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Jeremiah, the Deviant Prophet

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Abstract

Jeremiah was a prophet of violence and destruction. Contrary to Jeremiah, Judean religious establishments maintained shalom. Shalom prevailed over Jerusalem and Judah. Shalom, thus, represents the collective consciousness of Jeremiah's era. Shalom was also a "common social space" for the variety of religious orientations. The gods of Judah could form "a social God" who maintained different cults but shared a common social goal, divine and human welfare. It is, therefore, obvious that the devotees of the social God did not listen to the prophecy of Jeremiah. For them, doom-prophecy was a treason against national security and social morality. His prophecy was a blasphemy against the social God on the one hand and a violence against collective sentiments on the other hand. The period of Jeremiah is gen-

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erally said to be under a critical situation because Judah was afflicted by the menace from Babylonia and Egypt. In this pathological situation, Jeremiah came to be sensitive to socio-political transition, for he was located on the most outer border of social boundaries. He anticipated vaguely that Judah would be destroyed. However, even he could not determine whether his anticipation was true or not because he, as an individual and a corporate personality at the same time, had been also overwhelmed by the communal hope for shalom.

• Keywords

Jeremiah, Deviant, Emile Durkheim, Collective Conscience (Consciousness), Prophetic Conflict, False Prophecy

1. Introduction

One of the most frequently recurrent issues in the book of Jeremiah might be distinguishing between a true and a false prophet. In the book of Jeremiah, some prophets are accused of proclaiming lies and false dreams (8:10; 14:14; 23:25.32; 27:10.14.16; 28:15; 29:9.21), visions of their own heart and peace when there is no peace (6:14; 8:11; 14:13; 23:17; 28:2ff.11). They are labeled as false prophets.[1]

But, as G. Quell, T. W. Overholt, J. L. Crenshaw, and many other scholars have suggested, neither the external nor the internal criteria help very much to define their fallacies.[2] For example, the account of Hananiah's confrontation with Jeremiah (Jer 28), at least makes it obvious that the prophet Hananiah had not worked out these criteria on a theoretical and systematic basis. Rather interestingly, Jeremiah's opponents consider Jeremiah a false prophet. Shemaiah describes Jeremiah as a madman who sets himself up as a prophet (29:26), and the party of Azariah and Johanan reply to Jeremiah, "You are lying; the

1 The term, "false prophet (*pseudo-prophetes*)", comes from the Greek translation of the MT (Jer 6:13; 26:7, 8, 11, 16; 27:9; 28:1; 29:1, 8; Zech13:2) and was taken up by some New Testament texts. However, the Hebrew Bible never uses the equivalent of 'pseudo' or 'false' prophet.l

2 G. Quell, *Wahre und falshe Propheten* (Gütersloh: C. Bertelsmann Verlag, 1952); T. W. Overholt, *The Threat of Falsehood: A Study in the Theology of the Book of Jeremiah* (London: SCM, 1970); J. L. Crenshaw, *Prophetic Conflict: Its Effect upon Israelite Religion* (Berlin/New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1971). See also W. J. Wessels, "Prophets Versus Prophets in the Book of Jeremiah: In Search of the True Prophets," OTE 22 (2009), 733-751; A. Osuji, *Where is the Truth? Narrative Exegesis and the Question of True and False Prophecy in Jeremiah 26-29* (Leuven: Peeters, 2010); J. T. Hibbard, "Ture and False Prophecy: Jeremiah's Revision of Deuteronomy," JSOT 35 (2011), 339-358; D. Epp-Tiessen, *Concerning the Prophets: True and False Prophecy in Jeremiah 23:9-29:32* (Eugene: Pickwick, 2012); D. Rom-Shiloni, "Prophets in Jeremiah in Struggle over Leadership, or Rather over Prophetic Authority?" Bib 99 (2018), 351-372.

Lord our God has not sent you" (43:2).

From the viewpoint of the so-called false prophets, it is not themselves but Jeremiah who must be blamed for misleading their people. The doom prophecy of Jeremiah seems to threaten the social stability because most of the people are listening to shalom (well-being) prophecy. In addition, his pro-Babylonian attitude apparently contradicts their social allegiance to Egypt.

His dangerous prophecy seems not only to threaten the religious establishments but also social stability. While he shakes the unilateral patriotism with his doom prophecy, he breaks the social unity. Therefore, he might be regarded not only as a religious heretic, but also as a criminal. He consistently tries to break social stability with his heretical prophesy. For the contemporary religious authority, Jeremiah might be regarded as a deviant prophet who proclaims false prophecy and leads the people astray. He must therefore be punished by death according to canonical tradition (Deut 18:20-22).[3]

Before turning to the specific arguments about the deviant prophet, we would do well to examine the terminology "deviant" briefly. The term "deviance" refers to conduct which the people of a group consider so dangerous or embarrassing or irritating that they bring special sanctions to bear against the persons who exhibit it. According to Emile Durkheim, the deviance is usually expressed in the form of the

3 It has been suggested that Jeremiah is literarily and ideologically connected with Deuteronomy. See Sigmund Mowinckel, *Zur Komposition des Buches Jeremia* (Kristiania: Jacob Dybwad, 1914); Thomas C. Römer, "How Did Jeremiah become a Convert to Deuteronomistic Ideology?" in *Those Elusive Deuteronomists: The Phenomenon of Pan-Deuteronomism*, ed. Linda S. Shearing and Steven L. Mckenzie (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999), 189-99; Rainer Albertz, *Israel in Exile: The History and Literature of the Sixth Century B.C.E.*, trans. David Green (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2003), 302-345.

violation of collective rules. Deviance is an inevitable aspect of any society. In a famous and frequently quoted passage, he states:

> Imagine a society of saints, a perfect cloister of exemplary individuals. Crimes, properly so called, will be there unknown; but faults which appear venial to the layman will create there the same scandal that the ordinary offense does in ordinary consciousness. If, then, this society has the power to judge and punish, it will define these acts as criminal and will treat them as such.[4]

According to Durkheim, crime or deviance is a necessary and vital part of any social system. Its main function is to create and sustain the flexibility of any social system. Durkheim offers as evidence an example of a renowned criminal: Socrates.

> According to Athenian law Socrates was a criminal, and his condemnation was no more than just. However, his crime, namely the independence of his thought, rendered a service not only to humanity but to his country. It served to prepare a new morality and faith.[5]

Defined as such, deviance serves an important function in the social system. K. T. Erikson, continuing Durkheim's theoretical direction, states that

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4 E. Durkheim, *The Rules of Sociological Method*, trans. S. Solovay and J. E. Mueller (New York: The Free Press, 1938), 69.

5 E. Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*, trans. K. Fields (New York: The Free Press, 1995), 73.

> The deviant act creates a sense of mutuality among the people of a community by supplying a focus for group feeling. ... Deviance makes people more alert to the interests they share in common and draws attention to those values which constitute the collective conscience of the community.[6]

According to Erikson, the violation of law gives a tighter bond of solidarity than had existed earlier. In other words, the deviance draws attention to those values which represent the "collective conscience" of the society.

The deviant person or group is, at a glance, somehow different from his conventional fellow. This difference makes people consider the deviant person "dangerous" and bring special sanctions against him. Where then does this feeling of "danger" come from? It probably originates in different viewpoints on what happened. As Roland Barthes rightly points out, when a collective considers an idea, a person or a group dangerous, it already has in mind a different code by which to interpret the thought or the behavior of person or group.[7] Whenever a collective regards a certain thing or person dangerous, it draws back and tries to keep their boundary: *status quo*.

A human community, according to Erikson, is comprised of diverse

6 K. T. Erikson, *Wayward Puritans: A Study in the Sociology of Deviance* (New York: Macmillan, 1966), 4.

7 In his book, "Criticism and Truth," Roland Barthes confesses that he was once marked as a deviant scholar by other contemporary scholars. In the debate on 'new criticism', he argues that the collective accused him of being a fraud. He thinks that he was expelled from the community as a dangerous individual. See R. Barthes, *Criticism and Truth*, trans. K. P. Keuneman (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987).

boundaries. Its members tend to confine themselves to a particular category of activity and to regard any conduct which deviates from that category as somehow inappropriate or dangerous. Who then is responsible for maintaining the boundaries? Erickson conceives of a conception of "policing agents whose special business is to guard the cultural integrity of the community."[8] Erickson argues that the policing agents can be represented by criminal trials, excommunication hearings, or court-materials. The policing agents, however, cannot be executed without the communal agreements. Though everyone in a society does not participate in their process, s/he is supposed to be in the agreement of policing executions. The policing agents are none other than the representation of collective consciousness and communal morality.

Whether or not an act is deviant, then, depends on how other people react to it. Instead of asking why a deviant wants to do things that are disapproved of, we might better ask why conventional people do not follow through on the deviant impulses they have. The only way an observer can tell whether or not a given style of behavior is deviant, then, is to learn something about the standards of the audience which responds to it. In order to research the deviancy of Jeremiah, therefore, the primary step must be to define the social boundary which labels Jeremiah deviant.

II. Social Boundaries in Jeremiah's Era

The book of Jeremiah contains more material that deals with the sub-

8 Erikson, *Wayward Puritans*, 10-11.

ject of prophetic conflicts than any other prophetic book. Throughout the book of Jeremiah, we encounter a variety of suggestions as to what actually makes a prophet 'false'. This material is primarily found in Jer 2:8; 4:9-10; 5:12-14; 6:13-15; 14:13-18; 23:9-40; 26-29; 30-31; 37:19. To be more specific, Jeremiah 23:9-40 constitutes an attack on the false message of Jeremiah's prophetic opponents.

The oracles concerning the prophets (23:9-40) provide a rationale for Yahweh's judgment against prophets, who have been largely responsible for what the people as a whole have done. The charges against the prophets in 23:9-40 may be summarized briefly as (1) some of them prophesied Baal rather than Yahweh; (2) the prophets were morally corrupt; (3) they proclaimed peace when there was no peace, and thereby encouraged the community in vain hopes; (4) they had not stood in Yahweh's council, so did not know what was going on; (5) they were guilty of deception by using dreams, stealing each other's oracles and aping genuine prophetic techniques.[9]

Traditional interpretations consider these charges against prophets the criteria distinguishing a true prophet from a false prophet.[10] All the accusations, however, are inadequate as a means of illuminating

9 Cf. R. P. Carroll, *From Chaos to Covenant: Prophecy in the Book of Jeremiah* (New York: Crossroad, 1981), 180; N. R. Bowen, *The Role of YHWH as Deceiver in True and False Prophecy* (Ph.D. dissertation, Princeton Theological Seminary, 1994), 1-2; Crenshaw, Prophetic Conflict, 1-2.

10 The biblical scholarship has suggested various criteria to distinguish between true and false prophecy. For example, Hans Walter Wolff proposed five principles: (1) A true prophet confronts sin and pronounces God's judgment on it; (2) a true prophet speaks only upon divine prompting; (3) a true prophet does not tailor his message to gain approval of his audience; (4) a true prophet is ethically beyond reproach; (5) a true prophet is sent by God. See Hans Walter Wolff, *Confrontations with the Prophets: Discovering the Old Testament's New and Contemporary Significance* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983), 63.

false prophecy, since the latter is no unified phenomena. It is an oversimplification of prophetic movements to describe them from a dualistic standpoint. After all, the simplified contrast of false to true prophets reminds us of the Weberian voice. According to Max Weber, one may distinguish the true from the false prophet by his or her prophetic charisma which is "a free gift of godly grace without any personal qualification."[11] Therefore, the prophetic consciousness and activity are necessarily individualistic.

> We shall understand 'prophet' to mean a *purely individual* bearer of charisma, who by virtue of his mission proclaims a religious doctrine or divine commandment. ... The *personal* call is the decisive element distinguishing the prophet from the priest. The latter lays claim to authority by virtue of his service in a sacred tradition, while the prophet's claim is based on *personal* revelation and charisma. It is no accident that almost no prophets have emerged from the priestly class (italics are mine).[12]

The Israelite prophets are perceived as solitary individuals, who represent nobody except Yahweh, pitting themselves against the traditional socio-religious order. Prophets do not think of themselves as members of a supporting spiritual community. However, as A. Malamat points out, charisma that is not recognized by society as authoritative "lacks all substantiality and remains meaningless."[13] Peter

11 M. Weber, *Ancient Judaism*, trans. and ed. H. H. Gerth and D. Martindale (Glencoe: The Free Press, 1952), 294.

12 M. Weber, *The Sociology of Religion*, trans. E. Fischoff (Boston: Beacon Press, 1963), 46-47.

13 A. Malamat, "Charismatic Leadership in the Book of Judges," in *Magnalia Dei: The Mighty Acts of God*, ed. F. M. Cross et al. (Garden City: Doubleday, 1976), 159.

Berger also argues in his article "Charisma and Religious Innovation: The Social Location of Israelite Prophecy" that charisma can "originate within the traditionally established institutions and, even there, be sufficiently powerful to effectively change these institutions."[14] In this connection, Robert R. Wilson's assumption is remarkable.

> The process of validation begins when the prophet first claims to have a divine revelation. At this point the society must decide whether or not the prophet's experience is genuine ... However, if the prophet is to continue to be effective, he must have social support through his career. In a sense, then every new prophetic experience must be evaluated and validated by the society.[15]

Thus T. W. Overholt concludes that prophetic charisma is given in two channels: divine and social. Prophetic charisma is individually given by God but must be recognized by society.[16] Therefore, the Weberian conception that prophetic charisma originates in marginal social spheres might lose its theoretical validity at least for more recent scholars. As A. R. Johnson shows, prophets and priests alike executed both "sacramental" and "sacrificial" functions in the Jerusalem Temple, and as a corporate personality, they had to proclaim the welfare

14 P. Berger, "Charisma and Religious Innovation: The Social Location of Israelite Prophecy," *ASR* 28 (1963), 950.

15 R. R. Wilson, "Interpreting Israel's Religion: An Anthropological Perspective on the Problem of False Prophecy," in *The Place is Too Small for Us: The Israelite Prophets in Recent Scholarship*, ed. Robert P. Gordon (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1995), 73.

16 T. W. Overholt, "Thoughts on the Use of 'Charisma' in Old Testament Studies," in *In the Shelter of ELYON: Essays on Ancient Palestinian Life and Literature in Honor of G. W. Ahlström*, ed. W. Boyd Barrick and John R. Spencer (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1984), 298.

of the people.

> To sum up, there is considerable evidence both in the more definitely historical records of the Old Testament to show that during the monarchy the prophet was an important figure in the personnel of the cultus particularly that of the Jerusalem Temple. As such, his function was to promote the shalom or 'welfare' of the people, whether an individual or 'corporate personality'. To this end his role was a dual one. He was not only the spokesman of Yahweh; he was also the representative of the people.[17]

As P. Berger[18] and R. E. Clements[19] rightly pointed out, prophets were heavily indebted to earlier traditions concerning the covenant between Yahweh and Israel. Prophets were not only the spokesman of Yahweh; they were also the representative of the people. Prophets stood as heirs to the religious traditions of their people. Their messages were not new, but mere largely based on the older tradition of Israel rooted in the Exodus and covenant, a tradition which preceded the prophets and shaped their message. As Antonin Causse reminds us, prophecy is not just one block of mentality; rather, there are successive aspects of prophetic inspiration in the course of the evolution of prophecy.[20] The prophets are the guardians and interpreters of tradi-

17 A. R. Johnson, *The Cultic Prophet in Ancient Israel* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1962), 74-75.

18 Berger, "Charisma and Religious Innovation," 942.

19 R. E. Clements, *Prophecy and Covenant* (London: SCM Press, 1965), 25.

20 S. T. Kimbrough, Jr., *Israelite Religion in Sociological Perspective: The Work of Antonin Causse* (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1978), 110.

tions, not its creators.

In this regard, the assumptions on the false prophets in Jer 23:9ff. must be reconsidered. Jeremiah rejects and accuses the prophetic orthodoxy of idolatry. To Jeremiah, the prophetic orthodoxy seems to be only a mixture of animism, polytheism and Canaanite religious beliefs and practices. Jeremiah accuses his contemporaries and prophets of worshiping 'other gods'. They are described as going after other gods (7:6, 9; 11:10; 13:10; 16:11; 25:6; 35:15), burning incense to them (1:16; 19:4; 44:5, 8, 15), and offering libations to them (7:18; 19:13; 32:29).

Ancient Israel, however, as J. Berlinerblau and the other major scholars point out, has accommodated more than one religious movement.[21] Mutually competing religious beliefs and practices existed contemporaneously. The accusations, therefore, seem to be inappropriate. Each group of prophets regarded itself as the guardian and interpreter of their religious traditions. They didn't consider themselves false prophets. They were not aware of their prophetic fallacies. They thought that their oracles had divine authority. More importantly, people agreed with their prophetic authorities.

21 Most of scholarship including J. Berlinerblau accepts the dualistic conception of popular and official religion. R. Davidson defines the official religion as the orthodox religious tradition which can be compared to the conception of Berlinerblau's *ecclesiastical authorities*. Regarding popular religion, Berlinerblau defines it as "a system of religious beliefs which to varying degrees stand in tension with those of the ecclesiastical authorities." However his statement tastes of Weberian dualism. For the study of the deviance from the Durkhemian prospective, this division is apparently inappropriate. Durkheim argues that every religion is worshiped with its own fashion. Because every religion has the same quality, no religion has superiority over the other. Cf. R. Davidson, "Orthodoxy and the Prophetic Word: A Study in the Relationship between Jeremiah and Deuteronomy," VT 14 (1964), 407; J. Berlinerblau, "The 'Popular Religion' Paradigm in Old Testament Research: A Sociological Critique," in *Social Scientific Old Testament Criticism*, ed. D. J. Chalcraft (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997), 65-66; Durkheim, The Elementary Forms, 1-2.

Diverse religious orientations reflect the context of heterogeneous and differentiated Israelite societies. 2 Chr 34:3-7 provides good information about the diversity of Judahite cults. According to these verses, Josiah is supposed to have defiled sanctuaries ("the high places"), idols, such as "the carved and the cast images", and the altars of Baal, as well as to have burned the bones of the dead priests on their altars. Besides demoting the sanctuaries, he dismissed the Yahwistic priests who burned the food offerings, and removed all the vessels of Asherah and Baal, as well as those of the constellations (the 'heavenly host').[22] In addition, according to 2 Kgs 23:4-11, the horses and the chariots of the sun which the kings of Judah had made were removed, and the sacred prostitution in the Solomonic temple came to an end, as did the sacrifices to Moloch in the Kidron Valley.

As many scholars suggest, Yahweh was not the only deity who was worshiped in the Yahwistic Temple in Jerusalem; rather, several deities coexisted. Yahweh was the host of Jerusalem's pantheon (2 Kings 21:2-9). According to A. Lods, it was Manasseh who placed Yahweh on the highest place in his pantheon.[23] Under the highest god, Yahweh, there were the major active deities. These were those famous gods and goddesses who take center stage in the myths: Baal, the virile dim-bulb, Anat, the berserker warrioress, Mot, the deity of death, and many others.[24]

Though all the cults in the temple appeared different because they maintained distinct religious orientations, they formed a unity. All the

22 G. W. Ahlström, *The History of Ancient Palestine from the Palaeolithic Period to Alexander's Conquest* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1993), 771.

23 A. Lods, *The Prophets and the Rise of Judaism* (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1937), 129.

24 L. K. Handy, "The Appearance of Pantheon in Judah," in *The Triumph of Elohim*, ed. D. V. Edelman (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1995), 34.

cults in the Jerusalem Temple fulfilled conditions of human existence, though in different ways. All these cults were unified, and idolatry, which Jeremiah sharply denounced, was the complex system formed by that union, "just as Greek polytheism was formed by the union of all the cults that were addressed to the various deities."[25]

Gods are none other than collective forces personified and hypostatized in material form. According to Durkheim, it is not gods but society that is worshiped by the believers. Gods are social affairs and the product of collective thought. Gods are social because they represent collective realities. Therefore, the gods of Judah are social. They form "a social God" and thus maintain different cults but share common social space. Yahweh is the social God *par excellence*, who manifests himself in the relationships of family to family, clan to clan. He is the guardian of tribal custom, which is the rule of the just and good.[26] Therefore it is not surprising that Jeremiah was met with a unanimous refusal when he denounced these other gods, declaring that worship of them had been the cause of the disaster which had overtaken the nation.

Jeremiah does not deny the existence of any other gods (16:13), but he describes their impotence in terms so sweeping that it is hard to see what divine attributes he has left them: they "cannot save" (2:8, 11, 28; 11:12), they are "broken cisterns" (2:13), he calls them "vanities" and "falsehood" (2:5; 8:19; 13:25; 18:15), and says they are "no gods" (2:11; 5:7). He curses all the worship of other gods as idolatry. However, for its worshipers, the idol is merely a symbol, a material expression of something else. The idol is like the visible body of the god. It

25 Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms*, 157.

26 Kimbrough, *Israelite Religion*, 46.

represents the collective force of the worshipers. The idol's efficacy comes from its psychical power over its worshipers as well as its moral authority over society. Therefore, religious forces represented by idols are moral powers because "they translate to the way in which the collective conscious acts on individual consciousness."[27]

Therefore, Jeremiah's attitude against idolatry means rebellion against morality. He offends the collective sentiments. His condemnation is a crime, since it is an offense against sentiments still keen in the average conscience. He is no more than a criminal who tries to break the social stability. He violates rules of conduct which the rest of the community holds in high respect. Thus, his conducts make the people consider Jeremiah dangerous or embarrassing or irritating so that they bring special sanctions to bear against him.

III. Jeremiah's Immorality

Durkheim argues that morality is totally social. Morality, then, is a source of solidarity. The subordination of the individual mind to the social mind is a moral phenomenon. The duties of the individual toward himself are in fact duties toward society. An individual's morality, as C. E. Gelke rightly points out, is an abstract conception corresponding to nothing in reality.[28] In this regard, it is hard for an individual isolated from society to be moral. Only society can be moral because it represents the collective consciousness. An individual is not

27 Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms*, 254.

28 C. E. Gehlke, *Emile Durkheim's Contributions to Sociological Theory* (New York: Columbia University, 1915), 170.

aware of social morality and unconsciously follows it.

Regarding morality, biblical scholars have shown the unique tendency to emphasize individual moral commitment. They customarily contrast Jeremiah's morality with society's immorality. Jeremiah has been supposed as a moral reformer. However, the formulaic contrast between an immoral society and a moral reformer does not necessarily correspond to what was nor what must be, but merely to what the scholars think, which can be quite different from historical reality or scientific possibility. Morality cannot be reformed or created by an individual. The moral conscience is "a product of history" and "all the social forms of the past find their echo in the present."[29] According to Durkheim, the morality of a people at a given moment in its history cannot be created. It exists and functions, and we have only to supervise its workings. Thus morality must be a reality. In this regard, Jeremiah is not a reformer. He refuses to accept the history and reality which is made of completely heterogeneous elements. He does not share the moral conscience with contemporaries. He refuses to build a psychic unity with others. He is immoral!

I presume that his immorality originates in his isolation from the social mind. The obvious evidence of this can be found in Jer 15:17.

> I did not dwell with the company who are happy, nor did I rejoice; because of your hand I sat alone, for you had filled me with indignation.

29 E. Durkheim, "Review Lévy-Bruhl, *La Morale et la science des moeurs* (Paris: Alcan, 1903)," in Durkheim: *Essays on Morals and Education*, ed. W. S. F. Pickering (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1979), 31.

Jeremiah confesses here that he is excluded from the pleasures of normal social gatherings. As J. A. Thompson and D. R. Jones pointed out, the separation from the normal social relations might be the special role of Jeremiah as a prophet.[30] Jeremiah must sit separated because of God's hand. He seems to be cut off by the normal social company (*sôd*). According to L. Köhler, *sôd* is "the free meeting together in time of leisure of the adult men."[31] In *sôd* men share a common discourse. They discuss the affairs of the community, and gossip, and make decisions. Jeremiah does not join in this delightful discussion. Probably he does not want to do it, because those who sit in such gatherings are impious, as the Septuagint implies (*alla eulaboumen*).[32] However, as W. McKane suggests, according to the punctuation of MT, it is doubtful whether there is a negative meaning attached to *sôd* in this verse.[33] Rather, his unnatural way of life is set apart in loneliness from normal social pleasantries. The following *bādād yāšabtî* ("sat alone") well explains his deficient social mind.

The verb *yāšab* can be translated "to sit" as in NRSV or in other translations; in Hebrew it can also mean "dwell, reside." It describes the general action of settling down in a region in order to stay and reside. The word *yāšab* in v.17a is complemented by the adjective *bādād*. The occurrences of *yāšab* with *bādād* are found in three other passages in the Hebrew Bible: Lam 1:1; 3:28; Lev 13:46. Among these passages, Lev 13:46

30 J. A. Thompson, *The Book of Jeremiah* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1980), 397; D. R. Jones, *Jeremiah* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1992), 224.

31 L. Köhler, *Hebrew Man*, trans. P. R. Ackroyd (New York/Nashville: Abingdon, 1957), 87.

32 According to Septuagint, Jeremiah cuts himself off from social pleasures for the sake of his vocation. Septuagint renders the verse 17 as following: "I have not sat in the assembly of them as they mocked, but I feared because of thy power: I sat alone, for I was filled with bitterness."

33 W. McKane, *Jeremiah I-XXV* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1986), 353-354.

is noteworthy: "He [the leper] shall remain unclean as long as he has the disease; he is unclean; he shall dwell alone (*bādād yāšeb*) in a habitation outside the camp." It is very interesting that the two words describing the situation of lepers are used to explain the setting of life of Jeremiah. As W. L. Holladay argues, Jeremiah might be considered a "social leper."[34] Just as a disease such as leprosy demands social exile, Jeremiah is outcast from normal family and civic life. In fact, he cannot join in the normal social gathering, because he is an abnormal person. He has never married and had any family (16:2).[35] He is always alone. The Hebrew Bible regards loneliness as an unnatural phenomenon. The lack of community is an expression that life is failing.

While his contemporaries share the blessing of shalom in social gatherings, Jeremiah strives and contends with his brethren. Jeremiah confesses that he himself is "a man of strife and contention to the whole land" (15:10). As a man of strife and contention he spends a good deal of time denouncing the leadership of his day (8:8-12; 21:11f; 22:1-23:6), and the people in general (6:13; 8:4-7; 9:2-6).

Jeremiah fights against prophets all his life. Even among the exiles he combats with other prophets. He contends even with his own family in Anathoth. His tendency to "rant and rave"[36] can be seen in its virulent form in his polemical oracles against the prophets. Jer 23:9-40 is a fine example of Jeremiah's description of himself as a man of strife

34 W. L. Holladay, *Jeremiah: Spokesman out of Time* (Philadelphia: A Pilgrim Press Book, 1974), 76-77 and his *Jeremiah 1: A Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Jeremiah Chapters 1-25* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986), 460.

35 Jeremiah is ashamed by losing his masculinity and social privilege. See Corrine L. Carvalho, "Drunkenness, Tattoos, and Dirty Underwear: Jeremiah as a Modern Masculine Metaphor," *CBQ* 80 (2018), 597-618.

36 R. P. Carroll, "Jeremiah's Oracles against the Prophets," *Studia Theologica* 30 (1976), 44.

and contention.

In the so-called "concerning prophets" (23:9-40), Jeremiah claims that prophets who receive the message through dreams are by that very fact false prophets. He accuses the false prophet of speaking a "self-induced vision,"[37] which originates in his own mind. However, what Jeremiah calls an individualistic illusion is supposed to provide members of society with the very building blocks to be used for understanding the world: *šālôm*.

> They keep saying to those who despise the word of the LORD, "It shall be well with you"; and to all who stubbornly follow their own stubborn hearts, they say, "No calamity shall come upon you." (Jer 23:17)

Walter Brueggemann argues that well-being prophets misread the historical situation and misrepresent the character of Yahweh.[38] Probably, in a troubled political situation like Jeremiah's day it is no wonder that the major connotation of peace is that of security from warfare. The confidence of security is, however, not an illusion or false prophecy; rather, it is the social representation which reflects the communal mind of Judeans.[39] Shalom had been created by Israelite society across history, and it imprinted itself upon the consciousness of every individual. For the Israelites, shalom was an expression of communal

37 J. Bright, Jeremiah: *Introduction, Translation, and Notes* (Doubley: Anchor Bible Press, 1965), 152.

38 W. Brueggemann, *A Commentary on Jeremiah: Exile & Homecoming* (Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1998), 211.

39 For a discussion about the weal prophecy, see Rom-Shiloni, "Prophets in Jeremiah," 352 and 363-365.

participation of blessing. Shalom, as J. Petersen points out, is a prerequisite for a harmonious community.

> Its fundamental meaning is totality; it means the untrammeled, free growth of the soul. But this, in its turn, means the same as harmonious community; the soul can only expand in conjunction with other souls. There is "totality" in a community when there is harmony, and the blessing flows freely among its members, everyone giving and taking whatever he is able to.[40]

Shalom indicates totality, harmony, agreement and psychic community. In the harmonious community, each individual may be so firmly united without mutual inviolability that they are entirely penetrated by one will, that they are one. All the Israelites share the blessing of shalom because they are a familial unity. The peace entered upon between human beings consists in mutual confidence; shalom is the full manifestation of the soul, and if souls are united, then their well-being consists in their acting together for the common prosperity. Therefore, it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that prophets were consulted for the sake of securing welfare which might be that of an individual or that of a social unit or corporate personality such as the city of Jerusalem or the kingdom of Judah.[41]

Regarding well-being prophecy, the prophetic conflict between Hananiah and Jeremiah is noteworthy (28:1-17). In the very year in which the foreign envoys came to talk Zedekiah into joining the anti-

40 J. Pedersen, *Israel: Its Life and Culture*, vol. III-IV (London: Oxford University Press, 940), 263-264.

41 Johnson, *The Cultic Prophet*, 49-50.

Babylonian movement, the prophet Hananiah speaks an oracle to Jeremiah in the presence of priests and people. Hananiah announces that Yahweh would break the yoke of the king of Babylon, and that within two years the temple treasures and the exiles, including Jeconiah, would be brought back. Hananiah reveals his prophetic charisma through the symbolic action of breaking a yoke.[42]

Jeremiah brands Hananiah's confidence a 'lie' (28:15). However, Hananiah does not speak a lie or lead people to the false faith. Rather, as Brueggemann well recognizes, Hananiah's prophecy is a reiteration of God's trustworthiness rooted in the normative theological tradition of Jerusalem.[43] Hananiah's prophecy is, in a sense, congruent with the words of Isaiah a century earlier. Isaiah prophesied that though the invader might trample across Judah and shut up the soldiers of Judah in Jerusalem, Jerusalem would not fall. As a matter of fact Jerusalem did not fall under the heel of Sennacherib. This victory made the prestige of Isaiah and of Jerusalem stay high. Isaiah had insisted that God would never allow Jerusalem to fall or Zion to disappear; that was the good news, and it sustained the people in Isaiah's day and, when it remained true through the years, it became a cornerstone for the confidence of the people in Yahweh.[44]

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42 Edward Silver, "Performing Domination/Theorizing Power: Israelite Prophecy as a Political Discourse beyond the Conflict Model," *JANES* 14 (2014), 208-216.

43 Brueggemann, *A Commentary on Jeremiah*, 251.

44 Martin Buber contends that false prophets such as Hananiah misread the political situation. The prophet Hananiah, according to Buber, is a politician of illusion. The true prophet, Buber proposed, is a realistic politician, one who views the total historical situation before formulating a message. Conversely, the false prophet is said to be one who has taken conditional promises and made them unconditional certainties for time, hence preaching their own desires and living from dreams as if they were reality. E. Osswald also argues that Hananiah had apparently not interpreted the political events of his day as being a punishment leveled by Yahweh against a

In this regard, Hananiah is not the creator of the optimistic prophecy, but the guardian and interpreter of the tradition which preceded him and shaped his message.[45] Jeremiah, however, sharply criticizes Hananiah's conviction of peace as optimistic nationalism. Contrary to Hananiah, he prophesies the destruction of the country. Jeremiah argues that Judah must submit to Babylonian sovereignty. Such statements are surely a treason which could cause him to be put to the death. Likewise, the prophet Uriah of Kirjath-jearim who was as sharp in his condemnation of the king as Jeremiah fled to Egypt in order to save his life, but he was delivered back to Judah and executed (26:20-24).

Hananiah announces peace (or well-being) prophecy on the basis of tradition. His prophecy is not created but succeeded. His prophecy reflects reality and the collective consciousness which is oriented toward social welfare and security. Thus when Jeremiah refuses to follow the tradition, he not only opposes the prophetic orthodoxy; he violates so-

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sinful people. Hananiah had applied an old message in a new situation, and had thus demonstrated the inability to orient himself in the new historical situation. Thus, he was not capable of perceiving the will of God for a specific situation and at a specific place. However, the arguments of Buber and Osswald are a possible, in a sense, canonical, explanation after the events (*ex eventu*). In reality, it is not Hananiah but Jeremiah who misread the political situation. Being pro-Egyptian, Judah had to switch its allegiance to Babylonia after Nebuchadnezzar's victory at Carchemish in 605 BCE, but when the Babylonian king was defeated by Necho at Magdolos in 600 BCE, Judah again became an ally of Egypt. Necho had taken Gaza, making Egypt a close neighbor to Judah. The newly appeared empire, Babylonia, seems to be resigned by the old great kingdom, Egypt. From the political perspective of Hananiah, it is not Babylon but Egypt on which Judah should rely. M. Buber, "Falsche Propheten," *Die Wandlung* 2 (1946-7), 277-283; E. Osswald, *Falsche Prophetie im Alten Testament* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1962), 21; Ahlström, *The History of Ancient Palestine*, 788-799.

45 For the discussion on covenant traditions in Jeremiah, see D. Rom-Shiloni, "The Covenant in the Book of Jeremiah: On the Employment of Marital and Political Metaphors," in *Covenant in the Persian Perion: From Genesis to Chronicles*, eds. R. Bautch and G. Knoppers (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2015), 153-174.

cial morality as well. From the perspective of Durkheimian moral conception, the morality of a society is not created but exists. The morality is a reality. In this regard, Jeremiah's deviance is necessarily far beyond the theological horizon.

His tendency to rant and rave, to contend and cause strife is not only related to his psychological disorder, but to his criminality against society as well. According to Durkheim, crime is an offense against "certain collective feelings," and the "common conscience," and "sentiments still keenly felt in the average consciousness."[46] His pathological abnormality can be defined as anomie. He lacks social rule, or morality. He loses intensity, vitality, unity, strength of collective life. He neither trust anybody nor keeps harmony with others. He tries to break the communal solidarity through doom prophecy.

Carroll insists that Jeremiah's pathology originates from his mental derangement, such as his doubts and feelings of inadequacy, and divine manipulation.[47] Concerning divine manipulation, Carroll argues that Jeremiah considers himself deceived by God. In fact, when God delays the execution of the threats Jeremiah has put into his mouth, he is tormented by the thought that Yahweh may have deceived him (15:18; 20:7-9). The complaint of Jer 20:7-9 raises the possibility that Jeremiah himself is a false prophet because Yahweh has given him a word which is not true. From the nature of the accusation in 20:7, that Yahweh "deceived" him seems to be clear.

> O LORD, you have enticed me, and I was enticed; you have overpowered me and you have prevailed. I have become a

46 Durkheim, *The Rules of Sociological Method*, 99 and 102.

47 Carroll, "Jeremiah's Oracles against the Prophets," 47.

laughingstock all day long; everyone mocks.

The word *pātāh* (to entice) which occurs twice in v.7, has two important meanings in the Hebrew Bible. One sense of the word implies seduction. *Pātāh* describes the seducing of a virgin in Exod 22:15. It captures Yahweh's seductive activity in Hos 2:16 (MT). It is also used in Judg 14:15 and 16:5. The parallel *ḥzq* in the *hiphil* underscores this meaning of seduction and rape. A. Bauer thus concludes that Jeremiah identifies himself as a female accusing Yahweh of seduction and rape.[48] Her argumentative interpretation of *pātāh* is very attractive, but overly presumptive. Jeremiah never identifies himself as female in other passages and does not refer to any sexuality even in the verse in question. There are in fact many occurrences of *pātāh* where any sexual overtone is far from probable (e.g. Prov 24:28; 1 Kgs 22:20ff).

On the other hand, the verb *pātāh* can be translated as deception. The prophetic conflict in 1 Kings 22:19-23 is a classic instance of deception. When the kings of Israel and Judah are deciding to go to battle, the prophet Micaiah ben Imlah accuses the other prophets of deceiving the kings. Interestingly, he explains that the prophetic deception comes from God who deceived prophets through a "lying spirit (*rûaḥ šeqer*)."[49]

In Jer 20:7, Jeremiah accuses God of deceiving him. His complaint raises the possibility that he himself is a false prophet because Yahweh

48 A. Bauer, *Gender in the Book of Jeremiah: A Feminist-Literary Reading* (New York: Peter Lang, 1999), 114.

49 In Jeremiah, the conception of false prophecy occurs in connecting with the term *šeqer*, "lie". The term recurs thirty-four times: 3:10, 23; 5:2, 31; 6:13; 7:4, 8, 9; 8:8 (bis), 10; 9:2, 4; 10:14; 13:25; 14:14 (bis); 16:19; 20:6; 23:14, 25, 26, 32 (bis); 27:10, 14, 15, 16; 28:15; 29:9, 21, 23, 31; 37:14; 40:16; 43:2; 51:17.

has proved to be untrustworthy. In Jer 15:18, he also accuses Yahweh of being "like a deceitful brook, like waters that fail." Jeremiah would be a false prophet because Yahweh has given a word which is not true. If the judgement he announced did not come to pass, he was, by the standards of the Deuteronomic law code, a false prophet, and a false prophet, particularly an unpatriotic prophet who undermined the morale of the population, could be legitimately executed (Deut 18:20-22).

The assumption that Jeremiah is subjected to divine manipulation offers a possibility that he himself does not have any intention of doing nonconforming acts. He is not conscious that his prophetic fallacies threaten social morality and stability. He unconsciously proclaims the doom-prophecy, because his God deceives him to do it. H. S. Becker argues that deviants do their deviance unconsciously when they are involved in a particular subculture and they cannot discern the reality from the verisimilitude.

> They [unintended acts of deviance] imply an ignorance of the existence of the rule, or of the fact that it was applicable in this case, or to this particular person. But it is necessary to account for the lack of awareness. How does it happen that the person does not know his act is improper? Persons deeply involved in a particular subculture (such as a religious or ethnic subculture) may simply be unaware that everyone does not act "that way" and thereby commit an impropriety. There may, in fact, be structured areas of ignorance of particular rules.[50]

50 H. S. Becker, *Outsiders: Studies in the Sociology of Deviance* (New York: The Free Press, 1973), 25-26.

Even though Jeremiah, as a corporate personality, was well conscious of prophetic traditions,[51] God was more powerful than his traditional prophetic consciousness. His mind was prevailed by God's power (20:7). He tried to resist but it was useless. God overpowered him. Because of the divine prevalence over his consciousness, the prophet Jeremiah was unconscious of his impropriety of his prophecy. Interestingly, H. W. Robinson also does not avoid the possibility that Jeremiah might not be conscious of what he announces.

> Doubtless the prophet [Jeremiah] is unconscious of the degree to which the words of both speakers in the debate are his own, the degree to which god is speaking man's language, even when His will is asserting itself against that of the prophet. Sometimes, even in our own experience, some word or words will take shape in our consciousness and assert themselves with an objective quality as not our own thought at all.[52]

Thus we might say that his prophecies which took shape in his consciousness are not his own thoughts at all. His messages of doom are not of his own choosing; he had not desired the woeful day (17:16). He even intercedes for the people (11:14; 18:20; 37:3) at times rather than judging them. Much would he have preferred to cry "peace,

51 Jeremiah was a descendent of priest (1:1). Although it is highly improbable that Jeremiah himself ever exercised a priestly function, it is only to be expected that his background provided him with an intimate knowledge of Israel's sacral traditions and the proclamation of former prophets, as well as with a deep-seated awareness of the fact that he himself was a member of Yahweh's people, sharing his people's heritage and responsibility.

52 H. W. Robinson, *The Cross of Jeremiah* (London: Student Christian Movement, 1925), 63.

peace" and to hear "peace" in reply. He did not want to see destruction come upon his people: "I have not pressed you to send evil, nor have I desired the day of disaster, you know; that which came out of my lips was before your face" (18:16).

If Jeremiah unintentionally prophesies doom prophecy under the control of Yahweh, his deviancy is not derived from him. Yahweh is responsible for his deviancy. It is Yahweh who makes him a deviant prophet. In this connection, Yahweh himself plays the role of the policing agent as do religious establishments, kin-group members (11:21-23), the upper class of the social hierarchy (8:8-12; 21:11f; 22:1-23:6), close friends (20:10), and anonymous contemporaries (6:13; 8:4-7; 9:2-6). That is to say, the forces that isolate him on the edge of social boundaries are both human and divine.

IV. Conclusion

Jeremiah was a prophet of violence and destruction. Contrary to Jeremiah, Judean religious establishments maintained shalom. Shalom prevailed over Jerusalem and Judah. Shalom, thus, represents the collective consciousness of the Jeremiah's era. Shalom was also a "common social space"[53] for the variety of religious orientations. The gods of Judah could form "a social God" who maintained different cults but shared a common social goal, divine and human welfare. It is, therefore, obvious that the devotees of the social God did not listen to the prophecy of Jeremiah. For them, doom-prophecy was a treason against national security and social morality. His prophecy was a blas-

53 Berlinerblau, "The 'Popular Religion' Paradigm," 59.

phemy against the social God on the one hand and a violence against collective sentiments on the other hand.

The people presumably thought that Jeremiah was deceived by a "false spirit." Jeremiah might be considered mentally ill or possessed by an evil or demonic spirit. People did not believe that Jeremiah had communicated with the social God. The devotees of the social God, thus, denounced Jeremiah as a false prophet. If Jeremiah was called by their God, he was supposed to proclaim peace and happiness, as other prophets did as patrons and interpreters of the tradition.

Ben-Yehuda argues that Marxism considers deviance functional for the capitalistic social order because it sustains existing social arrangements and protests the bourgeoisie. According to him, Marxism clearly implies that deviance is a source of innovation that prevents the bourgeoisie from stagnating.[54] However, Jeremiah was not an innovative demagogue against bourgeoisie protecting the right of proletariat; rather he appeared sometimes as a guardian of bourgeoisie.[55] From the Weberian perspective, the deviant acts of Jeremiah are necessary, because prophets are supposed to receive prophetic charisma from God. The unnatural way of life was regarded as the mark of prophetic charisma. However, as shown above, the prophetic charisma of Jeremiah was not admitted by his contemporaries and even God. He is merely an immoral false prophet in the human horizon and a victim of trickery in the divine horizon. He was outcast to the outer border

54 N. Ben-Yehuda, *Deviance and Moral Boundaries: Witchcraft the Occult Science Fiction Deviant Sciences and Scientists* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1985), 8.

55 His pro-Babylonian tendency was supported by the anti-Egyptian elites. Thus, several functionaries in the royal court assisted Jeremiah. Ahikam ben Shaphan prevented Jeremiah being handed over to the people to be put to death (26:24). Jeremiah even told a lie to court officials for the protection of King Zedekiah (38:14-28).

of social boundaries by human and divine forces. His prophetic charisma was rejected by all the channels.

How then was he so sensitive to the socio-political situation? It is, probably, that he was located in the pathological situation. In the normal situation, individuals hardly understand their own socio-political situation, because they are prevailed upon by the social consciousness. In a pathological state, however, a person, especially one who stands at the edge of social borders, tends to become sensitive to changes.[56]

The period of Jeremiah is generally said to be under a critical situation because Judah was afflicted by menace from Babylonia and Egypt. In this pathological situation, Jeremiah came to be sensitive of socio-political transition, for he was located on the most outer border of social boundaries. He anticipated vaguely that Judah would be destroyed. However, even he could not determine whether his anticipation was true or not because he, as an individual and a corporate personality at the same time, had been also overwhelmed by the communal hope for shalom.

56 Bowen argues that Yahweh acts as a deceiver in times of transition. According to her, prophets are easily deceived by God in the socio-political changeovers. However, I think, not all the people are deluded in this pathological period. Only those who are in the outer border of society can be deceived, because they cannot share of social mind with others. Cf. Bowen, *The Role of YHWH*, 130.

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