



# The Pastor's Class

Session One

An Introduction to Prophetic Thought  
and to the Book of Jeremiah

I am Walter Brueggemann's Student

...

I owe much to my studies with him  
for the materials I'll share with you  
in the coming weeks.

“The Strange New  
World of the Bible”

Karl Barth



# The Strange New World of the Bible

- ◆ Karl Barth — 1916. in *Essay*
  - ◆ Disillusioned as “The Great War” proceeds.
- ◆ Again in 1919 — *Commentary on Romans*.

# The Strange New World of the Bible

- ◆ You cannot find morality in the Bible
- ◆ You cannot find history in the Bible
- ◆ You cannot find religion in the Bible
- ◆ WHAT YOU FIND IS . . .
  - ◆ The God who does not fit into any of our categories.
    - ◆ "Ganz Anders" = wholly other.

# The Strange New World of the Bible

- ◆ The theological crisis of our time in the PC (USA) is a crisis created by our uncritical acceptance of a God who fits into our categories.
- ◆ This is a crisis of both Conservatives & Liberals. (Barth would have called them in his time Pietists and Rationalists)

# The Strange New World of the Bible

- ◆ Conservative ideology typically makes God familiar, manageable, and convenient to the ruling class. This theology is often formulaic and constrains God's freedom.
- ◆ Liberal ideology typically domesticates the Almighty by assuming it knows too well the mind of God. This theology tends to be embarrassed by the difficult and complex God we encounter in the Bible and seeks to dismiss the parts which do not fit with progressive morality.

# The Pastor's Class

## Session Two

Recap

An Introduction to Prophetic Thought  
and to the Book of Jeremiah

# The Strange New World of the Bible

- ◆ BOTH assume they know more than can be known. Brueggemann wants to largely bracket out two kinds of inquiry which he thinks will ultimately prove unhelpful to us:
  - ◆ Historicity - "did it really happen?" (Did the red sea part? Did the Quail fall?)
  - ◆ Ontology - "Is it real?" (Is GOD real? Is the Manna real? Et Cetera)
- ◆ We cannot possibly PROVE these one way or the other.
- ◆ What we CAN do is accept the text given as a rhetorical record of witness about God — think court transcript.
  - ◆ Core Testimony — God is ALWAYS good and reliable and faithful and merciful.
  - ◆ Counter Testimony — "No so fast!" (Largely found in Job, Psalms of Lament, Lamentations).

# The Strange New World of the Bible

- ◆ So why do I start with this?
- ◆ Neither Liberals, nor Conservatives have much interest in the upsetting speech of prophets which calls into question all ideologies in favor of paying attention to the wild, feral God of the Bible.

# The Strange New World of the Bible

- ◆ Barth would say that neither liberals nor conservatives “know the mind of God” until God freshly chooses to disclose it — and that disclosure is nearly always unsettling and surprising.

A look at the "taproot"

- ◆ Moses - the first prophet.
- ◆ Later prophets live from  
Mosaic memory.

These are the last two verses of the TORAH

◆Deut. 34:10 “Never since has there arisen a prophet in Israel like Moses, whom the LORD knew face to face. 11 He was unequalled for all the signs and wonders that the LORD sent him to perform in the land of Egypt, against Pharaoh and all his servants and his entire land, 12 and for all the mighty deeds and all the terrifying displays of power that Moses performed in the sight of all Israel.”

# So . . . What did Moses Do?

- ◆ On God's behalf, he spoke truth to power —
  - ◆ “Let my people go!”
- ◆ He imagined (with God's inspiration) an alternative to Pharaoh's way of living.
  - ◆ 10 Commandments

## General Remarks about Prophets

- ◆ All the Hebrew Prophets were dedicated to:
  - ◆ Trying to awaken the people from slumber.
  - ◆ Articulating an alternative to the ideology of the Empire.
  - ◆ Using poetic oracles which, by the nature of the speech itself, breaks open the settled assumptions of king and pauper alike.
  - ◆ They are nearly always in opposition to the reigning government AND the reigning religious authorities which are typically aligned in the service of supporting the regime.

# Competing World Views

Yahweh & prophets = a grace-based world view confident of fruitfulness which promotes neighborliness (righteousness) and justice for all.

The elite of Jerusalem who believe there are no gifts (no free lunch), and who practice a world view of safety through self-sufficiency.

# The Economy of the Exodus

Ex. 16:16 This is what the LORD has commanded: ‘Gather as much of it as each of you needs, an omer to a person according to the number of persons, all providing for those in their own tents.’” 17 The Israelites did so, some gathering more, some less. 18 But when they measured it with an omer, those who gathered much had nothing over, and those who gathered little had no shortage; they gathered as much as each of them needed. 19 And Moses said to them, “Let no one leave any of it over until morning.” 20 But they did not listen to Moses; some left part of it until morning, and it bred worms and became foul.

# The Economy of the Exodus

Ex. 16:4 Then the LORD said to Moses, “I am going to rain bread from heaven for you, and each day the people shall go out and gather enough for that day. In that way I will test them, whether they will follow my instruction or not.

# Quick bibliographic note

- ◆ Paul Kennedy — The Rise and Fall of Empires.
- ◆ A technical book examining the rise and fall of Roman, Spanish, English, (and others) empires.
- ◆ Thesis is that every empire has so much of three things:
  - ◆ People
  - ◆ Wealth
  - ◆ Natural Resources

# Quick bibliographic note

- ◆ Paul Kennedy — The Rise and Fall of Empires.
- ◆ When these are put out of balance by:
  - ◆ Military adventurism — foolhardy entanglements . . .
  - ◆ Wealth Inequality where the 1% possess 80% of the wealth . . .
  - ◆ Greedy and Mindless over-consumption of resources . . .
- ◆ The empire collapses.

Every Empire believes it is exceptional

Every empire believes that it is unique in history

that the rules do not apply equally to it

that its preeminence is permanent



# The Pastor's Class

Session three - Jeremiah

External & Internal Chaos



Loss of King

Loss of Temple

Loss of Jerusalem

Loss of Faith

Perhaps 9/11

Is an analogue?

The historical/political context of  
Jeremiah's world—externally

# The Assyrian Empire

Strong 745 to 701 BCE ==> decline to 612 Ninevah Burned ==> 605 defeated



# The Babylonian Empire

605 BCE - 540 BCE ==> overrun by Persians



# The Persian Empire

540 BCE — Persians are eventually supplanted by the Medes (Proto-Greeks)



The historical/political context of  
Jeremiah's world—internally

# The promise of ever-lasting throne of David

1 Chron. 17:7 Now therefore thus you shall say to my servant David: Thus says the LORD of hosts: I took you from the pasture, from following the sheep, to be ruler over my people Israel; 8 and I have been with you wherever you went, and have cut off all your enemies before you; and I will make for you a name, like the name of the great ones of the earth. 9 I will appoint a place for my people Israel, and will plant them, so that they may live in their own place, and be disturbed no more; and evildoers shall wear them down no more, as they did formerly, 10 from the time that I appointed judges over my people Israel; and I will subdue all your enemies.

Moreover I declare to you that the LORD will build you a house. 11 When your days are fulfilled to go to be with your ancestors, I will raise up your offspring after you, one of your own sons, and I will establish his kingdom. **12 He shall build a house for me, and I will establish his throne forever.** 13 I will be a father to him, and he shall be a son to me. I will not take my steadfast love from him, as I took it from him who was before you, **14 but I will confirm him in my house and in my kingdom forever, and his throne shall be established forever.** 15 In accordance with all these words and all this vision, Nathan spoke to David.

## Last King of Israel - 2 Kings 25

- ◆ 2Kings 25:1 And in the ninth year of his reign, in the tenth month, on the tenth day of the month, King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon came with all his army against Jerusalem, and laid siege to it; they built siegeworks against it all around. 2 So the city was besieged until the eleventh year of King Zedekiah. . . . 5 But the army of the Chaldeans pursued the king, and overtook him in the plains of Jericho; all his army was scattered, deserting him. 6 Then they captured the king and brought him up to the king of Babylon at Riblah, who passed sentence on him. 7 They slaughtered the sons of Zedekiah before his eyes, then put out the eyes of Zedekiah; they bound him in fetters and took him to Babylon.

# How does the promise of everlasting throne turn out?

- ◆ *2Kings 25:27* In the thirty-seventh year of the exile of King Jehoiachin of Judah, in the twelfth month, on the twenty-seventh day of the month, King Evil-merodach of Babylon, in the year that he began to reign, released King Jehoiachin of Judah from prison; 28 he spoke kindly to him, and gave him a seat above the other seats of the kings who were with him in Babylon. 29 So Jehoiachin put aside his prison clothes. Every day of his life he dined regularly in the king's presence. 30 For his allowance, a regular allowance was given him by the king, a portion every day, as long as he lived.

# Last 5 Kings of Israel - 2 Kings 23 & 24

- King **Josiah**. 639 - 609 BCE. 23:25 “the best king we ever had.” Verse 29 - “He got killed in a shoot out with Pharaoh” (and that shouldn't have happened to a good king.)
- 23:31 Josiah's son takes over — “**Jehoahaz** was twenty-three years old when he began to reign; he reigned three months”. Only three months because the Egyptians didn't want him to be king.
- 609 BCE verse 36 Another son takes thrown . . . “**Jehoiakim** was twenty-five years old when he began to reign; he reigned eleven years . . . he did what was evil in the sight of the LORD.”
- 598 BCE 24:8 His son **Jehoiachin** takes over . . . “**Jehoiachin** was eighteen years old when he began to reign; he reigned three months”
- 24:18 Jehoichin's uncle **Zedekiah** takes over - “Zedekiah was twenty-one years old when he began to reign; he reigned eleven years” Reigns to 587.

# Context for Jeremiah

## The Rise and fall of Empires

Israel playing sycophant to super-powers — always trying to align with the empire in ascendancy

Not always getting that political calculus correct.

## Internal Political Stability in Jerusalem

Five Kings in short succession

Paired with the crisis of the ending of the Davidic Dynasty

# Context for Jeremiah

## First Kings Chapter 2

- ◆ verse 26 “The king said to the priest Abiathar, “Go to Anathoth, to your estate; for you deserve death. But I will not at this time put you to death...”

## Jeremiah Chapter 1

Jer. 1:1 The words of Jeremiah son of Hilkiah, of the priests who were in Anathoth in the land of Benjamin, 2 to whom the word of the LORD came in the days of King Josiah son of Amon of Judah, in the thirteenth year of his reign. 3 It came also in the days of King Jehoiakim son of Josiah of Judah, and until the end of the eleventh year of King Zedekiah son of Josiah of Judah, until the captivity of Jerusalem in the fifth month.

Into that context of crisis Jeremiah must speak

What do you say?

Do you perpetuate the party line of the Empire?

Do you risk offering an alternative?

This is the crisis of every prophet (and pastor) who must speak the unspeakable before outcomes are known.

# Two Quick reminders about prophets

1). They are NOT predictors! They don't predict anybody.  
Conservatives typically want prophets to predict Jesus.

2) They are NOT social activist! They are not Bernie Sanders.  
Liberals typically want prophets to be professional activist.

Prophets are poets — who like all good artists (poets included) are not particularly interested in explaining what their art (poetry) means. The point is that it “means” many things and part of its work is to elicit those many meanings over time.

# Karl Barth

“As ministers we ought to speak of God. We are human, however, so we cannot speak of God. We ought, therefore, to recognize both our obligation, and our inability — and by that very recognition give God the glory. That is our perplexity.”

Now . . . Let's look at Jeremíah!

# Jeremiah 1:1-3

“The words of Jeremiah son of Hilkiah, of the priests who were in Anathoth in the land of Benjamin, 2 to whom the word of the LORD came in the days of King Josiah son of Amon of Judah, in the thirteenth year of his reign. 3 It came also in the days of King Jehoiakim son of Josiah of Judah, and until the end of the eleventh year of King Zedekiah son of Josiah of Judah, until the captivity of Jerusalem in the fifth month.”

# Jeremiah & Anathoth . . .

- ◆ Solomon - "Keep the Torah & Kill your brother" 1

Kings 2

- ◆ verse 2:26 "The king said to the priest Abiathar, "Go to Anathoth, to your estate; for you deserve death. But I will not at this time put you to death..."

- ◆ 1 Samuel 2:31-33

- ◆ 340 years of resentful exile in Anathoth . . .

# The Pastor's Class

## Session Four

Prophetic Thought & Sinai

Sinai  
TORAH

Moses

Levites (Ex. 32)

Deuteronomy

Abiathar

Jeremiah

Jeremiah has DEEP roots in the TORAH tradition of Moses and He is a book of Deuteronomy kind of Guy.

Jerusalem enterprise: power, money, weapons  
King, temple, Zadock, Zionist, imperial  
exceptionalism . . . Jeremiah opposes all this.

# Jeremiah 1:1-3

“The words of Jeremiah son of Hilkiah, of the priests who were in Anathoth in the land of Benjamin, 2 to whom the word of the LORD came in the days of King Josiah son of Amon of Judah, in the thirteenth year of his reign. 3 It came also in the days of King Jehoiakim son of Josiah of Judah, and until the end of the eleventh year of King Zedekiah son of Josiah of Judah, until the captivity of Jerusalem in the fifth month.” [587 BCE]

What 587 BCE proves is . . . Imperial ideology/exceptionalism is not reliably true!

Jerusalem enterprise:  
power, money, weapons  
King, temple, Zionist,  
imperial exceptionalism — these all fail to keep promises.

Jeremiah argues — from the TORAH tradition of Moses that all the above failed because the King/empire did not keep the TORAH — which is a systemic commitment to justice.

Deut. 16:20 “Justice, and only justice, you shall pursue, so that you may live and occupy the land that the LORD your God is giving you.”

# The Call Narrative

Jer. 1:4 Now the word of the LORD came to me saying,

5 “Before I formed you in the womb I knew you,

and before you were born I consecrated you;

I appointed you a prophet to the nations.”

6 Then I said, “Ah, Lord GOD! Truly I do not know how to speak, for I am only a boy.” 7 But the LORD said to me,

“Do not say, ‘I am only a boy’;

for you shall go to all to whom I send you,

and you shall speak whatever I command you,

8 Do not be afraid of them,

for I am with you to deliver you, says the LORD.”

9 Then the LORD put out his hand and touched my mouth; and the LORD said to me,

“Now I have put my words in your mouth.

10 See, today I appoint you over nations and over kingdoms,

to pluck up and to pull down,

to destroy and to overthrow,

to build and to plant.”

# The Heart of the Call

10 See, today I appoint you over nations and over kingdoms,  
to pluck up and to pull down,  
to destroy and to overthrow,  
to build and to plant.”

4 negatives

2 positives

n.b.! — God does NOT tell Jeremiah to “report” on how GOD will enact these verbs . . . rather Jeremiah is told “YOU will: pluck, pull, destroy, overthrow, build, & plant.”

His speech is meant to deconstruct and also reconstruct the world which has been imperiled by royal/Imperial ideology.

# One way to think about the book

Prior to Exile:

Pluck up  
Tear down  
Destroy  
Overthrow

587!

Post Exile:

Build  
Plant

Walking people  
into the abyss

Walking people  
out of the abyss

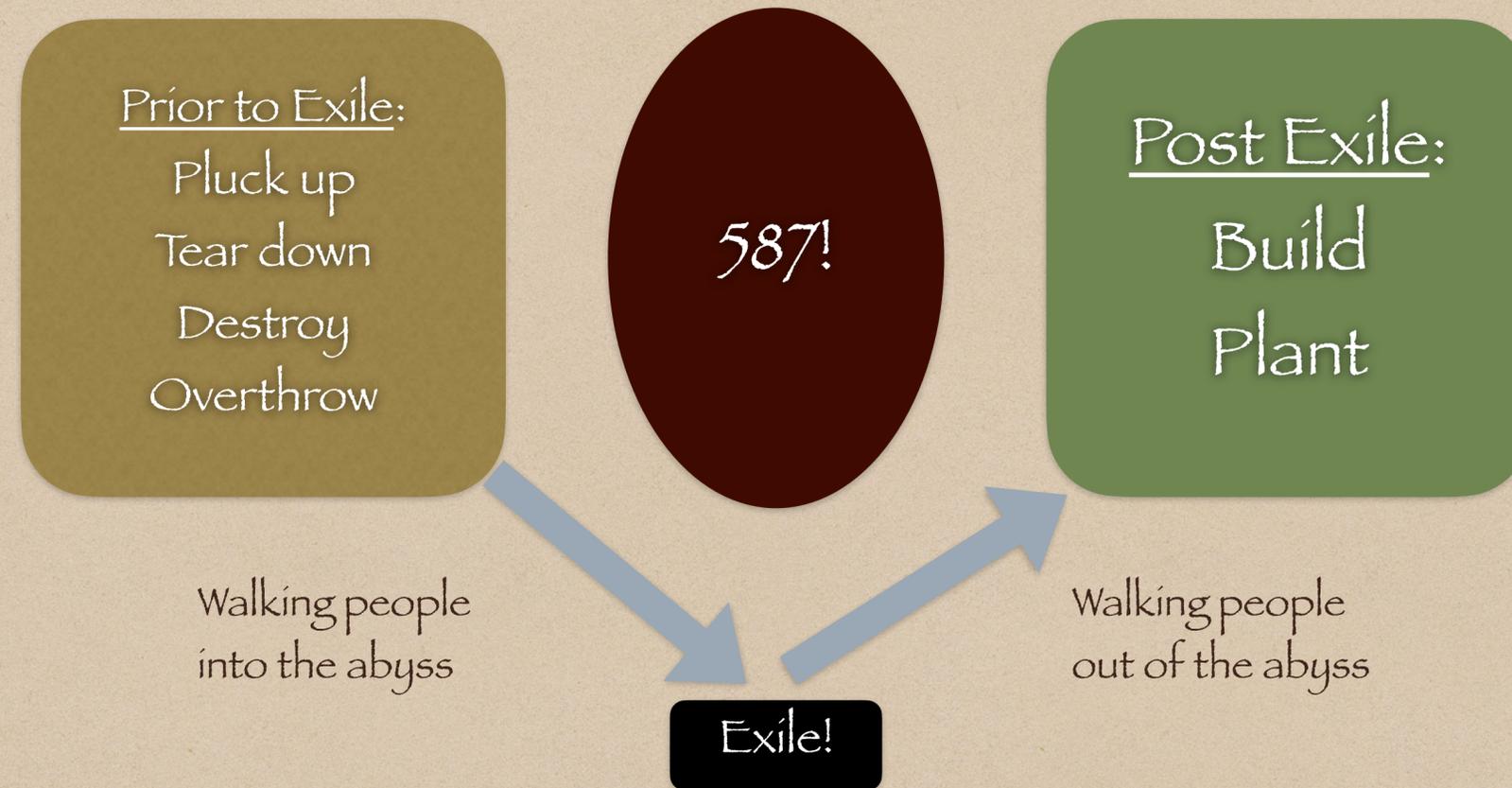
Exile!

# The Pastor's Class

## Session Five

Recap on Denial & Despair  
A reflection on God's Promises

# Something Jeremiah invites us to ponder . . .



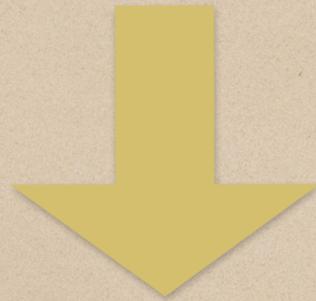
What if 587/Exile is a metaphor for all of the life-ending events which lead to despair — and what if the church is the last place where we speak honestly about the reality of the abyss and of the hope for new life on the other side?

# The powerful impulse of denial

- ◆ To deny any weakness
- ◆ To deny any complicity in wrong-doing
- ◆ To deny any end to our privilege and exceptionalism
- ◆ To deny that bad things can and do happen to good people
- ◆ To deny that we will be held accountable for our choices - eventually.

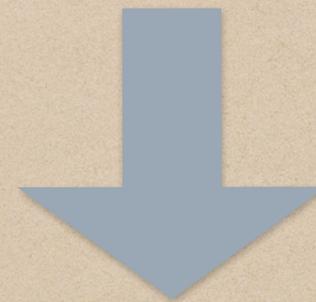
# Truth (Pluck up & Tear down) & Hope (Build & Plant)

Speaking Truth



Challenges Denial

Speaking Hope



Challenges Despair

It seems to me that the prophets believe that the principal trouble of every imperial society is DENIAL — and they spend much of their poetry speaking the kind of truth that breaks apart. Only MUCH later do they engage in offering HOPE - but only after denial has ended.

# 12 Theses in Jeremiah

1. Loss happens and is real - the world we have known is disappearing.

2. Loss happens because there are forces which want to negate us - there is something negative loose in the world.

3. If the world has moral coherence - then YAHWEH is implicated in our loss.

4. Our propensity is to deny the loss - simply pretend that it isn't so.

5. Our denial is reinforced by ideologies of triumph that are grounded in exceptionalism.

6. Denial leads to an illusionary world that is deadly.

7. The biblical voices in support of denial are the shalom-prophets.

8. The alternative to denial is truth-telling.

9. Truth-telling, in order to be effective, must be imaginative, metaphorical, and poetic - in order that it penetrate through ideology, soak through denial, and not be coopted by the royal ideology.

10. 587 is a metaphor for all loss. (Crucifixion, Holocaust, 9/11, current troubles)

11. Without truth-telling there is no chance for newness/Hope.

12. Truth-telling leads to newness.

# The Promises of God

- ◆ Jeremiah 31:20
- ◆ Isaiah 65:17-ff
  - ◆ Not a sober poem
  - ◆ Concrete socio-economic realities
    - ◆ Infant morality, bankers taking houses from poor people
    - ◆ Verse 23 - pain in birth (c.f. - Gen 3:16-ff)
    - ◆ New Creation is to replace failed creation — always a hope.

# The Promises of God

- ◆ Around 587 in Jeremiah & Ezekiel — Promise of Presence
  - ◆ “I will be your God and you will be my people.”
- ◆ Jeremiah 11:4, 24:7, 32:38
- ◆ Ezekiel: 11:20, 14:11, 36:28, 37:23 & 27
  - ◆ The bible’s most extraordinary promise of presence is given precisely in the exile of absence!

# The Promises of God

- ◆ Apocalyptic = the verbs of promise pushed to their limit.
  - ◆ Assurance of Pardon
  - ◆ God is faithful to a newness which is not yet in-hand.
- ◆ Messianism is the counterclaim to apocalyptic
  - ◆ Upper middle class liberal Presbyterians typically like messianism.
  - ◆ Less affluent & conservative people tend to gravitate to apocalyptic.

# The Promises of God in context of Modernity

- ◆ Well-educated, progress, affluent people tend to struggle with promises of God. We do not believe that God makes reliable promises — it just seems too primitive. IF we believe in God's promises taking effect, we tend to explain that through natural processes.
- ◆ Conservative people may be better able to believe in promises — but only of a particular kind:
  - ◆ ONLY private promises about piety, never about dismantling systems of oppression (economic reform, judicial reform).
- ◆ Matthew 6 “do not be anxious.”

# The God who keeps promises

- ◆ Quintessential example of God who keeps promises circles around Land.
  - ◆ Natah = "to give" (land).
  - ◆ Gen 17:8, 24:7, 26:3, 35:12,
  - ◆ Exodus 6:4, Deut. 6:23, 8:10
  - ◆ Ezek 47:21 & 48
  - ◆ Ends exilic poems by redistributing the land.

# The God of Jeremiah is internally complex

- ◆ The God of Jeremiah (and really ALL prophetic utterance) is internally complex.
- ◆ God is a complicated PERSON — not a simple IDEA.
- ◆ No “Big-O” God found in the prophets.
- ◆ Rather a God who feels, and is implicated in our troubles, and who acts and reacts to our behavior.

# Messianism of Ancient Israel

- ◆ The King is always the MAIN GUY — 2 Sam 7:15 “I will not take away my support of the throne . . . forever.”
- ◆ God’s presence in the Temple is uninterrupted.
  - ◆ 1 Kings 8:12
- ◆ We have to sing about the Guy and the Temple a LOT!
  - ◆ good examples are Psalms 46, 76, 84

# A Few Early Texts

The “Shalom-priests” (most notably  
Hananiah)

6:14

8:11

28

Ezekiel 13:10-16

Jeremiah 38:4

Chapters 2 - 8

# Exodus chpts. 19-21 Sinai

## ◆ Israel Swears allegiance to God & to Torah

Commandments in 19. Ex. 19:7 So Moses came, summoned the elders of the people, and set before them all these words that the LORD had commanded him. 8 The people all answered as one: “Everything that the LORD has spoken we will do.”

◆ Chapt. 19 3 Then Moses went up to God; the LORD called to him from the mountain, saying, “Thus you shall say to the house of Jacob, and tell the Israelites: 4 You have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles’ wings and brought you to myself. 5 Now therefore, if you obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession out of all the peoples. Indeed, the whole earth is mine, 6 but you shall be for me a priestly kingdom and a holy nation. These are the words that you shall speak to the Israelites.”

◆ God gives 10 Commandments in (20:1-17)

# 10 Commandments are COUNTER- Commandments

- ◆ Did you notice that they swear allegiance BEFORE they know what the Commandments will be?
- ◆ The commandments of the God of Liberation will be better than Pharoah's Commandments.
- ◆ Pharoah's Commandments found in Exodus 5.
  - ◆ Make more bricks!

# Pharaoh's Commandments found in Exodus 5

◆ 4 But the king of Egypt said to them, “Moses and Aaron, why are you taking the people away from their work? Get to your labors!” 5 Pharaoh continued, “Now they are more numerous than the people of the land and yet you want them to stop working!” 6 That same day Pharaoh commanded the taskmasters of the people, as well as their supervisors, 7 “You shall no longer give the people straw to make bricks, as before; let them go and gather straw for themselves. 8 But you shall require of them the same quantity of bricks as they have made previously; do not diminish it, for they are lazy; that is why they cry, ‘Let us go and offer sacrifice to our God.’ 9 Let heavier work be laid on them; then they will labor at it and pay no attention to deceptive words.”

Ex. 5:10 So the taskmasters and the supervisors of the people went out and said to the people, “Thus says Pharaoh, ‘I will not give you straw. 11 Go and get straw yourselves, wherever you can find it; but your work will not be lessened in the least.’” 12 So the people scattered throughout the land of Egypt, to gather stubble for straw. 13 The taskmasters were urgent, saying, “Complete your work, the same daily assignment as when you were given straw.” 14 And the supervisors of the Israelites, whom Pharaoh’s taskmasters had set over them, were beaten, and were asked, “Why did you not finish the required quantity of bricks yesterday and today, as you did before?”

Ex. 5:15 Then the Israelite supervisors came to Pharaoh and cried, “Why do you treat your servants like this? 16 No straw is given to your servants, yet they say to us, ‘Make bricks!’ Look how your servants are beaten! You are unjust to your own people.” 17 He said, “You are lazy, lazy; that is why you say, ‘Let us go and sacrifice to the LORD.’ 18 Go now, and work; for no straw shall be given you, but you shall still deliver the same number of bricks.” 19 The Israelite supervisors saw that they were in trouble when they were told, “You shall not lessen your daily number of bricks.”

# Covenantal Relationship with YAHWEH is to embrace:

- ◆ An alternative world-view
  - ◆ With alternative demands
  - ◆ With alternative possibilities
- ◆ But Egypt always has its attractions
  - ◆ We are constantly drawn back by the allure of Egypt's wealth etc.

# Trouble in the Covenantal Relationship with YAHWEH

- ◆ Exodus 32 - Golden Calf
  - ◆ Attempt to make God out of a commodity.
  - ◆ A domesticated god who asks for nothing from them.
- ◆ God gets REALLY ticked - Moses intervenes.

# Exodus 32

- ◆ Ex. 32:7 The LORD said to Moses, “Go down at once! Your people, whom you brought up out of the land of Egypt, have acted perversely; 8 they have been quick to turn aside from the way that I commanded them; they have cast for themselves an image of a calf, and have worshiped it and sacrificed to it, and said, ‘These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt!’”  
9 The LORD said to Moses, “I have seen this people, how stiff-necked they are. 10 Now let me alone, so that my wrath may burn hot against them and I may consume them; and of you I will make a great nation.”

Ex. 32:11 But Moses implored the LORD his God, and said, “O LORD, why does your wrath burn hot against your people, whom you brought out of the land of Egypt with great power and with a mighty hand? 12 Why should the Egyptians say, ‘It was with evil intent that he brought them out to kill them in the mountains, and to consume them from the face of the earth’? Turn from your fierce wrath; change your mind and do not bring disaster on your people. 13 Remember Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, your servants, how you swore to them by your own self, saying to them, ‘I will multiply your descendants like the stars of heaven, and all this land that I have promised I will give to your descendants, and they shall inherit it forever.’” 14 And the LORD changed his mind about the disaster that he planned to bring on his people.

Ex. 32:15 Then Moses turned and went down from the mountain, carrying the two tablets of the covenant in his hands, tablets that were written on both sides, written on the front and on the back. . . .

19 As soon as he came near the camp and saw the calf and the dancing, Moses’ anger burned hot, and he threw the tablets from his hands and broke them at the foot of the mountain. 20 He took the calf that they had made, burned it with fire, ground it to powder, scattered it on the water, and made the Israelites drink it.

Ex. 32:21 Moses said to Aaron, “What did this people do to you that you have brought so great a sin upon them?” 22 And Aaron said, “Do not let the anger of my lord burn hot; you know the people, that they are bent on evil. 23 They said to me, ‘Make us gods, who shall go before us; as for this Moses, the man who brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him.’ 24 So I said to them, ‘Whoever has gold, take it off’; so they gave it to me, and I threw it into the fire, and out came this calf!” . . .

Ex. 32:30 On the next day Moses said to the people, “You have sinned a great sin. But now I will go up to the LORD; perhaps I can make atonement for your sin.” 31 So Moses returned to the LORD and said, “Alas, this people has sinned a great sin; they have made for themselves gods of gold. 32 But now, if you will only forgive their sin—but if not, blot me out of the book that you have written.” 33 But the LORD said to Moses, “Whoever has sinned against me I will blot out of my book. 34 But now go, lead the people to the place about which I have spoken to you; see, my angel shall go in front of you. Nevertheless, when the day comes for punishment, I will punish them for their sin.”

So the Covenantal Relationship with YAHWEH  
turns out to be:

- ◆ An endless re-negotiation of the covenant.
  - ◆ Covenant made
  - ◆ Covenant broken
  - ◆ Covenant remade
  - ◆ wash-rinse-repeat — ad infinitum

# The Prophet as Poet

A quick study of Greek and Hebrew

# A Culture Clash Between Greeks & Hebrews

## Greeks

Thought of inspiration from the point of view of the nine Muses.

When “inspired” a person’s rational powers were superseded and the person lost self-control. They become “Divine Man.”

## Hebrews

Tended to think of inspiration in more organic and holistic terms. You do not get God except through the muddy, ambiguous medium of people. Hebrews tended to think of inspiration in slightly less lofty ways.

# Inspiration & Authority

Let's take a look at an example of Prophet

## **NRSV JEREMIAH 1 JEREMIAH'S CALL AND COMMISSION**

1 The words of Jeremiah son of Hilkiah, of the priests who were in Anathoth in the land of Benjamin, 2 to whom the word of the LORD came in the days of King Josiah son of Amon of Judah, in the thirteenth year of his reign. 3 It came also in the days of King Jehoiakim son of Josiah of Judah, and until the end of the eleventh year of King Zedekiah son of Josiah of Judah, until the captivity of Jerusalem in the fifth month.

4 Now the word of the LORD came to me saying,

5 "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you; I appointed you a prophet to the nations."

6 Then I said, "Ah, Lord GOD! Truly I do not know how to speak, for I am only a boy."

7 But the LORD said to me,

"Do not say, 'I am only a boy';

for you shall go to all to whom I send you, and you shall speak whatever I command you.

8 Do not be afraid of them, for I am with you to deliver you, says the LORD."

9 Then the LORD put out his hand and touched my mouth; and the LORD said to me,

"Now I have put my words in your mouth.

10 See, today I appoint you over nations and over kingdoms, to pluck up and to pull down, to destroy and to overthrow, to build and to plant."

11 The word of the LORD came to me, saying, "Jeremiah, what do you see?" And I

said, "I see a branch of an almond tree." 12 Then the LORD said to me, "You have

seen well, for I am watching over my word to perform it." 13 The word of the

LORD came to me a second time, saying, "What do you see?"

And I said, "I see a boiling pot, tilted away from the north."

# Prophet as Poet

Hebrew for "prophet" is (nabi - pronounce "navi").

As you can see in the Jeremiah passage he is not overcome. He doesn't not become an automaton who does God's bidding without question or input.

Rather, he is self-aware enough, and self-preserving enough to argue that he shouldn't be sent.

Jeremiah's role is to the the "Press Secretary" of the Almighty who delivers the news of what he overhears of God.

The Septuagent . . .

The GREEK translation of the Hebrew Bible

It translated the Hebrew word “poet” (*navi*) into the Greek word “Prophet,” from two Greek words *pro* (meaning ‘before’) and *phemi* (verb ‘to say’).

As you might imagine this decision to render the Hebrew into Greek in a way that literally means “to say before,” dramatically influences how prophetic inspiration is understood!

The Bible itself does not describe prophets in the category of fortune tellers.