

NAIROBI EVANGELICAL GRADUATE SCHOOL OF
THEOLOGY

THE CONCEPT OF POWER OR AUTHORITY
IN JEREMIAH 22:1-9, 13-23 WITH
IMPLICATIONS FOR AFRICA

BY

BUNGISHABAKU KATHO

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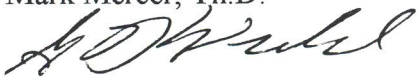
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Approved:

Supervisor: 
Tewoldemedin Habtu, Ph.D.

Second Reader: 
Mark Mercer, Th.D.

External Reader: 
Gerald D. Vreeland, Ph.D.


June, 2000

Student's Declaration Form

THE CONCEPT OF POWER OR AUTHORITY IN JEREMIAH 22:1-9, 13-23
WITH IMPLICATIONS FOR AFRICA.

I declare that this is my original work and has not been submitted to any other college or university for academic credit.

The views presented herein are not necessarily those of the Nairobi Evangelical Graduate School of Theology or the Examiners

signed 

Bungishabaku Katho

June 22, 2000

Abstract

God alone is the perfect ruler and his power is dependent upon none. Human beings who possess power can rightly exercise it only if they acknowledge that their power is delegated. God made it clear to the Israelites, even before they asked for a king, what such a king should be and how he should lead his people. Deuteronomy 17:14-20 sets forth a number of limitations placed upon the monarchy. The motive behind these limitations was to ensure that the Israelite king will not behave like the kings of the other nations, but that he will follow the will of God and maintain a society which is right with itself and right with God. 1 Samuel 8 warns the people of Israel against the potential danger of the establishment of kingship. More than a warning, 1 Samuel 8 can also be seen as another guideline which could help the kings of Israel to realize the temptations and dangers they were going to face in the exercise of their authority. From the text of Jeremiah 22, we chose two kings of Judah: Josiah and Jehoiakim as case studies of the use of power or authority in the Israelite monarchy. Josiah understood his task as a king in terms of complying with the standard set in Deuteronomy and 1 Samuel. As a result, it went well for him and for the nation. But Jehoiakim was condemned for his failure to comply with God's standard. Because of the failure of Jehoiakim and many other kings like him, Israel was destroyed and the people (were) of Judah were taken to exile. This means that the moral, social, economic, and religious conditions of any nation or society depend, in large part, on the kind of leadership of those in power. In the political sphere, the church in Africa has two responsibilities: (1) to teach the nation and their rulers the proper use of power and (2) to help the citizens to understand that they are responsible for the kind of government in power because their destiny is linked to the kind of leadership they have accepted to rule over them.

To

Vicky, my loving wife,

and our daughters: Furaha, Denise and Rachel.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Statement of the Problem

In the Old Testament, the concept of power or authority is primarily ascribed to God.¹ But when it is applied to human beings, power can also include the idea of political force and authority incarnated in a particular leader or a king. In discussing the issue of power, Laarman notices that while many Old Testament passages express admiration for human power, they also criticize it because it is sometimes used either to obscure reliance on God's power or to oppress the powerless.² The implication of Laarman's argument is that the moral, social, economic, and religious conditions of any nation or society depend, in large part, on the kind of leadership of those in power. Proverbs 29:2 rightly states that "when people rejoice; but when a wicked man rules, the people groan" (NKJV).

¹ P. H. Menoud, "Power," in The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible, 4th ed. He points out that all power of every kind is derived from God and that while God grants autonomy to man and other beings in their respective realms, His own prerogative remains uncompromised.

² Edward Laarman, "Power, Might," in International Standard Bible Encyclopedia, 2nd ed. See also Andrew J. Kirk (Liberation Theology: An Evangelical View from the Third World [Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1979], 209) who argues that "power in human hands is easily corrupted;" and Eugene H. Merrill (Kingdom of Priests: A History of Old Testament Israel [Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1987], 209) who states that authority or kingship is sometimes used as justification of merciless despotism.

Laarman's argument is supported by Preuss who argues that Israel's monarchy was a necessary but also a problematic institution; the problem being that kingship brought chaos in society since all power became concentrated in the hands of the kings and their few officials who oppressed the poor (Isa. 58:3; Jer. 6:6; 2 Kings 21:16; Ezek. 22:29), perverted justice (Amos 5:7-13; Isa.3:12-15), and turned the people from Yahweh to worship other gods (1 Kings 11:4-8; 2 Kings 21:7).³ Yet God made it clear to the Israelites, even before they asked for a king, what such a king should be and how he should lead His people. Deuteronomy 17:14-20 sets forth a number of limitations placed on the monarchy. The motive behind these limitations was to ensure that the Israelite king would not behave like the kings of the other nations, but that he would follow closely the will of God and thus maintain a society which was right with itself (from within) and right with God. On the other hand, 1 Samuel 8 warns the people of Israel, who were asking for a human king, against the potential danger of the establishment of such a kingship because of the religious deviations and the socio-economic burdens it might entail. These two texts were given both as a guide and a warning for the Israelite monarchy. Israel was God's people, chosen from among all the peoples of the earth. Yahweh alone was the king of Israel. The request of God's people to become like all the other nations was seen as a rejection of the covenant, or a rejection of theocracy. Therefore, God's permission of a human king for Israel was with the understanding that the latter would rule strictly under His control. In other words, the Israelite king was a

³D. H. Preuss, Old Testament Theology (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1992), 2: 21.

dependent king, with no absolute power; his rulership was legitimized and guided by Yahweh Himself. The most important task expected of such a king was of course to help the people of Israel to maintain a good relationship with Yahweh (no idolatry) and with one another (social justice). Unfortunately, with a few exceptions, most of the kings of Judah and almost all the kings of Israel were evil kings who did not follow the will of God. As Coote and Whitelam have argued, "the monarchy was perceived as an institution that served the interests of the few rather than those of the many."⁴

It is, therefore, important to notice that from the time of Samuel (the last leader of Israel in the premonarchical period) and Saul (the first king of Israel), two new offices came into being in Israel: the office of the king and that of the prophet. The simultaneous emergence of the two offices is not accidental.⁵ Wood, in his unpublished work, argues that:

due to the centralization of large blocks of power in the hands of the king, he could wield enormous powers unchecked. Deut. 17:14-21 provided a restraining guideline that the king was to follow in a voluntary way. And Psalm 72 provides a positive guideline. These written statements could be and were easily ignored, but a living, breathing, speaking prophet who cried out "Thus saith the Lord" in public could not so easily be silenced.⁶

⁴R. Coote and K. W. Whitelam, "The Emergence of Israel: Social Transformation and State Formation following the Decline in Late Bronze Age Trade," *Semeia* 37 (1986): 107.

⁵Bruce C. Birch, *Let Justice Roll Down: The Old Testament, Ethics, and Christian Life* (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox, 1991), 211. He also quotes Cross who argues that the institution of prophecy came with the monarchy and disappeared with it. While Cross' argument might be true for the beginning of the monarchy, it is certainly wrong to argue that the office of the prophet ended with the monarchy, especially when one considers the case of Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi whose ministries are located after the exile when there was no king in Israel.

⁶C. Wood, "With Justice for All; the Task of the People of God: A Biblical Theology," Unpublished class notes (Nairobi Evangelical Graduate School of Theology), chap.11, p. 6.

The prophets directed their messages primarily to those who had power or authority such as the kings,⁷ urging them to fear and honor God, and to deal justly with those under their authority. Jeremiah is one of the foremost prophets⁸ whom God sent to denounce the abuse of power by the Israelite kings in the late monarchical period. The prophet Jeremiah has two particularities that are important for this work and which must therefore be pointed out. First, his ministry spanned the reign of the last five kings of Judah (Josiah, Jehoahaz also called Shallum in Jeremiah, Jehoiakim, Jehoiakin or Coniah, and Zedekiah) and until the first years of captivity. Second, he lived during the last and most difficult days of his nation. Quoting Stream, Morgan describes the atmosphere in Judah during the time of Jeremiah in the following words:

It is difficult to conceive of any situation more painful than that of a great man, condemned to watch the lingering agony of an exhausted country, to tend it during the alternate fits of stupefaction and raving which precede its dissolution, and to see the symptoms of vitality disappear one by one, till nothing is left but coldness, darkness, corruption.⁹

⁷Gary V. Smith, "Prophet," in International Standard Bible Encyclopedia, 2nd ed. He argues that although some prophets delivered their messages in the temple, others spent far more time delivering God's word to the kings of Israel.

⁸Charles L. Feinberg, Jeremiah: A Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1986), 357. He writes that almost without exception, Bible students consider Jeremiah to be one of the foremost prophets. He also adds that Jeremiah has been called a sublime figure and that the highest praise has been given him. Robert P. Carroll (Jeremiah [London: SCM Press, 1986], 56) quotes Steinmann who compares Jeremiah with some of those deep and disturbing geniuses who have shaped the intellectual contour of modern thought: *Mais Jérémie fut vraiment le génie du tourment et du désaccord, l'Euripide, le Pascal ou le Dostoïevisky de l'Ancien Testament.*"

⁹G. Campbel Morgan, Studies in the Prophecy of Jeremiah (London: Fleming A. Revell Co., 1931), 9.

The quotation leaves us with a question: What was the cause of this catastrophic situation in Judah? Morgan's answer was that "the nation was under the domination of evil rulers, civil and spiritual. Shepherds, the civil rulers; and prophets the spiritual rulers were exercising a false authority, debasing national life and character."¹⁰

By denouncing the abuse of power by the evil rulers of Judah, Jeremiah also laid bare the causes of national ruin. That denunciatory tone towards the kings of Judah is clear in chapter 22¹¹ where we also find a summary of the reign of Josiah, a critical evaluation and condemnation of Jehoiakim. It is a section of that passage that constitutes the focus of this research.

The message of Jeremiah is as important for us today as it was for his nation. There is indeed a real threat of peril for any nation when its rulers use their authority to build their houses by unrighteousness (Jer. 22:13b), when they have their eyes and hearts on dishonest gain (Jer.22:17a), when they use their authority to shed innocent blood (Jer. 22:27b), and when they walk persistently in the forgetfulness of the word of God. How much is that situation true for us in Africa today?

In his book, Hope for Africa and What the Christian Can Do, Kinoti maintains that one of the causes of Africa's economic and social wretchedness is the misuse of

¹⁰Ibid., 123.

¹¹Morgan, Studies, 120. He gives the title "False rulers" to that passage, probably referring to the abuse of power and authority by the last kings of Judah. O. Eissfeldt (The Old Testament: An Introduction [New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1965], 356) says that in that passage are gathered threats against the kings of Judah. Carroll argues that "Jeremiah 22:11 - 23: 6 is designed to associate the royal leadership with the fall of Jerusalem in such a manner that responsibility for the disaster may be laid at the door of the royal house." (Carroll , Jeremiah, 404). J. A. Thompson (The Book of Jeremiah [Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1980], 465) recognizes also that the theme of Jer. 21:1-22:30 is judgment on the monarchy.

power by African leaders. He elaborates this when he says:

There is the problem of misuse of public institutions and embezzlement of public funds in many African countries government is quite plainly in the hands of crooks. men are ready to do anything including killing others and causing civil war, to get into position from where they can eat.¹²

Questions that arise from such a situation are the following: Is God concerned about how power and authority are being used in our nations? Does God have something to say about dictatorship and nepotism in our countries? Can the Church help our continent to understand the will of God about power or authority? Does theology have a constructive contribution to make to the political process? The task of this thesis is twofold: first, by evaluating the leadership of the two kings in the light of Deuteronomy 17:14-21 and 1 Samuel 8, we will attempt to address the relationship between the misuse of power or authority and the break up of national life as described in Jeremiah chapter 22:1-9 and 13-23. Second, we will seek to demonstrate that the church as an alternative community has important roles to play *vis-à-vis* the use of power in any community, particularly in those nations in Africa where the misuse of power or authority has become a common practice.

Key questions that we need to investigate in this research include:

- a) What were the lines of authority in Israel?
- b) How did two of the last four kings of Judah actually use their power or authority?
- c) What were the consequences of the use or misuse of their power for the nation?
- d) What constitutes a proper control on the exercise of state power or authority?
- e) What lessons can the African church learn from the relationship between the use or

¹²George Kinoti, Hope for Africa and What the Christian Can Do (Nairobi: AISRED, 1994), 38.

misuse of power or authority and its consequences for the nation?

g) And based on these lessons, how can the African Church help our political leaders to rightly use their power or authority?

Significance of the Study

There is an urgent need to understand, from a Biblical perspective, the relationship or the link between the disintegration or the break up of national life (socio-economic, religious and political) and the abuse of power or authority in our nations. Many times we misread the history and the events, we think that politicians in our nations have failed to produce statesmen who are able to cope with the political situation of the moment.

Jeremiah 22 teaches us at least four things. First, it teaches that, in many cases, the failure of our leaders is proof that God is still on His throne, judging the nations and their rulers. The second lesson we learn from Jeremiah 22 is that the destiny of our nations is linked with the kind of leadership of those in power. Thirdly, it teaches us that all ruin, loss, and national decay are due to the fact that we have forgotten God (in other words, God lifts up or breaks down according to whether or not a nation is living in right relationship to Himself). The fourth lesson that this passage teaches us is that if power is properly used, it is a great blessing, ensuring a just social environment in which individuals and communities can live in peace and prosperity; but that "without proper control, this same power becomes life-threatening tyranny, spreading violence and destruction through human society,

leaving devastation in its wake."¹³ This is what we are experiencing almost everywhere in Africa today. My hope is that this work will provide the African Church with some guidelines in her struggle for justice, peace and prosperity in the Continent. I believe that the church is not only a spiritual community or a society within human hearts as argued by Harnack,¹⁴ but a concrete community that can embody the patterns for shared life that God desires for all of human society. I, therefore, hope that this work will stimulate the African Church to work together and focus not only on individual members (commendable as that is) but also to seek the good of all the nations and the whole continent.

Kinoti notices that: "the most important first step is to get the vision of a better Africa, an Africa where all the people enjoy human dignity, spiritual and moral wellbeing, peace, freedom, justice and material prosperity."¹⁵ This is what, in my understanding, will be one of the most important tasks of the African Church in the next century. However, I also believe that this task will remain impossible unless the African church properly understands politics and power or authority from a Biblical perspective. That is the contribution this work is aiming at. B.J. van der Walt supports this idea when he argues that: "the understanding of power will always remain a significant Christian contribution to politics in any society, particularly those which are feeling their way towards a true and genuine sharing in political power."¹⁶

¹³B. J. van der Walt, Leaders with a Vision: How Christian Leadership Can Tackle the African Crisis (Potchefstroomse: Potchefstroomse University, 1995), 72.

¹⁴ Quoted by Gerhard Lohfink, Jesus and Community (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1982), 2.

¹⁵Kinoti, Hope for Africa, 68.

¹⁶B. J. van der Walt, Leaders with a Vision, 72.

Thesis and Methodology

God's will for those in power or authority is that they use their power rightly by establishing justice in society and by defending the rights of the powerless. But what happens when the divine principle is not followed? Jeremiah tells us that sin carries within itself the seed of its own punishment and its own retribution. In the same way, the prophet demonstrates that the major reason for the socio-economic, religious and political decline of Judah and its total destruction was the misuse of power or authority by its rulers. As stated in the preceding section, the main thrust of this thesis is to investigate the relationship between the use and misuse of power/authority and the break up of national life in Jeremiah 22:1-9,13-23, and its implications for Africa.

It would have been very interesting to study the concept of power in Jeremiah as a whole or even in all the prophetic books in order to have a clearer picture on the use and misuse of power during and after the monarchy in Israel. It would also have been interesting to study the role of priests, judges, and elders in Israelite leadership either in relationship with the king or with the society as a whole. But this was not possible in view of the limitation of time and the scope of this work. The writer will, therefore, deal only with a section of the book of Jeremiah (Jer. 22:1-9, 13-23). The choice of this particular passage is based on the fact that it contains, in a summary form, the judgment of God concerning the use and misuse of power by the last five kings of Judah. Our task will mainly consist of the exegesis of this passage in order to evaluate the use of power or authority by two of those five kings. We will evaluate the leadership of the two kings against the divine yardstick given in Deuteronomy 7:14-21 and 1 Samuel 8.

The writer will also refer to other relevant materials and in other historical books that are related to the key text. These passages will include mainly 2 Kings 22-23 and 2 Chronicles 35.

This work is literary research that requires an exegesis of the key text (Jer. 22:1-9, 13-23), taking into account its historical, cultural, socio-economic, political, and religious settings. Since our focus is on a specific period of time (the reign of two of the last five kings of Judah), some of the Biblical materials that will shed light on how power was used or misused by the kings we are referring to will be dealt with. The writer will draw some applications for the African context, especially on what the African Church can do *vis-à-vis* the misuse of power in our continent in general.

Definition of Terms

In this research, "power" and "authority" are used synonymously, and the research does not consist of a study of the two words but of the idea they convey as they are used to refer to the use or misuse of (political) power or authority by human leaders in Jeremiah 22:1-9, 13-23.

Many scholars agree that there is no exact word in the Hebrew Scriptures for the abstract notion of power.¹⁷ But according to Marsh, "the chief ingredients of the Biblical notion are present."¹⁸ One example is that of Proverbs 29:2 which we have already mentioned and where many English versions (KJV, Thompson, Scofield,

¹⁷S. V. McCasland, "Power," in The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible, 4th ed.

¹⁸J. Marsh, "Authority," The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible, 4th ed.

NRSV) read "...when the righteous are in authority. . ." instead of ". . . when the righteous increase" בְּרִבּוֹת צְדִיקִים. Among the several Hebrew words translated in English by "power" are the following: מַשְׁלָה גַּבַר כַּח אֵל מַשָּׁל

In order to have a general idea on the way the words power and authority are used in the Old Testament, we will select only two of these words for a brief study, with the hope that the context in which they are used will give a clue to our exegesis.

כַּח is used either to refer to God or to a human being.

a) With reference to a human leader, Isaiah 10:13 announces that God will punish the arrogant king of Assyria because he boasts saying: "it is by the power of my hand (בְּכַח יָדִי) that I have done it," namely, the subjugation of other nations. In Ecclesiastes.4:1, Qoheleth laments that in this world, oppressors possess all power (וּמִיָּד עֹשְׂקֵיהֶם כַּח) while the oppressed remain helpless and cry out for help but find none.

b) With reference to God, there are several passages where the word is used in relation to the power of God. Psalm 147:5 states that our God is "great and abundant in power" (וּרְב־כַּח); and in two different passages, Job repeats almost the same idea of the greatness of God's power: in 37:23 he states that "God is exalted in power" (שֹׁגֵי־כַח) in the sense that He does not violate justice, and Job 36:22 concludes that Yahweh lifts Himself up in His power (וַיִּשְׁגֵּב בְּכַחוֹ). In Isaiah 50:2, God asks His people ironically if His hand has no power to deliver (וְאִם־אֵי־רַבִּי כַח לְהַצִּיל) them. Finally, Psalm 33:16 issues a warning against any king or any warrior who would think that he is

saved by his (own) great power (בְּרַב־כֹּחַ). That same idea is also found in Zechariah 4:6 where the Prophet clearly states that it is neither by man's might nor by (his) power (וְלֹא בְכֹחַ) that he is able to do anything great but only by the Spirit of God.

From the study of the word כֹּחַ, we can draw two important lessons, one positive and another negative. Positively, all the power or authority belongs to God; He is the ultimate source of every power or authority. He uses it to deliver the oppressed, to strengthen or to appoint human leaders, and to punish the arrogant. Negatively, when used by human beings, power is very often abused: the powerful becomes boastful and he oppresses the powerless. However, human beings also can use power positively, that is by acknowledging that they are not themselves the source of power and that they must therefore use it according to the will of the Giver of that power, that is God Himself.

2. מָשַׁל when used as a verb, it means "rule, govern, have dominance over, have authority"; and as a noun, it means "a dominion". According to Nel,¹⁹ the word specifically refers to the act of having control or dominance over something. In that sense, a human being (Gen. 3:16; Ps. 8:6) or God (Isa. 40:10; Ps. 22:28; 2 Chron. 20:6) may be the subject. Nel adds that the word is even associated with the sun and the moon in Genesis 1:18. For the purpose of this research, we will classify the use of מָשַׁל into four categories:

a) General use: In Daniel 11:3-4, the word מָשַׁל is used with מְלִיכָה with the meaning of to rule. In 1 Kings 9:19, the word means "dominion" and refers to

¹⁹Philip J. Nel, "מָשַׁל," in New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis, 1st ed.

the kingdom of Israel.

b) Right execution of power: whenever it is used in reference to God's reign, the word conveys a positive sense or a right use of power. The following are some of the examples. In Judges 8:23, Gideon declares to the Israelites who wanted to make him a king over them: "I shall not rule over you, nor shall all my sons rule over you; Yahweh shall rule over you (אֲנִי בְּכֶם וְלֹא־יִמְשָׁל בְּנֵי בְּכֶם יְהוָה יִמְשָׁל כֶּם) (לֹא־אֶמְשָׁל). The idea here is that Yahweh is the perfect Ruler. But according to the Psalmist (Ps.89:9), Yahweh does not rule only over man but also over nature such as the sea. Thus, we read in Psalm 89:9: "You rule (אֲדַהּ מִשָּׁל) the pride of the sea; when its waves rise high, you still them".

c) Abuse of power: One of the clear references where the word מִשָּׁל refers to the abuse of power by a human being or a brutal political domination of a ruler over his subjects is Proverbs 28:15, where we read "The wicked ruler (בְּמִשָּׁל רָשָׁע) is a roaring lion, and a ranging bear, over a wicked people."

d) The ideal use of power by the coming King of Zion: In Zechariah 9:10, the word מִשָּׁל conveys the idea of an ideal execution of power or authority by the Messiah when he will come. In the second part of that verse, the prophet says that the King of Zion "will speak peace to the nations; his dominion (וּמִשָּׁלוֹ) shall be from sea to sea, and from the river to the end of the earth." The most important elements in the passage are peace, justice and unity for the whole universe which characterize the rulership of the Messiah.

This word study shows that the word מִשָּׁל is more oriented toward authority than power. When used to refer to God or to the coming Messiah, it conveys the positive idea

power. When used to refer to God or to the coming Messiah, it conveys the positive idea of a just rule or a right use of authority. But when referring to human beings, it is most often used with the negative connotation of the abuse of power.

This section on the "Definition of Terms" shows us four things: (i) that God (and the coming Messiah) is the only perfect Ruler - He is of infinite power and He is dependent upon none; (ii) that the human ruler very often tends to misuse the power he possesses; (iii) a human being can rightly use his power only if he acknowledges God as the Giver of power and only if he fears Him; (iv) power in human beings is derived - it is not original nor innate in them. Therefore, no human being can boast of possessing it in an absolute way since the ultimate source of it is God Himself.

General Content of the Paper

Chapter one includes introductory materials, namely statement of the problem, significance of the study, thesis and methodology, and the definition of terms. Chapter two will cover the study of Deuteronomy 17:14-21 and 1 Samuel 8 which will then be used as the standard for the evaluation of the use of power by the two kings of Judah. Chapter three will be devoted to the exegesis of the main passage of our study, namely Jeremiah 22:1-9, 13-23 against the divine yardsticks set in chapter two. The focus in this chapter will be on the relationship between the use of power or authority and the national life of Judah. In chapter four we will attempt to draw out the implications of the use and abuse of power in Judah on the exercise of political power in Africa. In other words, we will attempt to answer the questions: what is the relationship between the abuse of power and the break up of our nations? What can the role of the church be *vis-à-vis* the abuse of power in our continent? Chapter five will be a conclusion.

CHAPTER 2

LIMITATIONS OF THE MONARCHY (Deut. 17:14-20) AND WARNING ABOUT IT (1 Sam. 8:1-18)

Introduction

The issue of God's attitude toward Israelite human kingship is very debated. Many scholars admit that the monarchy arose and developed in controversy, and that the ancient debate continues to provoke sharp controversy in modern attempts to evaluate the theological significance of the Israelite kingship. Howard, for example argues that the problem is that the biblical texts relating to God's attitude toward kingship in Israel appear "-on the surface- to be ambiguous."¹ Whoever wants to study or evaluate the monarchy in Israel cannot ignore the two central questions frequently asked: should Israel have asked for a king? Did God intend to be a king in Israel at all? Roberts gives a summary of the three leading positions in ancient scholarship concerning the issue:

In the ancient debate some voices claimed that the mere request for a human king was tantamount to a rejection of God, to a rebellion against divine rule (Judg. 8:22-23; 1 Sam. 8:7; 12:12, 17-20). Others, arguing less theologically but equally opposed to the monarchy, saw kingship as a totally unnecessary and unproductive drain on the resources of a healthy society (Judg. 9:7-15; 1 Sam. 10:27). Still others, the ancient promonarchists, viewed kingship as God's gift that finally brought order to an irresponsibly chaotic society in which formerly "every man did what was right in his own eyes" (Judg. 17:6; 21:25; cf. 18:1; 19:1).²

¹David M. Howard Jr., "The Case for Kingship in the Old Testament Narrative Books and the Psalms," *Trinity Journal* 9 (1988):19.

²Roberts, "In the Defense of the Monarchy," 77.

The issue continue to divide modern scholars as well. On the one hand, there are those who argue that from the beginning to the end, human kingship was what God wanted for Israel;³ others think that kingship had never been God's intention for Israel and that by developing it on the model of pagan states, the Israelites introduced a paganization into the political and social history of Israel with fateful and lasting consequences.⁴ A third group of scholars agrees with this second view but adds that, though God never intended for Israel to have a human king, he *adopted* Israel's decision and then sought to *adapt* it in order to fit his covenant.⁵ It is important to recall at this point that the

³Some of the supporters of this view are: Howard , "The Case for Kingship," 19-35. He argues that among modern scholars, Gerbrandt has pointed the way toward a resolution of the issue by saying that the view in what is commonly called the deuteronomistic history of the institution of kingship in Israel is essentially a favorable one, not a negative one, as is commonly supposed. He also adds that the real issue in the biblical texts is what kind of monarchy was to exist or to be exercised, not whether Israel should have a monarchy or not. In another article, "The Case for Kingship in Deuteronomy and the Former Prophets," Westminster Theological Journal 52 (1990): 101-105. Howard argues that Israel's sin was in asking for a king who would be like those of the other nations, leading it in battle. He also quotes Gerbrandt who stated that the king was to lead Israel by being the covenant administrator, who could then trust Yahweh for victory. Another scholar who adopts this view is Roberts, "In Defense of the Monarchy," 377-96. His argument is that the transition to royal rule took place in Israel because the old system was no longer working. He further argues that under the combined pressure of Philistine and Ammonite expansion, the loosely organized Israelite confederacy could not muster and maintain sufficient military forces to deal with the continuing threat. He concludes by saying that the advantages the league offered during the earlier period of the struggle with the Canaanite city-states no longer worked against the new enemies.

⁴George E. Mendenhall, "The Monarchy," Interpretation 29 (1975): 155.

⁵I owe these two terms (adoption and adaptation) to my professor, Chester Wood ("With Justice for All; the Task of the People of God: A Biblical Theology," unpublished class notes [Nairobi Evangelical Graduate School of Theology],) who argues that in terms of the argument for and against the monarchy, adoption must not be confused with legitimation. In that way, Wood also quotes Wright, who argues that with the adoption, the king became the focus of new dimensions of God's self revelation. In other words, the king had to represent God's rule among his people in the present and became the symbol of the future hope of God's ultimate, perfect Messianic rule among

task of this thesis is not to discuss or to evaluate these different positions--many scholars have already done the work--rather, it is to evaluate the use of power by two of the last kings of Judah in the light of Deuteronomy 17:14-20 and I Samuel 8. However, a good evaluation requires a clear understanding of the issue. That is why, as far as the different positions about the attitudes towards kingship are concerned, I agree with those scholars who argue that God adopted and then adapted human kingship in Israel. I agree with this position for three reasons: first, the concept of kingship seems to be a totally foreign idea to Israel's tradition; second, it also seems that whatever position we adopt on the interpretation of 1 Samuel 8, this text clearly speaks against the establishment of kingship in Israel; and third, I agree with Craigie that Deuteronomy 17:14-20 appears to be a permissive legislation rather than posing a requirement.⁶ In other words, though God did not intend for Israel to have a human

men. Earl S. Kalland ("Deuteronomy," Expositor's Bible Commentary, ed. Frank E. Gaebelein [Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1982], 3:116) argues that the possible future institution of kingship comes not as a command. It does not arise out of the Lord's immediate plan for government but out of a supposition that the people will want a king because the surrounding peoples had kings. But most important is Kalland's argument that "the Lord, in developing revelation, revealed his eternal plan of using kingship as the vehicle of central importance in messianic prophecy and fulfillment." He also strongly argues that the supreme and eternal rulership of the Lord, as enunciated, for instance, in the Song of Moses and Israel at the crossing of the Red Sea (Exod. 15:18), could have been proclaimed either with or without a human representative [Ibid.].

⁶ Peter C. Craigie, The Book of Deuteronomy, The New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1976), 253. Jack Ford and A.R.G. Deasley, (Deuteronomy, Beacon Bible Commentary [Kansas: Beacon Hill Press, 1966], 563) also state that the monarchy is treated as a permitted institution but not commanded, and that it was a concession to the people's desire to be like the nations round about. A. D. H. Mayes, Deuteronomy (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1987), 271. He argues that "the monarchy originated on the basis of a desire of the people, not as a divine ordinance."

king, he did allow them to have kings according to their own request,⁷ but a king who would be under the control of Yahweh Himself.

Limitations upon the Monarchy (Deut. 17:14-20)

14 When you have come into the land that the Lord your God is giving you, and have taken possession of it and settled in it, and you say, "I will set a king over me, like all the nations that are around me," 15 you may indeed set over you a king whom the Lord your God will choose. One of your own community you may set as king over you; you are not permitted to put a foreigner over you, who is not of your community. 16 Even so, he must not acquire many horses for himself, or return the people to Egypt in order to acquire many horses, since Lord has said to you, "You must never return that way again." 17 And he must not acquire many wives for himself, or else his heart will turn away; also silver and gold he must not acquire in great quantity for himself. 18 When he has taken the throne of his kingdom, he shall have a copy of this law written for him in the presence of the levitical priests. 19 It shall remain with him and he shall read in it all the days of his life, so that he may learn to fear the Lord his God, diligently observing all the words of this law and these statutes, 20 neither exalting himself above other members of the community nor turning aside from the commandment, either to the right or to the left, so that he and his descendants may reign long over his kingdom in Israel (NRSV).

There are, at least, six limitations on the kingship in Deuteronomy 17:14-20.⁸

The Lord must select the king (15a); the king must not be a foreigner (15b); he must

⁷Perhaps a good example often quoted, of the way God in his sovereignty does sometimes adopt our decision can be seen in the discussion between the Lord Jesus and the Pharisees in Matthew 19:1-9 concerning divorce. In the passage, the Pharisees quote Deuteronomy 24:1 and think that God had legitimated divorce, but Jesus responds by referring to the will of God in Genesis 1 and 2. Jesus' statement is very clear: "It was because you were so hard-hearted that Moses allowed you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning it was not so. And I say to you, whoever divorces his wife, except for unchastity, and marries another commits adultery" (NRSV).

⁸Many scholars do not agree on the date of this passage in general, but on the date of verses 18-19 in particular. Marcus Dodd et al. (*Exposition of the Bible: Genesis-Ruth*, [Hartford, Conn: The S.S. Scranton Co., 1908], 573) have a lengthy discussion on Deuteronomy 17: 14-20. Their argument is that the passage is of late origin because of several reasons. Two of those reasons are that (1) the passage suggests that the book of the law would already be available to the king, and yet during the time of Moses it was impossible to think about such book; (2) the sending of Israelites to Egypt in order to buy horses was a reality during the time of Solomon, not before. But J. A. Thompson

not acquire great numbers of horses (16a); he must not take many wives (17a); he must not accumulate large amounts of silver and gold for himself (17b); he must write for himself on a scroll a copy of the law (18,19).

First Limitation: a God-Chosen King (v.15)

The first restriction on the kingship is that he must be divinely appointed. *"You shall appoint a king over you, whom the Lord your God chooses."* It is not by simple coincidence that this limitation comes first on the list. The fact is that, in the surrounding nations, there were many despots and those who came to power by military coups or by other illegal ways. The result of such governments was instability in the country with lasting consequences as we are experiencing in Africa today. Such a model was to be rejected by Israel. The God-chosen model of kingship means that the office of the king would not be dependent on either popularity or military strength or any other human grandeur, but that it would have the approval of Yahweh and remain under the strict control of God himself, the true King of Israel. A king not chosen by God would probably be unwilling to submit to God, and as a consequence God would also reject Him. This is an internal limitation to the office of kingship in Israel. Consequently, every Israelite king had to be anointed before he started ruling.

(Deuteronomy: An Introduction and Commentary. Tyndale Old Testament Commentary [Leicester:IVP,1974], 204) argues that "there is no reason why Moses should not have been aware of the extremes to which human monarchs could go in the exercise of their autocratic rule, for he had the example of the king of Egypt." See also Jack Ford and A. R. G. Deasley (Deuteronomy, 563) who state that the passage fits the time of Moses on the eve of entering the land as it fits no other time. I agree with Thompson that the passage fits well the time of Moses and that, in his sovereignty, God might have inspired Moses to instruct the Israelites on the possible danger ahead of them.

The anointment was a sacred ceremony and an evidence indicating the approval of Yahweh and, therefore, the legitimacy of the king.

Second Limitation: Not a Foreigner (15b)

Second on the list of limitations is that Israel should never accept foreign leadership. A foreign king would have been a disaster for Israel, in that he would be deficient in national feeling and would always be tempted to rule tyrannically. Beyond tyranny, a foreign king would also introduce heathen elements into Israelite religion.

The best example of the negative influence of a foreign king in Israel is that of queen Jezebel, the daughter of Ethbaal king of the Sidonians (1 Kings 16:31). Because of Jezebel's influence Ahab abandoned the way of Yahweh, started worshipping Baal, had Naboth killed unjustly, and greatly harassed Elijah.

It was therefore necessary that the office of the king be narrowed down to the members of the covenant people in order to avoid such idolatry and injustice in society. Compared to the first limitation which I have called internal, this one can be considered as an external limitation.

Third Limitation: Not Many Horses (v.16a)

The third limitation is linked to the prohibition not to make the people return to Egypt.⁹ The precise point of the link between the military power and the return of

⁹Mayes (*Deuteronomy*, 272) states that the precise point of the link between the third limitation and the idea of causing the people to return to Egypt is uncertain. He mentions that some people think in terms of the sending of Israelite slaves to Egypt in return for horses, and that others take it metaphorically in the sense of a return to dependence on Egypt through alliances involving the sending of ambassadors. But I tend to see the passage, in this context and in the African context today, as an attempt of military cooperation between Israel and Egypt, or between Israel and any other nation.

the people to Egypt is not very clear. But whatever the correct meaning might be, it is clear that God's concern remains the same as that expressed in the two preceding limitations, namely, the danger of apostasy in Israel. Horses were used to pull chariots during war and, in practice, infantry was defenseless before chariots. Nevertheless, Israelite kings were not to become a military power in the region but to trust the Lord for victory. In other words, their military strength lay not in the number or type of their troops or in military cooperations with other nations like Egypt, "but in the strength and presence of their God in battle."¹⁰ Several examples can be given to demonstrate that God was the one fighting for Israel. In Exodus 14:1-31, God demonstrated his power over the chariots of Pharaoh. In the time of Deborah the judge, God caused Israel to defeat Sisera although his army had up to 900 chariots (Judges 4-5). And in 1 Samuel 7 God demonstrated the superiority of his power over the Philistines at Mizpah. The lesson to learn here is that Israelite security was in the Lord alone.

Another problem with many chariots is that military expenses (thousands of soldiers, thousands of horses and many other weapons for war) would be very expensive for a small country like Israel, as a consequence, it would make people very poor.

Israel was a holy or separate nation and it had to remain separate in every aspect of its life, including the military.

¹⁰Craigie, The Book of Deuteronomy, 255.

Fourth Limitation: Not Many Wives for the King (v17a)

Here again, there is a link between taking many wives and the heart of the king being led astray from Yahweh to the religions of the many wives.¹¹ The purpose of having many wives would normally be political,¹² since those wives would come from families of other kings and so add strength to treaties with as many neighbors as possible. But the negative aspect of it would be that those wives would bring the impact of foreign cultures into the palace and introduce the worship of other gods. In that respect, it was clear that the heart of the kings would be led astray.

Fifth Limitation: Not Large Amounts of Silver and Gold (v.17b)

The fifth limitation is a prohibition against the accumulation by the king of personal wealth at the expense of his subjects. Craigie points out that the desire for the accumulation of wealth, which all too easily could become a consuming passion, would run contrary to the true character of the ideal king, as described in verses 18-20.¹³ This probably does not mean that the Israelite king should be a poor man, but the restriction here is on the temptation of the king and his few officials to accumulate wealth at the expense of the citizens who would consequently become poor. Most of us in Africa and in the Third World in general can easily understand this passage. We know leaders who would siphon millions of dollars out of their countries and fatten their personal accounts in Europe or elsewhere leaving their people in utter poverty.

¹¹See also I Kings 11:1-4.

¹²Craigie, Deuteronomy, 256.

¹³Ibid.

Sixth Limitation: the King Must Write the Law and Read It Daily (vv.18,19a)

The Israelite king was under the law, not above it. The book of the law was, therefore, to become his *vade mecum*, his life-long companion and source of wisdom and strength.¹⁴ The importance of the book of the law for the Israelite king cannot be exaggerated. By reading it and learning it constantly, the king would be reminded of his responsibility toward God and toward the people. He would also be able to understand the full dimensions of Israel's faith. This might be one of the greatest contrasts between the Israelite king and the autocracy of oriental despotism. An example is that of Egypt, where there was no promulgated law-codes and the divine Pharaoh was considered as the incarnation of divine justice,¹⁵ able to decide anything on the basis of his own absolute power. In the modern world, the Israelite law reminds us of the relationship between the office of the president/king and the constitution of a country. Normally, the constitution functions as a guide for any nation, but a president or a king can choose either to be under the constitution and thus, rule accordingly or be above it and do whatever pleases him, as we all know it in Africa. This limitation forbids the king to consider himself above the law.

Results of the Limitations

20a. So that he might not consider himself better than his brothers and turn from the law to the right or the left

20b. in order that he and his descendants will reign a long time over his kingdom in Israel.

¹⁴Ibid., 257.

¹⁵Leo G. Perdue, Wisdom and Cult (Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1977), 22.

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

the outcome of all of the provisions taken together, if obeyed, would have been a kingship/ monarchy that did not look like a monarchy by any of the Ancient Near East standards. The adapted monarchy would have at least two positive results. First, the transformed monarchy would not subvert God's plan that his people live in a community, a nation, a kingdom, where here was equality of access to the means of producing wealth. Second, such a transformed monarchy would also maintain the witness to the Lord's name, character, through the just social shape of his people Israel.¹⁸

¹⁷On the nature of kingship in Mesopotamia, see the detailed study by Perdue, Wisdom and Cult, 1977).

¹⁸Wood, 50.

The second result of the limitations would be that the king and his descendants would reign a long time over his kingdom in Israel (v.20b). This means that the reign and the success of any king in Israel depended totally on the way he ruled the nation under God. In other words, success in leadership (which involved both victory over enemies and the continuation of the dynasty) depended directly on whether a king followed the law or not. Success or failure of a king had a direct consequence on the nation as a whole.

Warning about the Monarchy (1 Sam. 8:1-18)

1 When Samuel became old, he made his sons judges over Israel. 2 The name of his firstborn son was Jo'el, and the name of his second, A-bi'jah; they were judges in Be'ershe'ba. 3 Yet his sons did not follow in his ways, but turned aside after gain; they took bribes and perverted justice. All the elders of Israel gathered together and came to samuel at Râ'mah, 5 and said to him, "You are old and your sons do not follow in your ways; appoint for us, then, a king to govern us, like other nations." 6 But the thing displeased Samuel when they said, " Give us a king to govern us." Samuel prayed to the Lord, 7 and the Lord said to Samuel, "Listen to the voice of the people in all that they say to you; for they have not rejected you, but they have rejected me from being king over them. 8 Just as they have done to me, from the day I brought them up out of Egypt to this day, forsaking me and serving other gods, so also they are doing to you. 9 Now then, listen to their voice; only - you shall solemnly warn them, and show them the ways of the king who shall reign over them. 10 So Samuel reported all the words of the Lord to the people who were asking him for a king. 11 He said, "These will be the ways of the king who will reign over you: he will take your sons and appoint them to his chariots; 12 and he will appoint for himself commanders of thousands and commanders of fifties, and some to plow his ground and to reap his harvest, and to make his impliments of war and equipment of his chariots. 13 He will take your daughters to be perfumers and cooks and bakers. 14 He will take the best of your fields and vineyards and olive orchards and give them to his courtiers. 15 He will take one-tenth of your grain and of your vineyards and give it to his officers and his courtiers. 16 He will take your male and female slaves, and the best of your cattle and donkeys, and put them to his work. 17 He will take one-tenth of your flocks, and you shall be his slaves. 18 And in that day you will cry out because of your king, whom you have chosen for yourselves; but the Lord will not answer you in that day (NRSV).

The Context of the Warning

1 Samuel 8 poses the question of the establishment of kingship in Israel with great vitality. According to the text, the request for the establishment of the monarchy in Israel was precipitated on the one hand by the age of Samuel, the prophet and the judge of Israel, and on the other hand by the pursuit of selfish gain by his two sons (8:1-5).¹⁹ The request is, therefore, seen as the result of a crisis situation. Many scholars also think that the real issue that motivated the elders of Israel to ask for a king was the constant threat by neighboring nations.²⁰ But while considering external threats (or historical context), it is also important to keep in mind that 1 Samuel 8 comes immediately after the passage that relates, with great detail, the mighty victory of Israel, under Samuel, over the Philistines (1 Sam. 7).²¹ Commenting on the passage, Wood rightly notices that,

although Israel is "disorganized" and weak from the point of view of its military structure (no standing army or central command), nevertheless with the aid of the Lord they gain a mighty victory over the powerful Philistines.²²

¹⁹See also Lyle M. Eslinger, Kingship of God in Crisis: A Close Reading of 1 Samuel 1-12 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1985), 251-282. Another important study on this issue is M. Weinfeld, "Judge and Officer in Ancient Israel and in the Ancient Near East," Israel Oriental Studies 7 (1977): 65-88.

²⁰See footnotes #23 and 25 chapter 2.

²¹It is possible that the threat of the Philistines and the other neighbors of Israel was renewed after the victory related in 1 Samuel 7, just as Walter Brueggemann sees it (First and Second Samuel [Louisville, Kentucky: John Knox Press, 1990], 61). When commenting on 1 Samuel 8:1-3, he writes: " it is a long time between chapters 7 and 8. Samuel is suddenly old." But the long time between Chapters 7 and 8 cannot justify that Israel is now unable to cope with the situation and that the solution is to have a human king. The issue is that of faithfulness of Israel to God: whenever the people were faithful, God intervened to help them, and whenever they became unfaithful, God abandoned them. I would, therefore, say that the request for a human king is another story of the unfaithfulness of Israel to Yahweh.

²²Wood, 6.

The three arguments (Samuel's age, the corruption of Samuel's sons, and the Philistine threats) most often given as justification to Israel's request for a human king, cannot stand if one compares chapters 7 and 8. What stands out very clearly is that the problem of Israel was not external but internal, more specifically its relationship with Yahweh. Several times the Bible warns the people of Israel that their lives and security in the land depended on their faithfulness to God.²³ Moreover, the strong reaction of Samuel against the establishment of kingship in Israel reveals that he knew the human king would not be able to solve the problem of Israel but that he would just worsen it. It is interesting to note here that Samuel's warning about the danger of the monarchy was not based on historical ground but on social and religious ground.

Religious Danger of the Monarchy (1 Sam. 8:6-8)

God's response to Samuel concerning the request of Israel (vv.6-8) makes it clear that the problem of Israel is more theological than political or historical as it might appear at first. The point of crisis is that the monarchy is the rejection of God himself. Brueggeman rightly points out that this rejection is not a new happening but a characteristic of Israel's history and that the whole history of Israel is one of "forsaking" and going after other gods.²⁴ This request of a human king "is one more

²³Craigie, Deuteronomy, 211. In his commentary on Deut. 11:18-25, he writes that the main emphasis in the passage is on "the requirement of God for his people (law, obedience, and love), upon which the future blessing of God in the conquest and the possession of the promised land would be contingent." What is very interesting is the use of many conditional sentences, that is, success for the Israelites depended on their relationship with God. Some examples of such conditional sentences can be found in Deut. 10:11-11:25.

²⁴Brueggeman, First and Second Samuel, 63

step in that continuing performance of mistrust."²⁵ It will not, therefore, be an exaggeration to argue with Samuel that the request of the people of Israel to have a human king marks the climax (or the beginning of the climax) of disobedience to Yahweh, since "the issue of monarchy in Yahweh's speech is perceived as Israel's unwillingness to have Yahweh as the source and ruler of life."²⁶ This is what Eslinger calls a covenantal sin of Israel.²⁷

Social Danger of the Monarchy (1 Sam.8:9-20)²⁸

God makes it clear to Israel that their request for a king will bring a serious distortion in the society. In other words, he accepts their request for a king but, at the same time, he commands Samuel: "you shall solemnly warn them, and show them the ways of the king who shall reign over them." A warning precedes a danger, and here Yahweh wants the people to know the consequences of their request. The real danger comes from the "ways of the king" (מִשְׁפַּט הַמֶּלֶךְ) literally translated, "justice of the king." Yahweh is asking Samuel to explain to the people the kind of social justice a human king will introduce into the society and its consequence for the whole nation.

²⁵Ibid.

²⁶Ibid.

²⁷Eslinger, Kingship of God in Crisis, 264.

²⁸This is another text that is debated by Old Testament scholars. Robert Polzin (Samuel and the Deuteronomist [San Francisco: Harper & Row Publishers, 1989], 85), for example, seems to disagree with those who take 1 Sam.8:11-18 literally, when he says: "To consider the royal practices listed here by Samuel as particularly abusive is, in my opinion, tendentious."

These "ways of the king" are contained in 1 Samuel 8:10-18,²⁹ and the governing word in the passage is the verb "to take." The in the passage is the verb "to take." The king is the one who takes or who confiscates what belongs to the people, and Samuel goes on to list what the king will take.

He will Take Your Sons (vv11-12)

According to the passage, the taking of sons is for military purposes; the king wants to build military power about which God said, in Deuteronomy 17:16 : ". . . he must not acquire many horses for himself, or return the people to Egypt in order to acquire many horses" It is important to be reminded at this point also that this speech of Samuel shows us the introduction of a new institution in Israel, "the standing army," as in the neighboring nations. Before this time, Israel had no standing army. Judges 3:27 gives a picture of how the Israelite army looked like before this time: ". . . he [Ehud] sounded the trumpet in the hill country of Ephraim; and the Israelites went down with him from the hill country, having him at their head." Those who went down from the hill country were certainly farmers, not trained and permanent soldiers. Moreover, there is no doubt that they returned to their land after the war. Commenting on the consequence of such a standing army, Wood rightly reminds us that,

²⁹Brueggemann (First and Second Samuel, 63) argues that this speech placed in the mouth of Samuel is the harshest, most extensive criticism of monarchy in the Old Testament (see also Deut. 17:14-20). He adds that it is one of the most important pieces in the Old Testament on the abuse of public power, but that it is disputed whether this indictment of oppressive political power is post-Solomonic- and, in fact, a critic of Solomonic abuses - or whether it reflects an awareness of the nature of monarchy drawn from the evidence of neighboring states. Brueggeman's conclusion is that either way, the statement reflects what must have been a strongly held view among theological conservatives in ancient Israel who greatly feared centralized government.

a standing army, on the other hand, takes not only the best of the young men away from productive farming but also creates the potential for a military coup, as any third world person understands clearly and becomes a tremendous expense item in a budget which until then did not exist! We certainly do not need to be told how expensive it is to maintain a standing army³⁰

Samuel does not see any benefit of the standing army for the people; on the contrary, he emphasizes that such an army will destroy the just social shape of Israel.

He Will Take Your Daughters (v.13)

With the monarchy, came also another new institution: "the palace." The taking of the daughters reflects a great, opulent and luxurious palace. Daughters of Israel are taken from their homes to serve in "the newly emerging royal class and its retinue."³¹

He Will Take the Best of Your Fields and Vineyards and Olive Orchards (v14)

After the taking of sons and daughters, Samuel now moves to the taking of property. Eslinger thinks that by mentioning the taking of the land only after the taking of the sons and daughters, Samuel is gradually lessening the importance of the affected items and thus leading "his audience to believe that the worst is over with the sons."³² While Eslinger has rightly perceived the sequence of the argument in the passage, it is dangerous to think of the land as less important for a society like early Israel. In fact, Christopher J. H. Wright rightly notices that for a society like Israel, "to be

³⁰Wood, 7

³¹Ibid., 8.

³²Eslinger, 273.

dispossessed of one's family land or, worst of all, to be driven out of the country into exile was unmitigated calamity."³³ . He also shows that the land belongs first of all to Yahweh and that " the most explicit assertion of divine ownership in the Old Testament is made for the sake of protecting the *family* and its *land* . . ." (emphasis his). His conclusion is that when economic changes and human greed later combined to attack and destroy large numbers of such small family landholdings, certain prophets were moved to denounce this, not merely on the grounds of social justice but because it represented an attack upon one of the basic socioeconomic pillars on which Israel's relationship with Yahweh rested: the family and its land. Therefore, the taking of a people's best land and its produce by the king was a very serious matter with grave consequences. Families would become very poor and live on the mercy of the king alone. This was one of the most serious failures of the monarchy in Israel. Leviticus 25:23, which states clearly Yahweh's ownership of the land, can be interpreted to have been given to ensure the survival of individual families by preventing permanent alienation from their land. Thus, Wright argues that the theological force of the belief in divine ownership of the land is brought to bear at the economic level and focused on the family.³⁴ Wright also quotes Bess who says that,

The proper concept of this divine ownership appears to be that every Israelite proprietor was to regard his holding as deriving from God himself as though it had been apportioned to him from God There existed the consciousness of an intrinsic equality among the Hebrews before God . . . which was expressed, among other ways, by each head of a family holding his land as from God.³⁵

³³Christopher J.H. Wright, God's People in God's Land: Family, Land, and Property in the Old Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1990), 4.

³⁴Ibid., 63.

³⁵Ibid.

In the light of this discussion on the land, one discovers that the land was vital for the Israelite family as it is for most families in African society, and to rob a family of its land was a serious offense against Yahweh himself. Unfortunately, according to Samuel, this was what the human king would do to Israel.

He Will Take One-Tenth of Your Grain and of Your Vineyards (v.15)

The taking of one-tenth here is taxation and should not, therefore, be confused with tithing. Deuteronomy 14:27 clearly shows that tithes were instituted to help the priests, the Levites and other poor people in Israel (widows, orphans and alien), but taxes benefited entirely the king and his officials. This means that apart from the 10% for the tithe, people living now in a poor country (since the best land has been already taken) will have to pay an extra 10% to the king.

He Will Take Your Slaves, Cattle and Donkey (vv.16-17a)

This last passage concerning the taking of the slaves, cattle and donkey by the king is very meaningful. After taking the best of their fields and vineyards and giving them to his officers and his courtiers (v.15), the king will proceed to take slaves (male and female) who work to produce those grains and vineyards.

Results of the Dispossession of the People by the King

And you shall be his slaves (17b). And in that day you will cry out because of your king, whom you have chosen for yourselves; but the Lord will not answer you in that day.

The first consequence of human kingship is that the people will become slaves of the king. The Israelites knew from experience what it meant to become slaves of a king, as they were themselves slaves of Pharaoh in Egypt. Thus, we read several times in Deuteronomy, "Remember that you were a slave in Egypt" (Deut. 5:15; 15:15; 16:12; 24:18). Eslinger rightly points out that "the election of a king will return Israel to the slave status from which Yahweh originally freed them"³⁶

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

The third result is that the Lord will not answer the people in that day (when they will start crying). Cry-answer is "a central construct and practice in Israel's faith (cf. Ex. 2: 23-25)."³⁷ The context shows how in 1 Samuel 7:8 the Israelites requested Samuel to cry to the Lord on their behalf because of the imminent attack by the Philistines. In Exodus 3:7, Yahweh tells Moses that he has heard the cry of his people in Egypt and, therefore, he decided to act. Isaiah 65:24 also shows that, because of his covenant, God will answer his people even before they call (cry). But by substituting God by a

³⁶Eslinger, 276. See also Brueggemann (First and Second Samuel, 65) who noted that Israel, especially the old Israel of Samuel, still had vivid memories of the Exodus and the deliverance from slavery. He adds that the people's request of a human king is a return to the pre-Exodus situation of bondage, and that it does not matter greatly if the one who enslaves is a pharaoh from Egypt or an Israelite king. He concludes by saying that Monarchy, in principle, generates destructive inequality and stratification, and thus enslavement is presented as intrinsic to the institution of monarchy.

³⁷Brueggemann, First and Second Samuel, 64.

human king, Israel was forfeiting the possibility of God answering their cry. Or, as Brueggemann says, Samuel warns that "in choosing the monarchy, Israel chooses a desperate autonomy that finally can lead only to futility, abandonment, and eventually death."³⁸

Conclusion

Yahweh knew that one day the people of Israel would request a human king; then in his eternal wisdom, he foresaw the need of setting a guideline. In this way, the idea behind the limitations in Deuteronomy 17:14-20 can be seen as a guide to the king to use properly his power and to maintain justice with the Lord and with His people Israel. In this way also, the kingdom of Israel would remain different from the other kingdoms around. In return, Yahweh promised the continuation of the kingdom as the result of the obedience to the covenant. 1 Samuel 8 is a warning to the Israelites that the king they wanted would not be able to keep the covenant and that it would be dangerous for the people to long for a human king. But the text can also be seen as another guideline which could help the kings of Israel to realize the temptations and dangers they were going to face in the exercise of their power. How did the kings of Israel understand their power and authority in the light of the two texts? Did they follow instructions (in terms of limitations and warnings) set in the two texts? The following chapter will attempt to answer these questions.

³⁸Ibid., 65.

CHAPTER 3

THE CONCEPT OF POWER OR AUTHORITY (JER.22:1-9, 13-23)

Brief Historical Background of Jeremiah and His Book

Historical Background

The consensus of scholars dates the birth of Jeremiah at about 646 B.C., and his call to the ministry in 627/6 B.C.¹ According to Jeremiah 1:2 and 25:3, the prophet started his ministry in the thirteenth year of king Josiah's reign. Josiah was a godly king in contrast to his predecessors Manasseh and Amon. He reigned from about 639/640 to 609 B.C. At that time, the kingdom of Judah had been a vassal state of the Assyrian empire for many years. But when Josiah came to power, the situation in the Ancient Near Eastern world was rapidly changing. Merrill summarizes the changes in these words:

... during his reign (640-609) the whole balance of power in the Near Eastern world shifted radically from what it had been for almost three hundred years. Assyria was in its death throes, and Egypt, though more stable than it had been for centuries, was still a mere shadow of its former self. On the other hand, the Medes and their cousins the Persians were beginning to move out from their

¹Robert P. Carroll, Jeremiah (London: SCM Press, 1986, 92), John Bright, Jeremiah: Introduction, Translation, and Notes (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company, 1965), xxix and Charles L. Feinburg, Jeremiah: A Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1982), 26. These are among those who support the view that 627/6 B.C. is the year of Jeremiah's call, whereas William Holladay (Jeremiah 1: A Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Jeremiah Chapters 1-25, Hermeneia-- A Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible [Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986], 1) is of a different point of view. For him, the thirteenth year of Josiah is the date of the prophet's birth, not the date of the beginning of his career. But Holladay recognizes that the majority of scholars do not agree with his view.

isolation in the highlands of Iran and were giving strong signals that they in time would be a factor to be reckoned with. Most dramatic of all, however, was the meteoric rise of the Neo-Babylonian Empire on the foundation of the Chaldean kingdoms. Surely it was manifest to all the world that Babylon was now the seat of awesome power and that she would dictate the course of human events for a long time to come.²

Early in his reign, the young good king started instituting reforms in Judah. Those reforms were accelerated with the discovery of the book of the Law in the eighth year of his reign, and they reached the climax with the covenant that the people, led by their king, made with Yahweh their God (2 Kings 22:3-23:23; 2 Chron. 34:8-35:19). The young prophet certainly had a very good relationship with the pious king. Unfortunately for the prophet, he was not to enjoy the good relationship for a long time because of changes that intervened after Josiah's premature death.

Very little is known from the Scriptures about Josiah's relationship with Assyria, but Biblical records inform us about the circumstances that led to his death.

Merrill again summarizes them this way:

. . . in 609 Neco II of Egypt, in response to an urgent appeal from Assur-uballit of Assyria, marched north through Palestine on his way to Haran to deliver his friend from an approaching Babylonian military force. Josiah, loyal to the Babylonians, learned of Neco's plans and so took measures to intercept the Egyptian troops in the hope of defeating them or at least impeding their progress to Haran (2 Kings 23:29) Courageously Josiah engaged Neco at Megiddo The result was a devastating defeat for Judah and the untimely death of Josiah at thirty-nine years of age.³

With the death of Josiah the good relationship between the Israelite monarchy and God was also gone for ever. The people of the land appointed Jehoahaz, Josiah's son, an

²Eugene H. Merrill, Kingdom of Priests: A History of Old Testament Israel (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1987), 441-42.

³Ibid., 446.

evil king whose reign of only three months was terminated by Neco II of Egypt (2 Kings 23:31-33) who exiled him to Egypt where he lived out the remainder of his life.⁴ Jehoahaz was replaced by his elder brother, Jehoiakim, another evil king, who found himself with the terrible burden of raising the tribute Egypt demanded. In 605, Nebuchadnezzar, the commander of the Babylonian armies, expelled the Egyptians from Palestine, and brought Jehoiakim under Babylonian protection. But this protection was nothing more than continued slavery.⁵ Schultz notices that Jehoiakim was not in sympathy with the reforms promoted by his father Josiah. His attitude and antagonism toward the prophets is significantly reflected in the book of Jeremiah.⁶ Undoubtedly, Judah reverted to idolatry during his reign. Jehoiakim died in 598 B.C. and was replaced by his son Jehoiachin who ruled only three months. He and his queen mother were taken prisoners to Babylon. Officials, executives, artisans, and leading citizens of Jerusalem were also taken with them.⁷

Zedekiah, Jehoiachin's uncle and Josiah's son, became the last king of Judah. He was evil like his brothers and refused to listen to God. Merrill summarizes his reign with the following words:

Zedekiah was, however, king *de facto* of whatever was left of Judah in 597. Evil like his brothers, he paid no attention to the admonishings of Jeremiah the prophet to accept Babylonian suzerainty as the will of God. Rather, he rebelled against Nebuchadnezzar, thus inviting sure and swift disaster. The date of this rebellion cannot be determined (see Ezek. 17:11-18), but by 588 Nebuchadnezzar advanced upon Jerusalem and commenced a siege which resulted in the fall of the city and the end of the Judean monarchy in July of 586 (2 Kings 25:1-7).⁸

⁴Ibid., 447.

⁵Ibid.

⁶Samuel J. Schultz "Jehoiakim," In International Standard Bible Encyclopedia, 2nd ed.

⁷Ibid., 975.

⁸ Merrill, Kingdom of Priests, 452-3.

Nebuchadnezzar appointed Gedaliah to be the civil administrator of Judah that now existed as a simple province with its headquarters at Mizpah (2 Kings 25:22-23; Jer. 40:5). According to 2 Kings 25:24, Gedaliah counseled submission on the part of the people remaining in the land in order to avoid further tragedy. But some of the Judean officers, who had made good their escape from the Babylonians, rejected Gedaliah's leadership, killed him along with the residents of Mizpah and the Babylonian garrison stationed there, and fled to Ammon (2 Kings 25:23-25; Jer. 40:7--41:15).⁹ It was then that "many of the remaining residents in the land soon fled for refuge to Egypt, apparently in order to escape the expected Babylonian retribution, taking Jeremiah and Baruch with them" (2 Kings 25:26; Jer. 42:1--43:7).¹⁰

It is important to mention at this point, as I have already mentioned in the first chapter, that the ministry of Jeremiah spanned the reigns of the five last kings of Judah until the first years of the captivity.

The Book of Jeremiah: Its Structure and Composition

The Structure

Craigie, Kelly and Drinkard open their section on the form and structure of the book of Jeremiah with the following words:

The modern reader of the book of Jeremiah is faced at the outset with a difficult task. What has survived is not a *book*, in the normal sense of the word; it does not move from beginning to end, following a clear logic and inner development. Indeed, the major portion of the substance of this "book" was never designed for the literary context in which it has survived; the stuff of which Jeremiah's book is constructed started life in various contexts, ranging from public proclamation to

⁹Peter C. Craigie, Page H. Kelly, and Joel F. Drinkard, *Jeremiah 1-25*, Word Biblical Commentary, 26, eds. David A. Hubbard and Glenn W. Barker (Dallas: Word Books Publishers, 1991), xlvii.

¹⁰Ibid.

private diary. What we are dealing with, then, in reading the book of Jeremiah, is a work that is essentially an anthology, or more precisely an anthology of theologies. And the collection of anthologies brings together a number of sayings and things that were associated with the prophet, binding them together in a single volume Furthermore, the logic by which this collection of anthologies was compiled can be only partially reconstructed, so that the reader cannot always determine the reason for the sequence and arrangement of the materials that comprise the whole.¹¹

To make their point clear, they give three concrete examples showing how it is difficult to read the book of Jeremiah: First, 25:1-14 contains a narrative suggesting that it is a conclusion to the oracles, yet clearly the extant book continues for many more chapters. Second, 30:1-2 suggests in form, an introduction to another book. Third, 46:1 appears to be an introduction to another anthology, namely a collection of oracles addressed to foreign nations.¹²

But Holladay argues that the data for a reconstruction of the chronology of Jeremiah's career, and for the establishment of fairly secure settings for his words and actions, are attainable.¹³ Thus, for Holladay, all the materials contained in Jeremiah can find place in the twelve following sections:¹⁴ Birth (627)¹⁵ and Josiah's reform

¹¹Ibid., xxxi-xxxii.

¹²Ibid., xxxii-xxxiii. In their attempt to explain why such problems occur in the book of Jeremiah, Craigie and company give three reasons: the book assumed its present form either very late in the prophet's lifetime, or more probably after his death; the process of compiling the book involved many stages of editorial collection and arrangement; insufficient data have survived from which to reconstruct accurately the process of the composition and compilation of the book.

¹³Holladay, Jeremiah 1, 1-10.

¹⁴For the sake of the space, I will give only few passages for each of the twelve sections.

¹⁵I have already discussed the issue of the beginning of Jeremiah's ministry (see footnote #1 in this chapter) and I said that Holladay is among those scholars who argue that 627 B.C. is the date of Jeremiah's birth and not of his call.

(622);¹⁶ the septennial reading of Deuteronomy; a propagandist for Josiah (615-609);¹⁷ from the Temple Sermon (609) to the battle of Carchemish (605);¹⁸ the drought begins; the king burns the scroll (601);¹⁹ the word of irrevocable punishment and Jeremiah's announcement of celibacy (601-600);²⁰ the first confession (601-600);²¹ the first siege of Jerusalem (598-597);²² the Jerusalem conference and its consequences (594);²³ the second siege of Jerusalem (588-587);²⁴ the New Covenant (587);²⁵ the flight to Egypt.²⁶

It would be wise to conclude this section by arguing after Bright (and many scholars agree with him) that though the book does contain some grand divisions which bear the earmarks of having at one time had separate existence one from another,²⁷ it remains difficult to arrange the materials chronologically.²⁸

¹⁶Jer. 1:2, 5; 15:16.

¹⁷Jer. 1:4-10; 2-3.

¹⁸Jer. 7:1-12; 22:10-12.

¹⁹Jer. 36; 5:20-29.

²⁰Jer. 36:29-31; 19:1-15; 20:1-6.

²¹Jer. 11:18--12:6.

²²Jer. 22:24-30; 10:17-22.

²³Jer. 27; 29:1-23; 28:1-16.

²⁴Jer. 37-44; 21:1-10; 37:1-21; 38:14-28.

²⁵Jer. 41:1-5; 31:31-34.

²⁶Jer. 42-43.

²⁷Bright, Jeremiah, lvii.

²⁸Another scholar, Elmer A. Martens (Jeremiah [Pennsylvania: Herald Press, 1986, 19]) argues that the book of Jeremiah is not only the longest prophetic book

The Composition

There are two major problems in the composition of the book of Jeremiah: the mixture of literary genres and the nature and extent of the differences between the Septuagint (LXX) and the Masoretic Texts (MT).

Concerning the literary genres, it is now established that there are three types of materials found in the book of Jeremiah. These materials are conventionally designated as type A, B, and C. The A materials consist primarily of the prophetic oracles and confessions of Jeremiah. They are characterized by the fact that in them the prophet, employing the first person singular of direct address, speaks as the mouthpiece of Yahweh.²⁹ The B materials contain biography. These materials typically provides us with a narrative account, often with a wealth of circumstantial detail, in which Jeremiah is referred to in the third person.³⁰ The C materials contain the prose sermons in Deuteronomic style,³¹ they are found scattered throughout the book.³² Concerning the relationship of the LXX to the MT text of Jeremiah, Sven

(1,364 verses) but the most difficult to sort out. He also adds that the principle of organization is neither fully chronological nor topical: its organization continues to be a challenge to all, especially to scholars who keep proposing organizational schemes and theories on how the book came about."

²⁹Bright, *Jeremiah*, lxiv. An example given by Bright is Jeremiah 2:2b-3. It is important to note that Bright classifies "confessions" in Jeremiah as a subhead under A materials. Some of the examples of confessions are: 11:18-12:6; 15:10, 15-21; 17:14-18. The A materials are mostly found in 1-25; 30-31.

³⁰Ibid., lxvii. Some of the examples of biography can be found in Jeremiah 21-23.

³¹John Bright, "The Date of Prose Sermons of Jeremiah," *A Prophet to the Nations: Essays in Jeremiah Studies*, ed. Leo G. Perdue and Brian W. Kovacs (Winona Lake, Indiana: Eisenbrauns, 1984), 193.

³²Some of the examples are 7:2, 16, 27; 11:1-17; 16:1-13; 18:1-12; 19:1-13. According to Bright (*Jeremiah*, lxviii), these materials are generally presented in an autobiographical framework, in which God addresses Jeremiah and tells him what he is to say or to do. In the scope of this work, it will not be possible to discuss the problem of

Soderland³³ writes that the LXX is considerably shorter than the corresponding MT text. He also adds that, "according to recent statistical studies by Y.-J. Min, 3097 words of Jer-MT are unrepresented in Jer-LXX, i.e. approximately 1/7 of the MT text." Another problem is that of the transpositions of various passages. For example, 46-51 come in the penultimate position of the book, while in the LXX it appears in the middle (25:14-31:44) along with an alternate internal order.³⁴ Finally, there are problems of variants where the LXX represents a different reading or interpretation in comparison with the MT.³⁵

Exegesis

The main text chosen for this exegesis (Jer. 22:1-9, 13-23) is but a small section of Jeremiah 21:11--23:8, which contains different sayings. According to Bright, those sayings are almost equally divided between poetry and prose, they were uttered over a considerable span of time, and they have been drawn together because

the relationship between poetry and prose in Jeremiah, since it is a much debated issue and scholars have not reached a consensus. For the debate on the issue, see various essays in Perdue and Kovacs, 175-267; Brevard S. Childs, Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture ([Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1979], 339-54), and Leo G. Perdue, The Collapse of History: Reconstructing Old Testament Theology ([Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1994], 175-182).

³³Sven Soderland, The Greek Text of Jeremiah: A Revised Hypothesis (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1985), 11. He writes that in the history of the investigation of the shorter/longer texts of Jeremiah, four theories, broadly speaking, have been proposed to account for the differences between them: "abbreviation," "editorial," "expansion," and "mediating" theories.

³⁴Ibid.

³⁵Ibid.

of their relationship to the theme stated in the heading (21:11): "the Royal House of Judah."³⁶ Concerning the same passage, Bright adds that,

this section is of considerable interest not only because it allows us to see something of Jeremiah's attitude toward the various kings who ruled during his adult lifetime, every one of whom is addressed or alluded to in the course of it, but also because it affords us our clearest insight into his view of the institution of monarchy and its place in the divine economy.³⁷

This thesis will focus on two groups of passages: Jeremiah 22 verses 1-9 and 13-23. The first passage will be entitled "statement of principle" and the second passage, "the use of power" (this is the evaluation of how two - Josiah and Jehoiakim - of the five kings mentioned in Jeremiah 22:13-23 understood their power or authority). There are at least two reasons for limiting this study to only two kings instead of dealing with all of them. First, our concern in this thesis is to evaluate the use of power, that is, to see how kings mentioned in the passages understood their power or authority. To do this, we need to analyze passages in which the use (or abuse) of power is referred to. But apart from verses 3-23, the other passages in Jeremiah 22 (vv. 10-12, 24-27) contain only condemnation of kings without showing the reason for the condemnation. Holladay was right in his observation about king Jehoiachin in verses 24-27, when he pointed out that,

this passage, like v. 10 and vv. 11-12, is a judgment-speech without a reason Here there is no accusation against Jehoiachin, any more than there was against Jehoahaz in vv. 10-12; he is simply a king who suffers in the general fate of the covenant people.³⁸

³⁶Bright, Jeremiah, 144.

³⁷Ibid.

³⁸Holladay. Jeremiah 1, 604.

Second, the two kings referred to in Jeremiah 22:13-23 are contrasted side by side, and in this way the passage contains a nice example and counter example of the exercise of royal power in Israel. Moreover, there are other passages in the historical books (Chronicles and Kings) that give helpful details for this exegesis, especially concerning Josiah.

Statement of Principle: Jeremiah 22:1-9

In this section, the prophet sets the standards by which Israelite kings should rule. In terms of our thesis, the passage will be considered as a reminder of the standards already set in the book of Deuteronomy and in Samuel's warning in 1 Samuel 8. As a reminder, the exegetical emphasis of Jeremiah 22:1-9 will therefore focus on the content of the warning or the nature of the reminder of the covenant to the king.³⁹

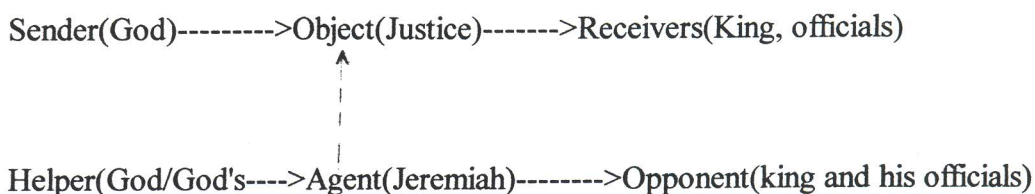
For the sake of clarity, Jeremiah 22:1-9 will be divided into four parts: 22:1-3 (exhortation to the king to do justice); 22:4-5 (result of obedience and disobedience); 22:6-7 (God announcing that he will send destroyers); and 22:8-9 (the reason for the destruction of the cities).

³⁹God made a covenant with the people of Israel at Sinai/Horeb (Exod. 19-24); the covenant was mediated by Moses. John Arthur Thompson ("Covenant [OT]," International Standard Bible Encyclopedia [Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1982], 1:792). He writes that following the recital of divine acts and the call to obey, God constituted Israel a "peculiar treasure," a "kingdom of priests," and a "holy nation," and gave them the stipulations that would guarantee the continuance of fellowship between them and their God. I agree with those who argue that the role of the prophets was to call the Israelites in general and their rulers in particular back to the obedience of that covenant, i.e., to the law (also known as the law of Moses). Gerhard von Rad (Old Testament Theology, Vol. 2 [New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1965], 395) writes that "the first task upon which we see the prophets engaged is that of using every rhetorical device and argument at their disposal to show their contemporaries how completely illusory their trust in God's salvation was. They did this by preaching the message of God's wrath and by placing their audience under his law."

Exhortation to the Kings to Do Justice (22:1-3)

1 Thus says the Lord: "Go down to the house of the king of Judah, and there speak this word, 2 and say: Hear the word of the Lord, O King of Judah, who sits on the throne of David, you, and your servants, and your people who enter through these gates. 3 Thus says the Lord: Do justice and righteousness, and deliver from the hand of the oppressor him who has been robbed. And do no wrong or oppression to the alien, the fatherless, and the widow, nor shed innocent blood in this place."

There are four important elements in the passage: the Lord who gives the commission to the prophet (he is both the sender, the initiator of the action and the helper of the prophet); the prophet is the agent who performs or carries out the commission; the ruling king of Judah (also his officials and his people) who is the receiver of the message. He may also become the opponent of the message (and therefore of the messenger and the sender himself). And the object of the commission is "(the recommendation to the kings) to do justice." These four elements can be represented on the following diagram.



The diagram shows that the message to the king is coming from God and that the object or the content of the message is justice. What is important for this thesis is that the king and his officials can play two roles: they are recipients of the divine message but they can also become opponents of the same message. This means that

whenever they receive the message, they can either accept it and comply with it or they can reject it and, therefore, oppose God's will. The helper or the enabler of the agent is apparently missing in the text but if we consider the whole book of Jeremiah, especially chapter one, it will become clear that God himself is the one who is the enabler of the prophet Jeremiah. This is particularly clear in Jeremiah 1:8-10, where it is written:

*8 Do not be afraid of them, for I am with you to deliver you, says the Lord.
9 Then the Lord put out his hand and touched my mouth; and the Lord said to me, "now I have put my words in your mouth.
10 See, today I appoint you over nations and over kingdoms, to pluck up and to pull down, to destroy and to overthrow, to build and to plant."*

The prophet is commanded to "go down" (יָרַד), probably from Mount Zion, where the temple of the Lord was as Jeremiah 26:10 and 36:12 seem to indicate.⁴⁰ He is to go to the house or the palace of the king of Judah and deliver there an oracle from Yahweh.⁴¹ Though it appears that the message of the prophet was addressed to the king, his servants, and the whole people of Judah, it must be noticed that the focus is first of all on the king. Three elements in the passage confirm the fact: First, the verb "hear" (שָׁמַע) imperative, masculine, singular) shows that the prophet is concentrating on the king alone. Second, there are two personal pronouns; one independent (אֲנִי) "you", which repeats the subject "king of Judah who sits on the throne of David."

⁴⁰See also Carroll (*Jeremiah*, 417) who writes that "the prophet was sent from *his regular place in the temple* . . ." (my emphasis). Craigie, Kelley and Drinkard (*Jeremiah* 1-25, 355) state that the command "Go down" implies that "Jeremiah was in the temple when he received the oracle and directions"

⁴¹This is a good example of the use of prose in the book of Jeremiah: The prophet is presented as being in conversation with God who sends him for a specific task (here, to the royal house of Judah). In terms of the categorization of different materials in Jeremiah, verses 1-5 should belong to source C.

There is an emphasis on the pronoun "you" which can better be translated by "you, yourself." The third element is the suffixed possessive pronoun "your" (ךָ) attached to the words "servants" and "people". This attached pronoun has the function of genitive of relation, and indicates that "the people and the servants,"⁴² to whom the message is also sent, are under the power and leadership of the king who "sets the drumbeat for the whole kingdom."⁴³ In other words, they are the helpers of the receiver of the message - that is the king himself.

The content of the message to the king is summarized in verse three:

עֲשֵׂה מִשְׁפָּט וְיָדָקָה. "Do justice and righteousness."⁴⁴ In other words, the Lord requests that the king makes justice his primary responsibility. But what does it mean to do justice and righteousness? According to Jeremiah, it means the following three things: (i) to deliver from the hand of the oppressor him who has been robbed; (ii) not to wrong and mistreat the alien, the fatherless, and the widow; (iii) not to shed

⁴²Bright (Jeremiah, 141) rightly notices that "the servants" in this passage, as regularly in this context, denotes the king's officials, courtiers, retainers. William L. Holladay (Jeremiah 1, 582) rightly argues that the gates referred to in the verse is the palace's gates, and for John Arthur Thompson (The Book of Jeremiah. The New International Commentary on the Old Testament, [Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1980], 474), the coming in and going out of those officials is no doubt for affairs of state and for administration of justice. But Craigie, Kelley, and Drinkard, (Jeremiah 1-25., 298) do not seem to agree with the above three scholars, they think that the word gate might also mean temple and in that sense, it is difficult to think of the gate as that of the palace.

⁴³Holladay, Jeremiah 1, 298.

⁴⁴The address here is in the plural probably to include all those who have power/authority to administer justice. This is in line with both Bright (1965, 141) who argues that the word "servants" in verse two refers to the king's officials, courtiers and retainers, and Thompson (198., 474) who thinks that "the coming and the going out of those officials is no doubt for affairs of state and for administration of justice.

"delivering from the hand of the oppressor him who has been robbed" and "not mistreating the powerless". According to Verhey,⁴⁵ in the Old Testament the oppressor designates somebody enriching himself by violating a neighbor's property rights. The victims or those being robbed of their rights were the poor, the powerless, the orphan, the widow, the slave, the sojourner, and the helpless. These victims constituted a special group in the Old Testament in that they were helpless and vulnerable in the society and subject to exploitation.

It was, therefore, the responsibility of the king to watch over the nation and make sure that nothing wrong was happening in the land, that the law was not distorted, and that every member of the community, especially the powerful, were not violating the law. For the king, this meant that he had to act like God himself, that is, he had to take side with the oppressed. In other words, for the Israelite king, doing justice was to liberate the poor and the oppressed. Commenting on this passage, Craigie, Kelly and Drinkard write:

The message is clearly that of covenant responsibility in the judicial area and emphasizes the administration of true justice on those whose rights were so easily disregarded, the poor one who has been robbed, the orphan, the widow, the sojourner. These were the very ones who had no one to plead their case for them, and probably no resources to get such assistance. Further, these would be the very ones who knew little about how to get justice.⁴⁶

Another important task for the king was to prevent the shedding of innocent blood. The innocent blood in the passage refers probably to those who have been wrongly

⁴⁵Verhey D. Allen "Oppress," in International Standard Bible Encyclopedia, 2nd ed.

⁴⁶Craigie, Kelly, and Drinkard, Jeremiah 1-25, 298.

entenced to death by the royal-judicial system (like the case of Naboth in 1 Kings 21).⁴⁷

The Choice of the King and Its Consequences (22:4-5)

4 For if you will indeed obey this word, kings will enter by the gates of this house sitting on the throne of David, riding in chariots and on horses, they, and their servants, and their people. 5 But if you will not heed these words, I swear by myself, says the Lord, that this house shall become a desolation.

These two verses contain promises of both blessing (v. 4) and judgment (v. 5), they are both conditional clauses, starting with אִם ("if") in the protasis. The use of "if" in the two verses shows the possibility of non-fulfillment of the obligation being given by the prophet.⁴⁸ And in both sentences, the apodosis shows what will be the result for the king and the whole nation if the condition is met, but also the kind of judgement that will follow if he fails to do justice.

The result of obedience is the continued blessing upon the dynasty: "kings who sit on the throne of David will enter the gates of this house" I have already mentioned that the house (בְּיַמֵּי דָוִד) here probably means palace. If this is right, the passage is a clear promise of the continuation of the dynasty on the condition that

⁴⁷Ibib., 298. But innocent blood can also refer to cultic practice in the valley of Ben-Hinnom associated with false worship at Topheth (See Criagie, Kelly, and Drinkard, 298); such a sacrifice Yahweh does not desire, preferring right living (Amos 5:21-24; Hos.6:6; Isa. 1:12-17).

⁴⁸For the use of the formula "if he shall not do/hear)" and the problem of sanctions in Biblical law, see Gershon Brin, Studies in Biblical Law from the Hebrew Bible to the Dead Sea Scrolls (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1994), 52-73. Interesting for this thesis is the summary to Brin's second chapter where he states that "the phrase 'if not' is interpreted in these laws as a warning of the sanction by which the lawgiver threatens those who do not properly fulfil their obligations." What Brin says for Biblical laws in general is also true for the king's obligations found in the book of Jeremiah.

*Yet surely, I will make you a desert, uninhabited cities,
7 and I will consecrate destroyers against you, each with his weapon;
and they will cut down your choicest cedars,
and they will throw them upon the fire.*

This passage is logically to be connected with the second part of our conditional sentences in verses 4 and 5, particularly verse 5 which starts with לֹא תִּשְׁכַּח (and if you do not . . .). But in verses 6 and 7 the language is figurative. The house of the king of Judah is compared with Gilead and the top of Lebanon. Robertson tells us that "Gilead has been known across the centuries for its beautiful pasturelands, its legendary balm, and the security it provided for any number of people fleeing from their adversaries."⁵² Craigie, Kelley, and Drinkard also note that both Gilead and Lebanon were noted in Antiquity for their forest,⁵³ and Blackwood adds that timbers from Lebanon were used in the palace and temple (21:14; 1 Kings 5:6, 8-10; 10:27).⁵⁴ In the passage before us, Gilead and Lebanon are used for the royal house of Judah, and describe the beauty and the glory of the palace. But despite that beauty and glory, the Lord states that the palace will be made a desert, and that he will destroy it himself. Carroll notices the striking contrast between the desert and the fertile land of trees and forest that Lebanon and Gilead depict in the passage.⁵⁵ That contrast is introduced by

⁵² Palmer O. Robertson, Understanding the Land of the Bible: A Biblical Theological Guide (Phillipsburg, New Jersey: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., 1996), 86.

⁵³ Craigie, Kelly, and Drinkard, Jeremiah 1-25, 300

⁵⁴ Andrew W. Blackwood Jr., Commentary on Jeremiah (Waco, Texas: Word Books Publisher, 1977), 167.

⁵⁵ Carroll, Jeremiah, 419.

the hypothetical particle (אָל כִּי) in verse 6, which can better be translated "yet surely" in order to show the contrast that is being underlined in the passage.⁵⁶

Verse 7 gives some more details on the act of the destruction of the monarchy: the Lord will be the principal actor of that destruction, we read that in the sentence beginning with וְקִדְשֵׁנִי (I will commission or set apart or consecrate [destroyers against you]). This is an important clue for this thesis: enemies of Israel are simply instruments in the hand of God himself. The task of the destroyers is also specified: "they will cut down your choicest cedars and cast them into fire."

I have already argued that the forest of Lebanon and Gilead mentioned in verse 6 are figurative and represent the house of the king of Judah. This, therefore, makes clear that the expression "to cut down cedars" is probably used figuratively to designate the destruction of the palace. First Kings 7:1-5 calls Solomon's palace "the House of the Forest of the Lebanon," to mean that the palace was built by cedars from Lebanon. This passage may also be referring to the building which is being referred to by the prophet Jeremiah. The use of the superlative אֲשֶׁר־אֵין־בָּהֶן־אֲחֵרִים "the choicest" with cedars confirms that the palace is in focus in this passage since the choicest cedars would be used for special buildings, such as temples and palaces.

Appointed destroyers will not only cut down the cedars, but they will also "cast them into fire." Craigie, Kelly, and Drinkard argue that the burning here refers to the judgment on Judah which will consist of a total devastation.⁵⁷ Likewise, Carroll writes

⁵⁶John Joseph Owens, Analytical Key to the Old Testament: Isaiah- Malachi (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1989), 4: 295.

⁵⁷ Craigie, Kelly and Drinkard, Jeremiah 1-25, 301.

that the cutting and the burning of cedars will reduce not only the palace but also all territories to wastelands.

The Reason for the Destruction of the City (22:8-9)

8 And many nations will pass by this city, and every man will say to his neighbor; " why has the Lord done thus to this great city? 9 And they will answer: "because they forsook the covenant of the Lord their God, and they worshiped other gods and served them."

These two verses answer the question, "why has God decided to destroy the city?" It is important to notice that the focus is now on the city rather than on the palace, as was the case in the previous seven verses. This focus on the city may mean two things: either the palace was used in previous passages to represent the whole city and even the whole nation, or after having foretold the destruction of the palace, the prophet is now focusing on the destruction of the entire city. In both cases, it is important to tie this passage on the city with verse 6 where it is stated that the city will be invaded and destroyed by fire.

Those who are asking questions about the devastated city are not the people of Judah (or Jews themselves) but גוֹיִם רַבִּים (many nations). Does this mean that those pagan nations recognized the hand of the Lord in dealing with the holy city? The question in verse 8 seems to confirm this fact. Craigie, Kelly, and Drinkard find it ironic that it is the pagan nations who have the answer to the question, for we hear them saying: "the people of Judah have forsaken the covenant of the Lord their God."⁵⁸ One would have expected such an answer from the people of God themselves to whom the covenant was given and who knew the consequence of not keeping it.

⁵⁸Ibid, 303. They also think that the passers-by asking the question are the very soldiers who are causing the destruction. They argue that the terminology "cross over

But how did the people of Judah forsake the covenant? It is by choosing to worship and serve other gods about whom Yahweh has said: ". . . you shall have no other gods before me, or you shall not bow down to them (other gods) or worship them . . ." (Exod. 20:1-5). The connection between idolatry and social injustice in these passages takes us back to the second chapter. Concerning the limitations imposed upon the Israelite king (Deut. 17:14-20), I argued that the Israelite monarch was to be chosen by God and that he had to remain strictly under Yahweh's control. His task was to promote justice with God (no idolatry) and justice in the society. I also said that the book of the law was to become his *vade mecum*. By reading it and learning it, the king would be reminded of his responsibility toward God and toward

against" (עבר), is normally used in a military sense of crossing over to or against an enemy (1 Sam. 14:1, 4, 6, 8), and that the addition of the preposition על reinforces the idea of an invasion (cf. 1 Sam. 14: 4). However, I wonder if this argument is not pushed too far; it seems to me that those passing by might designate any people who knew what Yahweh has been doing for Israel which is now destroyed. Another interesting position different from both mine and Craigie's is that of Rudolph quoted by Holladay (Jeremiah 1, 586) who insists that גוים רבים should be translated by "many people" instead of "many nations." This would mean that the people who are asking the question about the destruction of the city are Israelites themselves not foreigners. However, Botterweck "גוי," TDOT, 2:427, writes that Hebrew evidences a tendency for *goy* to describe people in terms of its political and territorial affiliation, and so to approximate much more closely to our modern term "nation." I, therefore, think that the best translation of the word *goyim* is nation, and those asking the question and responding to it are other nations different from Judah. My argument agrees with 1 Kings 9:6-9 that reads as follows: "If you turn aside from following me, you or your children, and do not keep my commandments and my statutes that I have set before you, but go and serve other gods and worship them, then I will cut Israel off from the land that I have given them; and the house that I have consecrated for my name I will cast out of my sight; and Israel will become a proverb and a taunt among all peoples. This house will become a heap of ruins; everyone passing by it will be astonished, and will hiss; and they will say, 'why has the Lord done such a thing to this land and to this house?' Then they will say, 'because they have forsaken the Lord their God, who brought their ancestors out of the land of Egypt, and embraced other gods, worshipping them and serving them; therefore the Lord has brought this disaster upon them'" (NRSV).

the people. He would be able to understand the full dimensions of Israel's faith. The first result would be that the king would not consider himself better than his brothers and that he would not turn from the law. The second result would be that the king and his descendants would reign a long time over the kingdom of Israel. In other words, success in leadership (which involved both victory over enemies and the continuation of the dynasty) depended directly on whether a king followed the law or not.

The connection between idolatry and human injustice also takes us back to Samuel's warning concerning human kingship in Israel. First, God told Samuel that the monarchy was the rejection of Yahweh himself as the king of Israel. This is idolatry or the covenantal sin of Israel. Second, Samuel also foresaw the social danger of the monarchy: the king will take everything from the people and the latter will become his slaves. These are messages being repeated in Jeremiah 22:1-9. Yahweh is the God who is just, he has steadfastly shown it to Israel in different ways (liberation from the house of slavery in Egypt, liberation from different enemies, the taking of the land, the division of the land, etc, are known as acts of justice of Yahweh). In return, it was the mission of Israel to show the justice and the greatness of Yahweh by first maintaining justice with God himself and then with one another. But when justice with Yahweh became distorted, it was clear that the people started going after other gods and also started oppressing the powerless.

How did the two kings of Judah, namely Josiah and Jehoiakim, understand their kingship or power? How much did they follow the guideline given in Deuteronomy 17:14-20? How much were they aware of the warnings given by Samuel? In other words, what did it mean for them to have power or authority in Israel? These are questions we are going to deal with in the following section.

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

Translation of the Passage (22:15b-16)

*15b Your father,⁵⁹ did he not eat and drink
and do justice and righteousness, and it was well for him?
16 He pleaded the cause of the poor and the needy; then it was well.
Is not that to know me? says the Lord.*

This is a section of the message addressed to Jehoiakim by Jeremiah. The prophet takes king Josiah as the model of a good leader which his son should have followed; but Jehoiakim's leadership is in sharp contrast with his father's. In other words, the prophet is indicating that if Jehoiakim wants a predecessor to emulate, he can try his father.⁶⁰ The prophet briefly enumerates the elements that constitute the right leadership of Josiah: he ate and drank, he did justice and righteousness, and he pleaded the cause of the poor and the needy.

The exact implication of the first two verbs (to eat and drink) is difficult to understand and scholars vary on the interpretation of the passage. For Cornill, Bright, and Thompson it means that Josiah lived well and still managed to adhere to the covenant. According to Duhm and Condamin, the passage means that Josiah lived simply and was concerned rather to adhere to the covenant. Volz thinks that what the passage wants to underline here is that there is no opposition between eating, drinking and doing justice; in other words, Josiah accepted the responsibility of being the head of his people in both his daily habits and in the royal maintenance of the covenant.⁶¹

⁵⁹Thompson (*The Book of Jeremiah*, 477) prefers "think of your father" or "now what about your father" in order to make the contrast clearer.

⁶⁰Holladay, *Jeremiah 1*, 596.

⁶¹*Ibid.*, 596.

The passage can also mean that what was socially equitable and the will to maintain it came as easily to Josiah as the natural activities of eating and drinking.⁶² Finally, Feinberg⁶³ has the following comment on the passage: "he (Josiah) enjoyed the normal comforts of life but never made ostentation his goal. He knew how to enjoy life without extortion or oppression. He was no ascetic but did not make it his ambition to rival Solomon in building." What is clear in all these different interpretations is that there is a relationship between eating/drinking on the one side and doing justice on the other.⁶⁴ I understand the verbs to eat and drink as representing the comfort of the king. When the comfort is exaggerated, it brings suffering and poverty upon the people who produce (or are forced to produce) it for their king. In other words, the king's comfort does not come from a vacuum, it must have been taken from somewhere (ordinarily from the common people). In Jeremiah 22:15b, the prophet is contrasting the well balanced life of the "good king" and that of Jehoiakim who lived too sumptuously at the expense of the common people. In other words, Josiah had enough food and drink (not too much), but that did not affect the economic condition of the people of the land because he cared both for his palace (as a king) and for his subjects. This is probably

⁶² William F. B. A. McKane, Jeremiah, The International Critical Commentary (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1980), 530.

⁶³ Charles L Feinberg, Jeremiah: A Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1982), 157.

⁶⁴ Hollady, Jeremiah 1, 596. He rightly says that the two verbs "eat" and "drink" form a hendiadys and are therefore joined by a simple copula, not the consecutive *waw* (compare I Kings 19:6). He adds that if the text is here correct (see structure), the sequence of verbs continues with "do justice . . .," a verb likewise joined by a simple copula.

what eating, drinking and at the same time doing justice (יָדָן וְשָׁתָה וְיָכַר) and righteousness (צְדָקָה) mean.

The word צְדָקָה occurs 425 times in the Old Testament and 32 times in Jeremiah. According to Enns, the most frequent use of the word is in the prophetic literature, and the topic is often a breach of justice suffered by Israelites at the hands of their corrupt leaders.⁶⁶ King Josiah stands in sharp opposition with those corrupt leaders who think of themselves more than of their subjects. More than a simple contrast, the prophet might well have been thinking of Josiah as a good example of the covenant-king, who lived well and was mainly preoccupied with the right administration of the Law. In fact, Osborn thinks that the "proper administration of Law by man" may be the correct meaning of the word צְדָקָה.⁶⁷ If this is acceptable, it then becomes clear that in the context of Jeremiah 22:15b, the word צְדָקָה can have two meanings: for the one who suffers under the oppression, it means deliverance and restoration, but for the other who is the cause of the oppression, the צְדָקָה-action is judgment and the use of power to effect justice so that the misery of the oppressed (in all its manifestations) may be brought to an end. Mott writes that the action of deliverance of the oppressed must go beyond simple charity to the attack of the causes

⁶⁶Enns Peter " צְדָקָה " in New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis, 1st ed.

⁶⁷Booth Osborne, "The Semantic Development of the Term צְדָקָה " in Journal of Biblical Literature 61(1942): 106-107. In his detailed study of the concept, he distinguishes eleven different meanings of the word: manner or custom, rightful due, judicial decision, case for decision, commandment of man, commandment of God, that which should be, administration of the law by man, administration of the law by God, and litigation. His conclusion that the proper administration of law by man may be the correct meaning is drawn from the fact that this particular meaning occurs in forty-six passages, most of which are to be found in the prophets and the book of Proverbs.

of suffering.⁶⁸ He also adds that the first sphere in which one would expect such power for justice to be applied is that of government and law.⁶⁹ But in order to administer justice, the king or the governor (to use Mott's word) must himself be just, in other words, the king / governor must rightly use his power or authority.

The result of eating and drinking and, at the same time, doing justice and righteousness is that "it was well with the king" (טֹב). Holladay suggests that the word טֹב must be construed as a perfect verb, "it went well," and that it has the most general application suggesting not only that life was "pleasing" to Josiah in eating and drinking, but that things went well for him as head of the covenant people.⁷⁰ This is clearly the fulfillment of the promise given in Jeremiah 22:4 that the result of the king's obedience to the law would be the continued blessings upon the monarchy. It also reminds us of the result of the king's obedience to the six limitations upon the Israelite kingship. It was well with him means that the king was blessed by the Lord because his reign was guided by the law.

In verse 16, the prophet states what doing justice and righteousness concretely involves: pleading the cause of the poor and the needy. I have already discussed in the second chapter that in the light of the beginning of the monarchy and its development in Israel, the primary task of the covenant-king was, above all other things, to maintain

⁶⁸ Charles S. Mott, Biblical Ethics and Social Changes (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), 73.

⁶⁹Ibid, 73.

⁷⁰Holladay, Jeremiah 1, 596.

justice within the community and justice with God. The so-called "royal psalms"⁷¹ contain several teachings concerning the protection of the powerless. For example Psalm 72:1, 2, 4, 12 suggests that it was the king's commission to judge the people in righteousness, and above all, to be the advocate and supporter of the weak and oppressed. This means that the king was to carry out the office of judge, on behalf of those to whom justice had been denied.⁷² This is what Josiah did, according to Jeremiah. The result was that "it was well" (טוֹב) repeated twice in the passage. Many commentators rightly notice the difference between "it was well for him" in verse 15, and "it was well" in verse 16. Craigie, Kelly and Drinkard write that the lack of the prepositional phrase "to him" following "it was well" indicates the broader scope for good. Perhaps the implication is that the whole nation enjoyed the good brought about by justice and righteousness of the king who fears the Lord.⁷³ This also reminds us of Psalm 72:3 that shows what the life of a nation is to be under a righteous king in Israel. Commenting on the passage, Kraus writes,

Life, bounteous harvest, good fortune and blessing in boundless measure- these are the expectations connected with Yahweh's presence with his king, and they are not to be thought of as due to the immanent power of a "divine monarchy." Thus the petitions and hopes that look toward שְׁלוֹם (*Shalom*), in the most comprehensive sense of the word, are closely connected with the monarchy in Jerusalem.⁷⁴

⁷¹Hans-Joachim Kraus, *Theology of the Psalms* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1986), 107. He argues that "royal Psalms" include the following: Psalms 2; 18; 20; 21; 45; 72; 89; 101; 132; 144:1-11.

⁷²Ibid., 119.

⁷³Craigie, Kelly and Drinkard, *Jeremiah 1-25*, 311. See also Holladay (*Jeremiah 1*, 596) who argues that the lack of לְ is an indication that things went well not only for Josiah but for everyone.

⁷⁴Kraus, *Theology of the Psalm*, 120.

At the end of verse 16, the prophet asks a rhetorical question: "Is not that to know me?" This is the central issue in the whole chapter, if not in the whole book of Jeremiah; or even the entire prophetic corpus.⁷⁵ How well we know the Lord determines how we live or, in the case of the king, how well he knows the Lord determines how he leads his country. According to Jeremiah, helping the poor, the needy, doing justice, etc., is dependent on the king's relationship with the Lord. But what is to know the Lord? Craigie, Kelly and Drinkard⁷⁶ rightly state that the verb *יָדָע*, "to know" communicates much more than knowledge in the sense of information. It implies relationship: to know Yahweh is to have relationship with him, and that relationship is based on the covenant and the keeping of the covenant. Botterweck adds that to know Yahweh refers to a practical, religio-ethical relationship.⁷⁷ All who are upright of heart know him (Ps. 36:11) or only those who are prepared to refrain from idolatry and sin know God. In his commentary on Hosea 4:1, McComiskey says that,

the knowledge of God, of which Hosea speaks in this verse, is not theological knowledge only, but knowledge of Yahweh's directive will. The nation is to be destroyed for lack of this knowledge (4:6). The fact that the knowledge of God is in parallel with *hesed* (lovingkindness) in 6:6 indicates that knowledge of God

⁷⁵One of the prophets who has "the knowledge of God" as his central theme is Hosea. In his commentary on the book of Hosea, James L. Mays (*Hosea*, [London: SCM Press, 1969], 63) writes that "the final position of knowledge of God (*da'at 'elohim*) is a clue to its central importance as normative term in the prophecy of Hosea . . . The lack of the knowledge of God is Israel's cardinal deficiency (4:2); it is what Yahweh demands rather than sacrifice (6:6) . . . What is required is the knowledge that Yahweh as he was revealed in the Exodus is their only God (13:4), that his healing help saw them through the history of their beginnings (12:3), and that it is Yahweh who gives them the good things of the land."

⁷⁶*Ibid.*, 311.

⁷⁷Botterweck, "יָדָע," in *Theological Dictionary of Old Testament*, 1st ed.

involves an understanding of the ethical sphere in which God's people must live if they have to experience Yahweh's love and bounty⁷⁸

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

In terms of our evaluation, it can be said that Josiah followed most of the limitations as described in Deuteronomy 17:14-20. Commenting on 2 Kings 22:2, Hobbs writes that Josiah equals Hezekiah in his piety and matches the standard of the royal piety for the deuteronomist, king David.⁷⁹ Numerous facts show Josiah's

⁷⁸Thomas E. McComiskey, "Hosea," in The Minor Prophets: An Exegetical & Expository Commentary, ed. Thomas E. McComiskey (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1992), 56.

⁷⁹T. R. Hobbs, 2 Kings, World Biblical Commentary (Waco, Texas: Word Books, 1985), 325. See also Iain W. Provan, 1 and 2 Kings, New International Biblical Commentary (Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, 1995), 270. He comments that 2 Kings 22:1-2 alerts us to the kind of king he (Josiah) is going to be. There is reference to David--as we would expect. More significantly, however, there is

attachment to the covenant: First, at the hearing of the words of the book of the law found in the temple (2 Kings 22:11), Josiah reacted by tearing his clothes as a sign of repentance and humility.⁸⁰ The young king came to realize how far short of divine acceptance Judean worship had fallen. Josiah understood that he was not above the law, that his royal power without the fear of the Lord could not protect the nation from Yahweh's wrath,⁸¹ and therefore, what was said in the book of the law would come to pass. Second, God's law found and then read produced a right action on the king's side. In 2 Kings 22:13, Josiah sent to inquire of the Lord for himself, for the people of Judah, and for the whole nation (or "for all Judah" according to NRSV). It is important to note that the king sent to inquire from the Lord so that he might *know* more about God's will and act accordingly, for the sake of the whole nation. This is further seen in that the king assembled all the elders of Judah, all the people of Judah, all the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the priest, the prophets, and all the people, both small and great to hear for themselves the word of God (2 Kings 23:1-2). Moreover, it was the king himself who read the law for the people. This was very important in that he acknowledged before the people, that his royal power was inferior to the word of God. The king did not stop at reading. According to 2 Kings 23:3-20, he lead the nation in

an unmistakable allusion to Deuteronomy 17:20, where the ideal king is one who "do not turn" (Hb. *swr*, as in 2 Kings. 22:2) from the law to the right or to the left. This is only the first of many references in 2 Kings 22-23 that link Josiah with the law of Moses in general and as a figure of Moses in particular.

⁸⁰Carroll (*Jeremiah*, 663) states that the story of king Josiah's response to the finding of the book of the law in the temple is the counterpart to the tale of Jehoiakim's burning of the scroll (Jer. 36:20-26).

⁸¹Commenting on Jehoiakim's burning of the scroll, Carroll (*Jeremiah*, 663) correctly writes that the king may have been opposing the power of the spoken word with his own unquestioned power in the community; but the point of the story is that such royal power is inferior to the prophetic word. Against Yahweh's word there is no effective power, not even that of a prophet-killing king.

a covenant renewal,⁸² or as Wiseman says, "the reading of the book publicly resulted in both a reaffirmation of the divine covenant (2 Kings 23:1-3) and a series of acts of reformation based on its teachings (2 Kings 23:4-25).⁸³ This was the result of the knowledge of (the law of) God. Thus, in 2 Chronicles 34:31-32 it is written that,

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

The covenant made by the king before the Lord to follow him and to keep his commandment, his statutes, and decrees can well explain the fact that it went well for the people of Judah during Josiah's time.⁸⁴ In fact, the writer of 2 Chronicles concludes chapter thirty-four by stating that "during all his days (the days of the king Josiah) they did not turn away from following the Lord the God of their ancestors." This is a good example of what a nation can become under the leadership of a godly king, and this is what God intended when he gave the six limitations in Deuteronomy 17:14-20.

In the narrative of Josiah's reformation in both 2 Kings and 2 Chronicles, the renewal reaches its climax with the celebration of the Passover. Hobbs has

⁸²Raymond B. Dillard, 2 Chronicles, Word Biblical Commentary (Waco, Texas: Word Books, 1985), 290.

⁸³Donald J. Wiseman, 1 & 2 Kings, Tyndale Old Testament Commentary (Leicester, England: Inter-Varsity Press, 1993), 294.

⁸⁴In Jeremiah's language to say that it went well with the people can mean that justice reigned in the country. This is clear since people were guided by the law of Moses which insists strongly on justice to the poor. By justice I understand both justice with the Lord (no idolatry) and justice with one another (social justice).

convincingly demonstrated that it is not right to think that there was no Passover celebration before Josiah's reformation, but that the significance of Josiah's Passover lies in the fact that it was celebrated in accordance with the demands of the book found in the temple.⁸⁵

The Passover celebration gives another clue for our interpretation. In terms of Samuel's warning (1Sam.8:1-18), Josiah was a good king in that he was not the one who could impoverish the people by taking ("taking" was the key word in Samuel's warning) their properties as other kings did. On the contrary, Josiah and his officials are described as the ones who gave or contributed⁸⁶ to the people's welfare. In 2 Chronicles 35:7-10, it is written,

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

Most kings mentioned in the Bible are described as tyrants, oppressors (robbers) of the poor (Isa. 58:3; Jer. 6:6; 2 Kings 21:16; Ezek. 22:29), and perverters of justice (Amos 5:7-13; Isa. 3:12-15). But Josiah and his officials are seen here as helpers of the poor people, most of whom were probably unable to afford animals for sacrifices. To use Samuel's language, Josiah and his officials were "givers," not "takers." Moreover, the

⁸⁵Hobbs, 2 Kings, 337.

⁸⁶It is important to note the contrast between the verb to "give" (or to contribute to) used for Josiah and his officials in this passage and its antonym to "take" found in 1 Samuel 8:1-18.

text states that the officials "gave willingly," that is without being forced by the king or even by any other circumstance, or even not out of any political reason. In other words, they feared the Lord of justice whom they came to know and whom they were willing to serve. Once more, from this passage, we can understand why Jeremiah emphasized the fact that it went well for the king and for the whole nation, or that before and after him there was no king like him. To conclude this section, it is appropriate to say that Josiah understood his authority or power in the context of the covenant, that is as the one who had to reign strictly under the power of God by following all the limitations imposed upon the Israelite monarchy.

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

Translation

13. *Woe to him who builds his house by unrighteousness,
and his upper room without justice;
who makes his neighbor work for nothing,
and does not pay him his wages;*
14. *Who says, "I will build for myself a large house
with spacious upper rooms,"
and cuts out windows for it, panelling it with cedar,
and painting it with vermilion (Bright red)*
15. *Do you reign because you compete in cedar?
[Your father, did he not eat and drink
and do justice and righteousness
and it was well for him.*
16. *He judged the cause of the poor and needy;
then it was well.
Is not this to know me? Word of Yahweh].*
17. *But your eyes and your heart are on nothing else
except on your dishonest gain,
and on shedding innocent blood,
and on practicing oppression and extortion.*
18. *Therefore, thus says the Lord concerning Jehoiakim,
son of Josiah, king of Judah:
"They will not lament for him,
Ah, my brother! or Ah my sister!
They will not lament for him,*

- Ah! Lord! or Ah! his majesty!*
 19. *He will be buried with the burial of an ass,
 Dragged off and thrown out
 outside the gates of Jerusalem.*
 20 *Go up to Lebanon, and cry out
 And in Bashan, lift up your voice
 Cry out from Abarim
 because all your lovers are destroyed*
 21 *I spoke to you in your (time of) ease
 You said I will not listen
 This has been your way from your youth,
 that you did not obey me (you did not hear my voice).*
 22 *The wind shall shepherd all your shepherds,
 Your lovers shall go into captivity
 then you shall be humiliated and confounded
 for all your wickedness*
 23 *O inhabitant of Lebanon,
 nested in the cedars
 how you will groan when pangs come upon you,
 pain as a woman in labor (my translation).*

I have already stated that the book of Jeremiah as a whole is a mixture of prose and poetry.⁸⁷ But the passage under consideration is completely poetic and it is composed of two short oracles against king Jehoiakim, son of Josiah. The first oracle is a group of accusations against the king (vv. 13-17) and the second, an announcement of judgment on the king (vv. 18-19) and on the nation (vv. 20-23). In my exegesis, I will follow this subdivision with the exception that vv. 15b-16 will not be dealt with in

⁸⁷See Bright, *Jeremiah*, cxxv-cxxxviii; Thompson, *The Book of Jeremiah*, 120-124. They also recognize that one of the difficulties on the interpretation of the book of Jeremiah comes from the fact that the book is partly in prose and partly in poetry. Craigie, Kelley and Drinkard, *Jeremiah 1-25*, xxviii. They add that the mixture of poetry and prose creates a difficulty of knowing whether the prophet addressed the people in two modes, poetic and prosaic, or whether the different modes or forms of the oracles in the book simply reflects the manner of recording the message (assuming for the moment that either or both types of message are authentic to the prophet). For an attempt at the solution to the problem of poetry-prose dilemma, see Brevard Childs, *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture*, 339-54 and the assessment of Childs's approach by Leo G. Perdue, *The Collapse of History: Reconstructing Old Testament Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1994), 175-182.

detail (since I have already done this in the previous section), but I will be referring to it only for the sake of comparison between Jehoiakim and his father.

Accusations against King Jehoiakim (vv. 13-17)

The passage starts with a "woe" (v. 13), which is usually used to denounce practices that are unjust and which disrupt the social order of the community.⁸⁸ This woe introduces a series of accusations against king Jehoiakim because of his disdain for righteousness and justice; but the name of the king is not given until verse 18. The following are the three charges all connected with the building project: he builds his house "by unrighteousness" (בְּלֹא צֶדֶק); his upper room "without justice" (בְּלֹא מִשְׁפָּט), and makes his neighbors work for nothing or without paying them their wages.⁸⁹

The first charge in verse 13 is that the king builds his house⁹⁰ by unrighteousness. There are two important observations to make at this point: First, it

⁸⁸Carroll (Jeremiah, 426-27) discusses in detail the use of "woe" in the prophetic literature and concludes that the "woe" saying is a feature of some of the prophetic traditions (e.g. Isa. 5:8-23; Amos 6:1-3,4-6), but not of the book of Jeremiah. He adds that the "woe" sayings are formal denunciations of anonymous groups introduced by the word "Woe . . . , and have their origins in the wise men's reflections about the conditions of the world." He also adds that to denounce groups in this manner is to call down bad luck on them and is parallel to the curse (i.e. cursed is . . .). More important for this work, Carroll argues that the rhetorical question which concludes the "woe" saying may have misled the editors into thinking that it referred to a king and, therefore, was about royal building projects. For Carroll, the original meaning may not have had a king in mind at all since kings are not usually the recipients of "woe" sayings. But for this thesis I do think that contrary to Carroll's argument, the woe here refers to king Jehoiakim.

⁸⁹H.-J. Zobel, "הוֹי," in Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament, 1st ed. He argues that all the woe sayings in the prophetic oracles are related to the misconduct which lies in the social sphere. And this is exactly the case in Jeremiah 22.

⁹⁰Craigie, Kelly and Drunkard, Deuteronomy 1-25, 310. They argue that the mention of the word "house" can appear at first sight ambiguous, since it is difficult to know if the writer is talking about his house, his family, or his dynasty. They also indicate that some of the ambiguity is quickly removed by the mention of the upper

might appear that the condemnation is not on the building itself but on the way the building project was carried on. In other words, the king was using unrighteous means to build his palace. This is what "לִבְנֵי" repeated twice may suggest here. But the problem with this argument is whether there was a need for the king to build a new sumptuous palace apart from the one built by Solomon (2 Kings 7:1-12) and where, apparently, all the kings after him lived.⁹¹ Moreover, Jehoiakim was a vassal of Egypt and as such, he found himself with the terrible burden of raising the tribute demanded by Egypt. Second Kings 23:35 reports that the only means of raising revenues that was available to him was the taxation of his people.⁹² It is, therefore, unbelievable to think that to the burden of the people under the yoke of Egypt, and later on of Babylon, the small-minded king could think about starting a luxurious building project. Thus, it becomes obvious that the project could not be carried on without harming the people already impoverished by heavy taxation. We can, therefore, understand why

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

⁹¹See also Ovid R. Sellers "Palace," in IDB 3:620. He notices that presumably subsequent kings of Judah occupied Solomon's palace.

⁹²Merrill, Kingdom of Priests, 447.

the prophet opens the accusation against Jehoiakim with a woe, which, as I have already mentioned, is used to denounce practices that are unjust and disrupt the social order of the community.

Second, he builds his upper rooms without justice. The upper rooms here refers to the building mania of Jehoiakim: it was not a small house but a grandiloquent building enterprise. Commenting on this passage, Martens writes that "it is tempting to equate an elaborate complex of buildings found by archaeologists south of Jerusalem with Jehoiakim's palace."⁹³ He also adds that the "imposing wide house with large chambers was surrounded by a citadel extending over five acres."⁹⁴ Craigie, Kelly and Drinkard also underscore this point when they say that it is not even the house of just any well-to-do person, but a house that is quite elaborate, both in its dimensions (large, with spacious upper rooms, and windows cut out for it) and in its decor (panelled with cedar).⁹⁵

⁹³Martens, Jeremiah, 147.

⁹⁴Ibid.

⁹⁵Craigie, Kelly and Drinkard, Jeremiah 1-25, 311. See also Holladay (Jeremiah 1, 595) who translates the sequence "he cuts out for it" with "(he) enlarges for it." He argues that the sequence literally means "to tear," usually used for tearing garments. He adds that the use of this verb with windows is so striking as to have called forth much comment. Therefore, he finds the key to the interpretation of that word associated with windows in another passage, namely in 4:30, where the harlot enlarges her eyes with eye paint. He then points out that in 4:30 the windows are associated with harlotry. He also gives another passage in the Scriptures where the windows are associated with Canaanite culture (Judg. 5:28). Holladays' conclusion is that Jeremiah's word to Jehoiakim, using the same verb by which the harlot enlarges her eyes, hints that the king has metaphorically indulged in harlotry. To enforce his point, he mentions the fact that in Jeremiah, after the rhetorical interruptions, the address speaks first of the king's eyes (v17) and then moves immediately to his illegitimate profit. McKane (Jeremiah, 530) suggests that the passage can be rendered as follows: "and windows will be cut out for it."

In verse 14 we find two important items: first, the passage describes the king as saying: "I will build for myself . . ." (בָּנֵה). The declaration shows the intention of the king. The project was not for any national interest but rather for a personal one with a negative impact on the whole nation. It was a kind of private villa for the king. In this way, he could have two or more villas like all the other near eastern monarchs of his day. Feinberg is correct when he writes concerning Jehoiakim that "the building mania, common among oriental monarchs, had seized him."⁹⁶ Therefore, for Jehoiakim to be a king meant among other things, to become very rich and one way to show that wealth was by having several palaces. In terms of our standards, the building mania goes against the fifth limitation which prohibits the Israelite king against the accumulation of personal wealth at the expense of his subjects. I also said that the idea behind the restriction was to prevent the king and his few officials to accumulate wealth at the expense of the citizens who would consequently become poor. Unfortunately, this did happen during the time of Jehoiakim.

Second, Jeremiah's statement that Jehoiakim is making his neighbor work for nothing without paying him his wage is a proof that the king is treating his subjects as slaves. By doing that, the king is breaking the law that forbids the Israelite to withhold his neighbor's salary. Leviticus 19:13 reads as follows: "You shall not exploit your friend, and you shall not rob him. You shall not hold back the wages of a hired worker until the morning."⁹⁷ Commenting on the similar law in Deuteronomy 24:14-15,

⁹⁶Feinberg, Jeremiah, 157.

⁹⁷Jacob Milgrom, "The Changing Concept of Holiness in the Pentateuchal Codes with Emphasis on Leviticus 19," in Reading Leviticus: A Conversation with Mary Douglas, ed. John F. A. Sawyer (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1986), 68. He rightly argues that all the commandments enumerated in this chapter fall under the rubric of holiness, and that holiness is not just a matter of divinely imposed restrictions of

Craigie argues that failure to behave in this manner would bring down sin on Israel as a community (v. 15b), for the poor and the needy would cry to God for help in their distress. He also adds that God does bring aid to the oppressed; but when that help should have been offered by the people of God in the first place, the people, by their failure, bring down the judgment of God on their own heads.⁹⁸ The reason is that not paying promptly a worker's labor will deprive him of the possibility of purchasing food for his family for the evening meal and for the following day. But Jehoiakim was not only delaying the wages until the following (morning) day; he was simply not paying them at all. In other words, he made his people become his slaves. This reminds us of the conclusion of Samuel's warning that the king will take everything from the people and that the people will become slaves of their own king (I Samuel 8:17); and under Jehoiakim, and many other despots, the people did become slaves.

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

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

God's nature; but that all Israelites should relate to each other as God relates to his creation.

⁹⁸Craigie, Deuteronomy, 309.

necessary to preserve them. It is the will to implement whatever is required to achieve these ends which constitutes "knowledge of Yahweh."⁹⁹

The thought "I will build for myself" with all the negative impact on the people had simply no place in God's plan for the Israelite king. In addition, the detailed description of the king's own house (the "upper rooms") -note the repetition of the upper rooms-, with windows, a house panelled with cedars and painted with bright red or vermilion are significant. Questions that come from such descriptions are the following: what information does the prophet intend to convey to his readers by giving all these details? Why were other building projects, like Solomon's, not condemned with such strong words? Where did the vassal-king obtain funds for such a spacious building? The answer to the last question is simply that the labor for his building project cost him nothing because the text mentions that his subjects were forced to work for nothing, that is he did not pay them their wages. The many details in the passage help us to notice the contrast between the huge building and the cost of such a building, and its impact on the economy of the nation. It appears, therefore, that Jehoiakim was a thoroughly spoiled and self-indulgent young despot¹⁰⁰ in the kingdom of Judah.

The climax of the accusation against King Jehoiakim begins in verse 16. The passage starts with an important question: "do you reign because you compete in cedar?"¹⁰¹ This question takes us back again to the role of the Israelite king, especially

⁹⁹McKane, Jeremiah, 531.

¹⁰⁰Thompson, The Book of Jeremiah, 479.

¹⁰¹Scholars vary on the translation of this passage. Bright (Jeremiah, 137) writes that the text of vv. 15 and 16 is somewhat confused, that the translation in some places are conjectural, and that the LXX differs widely from the MT. His translation of the

to the use of power by the Israelite king. Put in other words, Jehoiakim could be asked: "Why do you reign? or why are you a king?" Jehoiakim's answers, according to the passage, would be: "I reign because I outdo everybody in cedar, I reign because I have the best houses in Judah, I reign because I can force my subjects to work for me without any pay, I reign because I am the richest person in the nation," etc. This is probably how Jehoiakim and most of the evil kings of Israel and Judah understood the monarchy.

The prophet then compares Josiah, the good king of Judah with his son Jehoiakim. The same question can be asked to the father: "Why do you reign, Josiah?" The answer would be: "I reign to do justice and righteousness, and to plead the cause of the poor and the needy." To reign for Josiah meant to serve Yahweh and His people; but for Jehoiakim, it meant to serve himself and to be served by the people. Jeremiah declares in the second part of verse 16 that what Josiah did, proved that he knew Yahweh. In other words, the deeds of each of the two kings were dependent on whether they knew God or not. Josiah knew God, and as a result, he used his power properly by defending the cause of the powerless. This is God's will for the covenant-king, as it is clearly shown in Jeremiah 9:23-24:

Thus says the Lord: Do not let the wise boast in their wisdom, do not let the mighty boast in their might, not let the wealthy boast in their wealth; but let those who boast boast in this, that they understand and know me, that I am the Lord; I act with steadfast love, justice, and righteousness in the earth, for in these things I delight, says the Lord.

Commenting on this passage, McKane writes that,

Hence, if there is any reason for pride and complacency, it is a paradoxical one. It does not reside in the possession of human wisdom or worldly power or

passage resembles that of Thompson: "That makes you a king - outdoing everyone in cedar?"

wealth, but in the possession of an insight for the lack of which nothing can compensate. It consists of an awareness of ethical texture of Yahweh's world and a commitment to his morality.¹⁰²

But in verse 17, the prophet tells us that as a result of not knowing God, Jehoiakim had his eyes and heart on nothing else but dishonest gain, shedding innocent blood, and practicing oppression and extortion. Each of these charges deserves a special treatment.

First, the king is accused of having his eyes and heart on nothing else but dishonest gain. The word **בַּצֵּעַ** here means gain or bribe (and the pursuit of gain through greed), and it is used in conjunction with perversion of justice. In that sense, the gain is to be understood as unjust (Prov. 28:16; Hab. 2:9), selfish (Ps. 119:36; Prov. 15:27; Jer. 6:13), or even sinful (Isa. 57:17).¹⁰³ God made it clear that the Israelite king or any other leader must first of all be one who shows righteousness and who judges with justice. One of the many examples is that of the qualifications for the men who were to be chosen to help Moses in Exodus 18:13-27. The Bible says that those men had to fear God, be trustworthy, and hate unjust gain. These qualifications were also considered to be indispensable virtues of a judge.¹⁰⁴

Likewise, the book of Samuel indicates that the people of Israel revolted against the sons of Samuel because their heart turned aside after gains (I Sam. 8:3). McCann rightly notices that turning aside after gain is the opposite of walking in the way of righteousness, according to the will of Yahweh (Ps. 119:36; Isa. 33:15; 56:11;

¹⁰²McKane, Jeremiah, 213.

¹⁰³J. Clinton McCann Jr., "בצע," in NIDOTTE 1:695.

¹⁰⁴Diether Kellermann, "בצע," in TDOT 1:208.

57:17; Jer. 8:10).¹⁰⁵ The person who walks in his own way has little regard for God or for his fellow humans.¹⁰⁶ This was certainly the case of Jehoiakim, whom the prophet contrasts with Josiah the godly king who knew Yahweh and who consequently did not love unjust gain.

The contrast between the good father and the evil son is introduced by the adversative particle ׀. According to Holladay, the particle ׀ expresses a strong opposition and it is followed by a subordinate ׀, that expresses more opposition.¹⁰⁷ The combination of heart and eyes suggests that the total energy of Jehoiakim was concentrated on his selfish gain.¹⁰⁸ Second, Jehoiakim's heart and eyes were on shedding innocent blood. The word ׀ which is used in the passage refers to bloodshed in the contexts of either murder or warfare.¹⁰⁹ By using this word, the prophet may intend to show us that obsessiveness and diseased ambition drove Jehoiakim to oppressive and ruthless behavior.¹¹⁰

Thirdly, Jehoiakim is accused of practicing oppression and extortion. The verb ׀ means to oppress, to wrong or to extort. When related to Israel, the word

¹⁰⁵McCann, " ׀," in NIDOTT 1:695.

¹⁰⁶Ibid.

¹⁰⁷Holladay, Jeremiah 1, 597.

¹⁰⁸Samuel J. Schultz elaborates on this in "Jehoiakim," ISBE 2:976-977. His argument concerning the leadership of Jehoiakim as a covenant king is helpful for the understanding of the passage of our study. He comments that it is obvious that Jehoiakim was not in sympathy with the reforms promoted by his father Josiah and that, undoubtedly, Judah reverted to idolatry during his reign. He was responsible for the arrest and execution of a prophet named Uriah, for the burning of the scroll written by Jeremiah (Jer. 36), and for the oppression of the powerless.

¹⁰⁹Herbert Wolf and Robert Holmsted, " ׀," in NIDOTTE 4:222.

¹¹⁰McKane, Jeremiah, 531.

frequently describes various forms of social injustice by which the rich in Israelite society oppressed the poor.¹¹¹ As I have already mentioned, the responsibility of the king was to rescue the oppressed from the hands of their oppressors; but when the oppression is practiced by the king himself, as in this case, the ones oppressed become helpless. This is why, the Bible states clearly that the act of oppression against the poor is an act of oppression against God Himself (Prov. 14:31).

To conclude this section, it is important to note at this point with Craigie, Kelly and Drinkard that the spilling of innocent blood and oppression relate back to 22:3. They also add that the message of 22:3 called for justice and righteousness and not spilling innocent blood. Unfortunately, it is the king himself who is committing those very acts.¹¹²

Judgment upon Jehoiakim (vv.18-19)

The judgment upon the king is introduced by the preposition לְכֵן (therefore), which connects the accusations in verses 13-17 with the judgment in verses 18 and 19. According to Craigie, Kelly and Drinkard, the connection implies that the truthfulness of the accusations is the reason for the judgment.¹¹³ The formula, "thus says the Lord" follows immediately the transitional word to assure an awareness that the judgment is

¹¹¹Ignatius Swart, "עשק," in NIDOTTE 3:577. See also Ignatius Swart, "תח," in NIDOTTE 2:471. In this second article, Swart argues that the meaning of "תח" is closely related to that of "עשק," and that in the days of the OT prophets, the oppressors were the rich and ruling class in society (Jer. 22:1-3; Ezek. 22: 6-7; 45:8; 46:18; Zeph. 3:1,3).

¹¹²Craigie, Kelly and Drinkard, Jeremiah 1-25, 312.

¹¹³Ibid.

not being spoken by a mere messenger but is from the one who sent the messenger: Yahweh himself.¹¹⁴

Another important element that appears at the beginning of the judgment is the identification of the one who is being accused and judged: Jehoiakim, the son of Josiah, king of Judah. From verse 13 to verse 17, the prophet has been using different pronouns to identify Jehoiakim.¹¹⁵ But in verse 18, he calls him by name "to make unmistakable the one to whom the harsh judgment is spoken."¹¹⁶ The judgment itself concerns his death and it has two aspects: he will die without being mourned and he will be buried with the burial of an ass.

The first judgment is that Jehoiakim will not be mourned at his death. According to E. Jacob, lamentation and other funerary rites were as imperative a duty as burial, and their absence was considered a grave misfortune.¹¹⁷ The sentence "they shall not lament for him," repeated twice in the same verse, shows the emphasis the prophet is putting on the dishonor of the king at his death because of his heavy-handed oppression. Jehoiakim, who was thinking of himself as the greatest and the best man in the land, will die without honor.¹¹⁸ There is another contrast between Josiah and his

¹¹⁴Ibid.

¹¹⁵In verse 13, Jeremiah uses two pronouns: "him" and "who" to identify Jehoiakim ("Woe" to him who builds . . .). In verse 14, he is identified by "who," "I" and "me" (Who says, "I will build to me -myself- a great house . . ."). And in verses 15 and 17 the king is directly addressed: "Do you think you are a king because . . ." It would be interesting to study the reason for the change of those pronouns designating the same person and in the same passage (context).

¹¹⁶Craigie, Kelly and Drinkard, *Jeremiah 1-25*, 312.

¹¹⁷E. Jacob, "Mourning," in *IDB* 3:452.

¹¹⁸Because of some cultural differences, some people might not understand very well the meaning and importance of mourning for a dead person. But in the ancient world - as it is still true for some societies today - lamentation or mourning was an

son at this level also. In 2 Chronicles 35:24b-25, it is written that all Judah and Jerusalem mourned for Josiah, that Jeremiah uttered a lament for him, and that all the singing men and singing women have spoken of Josiah in their laments.

The second judgment is that Jehoiakim will be buried with the burial of an ass. The Hebrew word used here “קבר” is always related to the burial of people, never animals or lifeless objects. Jeremiah 22:9, is therefore, an exception to that general use. But how was the donkey buried? According to Dyer, when an animal died in the city, it was simply dragged away from the spot where it died and thrown outside the gates,¹¹⁹ and then dumped in a field to become a prey to dogs and vultures.¹²⁰ Burial, says Payne, constituted the biblical procedure from the days of the earliest patriarchs onward (Gen. 23:4; 25:9; Deut. 10:6; 34:6), and for a corpse to remain unburied or to be exhumed subsequent to burial, and thus become food for beasts of prey, was the climax of indignity or judgment.¹²¹ For the specific case of Jehoiakim, it is important to note a contrast between his grandiose way of life and his dishonorable death as predicted by the prophet.¹²²

integral part of ancient Semitic life (J.E.Hartley, "Lament; Lamentation," ISBE 3:64). See also "Dirge," ISBE 2:946. The author in this article ("Dirge") states that the main feature of an Israelite funeral was the lamentation for the dead. In such society, it would not be conceivable not to lament for a king. This simply means that Jehoiakim's judgment was among the most serious curses.

¹¹⁹Charles H. Dyer, "Jeremiah," in The Bible Knowledge Commentary: Old Testament, eds. John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 1157.

¹²⁰Holladay, Jeremiah 1, 598.

¹²¹J. Barton Payne "Burial," in ISBE 1:556.

¹²²The question of how Jehoiakim died, and therefore, how the curse came to pass is still dividing scholars. The problem is that 2 Kings 24:6 states that Jehoiakim slept with his fathers, and nothing is said on how he was buried. The formula, "he slept with his fathers" can be said to have been used for normal burial. There is a further prediction

Judgment on the nation (vv. 20-23)

The reference to Lebanon, to Bashan and to Abarim in verses 20-23 seems to indicate that the prophet is now prophesying about a foreign nation. In fact, Carroll writes that "Jerusalem is not named because it may not have been the original target of the poem"¹²³ McKane strongly argues that "a solution in terms of 'O Lebanon' = 'O Jerusalem' in v20 (cf v.23) is ruled out by the presence of Bashan and Abarim, for they indicate that we have to reckon with a group of neighboring mountain ranges (Lebanon, Bashan and Abarim), and they preclude us from attaching to 'Lebanon' a sense different from the one attached to them."¹²⁴ But I would not agree with both Carroll and McKane since it seems to me that in the context of this section (21:1--24:10), the passage is clearly referring to Jerusalem. Bright sees it in such a way when he briefly writes that verses 20-23 constitute a poem lamenting the fate of Jerusalem and that it was apparently composed just before the deportation of 597.¹²⁵ But the

in Jeremiah 36:30 that the corpse of Jehioakim will lie unburied. Holladay (Jeremiah 1, 598) quotes Weiser who suggests that the verse be taken to mean that "Nebuchadnezzar, at the conquest of Jerusalem, had the grave of his faithless vassal violated." But Holladay himself disagrees saying that disinterment is not at issue here, and that Jeremiah speaks of lack of burial. Unfortunately, Holladay's solution to the issue poses a more difficult problem; he says that, "in any event the power of the present verse is in its utterance, not in its literal fulfillment." The suggestion given by Schultz ("Jehoiakim," in ISBE 2:977) can be considered as a more acceptable explanation. For him, "since neither of the historical accounts reports the circumstances of Jehoiakim's death, nor mentions even his burial, the conclusion that this defiant king was killed in battle seems warranted. His conclusion is that in wartime, it was impossible to provide an honorable burial. Another solution to this problem can be that the silence indicates the fulfillment of that prophrecy.

¹²³Carroll, Jeremiah, 436. He also argues that the passage is an implicit oracle against the nations genre.

¹²⁴McKane, Jeremiah, 534-35

¹²⁵Bright, Jeremiah, 145.

strongest argument defending the passage as a clear reference to Jerusalem comes from Craigie, Kelly and Drinkard. They write,

. . . because similar use of chaps. 21-24 are directed against Judah, Jerusalem, and her leaders, it seems better to understand this oracle as referring to Jerusalem personified, as was the situation in 21:13-14. A strong link with 21:13-14 is found in the vocative (יִשְׁבְּתִי), "O one enthroned" (21:13; 22:23). The descriptive location following "enthroned one" shows contrastive parallelism; in 21:13 it is the one enthroned above the valley, in 22:23 it is the one enthroned in the Lebanon (mountains). Likewise connecting the two units is the idea of Yahweh being against the city. In 21:13 it was direct discourse statement הֲנִי אֵלֶיךָ, "Behold I am against you." In this passage, the words are a report, דַּבַּרְתִּי אֵלֶיךָ, "I spoke against you . . ." (22:21). A final connection, though not as definite, is the mention of forest in 21:24 and the reference to Lebanon and cedars in this passage.¹²⁶

In verse 20, the call is made to go up (עֲלֵי ,Qal impv.2 f.s.) to Lebanon (in the north),¹²⁷ to Bashan (in the northeast)¹²⁸ and to Abarim (in the southeast),¹²⁹ three neighboring mountains surrounding, geographically, the city of Jerusalem.¹³⁰ The

¹²⁶Craigie, Kelly and Drinkard, *Jeremiah*, 314-15. They also note several other elements showing that the passage does refer to Jerusalem. For example, they write that specific references to Lebanon and cedars provides a link with 22:6-7 (although there the oracle is decreed against the house of the king rather than to the city), that reference to the wind shepherding the shepherds (v. 22) provides a link with 23:1-4; v. 20 begins with a lament for the dead and vv. 18-19 have just spoken of the death Jehoiakim will face.

¹²⁷Lebanon and Anti-Lebanon mountain ranges are situated in the Northwestern section of the land of Israel. See Robertson, *Understanding the Land of the Bible*, 41.

¹²⁸Bashan is mostly tableland, wide open plains between 1600 and 2300 feet in height, and magnificently fertile. See also Denis Baly, *The Geography of the Bible* (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1957,) 220.

¹²⁹Baly (*The Geography of the Bible*, 220) writes that "Abarim (see also Num. 27:12; Deut. 32:49) was apparently the hilly country west of Heshbon, the last trace in Trans-Jordan of the Judaeo-Gilead Dome.

¹³⁰By mentioning the three places (Lebanon, Bashan and Abarim) the author may have in mind the land of Jerusalem in its entirety.

mission was to go on the mountains and cry for the city. The reason for the cry is given in the last line of verse 20: "all the lovers are destroyed." Craigie, Kelly and Drinkard notice that the call to the prophet to go up is reminiscent of Isaiah 40:9 which shows how Isaiah was sent to climb a high mountain in order to proclaim good news.

Questions that come immediately to our minds are: Who is the one being sent to go up? And who are her lovers?" The first thing to note here is that the passage is poetry, this means that we must be careful in our interpretation and pay attention to some images and special language being used. To be sure, the one being sent to climb Lebanon and cry out is not the prophet Jeremiah, since all the verbs used are feminine. I, therefore, think that according to the context the one who is sent to cry is Jerusalem herself personified (i.e., inhabitants of Jerusalem). Scholars vary widely about the identity of Jerusalem's lovers. According to Feinberg, some claim that they are Jerusalem's faithful patriots, such as Ezekiel the prophet. Others hold that the leaders of the nation are probably intended. Still others see them as Egypt and other nations Jehoiakim relied on for aid against the Babylonians. I agree with Thompson that the ones who have been broken are Jerusalem's political allies (cf. Hos. 8:9) and that the reference may be to Egypt, including perhaps other minor groups, such as those who staged the revolt referred to in chapter 27. Thompson also adds that Nebuchadnezzar routed all these after the collapse of the Egyptian forces at Carchemish in 605 B.C.(46:2-12; 47:2-7). As a result, areas in Transjordan soon became vassals of Nebuchadnezzar (cf. 2 Kings 24:1-2) and Jerusalem was deserted, isolated and alone.¹³³ In one sentence, it can be said that the message the prophet is conveying in

¹³³Thompson, *The Book of Jeremiah*, 481. See also Craigie, Kelly and Drinkard (*Jeremiah*, 316) who have a good discussion concerning the concept "lover." They write that in the covenant terminology, Israel-Judah was the wife of Yahweh; clearly Yahweh

verse 20 is that for a long time Israel had put her faith in her allies and that God has now decided to break down the latter before punishing the unfaithful Israelites.

Verse 21 states more clearly the reason for the doom of Israel: it is the refusal of the people of Israel to obey the word of Yahweh. The passage emphasizes the fact that this disobedience is not a new happening, but a characteristic of Israel's history (see also 1 Sam. 8:6-8). Even though Yahweh kept warning his people, they would not listen to him. During the time of ease or prosperity (בְּשִׁלְוֹתַיִךְ) they forgot their God. This reminds us also of the warning to the people of Israel in Deuteronomy 8:11-20, not to forget their God in time of prosperity. During the time of insecurity, the people of Israel would put their trust in their lovers or allies that the Lord has now broken and Israel is left defenseless. There is no need to reiterate here that none of the six limitations given in Deuteronomy 17 is being followed.

Verse 22 gives the kind of judgement that awaits the people of Israel because of their disobedience: all their shepherds will be shepherded by the wind. In other words, all the leaders of Israel will be led away because of their refusal to heed the word of the Lord, and Jerusalem will be ashamed and disgraced. This is a very important passage for our thesis. The prophet does not say that all the people shall be driven away but rather their shepherds. These are the very people who are supposed to shepherd the flock but they fail to do their responsibility, and as a consequence, they themselves are punished. Moreover, the whole city of Jerusalem (meaning the rest of

should have been her only lover. Yet Hosea and Jeremiah both use marriage metaphors often to depict Israel/Judah's unfaithfulness. Israel/Judah forsakes Yahweh and runs after other gods, especially the Baalim. In a couple of passages, the lovers are the foreign nations with whom Israel/Judah allies herself (this last case is the one referred to in Jeremiah 22:20).

the people) suffers the punishment of God because of the failure of their leaders (v23). In other words, the nation is broken because of the failure of its leaders; the people of Lebanon (used figuratively for Jerusalem),¹³⁴ though nested in their cedar, i.e., in their comfort, are now groaning in pain and anguish.

This section does not tell us how exactly this judgment took place, though we know that judgment did come upon Judah when Nebuchadnezzar attacked Jerusalem. What this passage is showing us is that, because of king Jehoiakim's failure,¹³⁵ lament and anguish will surely come upon the leaders of Judah and upon the whole nation.

Summary

The questions I sought to answer in this chapter were "how did some of the Israelite kings understand and use their power or authority? Did they follow the standards set for the Israelite monarch in the Scriptures? What was the result of complying or not complying with the standards? For this study, I chose two kings (Josiah and Jehoiakim) as an example and a counter-example of the understanding of power or authority. Josiah was a good king who understood his task as a king in terms of complying with the standards set for the covenant-king in Scripture. He reigned to establish justice with God and with one another in the context of Israelite society. And as a result, Jeremiah tells us that it went well not only for the covenant-king, but also

¹³⁴Thompson, *The Book of Jeremiah*, 482. He justifies the use of Lebanon for Jerusalem by the fact that there was so much cedar from Lebanon in Jerusalem that Jerusalem was a little Lebanon. If Thompson is right, and I believe he is, the fact that there was so much cedar in Jerusalem shows the kind of society Jerusalem became by the time of Jehoiakim and the last kings of Judah.

¹³⁵I do not intend to say that Judah is punished because of the failure of Jehoiakim alone, but that in the focus of this passage, it is obvious that Jehoiakim had enough opportunity to follow his father's step and help the country escape God's judgment.

for the whole nation. Therefore, Josiah is presented as the best king of the whole history of Israel. Thus we read in 2 Kings 23:25 that "before him there was no king like him, who turned to the Lord with all his heart, with all his soul, and with all his might, according to all the law of Moses; nor did any like him arise after him." In terms of the limitations found in Deuteronomy, 2 Chronicles 34:31-32 tells us that after the discovery of the book of the Law, Josiah made a covenant before the Lord, to follow him and to keep his commandment, his decrees, and his statutes with all his heart and to perform the words of the covenant that were written in the book. The same passage adds that the king made all who were present in Jerusalem and in Benjamin pledge themselves to it. Therefore, it is clear that the book of the law did become the *vade mecum* of Josiah. As a result, there was peace in the land since all went well both for the king and for all the nation. In terms of Samuel's warning, Josiah was a "helper" of the people, not a "taker." The best illustration comes from 2 Chronicles 35:7-10 where the king and his officials are described as giving to the poor people thousands of animals for the celebration of the Passover.

Jehoiakim was chosen as a counter-example of his father Josiah. There is nothing positive said about him by the prophet Jeremiah. He is rather condemned for: (1) his disregard for the law: he made his subjects become slaves by letting them work for him without wages, (2) his flamboyant behavior, (3) his acquisitiveness and oppression. In terms of the monarchic standards, Jehoiakim is an utter failure; he understands his possession of power or authority as a means of oppression and getting wealth. As a result, he was judged and condemned by God. It is also important to add

that it is because of his failure to comply with God's standards and the failure of many other kings like him that Israel was destroyed and the people of Judah were taken to exile.

CHAPTER 4

IMPLICATIONS FOR AFRICA

In the book Vision for a Bright Africa: Facing the Challenges of Development, Kinoti observes that "among the nations of the world Africa has become synonymous with poverty, political chaos, social disorder and general backwardness."¹ Gana makes the same observation when he writes that "politically, the continent is in a state of permanent turmoil as widespread repression intensifies, leading to the transformation of the continent into a massive refugee camp."²

What are the possible causes of Africa's economic, political and social wretchedness? Kinoti lists at least ten of them: bad government, a corrupted church, an international economic system, African culture, poor management, lack of education, moral failure, a rudimentary state of science and technology, population growth, and environmental crisis.³ His conclusion is that because of the many causes of Africa's crisis there are so far no universally agreed strategies for resolving them.

¹ George Kinoti, "Vision for a Bright Africa," in Vision for a Bright Africa: Facing the Challenges of Development, ed. George Kinoti & Peter Kimuyu (Nairobi: AISRED), 1.

² Aaron T. Gana, "The African Political Crisis and the Church in Africa," in Vision for A Bright Africa: Facing the Challenges of Development, ed. George Kinoti & Peter Kimuyu (Nairobi: AISRED), 224.

³ George Kinoti, Hope for Africa and What the Christian Can Do (Nairobi: AISRED), 35-65. See also Paul Harrison, Inside the Third World: The Anatomy of Poverty (London: Penguin Books, 1988).

There is little agreement about the causes of Africa's problems and therefore there are no universally agreed strategies for resolving them. It is therefore not surprising that the problems are deepening by the day.⁴

From this quotation, it appears that so far there has been no clear plan or strategy on how to tackle the many African problems, since there is no agreement on which ones of the causes are the most destructive. My argument, however is that not all the causes listed above could have so badly destroyed the continent. For example, the environment crisis alone could have been minimized since I believe that, in general, the continent has fairly adequate mineral resources, fertile land in many places and other resources like water, petroleum, forests, etc. I also think that the moral failure in Africa is not as bad as in other parts of the world. In fact many believe that the continent's moral failure originates from our desire to copy what is happening in other parts of the world.⁵ It is also difficult to convince someone that the African church is one of the major causes of African misery. As far as I am aware, many churches and church leaders in Africa do stand against corruption, injustice, and several kinds of wickedness.⁶ It will also be very difficult to argue that it is because of its culture alone

⁴ Kinoti, Hope for Africa, 35.

⁵ Paul Harrison, Inside the Third World, 48. He laments that "the Third World's obsession with the western way of life has perverted development and is rapidly destroying good and bad in traditional cultures, flinging the baby out with the bathwater. It is the most totally pervasive example of what historians call cultural diffusion in the history of mankind."

⁶ Some of important books (apart from the ones we have already mentioned) discussing the contribution of the African church in denouncing the abuse of power/authority by African leaders are: Kenneth Ross, ed., God, People and Power in Malawi: Democratization in Theological Perspective (Blantyre, Malawi: Christian

that Africa has been so destroyed; in fact it is generally agreed that our culture has many positive aspects that have kept the society somehow united for centuries. Kinoti himself lists some positive aspects of African culture.⁷ In line with my thesis, I will argue that one of the most important causes of Africa's social and economic wretchedness is the abuse of political power/authority by African political leaders. This is also in agreement with Kinoti, who points out that,

The most important single cause of Africa's social and economic problems is certainly bad government. Poor political leadership is guaranteed to keep a poor country poor and to turn a progressive nation into a retrogressive one. Poor and autocratic leadership has been a disaster for virtually every country in black Africa. The death of a fledgling democracy, in some countries slow and in others sudden and violent, has had disastrous consequences for African economies. The monopoly of national decision-making by despots and their associates, coupled with corruption and incompetence, has played havoc with the economies and social services of African nations.⁸

This, in my view, is the real problem of Africa as it was the case in Judah during the time of the prophet Jeremiah. What Morgan said about Judah, that the cause of the destruction of the nation was that leaders were exercising false authority over the nation,⁹ is also true for Africa today. What we read from the book of Jeremiah is

Literature Association in Malawi, 1996); Henry Okullu, Church and State in Nation Building and Human Development (Nairobi: Uzima Press Ltd., 1984); Henry Okullu, Church and Politics in East Africa (Nairobi: Uzima Press Ltd., 1974); Peter Walshe, Church Versus State in South Africa: The Case of the Christian Institute (New York: Orbis Books, 1983).

⁷ Kinoti, Hope for Africa, 46. His list includes: strong family ties, generosity and a strong community spirit.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 36.

⁹ G. Campbell Morgan, Studies in the Prophecy of Jeremiah (London: Fleming A. Revell Co., 1931), 120

that Israel's social and political ordering were authorized by Yahweh's sovereignty through his law and that it did not consequently reflect the will of any political rulers. That is why God first gave the law and then sent the prophets like Jeremiah so that they might function as checks against idolatrous political practices in Israelite society. In comparison with the African situation, there are at least three lessons we can learn from Israel's government as far as the exercise of political power is concerned: (a) the true unifying and guiding element of any nation is law or constitution and not the government itself; (b) the law was not made by the king to fit his selfish ambitions, but it was given by God to guide the government; in other words, the law was above the government; (c) the law reflects the will of God in that it teaches both the fear of God and justice in the society (i.e. with one another).

From what precedes, we can argue that the root of the problem in our continent is twofold: First, African leaders have not yet understood the nature of their power/authority and, therefore, how to use it. Most of them think of themselves as possessing absolute and unchallenged power, they behave as if there is no law to control them. This is why, whenever African political leaders (at least the majority of them) come to power, one of their priorities is either to change the constitution in order to fit it to their purpose or to suspend it and then rule by decree.¹⁰ They forget

¹⁰ The fact that the constitution has been the object of many changes in Africa helps us to understand why in some countries people have been crying for the revision of it (the constitution). This is because the current constitution does not really represent the will of the people (the majority), but has been made by a small group in order to serve its own interests.

that their power is delegated and that, consequently, they do not possess absolute power over their nations.

The second problem with African leadership is human pride and the tendency to self-glorification. In Jeremiah 22:13, Jehoiakim understood his leadership in terms of possessing wealth and enslaving his subjects for his personal projects (notably the building projects). In other words, Jehoiakim worked for his own glorification and, by so doing, he usurped God's glory and worked against God's purposes. This is what we are calling political idolatry and Jehoiakim was condemned for it.

The situation is not better in Africa. Kinoti again drives the point home when he writes that, for many of our leaders to become a president or a king means more likely to become a demigod.

At independence we had democracy, i.e. a multiparty parliament system, universal adult suffrage, an independent judiciary and an executive, subject to checks and balances. However, within a few years democracy was being replaced with "African democracy" or "African socialism", which simply meant one-party rule. This soon became personal rule, *with a president becoming not just a dictator, but also a demigod to whom every knee must bow and whose praises every tongue must sing* (emphasis mine).¹¹

Self-glorification unmistakably leads to personality cult and to the dethronement of God by the human leader. And in Africa, most of our leaders have not only forgotten God, the owner of Africa, but they have even taken his seat of sovereignty by promoting personality cult or what is referred to in this thesis as political idolatry. There are several examples to illustrate this misunderstanding of the nature of power or authority in the African context. For example, Mobutu was referred to as "our

¹¹ Kinoti, Hope for Africa, 28.

father," "the father of the nation," "the one who reigns eternally."¹² In Zaïre (now The Democratic Republic of Congo), a new effort was put in to replace Christianity with a new religion called "Mobutuism." Shaw quotes Hastings who writes that the credo of this new Zairian religion was summarized in a government statement of June 1974 in the following words:

God has sent us a great prophet, our wondrous Mobutu Sese Seko. This prophet is shaking us out of our torpor. He has delivered us from our mental alienation. He is teaching us how to love each other. This prophet is our liberator, our messiah, the one who has come to make all things new in Zaire. Jesus is the prophet of the Hebrews. He is dead. Christ is no longer alive. He called himself God. Mobutu is not a god and he does not call himself God. He too will die but he is leading his people towards a better life. How can honor and veneration be refused to the one who had founded the new Church of Zaire? Our church is the Popular Movement of the Revolution [MPR].¹³

One thing to note in this quotation, irrespective of who composed the credo, is that for many African leaders Christ is dead. Our leaders have proclaimed the death of Christ -not his resurrection - so that they can usurp his seat of sovereignty. Therefore, my argument is that the history of Africa's suffering and decay actually starts with the history of the death of God/Christ in Africa. Christ is de-sacralized and killed so that our leaders might be sacralized. This is true not only for those who

¹² Most of the songs to praise Mobutu's deeds were to start with something like *Mobutu libela*. This phrase (in lingala) means "Mobutu will reign eternally." Or "*topesaki cinq ans, tobakisi sept ans, ponakosukisa cent ans.*" It means something like "we gave him (Mobutu) five years, we added him seven years and we finally decided to give him one hundred years to rule us."

¹³ Mark Shaw, The Kingdom of God in Africa: A Short History of African Christianity (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1996), 266-67.

reject Christianity, but even for those who cover themselves with some kind of Christian religion. Needless to say, nothing of what was promised by Mobutuism really happened for Zairians, except the misery and decay of the nation as it was for Judah during the time of Jeremiah.

Another classical example is Kwame Nkrumah, the first president of Ghana. According to Shaw, Nkrumah encouraged a messianic personality cult and interpreted his rule in kingdom terms.¹⁴ Omari adds that meetings --during Krumah's reign-- began with such songs as *If you follow him, he will make you fishers of men*¹⁵

(emphasis original). Shaw also points out that Nkrumah was so fond of quoting his parody of Matthew 6:33 that the words were inscribed on his statue in Accra: "Seek first the political kingdom and all other things will be added unto you."¹⁶ In the same way, the Apostles' Creed was revised by the youth wing of Nkrumah's party. It reads as follows:

I believe in the Convention People's Party, the opportune savior of Ghana and in Kwame Nkrumah, its founder and leader; who is endowed with the Ghana spirit, born as true Ghanaian for Ghana; suffering under victimization, was vilified, threatened with deportation; he disentangled himself from the clutches of UGCC; and the same day he rose victorious with the 'verandah boys'; ascended the political heights; and sitteth at the supreme head of the CPP.¹⁷

¹⁴ Ibid., 259.

¹⁵ Peter T. Omari, Kwame Nkrumah: The Anatomy of an African Dictatorship (New York: Africana Publishing Co., 1970), 85.

¹⁶ Shaw, The Kingdom of God in Africa, 259.

¹⁷ Ibid., 260.

What was said about Mobutu is also true for Nkrumah: Christianity in Ghana was being replaced by the leader's religion. It was no longer to believe in God or in Christ but to believe in the Party (CPP) and its founder. In fact Bediako rightly points out that Nkrumah adopted the title "Osagyefo" (which means 'Savior' or 'Redeemer')¹⁸ in order to show that he has taken the place of the true and unique Savior of the world. Unlike the case of Mobutuism, where new credo was created for the new religion, Nkrumah and his followers were directly and consciously distorting the word of God and replacing it with that of the new Ghanaian messiah: Nkrumah.

I limit myself to these two extreme cases, but this does not mean that there is not a problem in other African countries. The abuse of human right and every kind of corruption in the government have become common practices in our nations.

Bediako thinks that the source of this misunderstanding of power or authority in Africa has "to do with the legacy of certain important religious aspects of the African traditional world-view as they related to authority, power and political governance, particularly the tendency of traditional society to sacralize authority and political office."¹⁹ The conclusion is that many of our leaders understood very little

¹⁸ Kwame Bediako, "De-Sacralization and Democratization: Some Theological Reflections on the Role of Christianity in Nation-Building in Modern Africa," Transformation, 12 (1995): 8.

¹⁹ Kwame Bediako, "De-Sacralization and Democratization," 7. He also argues that in point of fact, in the traditional world view, royal ancestors are not 'dead,' they have simply joined their grandsires in the realm of spirit-fathers, from where they continue to manifest interest and to participate in the affairs of the society through the channels of mystical intervention by appropriate rituals. Accordingly, the

that the power of the state as the creation of God is structurally bound to the norms of the word of God;²⁰ and that as such, they reign not above the Creator and his law but under his sovereignty. Is there anything we can do to change the situation?

It is the responsibility of the church to take this challenge.²¹ And this can be done in two ways: First, as we said in the introduction, we must help people not to misread history by thinking that the abuse of power and any other failure in our society is an imperfection of the human being and that the way to deal with it is by education, multipartism, democracy, etc. Rather, the church must confront our leaders by showing them that any kind of abuse of power is rebellion against the One who is the source of all power. Jeremiah 22 helps us to understand that the source of the collapse of Judah as a nation was a breach in the relation between the leaders of the latter and God and that the only solution for the healing of that nation was the proper understanding and use of power. In other words, God wanted the Israelite kings to know that their power was delegated and that they must exercise it strictly under the guidance of the One who possesses the absolute power. Moreover, the church must teach the people to learn to read historical events, for example the many civil wars, the endless flow of refugees in the continent, the utter poverty in most of

²⁰ See also Stuart Fowler, The State in the Light of the Scripture (Potchefstroom: Potchefstroom University, 1988), 10.

²¹ John Howard Yoder, The Politics of Jesus: Behold the Man! Our Victorious Lamb (Carlise, UK: The Paternoster Press, 1994), 156. He rightly argues that "It is rather a part of Christians' proclamation that the church is under orders to make known to the powers, as no other proclaimer can do, the fulfillment of the mysterious purposes of God (Eph. 3:10) by means of that Man in whom their rebellion has been broken and pretensions they had raised have been demolished.

civil wars, the endless flow of refugees in the continent, the utter poverty in most of our countries, etc. with an eye of faith, that is as the act of God's judgment because of our sins and mostly because of the misuse of power by our political leaders.²²

Dyrness rightly quotes Luther who understood clearly that "the agent who really works in all things is God, and not the personal and impersonal powers of this world which we think of as causes."²³ Likewise, Calvin also observed that,

The universe is ruled by God, not only because he watches over the order of nature set by himself, but because he exercises especial care over each of his works. It is indeed true that the several things are moved by a secret impulse of nature as if they obeyed God's eternal command, and what God once determined flows on by itself.²⁴

Second, there is a need to "de-sacralize" human power in Africa by presenting an alternative one: the power of God. Christ's life and the teaching of the whole New Testament can be used by the church as a demonstration of the de-sacralization of human power on the one hand and a proclamation of the almighty power of God/Christ on the other. An illustration of this can be found in John 19:11. This passage shows Pilate as "conscious of possessing authority from the most powerful man on earth (Caesar) and representing the most powerful nation on earth (the

²² This raises a very complex question: how can we be punished because of the sins of our leaders? The answer to this question is certainly beyond the scope of this thesis. However, I can argue that the citizens in any country are responsible for the existence of their leaders (good or evil), and that if those leaders continue to rule, it is because the citizens have allowed them to do so (it seems to me that our rulers cannot stand if all the people completely withdraw their acknowledgement).

²³ William A. Dyrness, The Earth is God's: A Theology of American Culture (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1997), 37.

²⁴ Ibid.

absolute, but rather delegated from above. In other words, Jesus was telling his judge that there was nothing on earth like absolute power except the one from God. This is an excellent case of confrontation between the power of God and that of the secular world. Jesus demonstrated to his judge that the power of this world is limited and delegated. In other words, Jesus corrected Pilate's misapprehension of power or authority. It became that instead of being judged by Pilate, Jesus turned the table and presented himself as the supreme judge, the source of all power and authority and the one who himself gave his life for the sake of his creation. Moreover, Jesus did this by accepting to take on his cross and, therefore, by presenting a different style of possessing power or authority,

The way of Jesus revealed, then, a new political option in the world of his time. *His was not the way of the Sadducees and the Herodians who preserved their religion through pragmatism and expediency by collaborating with the Roman occupying forces. His was not the way of the Zealots, the violent revolutionaries out to overturn Roman rule by force. Nor was it the way of the Essenes who chose withdrawal into the desert in order to preserve their religious life intact, nor of the Pharisees who preoccupied themselves solely with their religious observances and segregated themselves politically. Jesus' way was one of engagement and involvement through a new way of overcoming arising from a unique concept of power- the power of forgiveness over retaliation, of suffering over violence, of love over hostility, of humble service over domination. Jesus won his way to pre-eminence and glory, not by exalting himself, but by humbling himself, to the point of dying a shameful death. In other words, his conception of power was that of non-dominating power.*²⁶

This, according to Bediako, is a new way of conceiving power: not a power to dominate, to kill, to abuse, but a power that leads to the service of others, a humble

²⁵ George R. Beasley-Murray, *John*. Word Biblical Commentary (Waco, Texas: Word Books, 1987), 339.

²⁶ Bediako, "De-sacralization and Democratization," 9.

This, according to Bediako, is a new way of conceiving power: not a power to dominate, to kill, to abuse, but a power that leads to the service of others, a humble and sacrificial use of power. This should be a good counter-example for our leaders who think of their power as an instrument of domination. The result of such understanding of the nature of power will be justice, peace, love and a new political order in our nations.

The recognition that power truly belongs to God, rooted in the Christian theology of power as non-dominating, liberates politicians and rulers to be humans among fellow-humans, and ennoble politics and the business of government into the business of God and the service of God in the service of fellow-humans. It is this perspective which provides the only genuine and abiding foundation for any serious quest in Africa for a sustained culture of freedom and justice in a genuine democracy. Without such a conception of power as Jesus held, taught, and demonstrated by the Cross, the hope of achieving a real sharing of political power in any society will remain elusive.²⁷

This quotation reminds us the limitation in Deuteronomy 17:20 that the king should not exalt himself above other members of the community. Likewise, the church must teach all Christians in Africa that no human being should claim to possess absolute power or to take the place of God. The church must also learn to withdraw her support from any government which does not work for human dignity and the good of citizens. The church should not praise any tyrant or any leader who abuses his power/authority. Here the warning given by the French essayist Etienne de La Boétie as quoted by Mott is important; he says that the tyrant is the same as everyone else in society "except for the advantage you give to him to destroy you."²⁸ What we must

²⁷ Ibid., 10

²⁸ Mott, Biblical Ethics and Social Change, 143.

Before I conclude this chapter however, I must caution against the danger of making exaggerated claims for the role of the Church in Africa. The African church has not become the Kingdom of God, consequently, it will be wrong to think that she must produce a state in which total *shalom* will reign. It seems to me that such claim is pure utopia because the word of God teaches us that total peace will come on earth only when the devil will be destroyed and when the Kingdom of God will come. As I think about Jeremiah himself, I realize that despite his powerful ministry, the kingdom of Judah did come to decay. The true role of the African church is not, therefore, to transform human kingdoms to the Kingdom, of God but as Bediako sees it,

The major challenge that I see facing the Christian churches in Africa now in the political sphere is to raise to consciousness in the wider society, the connection between the Church's message of righteousness, love and justice and the quest for sustainable democratic governance in the process of nation-building.²⁹

This means that the church in Africa must help Africans, particularly Christians, to participate in the building of a better nation by practicing in daily lives what the word of God teaches them and also by resisting all kinds of wickedness in any oppressive government or in the society in general. This is not an easy task, but it must remain one of the priorities for the church of Christ in Africa.

²⁹ Bediako, "De-Sacralization and Democratization," 11.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

This thesis set out to study the concept of power/authority in Jeremiah 22 with implications for the exercise of political power in Africa. Among the four kings of Judah named in Jeremiah 22, we limited our study to two of them, namely Josiah as an example of the right use of power or authority and Jehoiakim as a counter example of his father (or as an example of the abuse of power or authority). In order to understand what was expected of a king in Israelite society, we decided first to study Deuteronomy 17 and 1 Samuel 8. These two texts were used as standards from which we were then able to evaluate the use of power or authority.

From our study, the following lessons can be drawn: First, the passage of our inquiry has shown us that Jeremiah's life and ministry were deeply involved with public events in his nation. He lived during the most difficult days of his nation (as some of us do), and consequently as God's messenger he had a message from God to the leaders of his nation about the causes of the decay in the country. His message comprised the right things to do if the leaders wanted to see a positive change in the whole society of Judah and the judgment from God if the leaders would not listen to Yahweh. Jeremiah was therefore a spokesman of God, and as such, he had the mission of disclosing the moral crisis tearing apart his nation, a crisis in which all the Israelites and their kings stood unheeding. He also had the mission of declaring the way of life.

and the way of death. In Africa, the church is the only institution credible and able to carry on this prophetic task. This is why we said that it is the responsibility of the African church, with its phenomenal growth, to take the challenge of the Continent and speak out against the abuse of power in our nations and the decay of society.

Second, according to Jeremiah, the real source of corruption is a breach in the relation between God and Israel, especially the leaders of Israel. The solution is to come back to Yahweh (to know him and his will) in terms of radical change in the life of the entire nation. This also means that the crucial thing was the religious defection of the rulers and that the abuse of power was a consequence of that defection. Josiah did realize the importance of coming back to Yahweh and the result was that it went well for him and for the nation (Jer. 22:15-16). But Jehoiakim refused to heed the word of God and he was condemned and judged (Jer. 22:13-19). With Jehoiakim was also judged the whole nation (Jer. 22:20-23). The implication of this second point is that the destiny of a nation is linked to the destiny of its ruler(s). Here again, we said that one of the grave mistakes being made in Africa is the sacralization of power by our leaders who want to become African gods, replacing God (Christianity) with their personality cults. The solution to this problem is the desacralization of human leader in Africa by presenting a new model of leadership: the servant-leadership model in the image of the Lord Jesus Christ. Third, the prophet also demonstrates that all power and authority in humans are delegated, and that only God possesses absolute power. In other words, the sovereignty of the kings is not unlimited. Over human power stands the power and absolute sovereignty of God. This is clearly seen in the six limitations (Deut. 17:14-20), in the warnings issued by

Samuel (1 Sam. 8) and in the way God threatens the kings of Judah with judgment if they do not obey and follow the standards (cf. Jer. 22:1-9, 20-23). The relationship between kingship in Israel and the law helps us to re-think about our constitutions in Africa: who makes our constitution? What should be the relationship between any particular government and the constitution? How many times should the constitution be changed? If there is a need for change because of a particular situation, who is authorized to do it? Should it be the government alone? Should it be the parliament, or a commission composed of different sections of the population? But in Africa, most of our leaders think of themselves as above the law or the constitution; they suspend it and change it as they want. For me, the constitution should be made by different sections of the population and the church must play a major role in its composition or revision.

It is clear from the above that a solid foundation for building our continent must start with a clear understanding of God's word. Our study of Jeremiah 22 has shown that the abuse of power is one of the most important factors which contributed to the decay of Judah and which is also contributing to the decay of our nations today. It also showed us that kings and rulers of this world stand under the sovereignty of God, the source of all power in the universe. The African church has, therefore, a double responsibility of teaching the nations and their rulers the proper use of power, and of helping the citizens to understand that they are responsible for the kind of government in power, because their destiny is linked to the kind of leadership they have accepted to rule over them.

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