people desired peace (8:15; 43:1-2); and this peace was thought of as consistent with the nation's continuance. Numerous times the people expressed confidence that Jerusalem would not fall (17:15; 20:10; 21:13; 36:29; 37:9). Jeremiah was, in fact, considered a traitor and a liar when he suggested otherwise (37:13; 38:4; 43:1-2). While on occasion there may have been some loss of confidence (33:24),³³ the people generally did not conceive of Jerusalem's fall. There was also confidence in Yahweh's faithful execution of his promises (5:12; 8:19-22). They evidently understood that his faithful execution of promises incorporated the preservation of Jerusalem and the nation. They lament in captivity, "Harvest is past, summer is ended, and we are not saved" (8:20). That Jerusalem fell caused them to doubt the promises, not to evaluate their personal lives.

By fitting together the pieces of the audience response puzzle, the following picture emerges. They believed:

- (1) That weal and woe were conditioned on the physical act of sacrifice, not on the entire covenant Yahweh made with his people.
- (2) That Yahweh was faithful to his promises and that these promises included preservation of the nation from Babylonian conquest.
- (3) That Yahweh's faithful fulfillment of his promises and the nation's fall were contradictory and thus cause for despair.³⁴
- (4) That the continuing presence of externals such as the temple, law, and religious functionaries was evidence that Yahweh

³³Note von Orelli, *The Prophecies of Jeremiah*, 253.

³⁴Traces of these elements of contradiction and despair seem to be reflected in the Lachish Letters. Note J. B. Pritchard (ed.), *ANET* (3rd ed.; Princeton: Princeton University 1969) 322. Laetsch in *Bible Commentary: Jeremiah*, 275, gives a succinct evaluation of the relevance of the Lachish material for Jeremiah studies. Note the more extended discussion by U. Cassuto, *Biblical and Oriental Studies, Vol. II: Bible and Ancient Oriental Texts* (Jerusalem: Magnes 1975) 229ff.

would give weal, not woe, to his people.

- (5) That moral degradation of the nation held no necessary implications about Yahweh's faithful preservation of the nation from Babylonian hands.³⁵

Origin of pseudoprophet "revelation"

Once the issue of the national background from which both Jeremiah and the false prophets spoke has been established, the discussion can turn directly to issues relating to the pseudoprophets themselves. For analyzing their theology it is best to begin with its origin, "revelation." The amount of material on this subject is small (fewer than 15 references) but nonetheless relevant. The references divide into two groupings, those of the pseudoprophets' own opinion and those containing reference to evaluation by others.

The personal testimony of the pseudoprophets is that by dreams (23:25) they received divine information (חֲלֹמֹתַי וְחֲלֹמֹתֶיךָ). While this word may refer to prophetic dreams, its usage in Deut 13:1-2 makes clear that to dream a dream does not make one a true prophet.³⁶ The problem with using dreams as a claim to divine truth has been captured by Naegelsbach: "The dream is farthest withdrawn from the control of other men. Nothing is easier than to say: 'Last night I dreamed this or that!' Who can refute it? These prophets made an immoderate and questionable use of dreams."³⁷ Also, these false prophets prefaced their utterances by, "The Lord has said" (23:17). That this expression was frequent is indicated by the several times the book of Jeremiah recalls that these false prophets claimed to speak in

³⁵Interesting is the fact that while the chosen people were perplexed over the fall of the nation, foreigners at least knew well enough the connection between sin and subsequent fall (22:8-9).

³⁶See BDB 321, where cognates are also given.

³⁷Note Laetsch, *Bible Commentary: Jeremiah*, 200, and C. W. E. Naegelsbach, *The Book of the Prophet Jeremiah* (Lange's Commentaries; New York: Scribner's Sons, 1915) 214. S. Cramer, "The Practice of Divination in the Old Testament" (unpublished Old Testament Seminar paper, Grace Theological Seminary, Fall, 1973) 20-21, further explains that "the use of dreams, or inspirational divination, has been regarded as the most direct means of divination . . . Often a dream was induced by means of incubation. This was accomplished by sleeping in some sacred place where gods or spirits would reveal knowledge to the sleeper. Possibly this is what Isaiah was referring to when he spoke of those 'who remain among the graves, and lodge in the monuments' (Is. 55:4)." Further references for study of the issue of divination and the origin of the false prophets' message are T. W. Davies, *Magic, Divination, and Demonology* (New York: KTAV, 1969); S. H. Hooke, *Babylonian and Assyrian Religion* (London: Hutchinson's University Library, 1953); Johnson, *The Cultic Prophet in Ancient Israel*, 30ff.; B. O. Long, "The Effect of Divination Upon Israelite Literature," *JBL* 92 (1973) 489-97; G. F. Oehler, *Theology of the Old Testament* (New York: Funk and Wagnalls, 1883) 464; and R. B. Zuck, "The Practice of Witchcraft in the Scriptures," *BSac* 128 (1971) 352-60.

Yahweh's name (14:15; 23:25; 27:15; 29:8-9; 29:21). To speak thus would not only give a ring of authenticity to their words but would make their fraudulent claim most difficult to detect alongside the true prophets who also spoke in Yahweh's name.

Yahweh's evaluation (and Jeremiah's, also) is that the pseudo-prophets' messages, while claiming authentication for oracular material, did not originate in Yahweh's council (23:18), and thus they were not given by Yahweh (23:31; 29:31).³⁸ "But if they had stood in My council, then they would have announced My words to My people" (23:22). A confrontation between Yahweh and false prophet was missing.

Two other times Yahweh gives his evaluation of the origin of the message of false prophets. "They speak a vision of their own imaginations" (תְּזוֹן לִבָּם; יְדַבְּרוּ). In 23:26 the origin of their message is further described: "Is there *anything* in the hearts of the prophets who prophecy falsehood, even *these* prophets of the deception of their own heart."³⁹ The following verse indicates that the intention of such doings is "to make My people forget My name by their dreams which they relate to one another" (23:27). Initially it appears that the origin of their message is in their own heart, a deceptive human heart (תַּרְמֵת; cf. 17:9, עֵקֶב, "crafty").⁴⁰ But the context that follows goes on to develop a fuller picture of the origin of pseudoprophet "revelation." The leading traits of their "revelations" are mixing of falsity and truth (23:28) and stealing Yahweh's words from other sources (23:30). Laetsch has well summarized this passage:

Since I am the omnipresent God, let every prophet be honest and faithful in preaching My Word — God, who knows the heart of man, demands that man be honest. If a prophet has had a dream which he would like to tell his neighbors, let him be honest enough to say: I am telling you a dream of my own. And if a prophet has My Word, let him speak My Word faithfully, literally, as truth, just as it has been given to him, without alteration, without changing its sense in the least. How dare man mingle the chaff of his own dreams into the pure wheat of the Word of the omnipresent, omniscient Lord Jehovah in order to

³⁸While the discussion of E. Kingsbury, "The Prophets and the Council of Yahweh," *JBL* 83 (1964) 279-86, is helpful in discussing especially Micaiah, Isaiah, and Ezekiel, he overdraws the parallels between these prophets and Babylonian literature.

³⁹Jer 23:26 is particularly problematic textually. Discussions of the textual difficulties can be found in Keil, *The Prophecies of Jeremiah*, 362-63, and Naegelsbach, *The Book of the Prophet Jeremiah*, 214-15. The major questions concern the double interrogatives (מִי and -הֵן) in the MT, whether the reading of the LXX, Syriac, Targum, and Vg is preferable, and whether שׁוֹׁ should be read שׂאִ (ibid., 215).

⁴⁰Note W. L. Holladay (ed.), *A Concise Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971) 281 and 395, where he suggests reading תַּרְמֵת as תַּרְמִית.

find more ready and willing hearers! . . . Whatever truth they preached, they did not obtain, as they claim, by divine revelation. They stole this truth, 'a man from his neighbor,' from someone else, either directly from a true prophet, or from some other false prophet who also had stolen it, or from any other person.⁴¹

In summary, the book of Jeremiah declares that the origin of pseudoprophet theology was through a mixture of purported dreams and Yahweh's Word stolen from other sources, all of which sprang out of the deceptive hearts of men whose intention was to make the nation forget Yahweh's character.

A, characterization of pseudoprophets

False prophet traits as depicted in the book of Jeremiah follow the pattern established for the origin of their message. These traits may be grouped for convenience into five divisions: (1) personal immorality, (2) encouragement of evil, (3) confidence, (4) compatibility with the populace, and (5) ineffectiveness. The goal of this analysis is to suggest the nature of a theology consistent with these traits. Their theology evidently could legitimize such traits and was compatible with them.

Personal immorality. Of course, not every false prophet is condemned for gross immorality. Hananiah in 28:1ff. is not so condemned, with the exception of the reference to his not speaking Yahweh's word (28:15-16).

Two passages are worthy of discussion here: 6:13 and 29:23. In the first of these, the description of pseudoprophets is that they deal falsely and are greedy of gain. Base gain replaced a desire to lead the nation into obedience to covenant stipulations. Their desire for base gain seems to serve as the reason for Yahweh's promise (v 12) that he will turn valuables (houses, fields, etc.) over to others. As they sought gain, so things they valued would be given to their enemies. Base gain as a principle of operation led the false prophets to bring only superficial healing (6:14).⁴² They also made inaccurate analyses of the degree of the nation's security (6:14).

⁴¹Laetsch, *Bible Commentary: Jeremiah*, 201.

⁴²The issue of prophets seeking gain is also suggested by Mic 3:11. In the Jer 6:12-14 passage, the false prophets are cited for only superficially (note Holladay, *A Concise Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*, 319, where he translates the Niphal feminine participle נִקְלָהָ, from קָלַל, by "superficially") healing the wound of the people. The nature of the wound is suggested by the same usage of this term, שָׁכַר, in Jer 4:6 and 6:1 where the word refers to the coming destruction from the north (note T. W. Overholt, *The Threat of Falsehood* [3 vols.; Naperville: Allenson, 1970], 3, 75. Thus, the pseudoprophets gave only superficial treatment ("Peace, Peace") to the impending national threat. Hillers, *Treaty-Curses and the Old Testament Prophets*, 64-66, points out that this imagery of the wound not being given adequate treatment is set

The second of these passages, 29:23 (note 23:14 also⁴³), charges two pseudoprophets with personal immorality. Jeremiah 29 records "the words of the letter which Jeremiah the prophet sent from Jerusalem to the rest of the elders of the exile, the priests, the prophets, and all the people whom Nebuchadnezzar had taken into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon" (29:1). The exiles had contented themselves that they were quite well equipped with prophetic sources in Babylon (29:15⁴⁴), two of these prophets being Ahab and Zedekiah (29:21). These false prophets, though in exile, evidently had been declaring the perpetuity of the nation as indicated by the continued existence of the temple and the Davidic throne.

Ahab and Zedekiah, says the letter, will face death by the hand of the Babylonian king (29:21). This slaying will take the form of roasting in the fire and will form the basis of a curse-form among the exiles (29:22).⁴⁵ The reason cited⁴⁶ for their judgment is that "they have acted foolishly in Israel and have committed adultery with their neighbors' wives, and have spoken words in My name falsely" (29:23). Clearly, personal immorality is the charge against these two false prophets. Such looseness indicates that at least these prophets' level of morality was not consistent with OT norms and may be suggestive of a theological perspective from which such practices could arise (perhaps confidence in Jerusalem's existence apart from adherence to the moral obligations of Yahweh's treaty with the nation).

Encouragement of evil. Not unexpectedly, the pseudoprophets are charged with the promotion of evil among the members of the

in treaty terminology (curse form). The wounds' incurable nature can be treated only by the healing produced by conformity to treaty obligations in this case.

⁴³To be sure, 23:14 charges pseudoprophets with "the committing of adultery." Laetsch, *Bible Commentary: Jeremiah*, 198, concludes that the adultery here is of a personal moral nature. However, Overholt, *The Threat of Falsehood*, 54-55, suggests that the reference here may be to adultery as national apostasy, thus seeing the reference to Sodom and Gomorrah as one of judgment. Overholt's point may be borne out by the limited usage of שְׁעָרוֹתָהָּ, "a horrible thing" (Holladay, *A Concise Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*, 380, suggests two roots, שְׁעָרוֹר and שְׁעָרוֹרָה, together occurring a total of four times) in the OT. Each of these passages could be interpreted in terms of national apostasy.

⁴⁴The verses that follow, 29:16-20, are not included in the LXX. In this light note the discussion of Naegelsbach, *The Book of the Prophet Jeremiah*, 249.

⁴⁵Much earlier, The Code of Hammurabi stipulated the punishment of burning for one who was involved in immorality. According to Pritchard (ed.), *ANET*, 172, law 157 reads: "If a seignor has lain in the bosom of his mother after (the death of) his father, they shall burn both of them," the word for burning being *iqalu*?*ušunuti* from *qalû*. Conceivably, use of fire for punishment of adultery was practiced by the Babylonians much later. Compare Deut 22:22 as the OT pattern.

⁴⁶Jer 29:33 uses the expression אֲשֶׁר יַעַן with a following verb (עָשָׂו) in the perfect to indicate cause or reason; note, GKC 318, n. 1.

covenanted people. Two chapters (23 and 29) in Jeremiah clearly make this point, the primary section occurring in 23:11ff. In this passage false prophets are accused of strengthening "the hands of evildoers, so that no one has turned back from his wickedness" (23:14). This was possible because of the position of leadership held by these prophets. Out of the circle⁴⁷ of the false prophets, ungodliness⁴⁸ had "gone forth into all the land" (23:15). This was accomplished partially at least by their promotion of the continuing presence of the temple as a tenet in their theology, requiring in the process promotion of idolatry (23:11 in comparison with 7:30-31 and 32:34). In fact, they had taken the lead in such, indicated by the use of the term *ישׂימו* (from *שׂים* — "put, set, place") in 32:34. The word "they" in v 34 refers to those enumerated in v 32. In light of this promotion of evil it is not surprising that Shemaiah is judged, according to 29:32, for preaching "rebellion against the Lord."

From the personal corruption of the false prophets one would expect corruption to be promoted among the people. Surprisingly the very object which these prophets used as a leading point in their theology (the temple) is the very channel through which further corruption and idolatry is promoted.

Confidence. A third leading trait of false prophets in Jeremiah's day was that of confidence. This trait is suggested by 23:31-32. Verse 31 suggests that these prophets took ("use", cf. *הִלְקִיָּהִים*) their tongues and uttered oracles. They took the oracular initiative; they did not have words put in their mouths by Yahweh. The fact that the word "take" is a participle may indicate repeated orations, emphasizing their readiness for opportunities to ejaculate their supposed divine words. This eagerness to prophesy is further indicated in 23:32 by the description of them as those who made "reckless boasting." The term here is *וּבְפִתְוֹתָם*, indicating "loose talk, boastful tales."⁴⁹ The picture which emerges from these notes is that pseudoprophets were seeking opportunities to speak and readily boasted of their ideas. This, added

⁴⁷This idea is suggested in 23:15 by the use of *מִן* (*מִן*) which originally signified "separation" which "naturally derived on the one hand the sense of (*taken*) from among . . ." (note GKC, § 119vw).

⁴⁸The word "ungodliness" (NASB, "pollution") is *הִלְקִיָּהִים*, the verbal form being employed in Jer 23:11 to describe the priests and prophets. The root *הִלְקִיָּהִים* may have several cognates such as the Ugaritic *hnp* and *hanâpu* occurring once in the Amarna literature. Each connotes something of a haughty impiety. Note C. H. Gordon, *UT*, 403.

⁴⁹While this term is problematic, Holladay, *A Concise Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon*, 291, does suggest this meaning. Note also the reference to this term by J. Barr, *Comparative Philology and the Text of the Old Testament* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1968) 333, n. 261.

to their personal immorality and promotion of such, produces a volatile combination.

Compatibility with the populace. Jer 32:31-35 (cf. 5:31) suggests this. Admittedly, this reference is a generalization about the religious decline of the nation over a period of time (32:31). The results of their spiritual decline are briefly catalogued with little explanation (32:33-35). However, what is informative about this passage is its recognition that both the populace and the leaders (including prophets) were involved in this decline. This may be taken to imply that there existed a level of compatibility between the theological perspective of the populace and that of the false prophets. The same compatibility may be indicated as well by the numerous correspondences between these prophets and the people (such as their mutual moral decline). This trait alone is sobering in light of the religious ideas of the populace as previously described. When, however, this characteristic is added to the above, the magnitude of opposition to the true prophets becomes apparent.

Furthermore, the compatibility of pseudoprophet and populace may indicate that on occasion these prophets "stole" ideas from the populace and incorporated them in their oracles and that the people may have taken, of course, their religious ideas from the prophets. This exchange of ideas would create solidarity of opposition that would make Jeremiah's ministry most difficult.

Ineffectiveness. While the false prophets were confident and boastful, no doubt encouraged by the acceptance of the populace, they were nonetheless ineffective. This may, in fact, be their primary trait. Several indications suggest this idea (note 4:9; 5:13; 6:14). The leading indication is the repeated reference to these men as prophets of deceit and falsehood (5:31⁵⁰; 8:10; 14:14; 20:6⁵¹; 23:14; 23:32; 27:10; 27:14; 27:16; 28:15). In each of these references the term כִּזְבוֹנִים is used in connection with the pseudoprophets. This term is found through-

⁵⁰On the understanding of the parallelism in this verse, W. L. Holladay, "The Priests Scrape Out On Their Hands,' Jeremiah V 31," *VT* 15 (1965) 111-13 suggests that the translation of the first part of the verse might best be read: "The prophets have prophesied falsely, and the priests deconsecrate themselves," based on his interpretation of כִּזְבוֹנִים as technical terminology employed in the consecration of a priest.

⁵¹There is disagreement over the status of Pashur as prophet. E. W. Nicholson, *The Book of the Prophet Jeremiah, Chapters 1-25* (Cambridge Bible Commentary on The New English Bible; Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1963) 167, suggests that Pashur is not a prophet while Naegelsbach, *The Book of the Prophet Jeremiah*, 187, suggests that he is. The comment of Jer 20:6 would tend to support Naegelsbach. For some help in understanding the renaming of Pashur see W. L. Holladay, "The Covenant With the Patriarchs Overturned: Jeremiah's Intention In 'Terror On Every Side' (Jer. 20:1-6)," *JBL* 91 (1972) 305-20 and D. L. Christensen, "'Terror on Every Side' In Jeremiah," *JBL* 92 (1973) 498-502.

out the OT but is much more frequent in Jeremiah.⁵² This calls for special attention to the term.⁵³

The term means "deceit, falsehood."⁵⁴ However, very often the term is set in a legal context. If such is the case, one would expect Jeremiah to employ the term within its legal setting and perhaps build upon and enlarge it.⁵⁵ This is especially important in light of Jeremiah's self-analysis that he is always indicting and accusing his people (note רִיב , 15:10).⁵⁶ Jeremiah employs this legal term as a description of the *ineffectiveness* of the pseudoprophets' analysis that Jerusalem will not fall to foreign enemies.⁵⁷ The false prophets claim, "all is well," but the actual events are to the contrary. Their words do not have power to effect events as they predict (cf. 14:14-15; 27:10; 27:14-17).⁵⁸ Certainly the words of pseudoprophets were prevarications but they were also marked by ineffectiveness, lack of power to achieve the predicted outcome.

The message of the pseudoprophets glossed over the real issue, that of obedience to covenant stipulations (23:13-22 and 7:3ff.). Because they did, these words, when trusted in, resulted in the actual forfeiture of Jerusalem's security. These prophets "counselled a course of action diametrically opposed to that which would have been necessary to avoid the coming destruction of the city, temple and land."⁵⁸ While their perspective allowed them to pronounce security, it was a security built on the wrong basis. Rather than building on Yahweh's covenant stipulations (cf. 23:19-22 with Deuteronomy 28 and especially Deut 29:19), they built their security only upon the hopes attached to the Davidic throne (2 Sam 7:13ff. in comparison with Ps 89:30-37) and thus to the continuance of the place of David's

⁵²According to this writer's count, the term in all forms occurs 113 times in the OT and 34 times in Jeremiah alone. Note S. Mandelkern, *Veteris Testamenti Concordantiae* (Graz: Akademische, 1955) 1232-33.

⁵³So Overholt, *The Threat of Falsehood*, 1.

⁵⁴See Holladay, *A Concise Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon*, 383, and BDB 1055. The root שָׁקַר has several cognates (Arabic, Syriac, Aramaic, and Assyrian). Gordon, *UT*, 494 does list, though does not define, a suggested root *šqr* (no. 2475) in Ugaritic.

⁵⁵Note the discussion of Overholt, *The Threat of Falsehood*, 76ff. He says: "We might expect that in the process of employing the noun *šeqer* as one of the important concepts in his theological vocabulary, Jeremiah would not lose sight of the predominant legal sense in which the term was usually employed, but would rather build upon and enlarge it" (*ibid.*, 91).

⁵⁶For discussion of this point see J. Bright, "A Prophet's Lament and Its Answer, Jeremiah 15:10-21," *Int* 28 (1974) 59-74.

⁵⁷Overholt, *The Threat of Falsehood*, 92.

⁵⁸*Ibid.* An interesting study is also involved in Yahweh's usage of טֹב and רָעָה in connection with the false prophets, 22:13-17 and 23:17, for example. Note also the contrast between Isa 55:11 (Yahweh's word is not empty, void — רִיק) and the futility (הַבֵּל) to which the false prophets' words lead, see Renner, "False and True Prophecy," 97.

throne, Jerusalem. Their view left no room for obedience to the demands of the Mosaic treaty.

Pseudoprophets quotations. The sources for discussion here are 2:26-27; 6:14; 8:11; 14:13; 23:17; 26:8, 9, 11; 27:9, 14, 16; 28:2-4, 11; 29:24; and 37:19 (23:25 was previously discussed⁵⁹). The first of these references suggests the contradictory thought pattern of the people and false prophets; they served other gods but imagined that in times of distress this practice would not keep Yahweh from responding to their cry.⁶⁰ Based on the other references, the following formulation seems to be legitimate.

The leading claim of the pseudoprophets was "Peace! Peace!" (6:14; 8:11) and that the people would have "peace" (14:13; 23:17). In the case of 6:14 and 8:11 the "peace" promised by the false prophets is set in the context of treaty terminology.⁶¹ In the face of breach of the Mosaic Covenant they proclaimed the general welfare of the people, thus promoting the notion of security.⁶² They seemingly understood that covenant breach had little to do with welfare or the lack of it. Jer 23:17 presents this very picture. Those who despised Yahweh and walked in obstinate rebellion against him were told by the pseudoprophets, "You will have peace . . . Calamity will not come upon you." On this issue of a non-calamitous future these prophets laid particular stress: "You will not see the sword nor will you have famine, but I will give you lasting peace in this place" (14:13). The words "lasting peace" (literally, "peace of truth," שְׁלוֹם אֱמֶת) emphasize that this promised peace was an assured, steadfast, predictable outcome.⁶³ All this evidently was uttered under the menacing threat of drought (14:1).

From these observations the theological formulation of pseudoprophets was that the welfare of the people was assured, in spite of obvious covenant infractions and menacing threats (for example, drought and removal of temple vessels). The other quotations of false prophets all fit this mold. In spite of continuing disobedience and increasing international threats against security, they claimed that no calamity, sword, or famine will interrupt (23:17). The people will not serve the king of Babylon and he will not come against them (27:9,

⁵⁹See p. 87.

⁶⁰Keil, *The Prophecies of Jeremiah*, 68-69, points out that this reference is a generalization about all periods of the nation's history and that, therefore, the reference to "Israel" is a reference to the entire nation, not just the ten northern tribes.

⁶¹See the discussion on p. 89, n. 42. On the issue of covenant confession on the part of the people see Rust, *Covenant and Hope*, 99-105.

⁶²The employment of the term שְׁלוֹם is to be understood in the wider Ancient Near Eastern meaning of a "settled well-being." Note as an example the use of the Akkadian cognate *šalāmu*.

⁶³Cf. Keil, *The Prophecies of Jeremiah*, 249; von Orelli, *The Prophecies of Jeremiah*, 122; Naegelsbach, *The Book of the Prophet Jeremiah*, 149.

14; 37:19). Even the setback to security suffered in 597 B.C. will soon be rectified, they claimed (27:16; 28:2-4, 11). On these bases they rejected Jeremiah's oracles against Jerusalem's security and concerning a short exile (26:8-11; 29:24).

Of special importance among the many quotations is that from the mouth of Hananiah in chap. 28. He predicts the return of two items that may symbolize the essence of his theology — the temple vessels and the former king. The return of these seemed to mean for him the breaking of the yoke of the king of Babylon and the continuing security of the capital of the Southern Kingdom. That he should cite these two items would imply that the proclamation of security required the existence of the temple and the presence of continuing kingship. Putting together these ideas with other quotations, it appears that the factors which supported a *Peace Theology* were the temple and the dynasty. These components became a "Para-Covenantal" theology built on dynastic and temple hopes.

Jeremiah also spoke a "Covenant Theology" based on the blessings and curses of the Mosaic treaty. Certainly Jeremiah also knew that the nation possessed a secure future (cf. 33:6-9) but this did not blind him to the stipulations of the covenant.

The fact that both proclaimed a theology built on covenants made the judgmental nature of Jeremiah's word all the more unacceptable. Pseudoprophets had prooftexts too! This pictures all too clearly the insidious nature of falsehood and clearly implies a number of current-day applications.

SUMMARY CONCLUSION

The theology of the pseudoprophets in Jeremiah may be described as a "Para-Covenantal" theology built on the hopes attached to the temple⁶⁴ and the dynasty. This is in basic conformity with the religious ideas held by the populace. Pseudoprophets and the populace encouraged each other and together rejected the theology of Jeremiah.

This "Para-Covenantal" theology (originating in a mixture of claimed dreams and Yahweh's words) was built on the assumption that Jerusalem's existence was without condition. Therefore, the only realistic proclamation of such theology was peace. Furthermore, Mosaic Covenant infractions were really of no consequence in this theology. This theology, distorted as it was, could exist alongside rebellion against Yahweh's demands. Given the perspective of pseudoprophet theology with its attendant prooftexts, Jeremiah gained little hearing.

⁶⁴An interesting interpretation of the importance of the temple vessels in the theological formulations of the people is given by P. R. Ackroyd, "The Temple Vessels — A Continuity Theme," *Studies in the Religion of Ancient Israel* (SVT 23; Leiden: Brill, 1972) 166ff.; note especially 175-77.

Practically speaking, the appeal of this false theology was its approximation to certain elements in Yahweh's covenantal dealings with his people. Because it approximated correct theology, its results were all the more devastating. The pseudoprophets spoke of Yahweh's work and will partially, not fully. Their theological distortion was primarily in not speaking Yahweh's demands; they spoke only of certain promises.

Present-day parallels may be seen among those who speak part of the counsel of God and who, by not speaking all of it, have not really spoken it at all. These same characteristics are found among those whose "words" sound somehow orthodox but whose content behind those words is ominously unorthodox.

This study of Jeremiah brings to the surface several points worthy of note. One is that understanding carefully the nature of the book requires understanding the plentiful material on pseudoprophets. Material so common to a corpus of literature must be studied seriously to aid in interpreting the book. The relative absence of writing on pseudoprophets in Jeremiah undoubtedly impoverishes a worthy understanding of the book.

Further, this canonical material on pseudoprophets furnishes at least a two-fold warning and a godly example. The two-fold warning is a warning to the one who speaks and the one who hears God's revelation. The one who speaks the revelation (in any age) must speak all of it, not just a part. He is warned that the desire to be heard and followed is not the end of speaking the revelation. The end is speaking the particulars of God's Word fully, clearly in terms of the whole (the very context in which God gave meaning to the particulars).⁶⁵ As well, there is due warning for those who hear the revelation. The hearer must want to hear the whole of the matter, not just those parts that justify his present theological ideas and their subsequent activities. And he must know the revelation adequately enough to know when the whole has *not* been spoken. Too commonly the Church has been plagued by speakers whose perversion is to speak the revelation only in part and hearers who prefer only a part or who do not know that only a part has been spoken.

But just as surely this study highlights the sterling example of Jeremiah who spoke faithfully and fully the whole of Yahweh's counsel, spoke it whatever the consequence. His example encourages those who measure success by how fully and faithfully they have spoken the Word of the living God, not simply by how pleasant are the consequences that result from speaking.

⁶⁵So S. J. De Vries, *Prophet Against Prophet* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978) 148, observes concerning OT false and true prophets: "The basic conflict is always between covenant integrity and political opportunism."