

A Study of Jeremiah 11:9-13 and Its Theological Implications

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Abstract

In keeping with the deuteronomistic tradition of the covenant, Jeremiah insists that the covenant is not only the foundation and source of Israel's identity but also the basis of Israel's survival. Thus, Israel's attitude towards the covenant becomes very important as any action that contravenes the demands of the covenant would directly mean rebellion and a rejection of YHWH's leadership of Israel. Judah and her inhabitants in Jerusalem indulged in adulterous practices through the action of worshipping false gods. This is infidelity to YHWH. Consequently, this paper studies the text of Jeremiah 11:9-13 as it concerns Judah's infidelity and adulterous actions, and its theological implications. The paper adopts the historical-critical method. It discovers that Judah and its inhabitants sway from the covenantal relationship between the nation and YHWH and that the decision to be unfaithful to the covenant is as a result of an unanimous conspiracy by the people. The study shows that covenant is conditional, since YHWH's fulfillment of his promises is based on Judah's fidelity. Also, judgment introduces the forensic dimension of the text, highlighting that Judah will be punished in as much as Judah remains unfaithful and adulterous.

Keywords: Covenant, Judgment, Infidelity, Idol, Conspiracy, Adulterous, Sin.

1.0 Introduction

Idolatry can be defined as the “practice of worshiping and serving images (pictures, sculpts etc.) as identified with, as representative of, or as deity”.¹ Idolatry is considered the first and worst violation of the covenantal relationship between Israel and YHWH. Idolatrous acts that undermine the covenant are described as vile deeds by the prophet Jeremiah (cf. Jer. 11:15).² It is important to underscore prophet Jeremiah’s emphasis that God’s covenant with Israel is the foundation of Israel’s identity and the key to the survival of Israel as a nation and a people.³ In other words, in this conditional covenant, God’s obligations was premised largely on Israel’s fidelity and obedience. An obedience which implied that God was accepted unreservedly as the suzerain and any form of worship of any other god or gods would constitute a violation of YHWH’s claim of exclusivity in terms of loyalty.⁴ Furthermore, the prophet Jeremiah considered social injustices in its different and varying manifestations (cf. Jer. 2:34; 5:26-28)⁵ and foreign political alliances which strictly speaking, undermined God’s rulership of Israel and represented an abandonment of God as strategic ways of violating the demands of the covenantal relationship between God and Israel.⁶

A look down the history of the people of God, Israelites, the practice of the worship of idols and or other gods, is not strange to the religious experiences and practices of the Israelites and even when monotheism became a major religious practice, the attitude and practice of withdrawing to worship idols was never completely overcome. The second commandment of the Decalogue which outrightly condemns idolatry and its practices, directly speaks to the fact that idolatry was not just a possibility among the Israelites but that it was a constant religious deviation which Israel needed to stay away from.

¹ Marbaniang Domenic, “Idolatry,” *Light of Life Magazine*, Mumbai: 2007.

² Thomas Leclerc, *Introduction to the Prophets: Their Stories, Sayings and Scrolls* (New York: Paulist Press, 2007), 251.

³ Leclerc, *Introduction to the Prophets*, 248.

⁴ Leclerc, *Introduction to the Prophets*, 248.

⁵ Leclerc, *Introduction to the Prophets*, 253.

⁶ Leclerc, *Introduction to the Prophets*, 259.

This article attempts an exegetical analyses of the text of Jer. 11:9-13 with specific aim of gleaning the theological themes therein. In essence, the text of Jer. 11:9-13 exposes how both Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem indulged in infidelity and adulterous practice which resulted into the breaking and violation of the covenantal relationship between them and God. This led to the nation's backsliding and consequently returning to the sins of her fathers. Thus, the nation was guilty of idolatry which is the worship of other gods other than the one true God of Israel.

2.0 Background to the text of Jeremiah 11:9-13

As shown in the superscript of the book of the prophet Jeremiah (cf. Jer. 1:1-3), Jeremiah carried out his prophetic activities during the kingship of Josiah, Jehoiakim and Zedekiah under whom Judah as a nation was exiled. Thus, Jeremiah experienced Judah on two fronts; that is, Judah as a faithful and loyal nation and Judah as a disloyal, covenant breaking nation. That is, Judah abandoned the worship of God as she practiced idolatry and also indulged in injustices of different sorts.⁷ Thus, the text of Jeremiah 11:9-13 can be traced to the period of Josiah's kingship over Judah after the assassination of his father in 639 B.C and he reigned for thirty-one years.

During his time as king, Assyrian reign and power was in its final decline⁸ and this gave momentum to the many political and religious reforms that Josiah undertook. Although, scholars disagree as to when Josiah began his religious reforms, these reforms essentially ensured the removal of all traces of foreign worship and the elimination of all outlying places of worship including those in Assyrian controlled sections of what was the Northern Kingdom.⁹ The consequence of Josiah's action is glaring as all religious practices were centralized in Jerusalem and he entered into a

⁷ Leclerc, *Introduction to the Prophets*, 251.

⁸ Paul Achtemeier, *Harper's Bible Dictionary* (Bangalore: Theological Publication, 2002), 510.

⁹ Achtemeier, 510.

covenant with God and this was crowned with the special Passover he observed in Jerusalem.¹⁰

Sadly, Josiah was killed at Megiddo by Pharaoh Neco II in 609B.C and Judah was faced with serious grim political situation. According to 2 Kings 23:30, his son Jehoahaz succeeded him as he was installed by the people and in 2 Kings 23:34, another of his son Jehoiakim was installed king by Pharaoh Neco II of Egypt.¹¹ Generally, it is accepted that after the death of Josiah, his religious reforms failed as Judah once again relented in her worship of God and in keeping the covenant between God and her ancestors.

From the above, Jeremiah experienced Judah abandoning the Sinitic covenant and this implies that Judah needs a recall or reminder of the demands of the covenant and an explanation in regard to the plight of Judah.

3. Text

Jeremiah 11:9-13

The Lord said to me, “there is revolt among the men of Judah and inhabitants of Israel”.

10 They have turned back to the iniquities of their forefathers who refused to hear my words. They have gone after other gods to serve them. The house of Israel and the house of Judah have broken the covenant which I made with their ancestors.

11 Therefore, thus says the Lord, see! I am bringing evil upon them which they will not be able to escape. Though they will cry to me, I will not listen to them.

12 Then the cities of Judah and inhabitants of Israel will go and cry to the gods who they burn incense to but they will not save them in their time of trouble.

13 For your gods have become as many as your cities O Judah! And as many as the streets of Jerusalem are the altars you have set up to shame, alters to burn incense to Baal.

¹⁰ Achtemeier, 510.

¹¹ Leclerc, *Introduction to the Prophets*, 236.

3.1 Delimitation of Jeremiah 11:9-13

The text of Jer. 11:9-13 can be considered and studied as an independent unit and a smaller unit within the larger block of Jer. 11:1-13:27. Also, the text of study as an independent unit is situated within the sub-section Jer. 11:1-17 which is termed 'rejection of the covenant message'.¹² The larger block of Jer. 11:1-17 is divided into four parts and the text of study Jer. 11:9-13 as an independent unit of study, constitutes the third part of the larger block which clearly manifests the actions of the present generation of Judah in undermining the covenantal relationship between their ancestors and YHWH and presents the testimony against such action.¹³

Furthermore, the text of study Jer. 11:9-13 as an independent unit, begins a new thought pattern in the message of Jeremiah Judah and her inhabitants. Significantly, the shift in the sequence of thought centers on the tension between YHWH and the present generation of Jerusalem and Judah as it relates to the covenant. That is, Jeremiah 11:9-13, in specific terms, expresses how the present generation of Judah rebelled against YHWH and the subsequent action of YHWH. That is, as an independent unit, it states the action of Judah which informed YHWH's response in the in the following unit (cf. Jer.11:14), where he refuses to listen to their plea or their call in time of distress.

Also, as an independent unit of study, it is loaded with themes that are unique to it. These include: the theme of tension and conspiracy (Jer. 11:9), the theme of backsliding (cf. Jer. 11:10), the theme of judgment (cf. Jer. 11:11) and the themes of false gods and idolatry or apostasy (cf. Jer. 11:12-13) which is the fundamental action that undermined the covenantal relationship. Also, from the point of view of genre, the text of study could be termed a conflict story as it depicts the struggle of Judah in obeying the demands of the covenant between her and YHWH. Lastly, in terms of linguistic style the text of Jer. 11:9-13 can be considered an independent unit.

¹² Lawrence Boadt, *Old Testament Message: A Biblical-Theological Commentary* (Willington: Michael Glazier, Inc 1982), 93.

¹³ Gordon McConville, *Exploring the Old Testament: A Guide to the Prophets*, (Illinois: Intervarsity, 2002).

Precisely, the linguistic use of the word ‘therefore’ (*lākēn*) to introduce the threat of judgment (cf. Jer. 11:11) and the use of ‘for’ (*kî*) to introduce direct address to the people (cf. Jer. 11:13)¹⁴ show the specific linguistic element in the text of study.

3.2 Literary Genre of Jeremiah 11:9-13

The text of study Jer. 11:9-13 belongs to the set of Jeremiah’s sayings under the literary genre called prose sermon.¹⁵ However, in some scholarly works, Jer. 11:13 is considered a poetic verse.¹⁶ On the other hand, the text of study Jer. 11:9-13 could be considered a combination of prose and poetry. In the book of the prophet Jeremiah, prose takes several forms which include judgment speech, indictment of sins, and threat of judgment which is usually introduced by “therefore” (*lākēn*)¹⁷ (Jer. 11:11). Also, poetic section may be included in a prose sermon as is the case in verse 13 and this largely accounts for the earlier assertion that the text of study is a combination of both prose and poetry and the fact that in certain part of the book, there exists a combination of both techniques of writing.¹⁸ Also, the text of study could be considered a conflict story between Judah and YHWH and this is seen in the revolt against the demand of the covenantal relationship between Judah, the inhabitants of Jerusalem and YHWH. This paves the way for the use of forensic language in Jer. 11:11-12.

3.3 Literary Structure of Jeremiah 11:9-13

The text of study is structured in such a way that the message of the prophet is clearly buttressed. The prose sermon has been divided into two major parts and they are:

1. The action of Judah and her inhabitants: Jeremiah 11:9-10
 - i. The Conspiracy of Disobedience (Jer.11: 9).

¹⁴ John Mackay, *Jeremiah* (Edinburgh: Free Church College, 2014), 403.

¹⁵ John Thompson, *The Book of Jeremiah (New International Commentary on the Old Testament)*; Grand Rapids: William B.Eerdmans, 1980), 339.

¹⁶ Thompson, *Jeremiah*, 401.

¹⁷ Thompson, *Jeremiah*, 394.

¹⁸ Thompson, *Jeremiah*, 344.

- ii. The Return to Idols (Jer. 11: 10)
- 2. The consequence of Judah and her inhabitants action: Jeremiah 11:11-13
 - iii. The Judgment of YHWH (Jer. 11:11)
 - iv. Futility of their Efforts (Jer. 11:12)
 - v. Justification of YHWH Action (Jer. 11:13)

4. Analysis of Jeremiah 11:9-13

This section deals with the analysis of the text of Jeremiah 11:9-13 with the view of adequately exposing the different aspects, as shown in the structure of the text. In achieving this, the historical-critical cum exegetical methods will be applied.

4.1 The action of Judah and her inhabitants: Jeremiah 11:9-10

Jeremiah 11:9-10 is the first major subdivision of the text of Jeremiah 11:9-13 and this subdivision contains the dual actions of Judah and her inhabitants which underscore the abandoning of the covenantal relationship with God.

i. The Conspiracy of Disobedience (Verse 9)

The verse opens with the introduction of the word *qešer* and understanding this word depends largely on the meaning read into the word. It is translated as 'conspiracy' or 'alliance' and from its root meaning, it means 'to tie', 'to join'.¹⁹ Thus, when one reads the word *qešer* from the political point of view, one gets a sense of the uniting together of the people in order to revolt against or overthrow a constituted authority. Basically, the word is borrowed from the political circle and adapted into religious explanation. This is even clearer when we consider the fact that the covenantal relationship is structured according to the models of political treaties where loyalty was central.²⁰ On the other hand, some scholars hold that if

¹⁹ McConville, *Exploring the Old Testament*, 47.

²⁰ Thompson, *Jeremiah*, 346.

the words in verse 9 are earlier in terms of dating, they definitely must be describing the unexpressed determination to resist the religious reforms to which Josiah represented.²¹

In any case, the word *qešer* must be read as a metaphorical presentation of Judah's attitude²² where a consensus was reached by the people to renounce YHWH as their God and also renege on the demands of the covenant.²³ It is important to point out that such a rebellion was not a hidden or secret act and that there was no form of formal gathering where this rebellious action was planned. In other words "there was no furtive plotting but rather there was a wide spread of minds".²⁴ The implication of this is that, the mind-set of the people of Judah towards loyalty as it concerns YHWH was questionable even though they continued in the observation of temple rituals. This unprecedented agreement in their mind-set which refers to *qešer* (conspiracy) could only result to religious anarchy or confusion. J.L. Mackay gives a summary of this verse as follows:

A consensus had emerged whereby the sovereignty of the Lord was rejected and also their obligation to respond to the demands his covenant had placed on them. It had not arisen suddenly from nowhere but came out of the mind-set of the people. Although they do not seem to have given open voice to their attitude and there was continuing observance of Temple rituals, the nation as a whole was effectively united in agreement over this and the result in the realm of religion is like the anarchy and turmoil that is associated with a coup d'état.²⁵

ii. The Return to Idols (Verse 10)

The composition of verse 10 continues to establish the action of the inhabitants of Jerusalem as regards the conspiracy in verse 9. Here,

²¹ William Lasor, David Hubbard, and Frederick Bush, *Old Testament Survey* (Michigan: Zondervan, 2010), 337.

²² McConville, *Exploring the Old Testament*, 47.

²³ Thompson, *The Book of Jeremiah*, 345.

²⁴ Thompson, *Jeremiah*, 401.

²⁵ Thompson, *Jeremiah*, 401.

the conspiracy comes into action as they completely returned to the sins of their forefathers. The word *šābū* which is translated as 'returned' expresses the consequence of the conspiracy clearly and *ḏāû* is used ironically to mean 'backsliding' which implies turning away from the Lord and reverting to evil practices.²⁶ In other words, Judah turned back to *'āwōnōt* (the sins) of their ancestors. According to J.A. Thompson, "the apostasy of Judah was the turning back of the people to the iniquities of their earliest forefathers, who refused to listen to YHWH's covenantal demands. These led them to follow other gods and to serve them".²⁷

Now when the rendering *ābōwtām hārišōnîm* (their fathers the former ones) which is a compound phrase is interpreted in conjunction with the word 'fathers' in verses 4, 5 and 7, one gets the sense that reference is made not just to the immediate generation but to a much more earlier generation in the nation's history (cf. Exod. 32; Num. 14; Judg. 2:10-23).²⁸ Thus, verse 10 establishes the main charge against Judah. That is, Judah and her inhabitants both refused to listen to the words of YHWH (cf. Jer. 11:1-8) and consequently followed other gods to serve them (cf. Jer. 1:16). This charge of apostasy is directly connected to the earlier acts of apostasy in Israel's history and this makes it clear that *ḏāû* implies that the Sinaitic covenant was abandoned and YHWH consequently was no more their God. Nonetheless, it should be said that it is the behaviour of Jeremiah's contemporary that is being described. According to J. L. Mackay, "the current generation was walking in the steps of their ancestors. This is the main charge against them, and it is obviously not a peripheral matter but takes on the central demand of the covenant that there be total and undeviating loyalty to the Lord".²⁹

Furthermore, *hêpêrû* (they have broken), is interpreted to mean 'withdrawal' or 'removal',³⁰ and refers to the action of Judah to cease their support for and maintenance of the covenant between

²⁶ Thompson, *Jeremiah*, 401.

²⁷ Thompson, *Jeremiah*, 345.

²⁸ Thompson, *Jeremiah*, 402.

²⁹ Thompson, *Jeremiah*, 392.

³⁰ Thompson, *Jeremiah*, 402.

them and YHWH. It should be noted that Judah broke the covenant YHWH made with their origin or ancestors. J.D. Hays comments that *hêpêrû* (broken) “does not carry a mere connotation of “to violate” as when we break the law today, say by speeding; it implies breaking the relationship, as in an annulment ... clearly there is no danger of Yahweh “violating the rules”, but rather the threat is of Yahweh ending the covenant relationship in Deuteronomy”.³¹ Now, *šābû* (backsliding or turning back) in this verse, suggests the fact that at a time, Judah and her inhabitants were in the right with YHWH in terms of loyalty to him as their God and loyalty to the covenant. This period in history is associated to the reign of Josiah the king who championed religious reformation. On the other hand, the word *šābû* also points to the fact that the religious reforms of Josiah failed after his death and as a result, a people who once were loyal to YHWH became disloyal.

4.2 The consequence of Judah and her inhabitants action: Jeremiah 11:11-13

Jeremiah 11:11-13 is the second major subdivision of the text of Jeremiah 11:9-13 as shown in the structure above. This subdivision highlights in clear terms, the repercussion or aftermath of the action of Judah and her inhabitants which is outlined in Jeremiah 11:9-10.

i. The Judgment of YHWH (Verse 11)

This verse introduces the judgment that will befall Judah for breaking the covenant. In other words, the conspiracy led to the invocation of the curse of judgment and the wordings of verse 11 show how extreme the situation was.³² The word *lākēn* (therefore) initiates the judgment and sadly they will not be able to escape the horrors that will befall them. This evil will not come all of a sudden on them but will be the product of divine initiative (cf. Jer. 4:6,

³¹ Daniel Hays, *The Message of the Prophets*, (Grand Rapids, Illinois: Intervarsity, 2022), 163.

³² Thompson, *Jeremiah*, 402.

5:15) and on this ground, they will not escape the evil. On account of the dire situation they will find themselves, they will cry to YHWH for help and they will find no help. They will cry (*zaaq*) for help and their cry will connote an expression of distress expressed to YHWH and pleading for his help.³³ Sadly, their cry (*zaaq*) for help will yield no help from YHWH as at this point, their consistent refusal to listen to YHWH necessarily brings upon them judgment which they cannot avoid.³⁴ They refused to listen to YHWH and now that they seek for audience with YHWH, they will not get it.

ii. Futility of their Efforts (Verse 12)

The misery and inescapable hardship that Judah will face on account of YHWH not listening to Judah and its inhabitants' cry will lure them into seeking for help from the gods they have been worshiping in place of YHWH. However, the much needed help sought for from these gods will not come as these gods will not be able to help. That is, these gods are impotent. The attitude of returning to these gods and their failure to help them was first presented in Jer. 2:27-28 and this also indicates that the attitude of worshiping other gods at this point in time in the history of Judah, was prevalent even in the early days of Jeremiah the prophet and during the reign of Josiah the king.³⁵ In fact, it is an attitude or habitual practice for Judah and its inhabitants to abandon YHWH and to go after other gods. This is made clear by the phrase *məqattîmərîm* (to make sacrifice or burn incense) which is from the root *qtr* and serves as a participial phrase indicating habitual practice.³⁶ Also, as they carry out this habitual practice of burning incense or making sacrifices looking for remedy, they won't be saved. Rightly, these gods cannot save them as it is only YHWH who can come to their aid. This fact is strengthened by the word *yasha* (help), which is translated in Jer. 2:27-28 as 'save' and is a common word for deliverance and it implies

³³ Thompson, *Jeremiah*, 402.

³⁴ Thompson, *Jeremiah*, 402

³⁵ Thompson, *Jeremiah*, 246.

³⁶ Thompson, *Jeremiah*, 403.

that it is only from YHWH that such a divine and effective intervention can come forth.³⁷

iii. Justification of YHWH Action (Verse 13)

In considering the actions of YHWH in relation to their behaviour, verse 13 provides as it were a justification or reason why the Lord would treat them the way he promised. The verse opens with the causal clause (*kî*) and the statement is put in a direct form of address.³⁸ The multiplicity of idols by the people once again re-echoes the habitual practice of the people in following other gods and here, it was a custom for each community to view its god as manifestation of Baal.³⁹ Also, the statement “your gods have become as many as your cities...” is a sarcastic way of describing the powerlessness of these gods whom they have embraced at the expense of YHWH.⁴⁰ Furthermore, one gets the impression from the above statement that every street in the capital had one god which was considered to be a manifestation of Baal and this depicts massively the rate at which idolatry had eaten deep into the religious life of the people. Again, some scholars consider the statement to be a hyperbolic statement while some truly think it best described the religious situation during the time and reign of king Jehoiakim.⁴¹

5.0 The Theological Implications of Jeremiah 11:9-13

The exegetical study of the text of Jer. 11:9-13 reveals two major theological themes and they are:

1. The theology of covenant
2. The theology of judgment

5.1 The Covenant

At the heart of the text of study is the theme of covenant and indeed,

³⁷ Thompson, *Jeremiah*, 403.

³⁸ Thompson, *Jeremiah*, 403.

³⁹ Thompson, *Jeremiah*, 403.

⁴⁰ Thompson, *Jeremiah*, 403.

⁴¹ Thompson, *Jeremiah*, 403.

in discussing the religious history of Judah, the covenant and its demands cannot be over emphasized. Very importantly, when the wordings of Jer. 11:9-10 are put into perspective, one gets the sense that the covenant and in fact its violation underscores the focus of the entire chapter 11 of the book of Jeremiah. According to Thomas Leclerc, "in chapter 11 we find Jeremiah's most developed treatment of the covenant".⁴² Now, Jeremiah views YHWH's covenant to be the foundation of Israel's identity and the foundation to its survival.⁴³ Thomas Leclerc captures this aptly in the following words:

This passage evokes the memory of two significant events in Israel's past: the promise of land God had made to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob (Jer. 11:5) and God's deliverance of the Hebrews from their Egyptian bondage (Jer. 11:4). At Sinai, God formalized the relationship built on promise by making it a relationship built on covenant. That relationship is classically and succinctly summarized in Jer. 11:4: so shall you be my people, and I will be your God.⁴⁴

Furthermore, this covenant was one built on condition. That is, God's fulfillment of his promises was premised on Israel's fulfillment or fidelity to its own part of the covenant. With this in mind, it becomes clear that within the context of the covenant, YHWH is the master while Judah is the suzerain and YHWH claimed exclusive loyalty in this relationship. Any actions that undermined this exclusive loyalty as can be seen in the worship of other gods and the many social injustices prevalent in Judah and among her inhabitants amounted to a violation of the covenantal relationship. Essentially, for Jeremiah, the covenantal relationship is based on the ground that YHWH has a special relation to Israel, a relation which is built on God's original grace and love. YHWH for him is conceived as the universal God of the world to whom as the creator of the world and lord of history, all powers are subject and obedience is due.⁴⁵ The covenantal relationship is therefore based on man

⁴² Leclerc, *Introduction to the Prophets*, 249.

⁴³ Leclerc, *Introduction to the Prophets*, 248.

⁴⁴ Leclerc, *Introduction to the Prophets*, 250.

⁴⁵ Artur Weiser, *The Old Testament: Its Formation and Development*, (New York: Associated, 1961), 221.

being open to an inner surrender to God in love and loyalty (cf. Jer. 2:32, 29:12ff, 35).⁴⁶

Interestingly, Jeremiah's understanding of the covenant is not completely different from early prophetic description of the relationship between YHWH and his people. Thus, in the description of covenantal relationship as 'marriage relationship' (cf. Jer. 2:2, 3:6), or speaking of Israel as Yahweh's sons (cf. Jer. 3:19, 4:22), we see striking similarities between Jeremiah and Hosea.⁴⁷ Now, Jeremiah unlike the Deuteronomistic theologians begins the history or story of this relationship with the deliverance of Israel from Egypt (cf. Jer. 2:6). This deliverance is traced back by Jeremiah to the love of YHWH and not to the election of Israel.⁴⁸ The period of pure covenantal relationship is limited by Jeremiah to the time of Moses and the wondering in the desert by Israel when there was yet no sacrifice (cf. Jer. 2:2, 7:22).⁴⁹ Therefore, it becomes clear that for Jeremiah, Israel's entrance into the promise land marked the beginning of distorted relationship between YHWH and the people of Israel. In fact, the entrance into the promise land, Canaan, marked the beginning of apostasy in Israel's history (cf. Jer. 2:7).⁵⁰ Speaking about this, Georg Fohrer says: "Entrance into the settled land of Canaan marked the beginning of apostasy from Yahweh (2:7), which Jeremiah prefers to describe in terms drawn from nature rather than from history (8:4-7) and which he depicts in almost classic fashion in 3:19-20 Because this apostasy has continued to the present day..."⁵¹

5.1.1 The Covenant and Sin

With regard to covenant and sin, Jeremiah insists that the propensity for Judah to break or consistently flout the demands of the covenant is hinged on the nature of human heart which for him, is indelibly

⁴⁶ Weiser, *The Old Testament*, 221.

⁴⁷ Georg Fohrer, *Introduction to the Old Testament*, (London: S.P.C.K 1968), 402.

⁴⁸ Fohrer, *Introduction*, 402.

⁴⁹ Fohrer, *Introduction*, 402.

⁵⁰ Fohrer, *Introduction*, 402.

⁵¹ Fohrer, *Introduction*, 402.

stamped with sin (cf. Jer. 13:23).⁵² The apostasy of the inhabitants of Jerusalem in the text of study shows the ungrateful rebellious character of Judah. For him, the human heart is the domain for intellectual and moral decision and the heart is deceitful and corrupts (cf. Jer. 17:9).⁵³ Therefore, for Jeremiah, sin is not interpreted as an individual transgression but as a basic perversion of human life.⁵⁴ Jeremiah recognizes “the ingrained nature of sin which perverted basic attitude and in man’s callousness with regard to God (cf. Jer. 4:22, 5:3, 6:15, 13:23)”.⁵⁵ Thus, for Jeremiah, sin is habitual and Judah cannot overcome by their own efforts their habitual sinfulness.⁵⁶ Jeremiah speaks of the irreversible quality of sin which is manifested in the inability of the people to change their evil behaviour (cf. Jer. 8:4-7), inability to give up their lustful urges (cf. Jer. 2:25), and their continuous going backward (cf. Jer. 15:6).⁵⁷

For Jeremiah, sin impacts negatively on the human condition and the health of the nation. It is old and extends back to Israel’s earliest generation which made it bad (cf. Jer. 2:20, 7:22-26, 22:21) and within the context of the new generations, it has become worse and renders the new generation worse (cf. Jer. 16:12).⁵⁸ In conclusion, Jeremiah clearly holds the view that Judah cannot but walk the path of apostasy and social injustice. Judah cannot but violate the covenantal demands and this unrepentant attitude will definitely lead to YHWH’s judgment.

5.1.2 The New Covenant

The old covenant which was the Sinaitic covenant was one based on condition. That is, it was a mutual covenant which impressed obligations and rights on the persons involved in as much as they kept the demands of the covenant. Thus, this covenant was liable

⁵² William, *Old Testament Survey*, 350.

⁵³ William, *Old Testament Survey*, 351.

⁵⁴ Fohrer, *Introduction to the Old Testament*, 402.

⁵⁵ Weiser, *The Old Testament*, 221.

⁵⁶ Weiser, *The Old Testament*, 221

⁵⁷ Jack Lundbom, *Jeremiah in Anchor Bible Dictionary*, (Toronto: Doubleday, 1992), 718.

⁵⁸ Lundbom, *Jeremiah in Anchor Bible Dictionary*, 718.

to violation or can be broken on account of the faults of the individuals who entered into it (cf. Jer. 11:10, 31:32).⁵⁹ The violation or breaking of the covenant by Judah which, simply put, implied abandoning of YHWH meant that the covenant could not lead Judah and its inhabitants to righteousness and implied that YHWH abandoned Judah. Now, in the midst of the punishment that followed the violation of the covenant, YHWH inaugurates a new covenant which in essence is different from the old covenant. He does not renew the broken covenant but enacts a new one which will revolutionize the relationship between him and his people.

In other words, on account of YHWH's own initiative to save and restore his people, he opens up a new covenant where his laws will be written on the hearts of the people (cf. Jer. 31:31-34). This new covenant will essentially lead to an interior regeneration of the human heart⁶⁰ and will symbolize the new marriage between Judah and God. This new covenant unlike the old will not be based or built on external requirements or rituals and obligation and external admonitions but will be based on God creating a new heart for humans who will have the love, fear and knowledge of God (cf. Jer. 5:4ff, 22:16, 24:7, 32:39-40,). For Jeremiah, a renewed heart will necessitate the transformation of the entire human person and as a result, the human person will freely respond to God's laws naturally and spontaneously in obedience⁶¹ without any form of compulsion (cf. Jer. 31:31-34). In conclusion, the new covenant that Jeremiah speaks about signifies the hope of restoration in Jeremiah's theology. This hope and restoration is premised on God's own turning from his anger to delivering his people.

5.2 The Theology of Judgment

The concept of judgment is a dominant theme in the text of study. The use of the particle adverb *lākēn* (therefore) (Jer. 11:11)

⁵⁹ P. Van Imschoot, *Theology of the Old Testament*, (Paris: Descale, 1965), 242.

⁶⁰ Imschoot, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 243.

⁶¹ Jarvis Washington, *Prophet, Poet, Priest and Kings*, (New York: The Seaburt, 1974), 201.

introduces the theme of judgment and this is the direct consequence of Judah's violation of the covenant. That is, in as much as both nations refused to repent or embrace conversion, YHWH's judgment will but surely fall on them. In prophet Jeremiah's theological presentation of judgment, it usually will come upon anyone when repentance or conversion has proven to be impossible.⁶² YHWH's judgment in this wise is different from "the reckless and arbitrary Judgments of ancient Near Eastern deities and the mindless judgment of evil people".⁶³ In essence, YHWH's judgment according to Jeremiah is reason based and the reason is sin (cf. Jer. 1:16, 4:17, 5:6, 8:14, 13:22). Therefore in the theology of the prophet Jeremiah, judgment is tied to threat and punishment and punishment is sure to befall both nations on account of their moral and religious corruption (cf. Jer. 2:13, 5:27-28, 7:18-31) and for the prophet, the failure of both nations to change could only lead to the end of divine protection, defeat, destruction and exile.⁶⁴ Articulating the idea of punishment as a necessary part of YHWH's judgment of Jerusalem and Judah, Jack R. Lundbom writes: "YHWH is the one who raised the question of pardon for Jerusalem (cf. Jer. 5:1-8), but his answer was negative because the city could not produce one righteous soul. Repentance would have made a difference (cf. Jer. 4:1-4), but the people refused. Pardon had to wait therefore until after the punishment was completed (cf. Jer. 31:34)."⁶⁵

From the above, it becomes clear that pardon was in view in the judgment and consequent punishment of both nations. Interestingly, the people would not repent and as such, YHWH on his own part, repented from his anger and pardoned his people. "For Jeremiah, God himself relieves the tension. It is he who from the depths unfathomable love subdues his anger within himself (cf. Jer. 31:20) and forgives human sin, who on his own initiative will make a new covenant on the foundation of the forgiveness of sins by giving

⁶² Fohrer, *Introduction to the Old Testament*, 402.

⁶³ Lundbom, *Jeremiah*, 718.

⁶⁴ Eugene Maly, *Prophets of Salvation*, (New York: Harder and Harder 1966), 117.

⁶⁵ Lundbom, *Jeremiah*, 719.

man a new heart.”⁶⁶ Consequently, within the context of the judgment and punishment, Jeremiah foresaw God’s reversal of the situation of his people. That is, he foresaw “the powerful hand of God coming down to save his people much as he saved them in the land of Egypt”.⁶⁷ YHWH who had used other nations to punish his people, will now intervene in the history of his people, turning the table round and delivering his people in a divine and fatherly show of mercy. Jack R. Lundbom once again captures this divine act succinctly in the following words: “Because Yahweh is God over the whole earth, other nations cannot escape his punishment. Yahweh has no covenant with any of them; still he must avenge himself for the evil done to his people and to Jerusalem (cf. Jer. 46:10; 51:53), but he also moves against them because they are wicked (cf. Jer. 25:31), proud (cf. Jer. 50:31-32), and trusting in their own gods (cf. Jer. 50:38, 51:47).”⁶⁸

6.0 Jeremiah 11:9-13 and its Implication for the Traditional African Christian

The text of Jeremiah 11:9-13 has serious implication for the Traditional African Christian. It should be understood that the Traditional African Christian is first and foremost rooted in the African cultural world view especially as it relates to African Traditional Religion and the general African perception in the local deities or gods. Therefore, it appears as scholars have argued that the Christian God is a stranger to the African just as Christianity is a late comer within the African world.⁶⁹ Consequently, the Christian faith, practice and belief find itself in a weak position. This is even more pronounced within the context of deficient assimilation of Christian teachings and doctrines by some Christians within the African world. “Given such religious environment, an African Christian consciously or unconsciously begins to follow the trail of

⁶⁶ Weiser, *The Old Testament*, 221.

⁶⁷ Maly, *Prophets of Salvation*, 118.

⁶⁸ Lundbom, *Jeremiah*, 719.

⁶⁹ Emmanuel Nwaoru, *In God’s Words: Essays on Select Old Testament Text in Context* (Owerri: Apt Publications Nigeria 2022), 390.

this traditional relationship to the divine, even in practicing Christianity. Thus, many African Christians hardly conceive God as a revealed Divinity or Supreme Being who in his uniqueness demands exclusive relationship with his adherents.”⁷⁰

Therefore, just like the situation in the text of Jeremiah 11:9-13, the Traditional African Christian operates on a level where it is easy to move or walk away from the Christian God or finds it comfortable to marry the worship of the Christian God and the gods of the Traditional African Religion. Just as Judah found it pleasing to return to the religion of his ancestors, the Traditional African Christian may find it all the more comfortable to return to the religion and worship of the gods of his or her ancestors. This obviously in some instances, have become the other of the day where it becomes difficult to tell who is a Christian. That is, persons who profess to be Christians are seen involving or indulging in actions that completely repudiates the exclusive relationship that is expected to exist between God and the Christian. The allegiance and total fidelity that Christianity as a religion demands from the Christian is not only compromised but considered as old fashioned.

In considering the definition of Idolatry, it is clear that idolatry and its practice have been taken to a whole new dimension. That is, apart from the possible worship of the traditional African gods or deities etc. elements such as money, power, position, and wealth, have all become gods that demand allegiance. In essence, these continue to place the Christian who freely opens up to them, on the platform where fidelity to God is challenged and as can be seen in some cases, God is abandoned and these elements are embraced. In other words, the place of God in human life is challenged by these new idols which give quick but brief or momentary hope to the many economic and human challenges facing the human person.

7.0 Conclusion

This paper has so far studied the text of Jer. 11:9-13 and the study showed that both Judah and its inhabitants abandoned the covenant that existed between them and God. The study showed that, in the

⁷⁰ Nwaoru, *In God's Words*, 391.

breaking of the covenant, Judah, appeared to have agreed in what is termed, conspiracy of disobedience and in this, the inhabitants of Jerusalem, walked away from God and embraced the idols which their fathers served. The study revealed that Judah as a nation, reneged on the covenantal relationship between her and God, thus, putting into jeopardy, God's absolute ownership and rulership of the nation. The study showed that the backsliding or turning away from God to idols is habitual, sinful and consequently necessitated God's anger and judgment. The study showed that Judah's actions were adulterous, as it is a departure from God and towards the creation of man (idols). It involves surrendering one's allegiance not to God but to created idols. Finally, the study emphasized that although Judah and its inhabitants cry to God, this effort would be futile as their consistent refusal to listen to God would inevitably bring upon them God's anger.