THE PROPHECY OF JEREMIAH

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XXV. THE LULL BEFORE THE STORM

THERE is no suggestion that Jehoiakim ever turned to Jeremiah for advice, when he saw his doom closing in on him. Any such action would have been a contradiction of his character as revealed to us both in 2 *Kings* and *Jeremiah*. There is no indication even that Jehoiachin and his advisers, when faced with the agonizing decision of whether to fight or to yield, turned to the old prophet. We might have expected, however, that when Jehoiachin went out of Jerusalem on March 16, 597 B.C.[1] and threw himself and his people on Nebuchadrezzar's mercy, Jeremiah would have stood vindicated in the eyes of the people, and that they and their new king would have turned to him for advice and guidance.

Nothing could be further from the truth. There are two rather enigmatic oracles linked with Jehoiachin (Coniah), *viz.* 13: 15-19 and 22: 24-30. Then from the first eight years of Zedekiah, while he was still outwardly true to the oath Nebuchadrezzar had laid on him, we have only 24: 1-10; 29: 1-32; 27: 1-28: 17. In none of these did the initiative come from king or people. In addition, Jeremiah's confrontation by Hananiah ben Azzur of Gibeon (28: 1-11) shows how little the people had been impressed by the blow that had fallen on the city.

Their ignoring of Jeremiah seems to be a clue to the madness which swept Zedekiah and his advisers to their doom. It is generally agreed today that Nebuchadrezzar's "unwise" policy made the destruction of Jerusalem a certainty, for those he had left in charge with Zedekiah were incapable of responsible rule. Here are some typical quotations: —

> Though he [Zedekiah] was reasonably disposed to follow Jeremiah's advice and accept the inevitable, he possessed neither enough skill nor strength to control the difficult circumstances. The deportation of the rich and ruling elements was the source of many complications for the new state order. Incapable and ambitious men found open doors, for all offices and estates were vacant. The new possessors of estates and power—all who had played any leading part earlier had been deported—were with all the zeal of the *parvenu* as

[1] *DOTT*, pp. 80f.; 2 Ki. 24: 12.

unwilling as their predecessors to relinquish Judah's right of playing an independent role. The one task of Judah at the time, that of regaining inner order and new strength, was too small for their zeal. . . . It appears that Zedekiah was the plaything of the parties and powerful men in his own capital.[2]

Nebuchadrezzar's measures at Jerusalem in 597-596 B.C. display less than his usual political wisdom. The success of his policy required a strong government which should be devoted to the Babylonian cause, and should have had enough stability and insight to stand firmly against the wiles of the Egyptian court. Nothing was to be gained by reducing the country to abject poverty, and he would have done well to leave behind many of the artisan class whom he actually removed. But his worst mistake was in his treatment of the nobles. He placed a younger son of Josiah on the throne . . . and, since the old nobility had been largely removed, there stood about the king a court with no stable traditions and with little experience of statecraft . . . Zedekiah, too, was a bad choice. He was not a wicked man, and proved in every way a strong contrast to his elder brother. He seems to have had sound human instincts, and to have possessed more than a trace of true religious feeling. . . . He was essentially a weak man, unable to exercise the slightest control over his reckless and turbulent nobles.[3]

The nobles left to serve Zedekiah were men of small vision and less character, as Jeremiah makes abundantly clear (e.g. Jer. chs. 24; 34: 8-22). Nor was Zedekiah the man to guide his country's destinies in so grave an hour. Though he seems to have been well intentioned (cf. Jer. 37: 17-21; 38: 7-28), he was a weakling unable to stand up to his nobles (ch. 38: 5), and fearful of popular opinion (v. 19). Furthermore, his position was ambiguous in that his nephew Jehoiachin was still regarded as the legitimate king by many of his subjects and, apparently, by the Babylonians as well.[4]

In contrast to the despotic Jehoiachin Zedekiah was mild and benevolent. But he was a weak and vacillating ruler, easily swayed by the advice of those around him. Although the new situation gave the princes a chance to control public policy in their own selfish interests, it also presented Jeremiah with a golden opportunity.[5]

It was unwise on Nebuchadrezzar's part to deport so many of the leading statesmen of Judah with Jehoiachin. This meant that those who were left as advisers of the new ruler were men of less sagacity and maturity. Many of them, unable to profit by experience, pinned their hopes of restored national independence to Egyptian intervention. Zedekiah, having sworn an oath of loyalty to the Babylonian king, wished to keep it, but he was too weak to resist his foolish advisers.[6]

[2] Kittel, *Geschichte des Volkes Israel,*[6] Vol. II, p. 423.
[3] T. H. Robinson, *A History of Israel,* Vol. I, pp. 436f.
[4] J. Bright, *A History of Israel,* p. 307.
[5] B. W. Anderson, *The Living World of the Old Testament,* p. 344.
[6] F. F. Bruce, *Israel and the Nations,* p. 89.

Behind the superficial unanimity there are signs of differing interpretations, and in addition we may well ask whether weakness and lack of experience are sufficient explanation of Judah's tragedy. M. Noth seems to be wiser, when he spreads the blame more widely. True, he does speak of "the obviously weak and undecided king Zedekiah", but he also realizes that "in the reduced vassal state of Judah the people found it difficult to acquiesce in the new situation",[7] and probably wisely he does not single out the princes for blame.

Before looking to the evidence offered us by Jeremiah there are some general considerations we would do well to bear in mind. Nebuchadrezzar seems to have had a fairly efficient secret service, and, so far as was possible in an ancient and worn-out system, he governed wisely. There are no real grounds for thinking that he had created a situation which would have led to an explosion in any other people. Then we may look in vain for any denunciation of Zedekiah's princes for the qualities alleged above. That Zedekiah cracked during the siege of Jerusalem is self-evident, but many a man has done so, when the moment of truth has come, especially if he has felt the shadow of a broken oath over him (Ezek. 17: 11-21). It is risky to argue back from this to the earlier days of his reign. Equally we tend to judge his councillors by their desperate behaviour, when they felt the cord being drawn ever tighter round their necks.

The impression given by Jeremiah is that the doom of Jerusalem was created by religious factors and brought on the city by God, as Ezekiel insisted. It is these factors we must try to discover.

JEHOIACHIN'S SURRENDER

The publication of portions of *The Babylonian Chronicle* in 1956 fixed the date of the surrender of Jerusalem by Jehoiachin but left some other matters still unclear. D. J. Wiseman insists that he was deposed at once, from which he draws the certain inference that his father had died before Nebuchadrezzar had set out from Babylon and that his death was perhaps the reason for the Babylonian king's intervening in person.[8] He is followed by many, but others, e.g. E. Vogt[9] and E. Auerbach,[10] maintain that Jehoiachin's deposition was not immediate, and so we cannot be sure when his father died. Until further portions of *The Babylonian Chronicle*

[7] *The History of Israel,*[2] p. 284.
[8] *DOTT,* p. 81.
[9] *Supplements to Vetus Testamentum* IV, pp. 94f.
[10] *Vetus Testamentum,* Vol. XI, pp. 131f.

are found and deciphered we cannot be certain of some aspects of the picture.

We gain the impression from 2 Ki. 24: 10-12 that Jehoiachin surrendered as soon as Nebuchadrezzar appeared in person. This is entirely compatible with *The Babylonian Chronicle*, for the king need not have marched with the vanguard of his army.

There is one little touch in the story which is not explained. In itself there is nothing particularly surprising about the mention of the queen-mother in 2 Ki. 24: 12. It could be merely a living touch by an eye-witness, but that does not explain why she should appear in Jer. 13: 18; 22: 26 as well. Accessible authorities do not consider the point worth mentioning, unless indeed they stress Jehoiachin's youth. Since he had already reached his majority and was married, it is not likely that he still felt tied to his mother's apron-strings or that there was in any sense a regency. While the *gebirah*[11] indubitably had an official position of considerable importance, there are no reasons why she should have taken part in the surrender of the city. It may be that Nehushta bath Elnathan was a masterly woman who had been able to secure more than the normal power due to her, but if so, no hint is given of the fact.

The lack of supporting evidence makes the following reconstruction hazardous, but it goes far to explaining the situation under Zedekiah.

If it is true that Nebuchadrezzar mustered his forces on receiving the news of Jehoiakim's death,[12] it shows that it was unexpected. It is hardly likely that he was assassinated,[13] for had he been, there are no grounds why it should not have been mentioned. It was probably something that made him incapable of receiving normal burial (Jer. 29: 19) and was a plain sign of God's judgment on him.[14] Nebuchadrezzar, robbed of his chance of vengeance, showed by his immediate march that a price for rebellion remained to be exacted. Jehoiachin, who at his coronation had affirmed his intention of following his father's religious policy,[15] soon realized that his father's premature death—he was only 36—did not exhaust.

[11] Cf. R. de Vaux, *Ancient Israel*, pp. 117f.

[12] *DOTT*, p. 80.

[13] So Bright, *op. cit.*, p. 306; Albright, *The Biblical Period from Abraham to Ezra*, p. 82.

[14] 2 Ki. 24: 6 is studiously non-committal; 2 Chr. 36: 6 cannot be interpreted with any certainty and need not refer to his death.

[15] This interpretation of "He did what was evil in the sight of the Lord", proposed by D. J. Wiseman in a paper at a meeting of the Tyndale Fellowship, seems demanded in the case of kings like Jehoahaz and Jehoiachin with their short reigns.

God's wrath on Judah. In order to save his country he surrendered to Nebuchadrezzar as soon as he reached Jerusalem, taking with him all who had been leaders under Jehoiakim. Nehushta, as mother of the heir-apparent, would have exercised considerable influence, especially if Zebidah bath Pedaiah, the former *gebirah* (2 Ki. 23: 36), had already died, as is quite possible. So the special mention of Nehushta may indicate the complete surrender of all who could be associated with Jehoiakim's policy.

As the people watched the train of deportees marching northwards towards Bethel and exile, it must have seemed to many that here was the scapegoat going out into the wilderness of the peoples bearing the nation's sins. Some such thought seems to lie behind Jeremiah's cry (22: 29, 30):

"O land, land, land,
hear the word of the LORD!
Thus says the LORD:
'Write this man down as childless,
a man who will not be successful all his days;
for none of his offspring will be successful
in sitting on the throne of David
or in ruling again in Judah'."

Such a doom almost irresistibly suggests that the sins of his ancestors had met on the head of Jehoiachin. The oracle does not say that he would not have children (cf. 1 Chr. 3: 17) but that none of his descendants would ever sit on the throne. On the basis of Lk. 4: 27 it has been argued that he adopted Shealtiel, who is specially marked out as "his son" in 1 Chr. 3: 17, as his legal heir. Though unprovable, this must be regarded as quite likely.

This role of scapegoat is seen in the fact that Jehoiachin was obviously imprisoned when Zedekiah revolted,[16] and so his release, recorded in 2 Ki. 25: 27-30, was not merely the morning star of hope for those who had been deported but also a sign of divine forgiveness for Jehoiachin.

It is this concept of the exiles that explains the attitude of those left behind. While, on the one hand, they expected their speedy repatriation (Jer. 28: 3; 29: 9), on the other they saw them accursed, driven away by the Lord. As Ezekiel put it, "Son of man, your brethren, even your brethren, your fellow exiles, the whole house of Israel, all of them, are those of whom the inhabitants of

[16] The Jehoiachin ration documents (DOTT, pp. 84f.) show him as a royal pensioner subject at first apparently to nothing more than forced domicile.

Jerusalem have said, 'They have gone far from the LORD; to us this land is given for a possession' " (11: 14).

Here is probably the true cause of the madness which seized Judah under Zedekiah. Under Josiah judgment had fallen as the king was borne dead from the fateful field of Megiddo, but the Temple had been left untouched. Worse judgment had fallen on Jehoiakim and his son, but even then the Temple had been partially spared. The cause of the evil had been kicked out of His land by God. The evil was gone, the curse lifted; now there was bound to be blessing and prosperity. Zedekiah's weakness of character and his advisers' inexperience may have played their part in bringing ruin. Primarily, however, it was the madness that had seized the people as a whole. Seldom has the old tag, "Whom God will destroy He first of all drives mad," been better exemplified.

THE GOOD FIGS

Faced with such an outlook Jeremiah could well save his breath, but for all that an immediate protest was needed. Only a few months after the deportation (24: 1) God gave him a vision that made the position crystal clear to him. Probably in late June or July 597 he saw a vision of two baskets of figs before the Temple.[17] It was a vision pure and simple, not an investing of objects round the prophet with deeper significance, as was the case at his call. This we gather from the fact that none would have dared to bring over-ripe or rotten figs as an offering. Even had someone dared, the priest on duty would not have accepted them. The presence of the Temple in the vision implied that both groups symbolized by the figs were completely at God's disposal and under His control.

The claim that God had taken the cream of the population to Babylonia, leaving the trash at home, was revelation, not the outcome of observation and meditation. In fact to speak of cream and trash goes beyond the strictly permissible. In v. 5 God says of the exiles *'akkir letobah,* i.e., "I shall regard (them) as good," or probably better, "for good".[18] God would deal with the rotten figs as what they were (vv. 8ff.). There is, however, no suggestion that the exiles were in the slightest any better than they. It was

[17] Peake, Skinner and G. A. Smith all agree in attributing an early date to the vision. The letter of 29: 4-23, which we can date with reasonable accuracy in the second half of 594, seems to presuppose the revelation of ch. 24. It is hard to understand Rudolph and Weiser, when they make of the oracle a mature judgment, based on experience, of the two groups. If it had been so, one might have expected a more specific condemnation of the men of Jerusalem.

[18] So RV, Rudolph, Weiser.

merely that God in His graciousness had decided to be gracious to them. Every effort to explain the débacle under Zedekiah by a depreciation of those who had been left in the land is to overlook that we are not dealing with an outworking of natural laws but with the electing choice of God, which defies human understanding and analysis.

Even if we did not have the revelation to Jeremiah in this chapter, we have the testimony of Ezekiel in 2: 3 to the character of the exiles.[19] In addition he stresses that it is only the operation of God that will make them acceptable to God (11: 14-20).

We are not dealing with inescapable doom or irresistible grace. Quite apart from the special case of Jeremiah himself, the heart-broken grief of *Lamentations* shows that some godly men were left to mourn in the ruins of Jerusalem. Equally the warnings of Ezek. 18 and the fate of Ahab ben Kolaiah and Zedekiah ben Maaseiah (Jer. 29: 21ff.) show that the exiles could not presume on the grace of God.

A FOREIGN MINISTERS' CONFERENCE

In 595 to 594 Nebuchadrezzar was forced to put down troubles at home, and so it is not surprising that in 594, Zedekiah's fourth year (28: 1),[20] there was a "foreign ministers' conference" in Jerusalem. What was plotted is not told us, but its nature is made clear by Jeremiah's action and message (27: 2-11). Though he repeated his appeal to Zedekiah (27: 12-15) and to the priests and people (27: 16-22), it seems as though he put his main hope in dissuading Zedekiah's possible allies. He knew that if anyone raised the flag of revolt, there would be no holding Judah back.

There is nothing unexpected in the fact that the popular prophets were busy trying to drive Judah to ruin. The surrender to Nebuchadrezzar and the partial plundering of the Temple had been God's denial of all they had stood for. Being self-deceived rather than vulgar deceivers they found themselves being driven to the most categorical of foretelling (28: 3) to keep their prestige alive. In sheer desperation, like a gambler who has been losing steadily, they staked everything on one last desperate throw. What is unexpected is that the prophets of Judah's neighbours were proclaiming the same message (27: 9). We need hardly suspect collusion. It would seem that a common expectation may dominate the

[19] In my *Ezekiel: The Man and His Message*, pp. 19ff., I have given my reasons for believing that Ezekiel prophesied in Babylonia to the exiles and not in Jerusalem to those left there.

[20] It is universally recognized that the MT of 27: 1 (partially corrected by RSV) and of 28:1 ("at the beginning of the reign of") is incorrect.

sub-conscious of men over a large area. Since Jeremiah's message to the neighbouring kings was purely political in purpose, he did not stop to ask or discuss what validity their prophets might have under other circumstances.

The promise of the return of the Temple vessels (27: 16; 28: 3) implied the defeat of Nebuchadrezzar and his overthrow, but even these wild men knew enough not to say this openly. The Babylonian emperor was not a gentle man when his anger was roused (cf. 29: 22; 2 Ki. 25: 7). For the priests the hope of the return of the temple vessels meant more than did that of Jehoiachin and the other exiles.

The reaction to Jeremiah's message is not given. It is quite likely that most who heard him were torn between the desire to believe Hananiah and his friends and a certain awe in the presence of a man whose prophecies of doom had to such a terrifying extent gone into effect. It may well be that it was Hananiah's sudden death two months later (28: 17), combined, of course, with Nebuchadrezzar's overcoming of his difficulties at home, that prevented the revolt from breaking out and so gave Jerusalem a few more years of life.

THE LETTER TO THE EXILES

Enough information about the conference must have reached Nebuchadrezzar's ears to make him highly suspicious. Zedekiah will have hurried to send Elasah ben Shaphan and Gemariah ben Hilkiah (29: 3) to explain matters.[21] Their mission will have been unavailing, for soon after Zedekiah himself had to make the journey before the year was out (51: 59).

Communication between Jerusalem and the exiles was probably not unduly difficult, but we can only speculate why Jeremiah chose these two to be his messengers. Our answer would have to be modified, if we agreed with G. A. Smith[22] in separating off vv. 15-23 as a distinct letter, but there seems to be no reason for so doing. Again, it would influence our decision, if certain excisions, beyond those attested by the LXX, could be justified. As the letter stands it hints at the end of Babylonian rule (v. 10) and disloyal activity by prophets (vv. 8, 23). We may question, therefore, Skinner's suggestion that "the Babylonian Resident in

[21] Rudolph, *Jeremia*,[2] p. 166, is, of course, correct in maintaining that we cannot ascertain the purpose of their journey with certainty. Weiser, *Das Buch des Propheten Jeremia*[4], p. 251, basing himself on Volz, claims that the status of the messengers is too high for a routine payment of the tribute and explains the mission as above.

[22] *Jeremiah*,[4] p. 425.

Jerusalem" had knowledge of it;[23] if we allow vv. 16-20 to stand, it is unlikely that Zedekiah knew and approved of it.[24] It seems wiser to start from the fact that Elasah was apparently a brother of the Ahikam who had saved Jeremiah's life (26: 24). That the Shaphan family was well inclined to the prophet is also suggested by 36: 10 and by his relationship to Gedaliah (39: 14, etc.). It is likely that Jeremiah knew that he could trust him to deliver the letter into the right hands, and that he would enjoy a measure of "diplomatic immunity" from search.

The letter was sent to "the remmant of the elders" (v. 1). This shows that the Babylonian king had in large measure allowed them to retain their own organization, but that he had eliminated those persons whom he could not trust.[25] LXX omits "remnant", but this is obviously one of the cases where the more difficult reading must be followed. G. A. Smith's justification of the LXX here carries no conviction.[26]

The first advice given by Jeremiah was that the exiles should settle down and lead normal lives (vv. 5f.). This is not so obvious as it might seem. Quite apart from their hopes of a speedy return, they may well have expected Nebuchadrezzar to follow the Assyrian pattern and place them in some other conquered area in his empire, as had been the fate of the exiles from the North (2 Ki. 17: 6). Jeremiah, however, had the certainty that they had reached journey's end, until the day of liberation dawned.

Then they were to pray for the welfare of the land of their exile (v. 7). It was true that their return would involve the collapse of the neo-Babylonian empire, but that would only come at a time fixed by God. In 605, some eleven years earlier,[27] Jeremiah had announced, "these nations shall serve the king of Babylon seventy years" (25: 11). Even then seventy had been an approximation. Now its repetition could mean only a perfect time predetermined by God. Disloyalty, intrigue and rebellion might well weaken Babylon, but they would only suffer in its sufferings, for the weakening would not bring it to its knees before the time.

Though the restoration would be an act of grace, it would have to be prepared for by the exiles themselves. It is just here that we see how baseless the supposition that the "good figs" of the de-

[23] *Op. cit.*, p. 252.

[24] So Skinner, *op. cit.*, and by implication Weiser, *op. cit.*, p. 252.

[25] So Weiser, *op. cit.*, p. 252. Those who had lost their status may have been executed or simply demoted.

[26] *Op. cit.*, p. 143.

[27] Cf. *E.Q.*, Vol. XXXV, No. 4, 1963, pp. 199f.

portation had been chosen by some intrinsic merit. There could have been no exodus from Egypt until the people cried to the Lord (Ex. 2: 23; 3: 9). So now too the new exodus would have to be prepared for by a change in their attitude to God. There is some difficulty in deciding exactly what Jeremiah wrote. LXX is considerably shorter, and those who wish to find metre here tend to follow it, e.g. Skinner and G. A. Smith. Some deletions may be likely, but on the whole the MT seems normally preferable. "When you call upon Me and pray to Me, I will listen to you. When you seek Me, you shall find; when you inquire (of Me) with all your heart, I shall appear unto you[28]—oracle of the LORD—and I shall turn your fortunes."[29] Pre-exilic religion had an ample place for prayer, but except in emergencies it was linked with the sanctuary and its sacrifices. As though to underline this, Jeremiah uses words which formed part of the cultic vocabulary. For many of the exiles it was just the separation from the Temple that was the chief burden (cf. Ezek. 11: 15-17). Jeremiah is challenging them to learn to worship God apart from sanctuary and sacrifice. It had to be so, for otherwise they would never be able to free themselves from the magical dependence on the mere fact of the sanctuary. Are we to see in this lesson they had to learn the real foundation of the miracle by which idolatry was completely obliterated among the exiles?

I cannot agree with the majority of moderns, e.g. Peake, G. A. Smith, Welch,[30] Rudolph, Weiser, Cunliffe-Jones, that vv. 16-20, lacking in LXX, except in the Lucianic text, are a latter insertion. That the MT is dislocated seems obvious; vv. 8, 9 belong after v. 15 and link with vv. 21-23. But—and it was just this that proved to be the dilemma of the post-exilic and inter-testamental period—how were a temple with its cultus and a worship carried on far away from it to be reconciled? Jeremiah's advice seemed high treason against God's self-revelation, unless indeed He was abolishing the house He had caused to be built. Jeremiah was not holding out to them a stop-gap worship ultimately to be replaced by something better. He implied that the Temple had become virtually an anachronism, doomed to perish with those that put their trust in its shadow. The fact that we cannot explain the lacuna in LXX and the dislocation of the text does not diminish the essential nature of these verses in his message.

Finally he dealt with the welling up of prophecy among the

[28] Following LXX, Vulg. Syr.
[29] LXX is probably correct in omitting the remainder of v. 14.
[30] *Jeremiah—His Time and His Work*, p. 169.

exiles. This will have been before the call of Ezekiel. The false had to be exposed before the true prophet could be called. When Skinner says:

> The men whom he addresses were congratulating themselves that Yahwe had raised them up prophets in Babylon. It was evidently a surprise to them that prophetic inspiration was not limited to the land of Israel, nor exclusively bound up with the political institutions in the preservation and recovery of which all their hopes were concentrated,[31]

he gives the impression of resting on a conception of Israelite religion which is now going out. If the rise of the prophets surprised them, it will have been merely because they were regarded as a sign of God's favour and hence a proof that the exiles were not under God's curse, as those left in Judah imagined. The danger was that, quite apart from the messages of these prophets, they would remind them of the position in Egypt some eight hundred years earlier. After all, Moses had been the greatest of the prophets. Might not one of these prove to be the leader in a new exodus?

Just as Hananiah ben Azzur threatened to destroy the rump state of Judah by his prophecies and so had to die, so too Ahab ben Kolaiah and Zedekiah ben Maaseiah threatened the existence of the exiles and had to die, but by a far worse death, for they had degraded the name of prophet by their immorality (29: 22f.; cf. 23: 14). Obviously enough Nebuchadrezzar had little, if any, interest in their morals, of which he probably knew nothing, but he strongly objected to their words, which clearly implied his speedy downfall. Jeremiah did not record their message, lest his letter fall into wrong hands, but it was doubtless very much the same as Hananiah's (28: 2-4).

It may be because they knew that their morals would not bear investigation that Ahab and Zedekiah are not recorded as taking action against Jeremiah's letter, but another of the prophets, Shemaiah of Nehelam, sprang to their defence by writing to Zephaniah, the priest in charge of order in the Temple (cf. v. 25 with 2 Ki. 25: 18) and demanding that he exercise discipline over Jeremiah (vv. 24-28). The anger of the prophets in Babylonia is seen in his writing in his own name, i.e. without any commendation from the elders there. His self-importance is seen in his addressing his letter[32] to "all the people who are in Jerusalem" (v. 25);[33] he

[31] *Op. cit.*, p. 290.
[32] RV, RSV erroneously translate as a plural.
[33] G. A. Smith, Rudolph, Weiser quite unnecessarily delete.

evidently expected Zephaniah not merely to act but also to have his letter read to the people.

Pashhur ben Immer (20: 1) had died not long after his denunciation by Jeremiah and had been replaced by Jehoiada (v. 26). Hananiah had died two months after facing Jeremiah. Zephaniah hardly welcomed a haughty letter of this sort from an exiled prophet. He may, for all we know, have been open to Jeremiah's message. At all events he did not want to run himself into danger, so he showed Jeremiah the letter and left it at that.

Jeremiah did not answer insults with insults. Shelemiah had implied that he was mad and had used the insulting *mitnabbe'* (sometimes translated 'raving') of his prophesying. Jeremiah used the normal *nibba'* in his answer, which was deadly clear for all that. The penalty of his prophesying falsely and without divine authority was that he and his whole family would have died out before the end of the exile. Probably the death of Ahab and Zedekiah put a frightened end to any possible continuation of the correspondence.

(To be continued)

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