



Suffering and the portrait of YHWH in Jeremiah: energizing hope in contexts of suffering and pain

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Abstract

This paper interrogates the portrait of YHWH that emerges in the face of the pain and suffering of Jeremiah and the covenant people of YHWH. The paper attends to the question through a combination of synchronic and canonical methods in reading the book of Jeremiah. Through a theological analysis and exposition of some key texts, which includes Jeremiah 8:18-9:3 11:18-12:13; and 32:1-15, this paper demonstrates that the portrait of YHWH that emerges is not a God who watches the suffering of his covenant people helplessly, hardheartedly or dispassionately from without, but is himself grief-stricken in the suffering of his people, so that he might eventually bring suffering to an end and hold all that are complicit accountable. The paper discusses the call of Jeremiah in the light of its connotation of forthcoming suffering and pain and the non-insulation of the prophet and YHWH's covenant people from the coming suffering. This is followed by an expose on the nature of the suffering of YHWH as portrayed by Jeremiah in his poetry of lament in 8:18-9:3 as well as the vital function of Jeremiah 32 in the suffering of YHWH's people.

Keywords: Jeremiah, Suffering, Pain, YHWH, Persecution, energizing-hope

Introduction

The question of suffering and pain and the place of God in it is not a new one. The question becomes more perplexing when those undergoing suffering are those belonging to, or having a relationship with God. The current situation of suffering, pain and even death as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic experienced by people of all faiths across all racial divides, further accentuates the reality of pain and suffering in our world. For the covenant people of YHWH in Jeremiah, the reality of their suffering and pain would have raised a number of questions in their mind about the nature of the God to whom they belonged. This is more so when one takes into consideration their Ancient Near Eastern context of the plurality of gods and belief in the power and the protection of such gods over their people. Apart from raising the question of the nature of God, suffering has a way of prompting the question of where God is in such an acute manner that it would not be asked under normal circumstances. Along with these questions, suffering also



poses the question of a suitable response. It necessitates the question of how to respond to suffering especially as YHWH's covenant people.

According to Fretheim¹, more often than not the belief in God is urged without giving sufficient attention to the question of the kind of God, or better still, the nature of this God that people are called to believe in. The attendant consequence could be misunderstandings, misconceptions and even wrong assumptions. On the extreme scale of wrong assumptions, there could be a picture of God wrongly held to be at variance with that of Jesus. According to Fretheim, less palatable attributes such as wrath, power and justice are ascribed to God only, while attributes such as love, compassion and mercy, acts of healing, forgiving and redeeming are attributed narrowly to Jesus. One can almost hear someone say, 'if only Jesus were here, he would do something about all our troubles!'

Fretheim's concern rings true at least within the context and background out of which this author writes from², which is a context of suffering due to persecution as a result of religious intolerance and violence, amidst the taunts of believing in a Christian God that is not as great as 'Allah'³. The situation is further compounded by anecdotal evidence of the rise of some Christian 'prophets' who are proclaiming a 'pain-free' Christianity and a God that forbids suffering of any kind in the life of his people. The result has been confusion, since pain and suffering have refused to vanish away as expected, the bitter reality has left many confused and questioning their faith in God, or a perceived lack thereof.

Calloused, uncaring, even complicit God?

Given the background above and considering the fact that pain and suffering have remained a reality which has left many confused and questioning the place of God in their suffering, the problem this paper will seek to address by way of a question is: What is the portrait of YHWH reflected in the suffering of his people in Jeremiah?

The central theory this paper argues for is that, the portrait of YHWH that emerges from the suffering of his people in Jeremiah, is that of a God who allows his prophet and his people to suffer, because of his righteous judgement. Yet, he is not the calloused, uncaring, even complicit

¹ Fretheim (1984:1-3)

² The author writes from the context and experience of a minority Christian population in the Muslim dominated north-eastern part of Nigeria, where Islamic Sharia law have been imposed and there is a constant agitation by extremist Islamic groups for a more rigid application of the Sharia law. This has caused untold suffering and persecution, leading to the death of many Christians.

³ The constant affirmation of the Islamic faith 'Allahu Akbar' meaning, 'Allah is the greatest' underscores Islamic faith and practice, and informs their attitude in dealings with people of other faith and religions.



God (Melvin, 2011:105) as Jeremiah thinks in 12:1-2, but rather the God who is pained⁴ with the suffering of his people and is intent on bringing an end to suffering while holding all accountable.

The new contribution this paper makes is a fresh scholarly engagement with the question from an Old Testament theological perspective. It hopes that the result of the findings could also serve as a theoretical base to be utilised as a theological tool to energise hope in contexts of suffering and pain by the people of YHWH.

Multidimensional approach to Jeremiah: synchronic-canonical

This paper proposes and utilises a Synchronic-canonical approach as a combination of approaches variously suggested by Brueggemann (2004: ix) and Smelik (2004:1-11). This is a departure from the mostly followed fictional approach proposed by Carroll (1989:9). The Synchronic-canonical method is considered fitting towards answering the concern of this paper. In other words, while considering the history of Jeremiah's time as a help in understanding the book, this paper approached Jeremiah as a synchronic canonical book put together with a theological intentionality⁵.

⁴ The theological debate about the passability of God as championed especially by 'process theology' as well as 'liberation theology' is not the view that this paper espouses. For more on this, see Bauckham, R. (1984) and Childs, B. S. (1993:357-358). Though this paper is not purposed to engage specifically with that debate, it is worth noting that this paper stands in the traditional view that holds to God's attribute of impassibility. The reference to the God who is pained and suffers here is in anthropomorphic sense to help humans towards an understanding of the nature of God, as a precursor to understanding the wilful suffering of Christ on the cross for sin. This follows Paul S. Fiddes (1988) who according to McWilliams (1990), 'although he advocates the suffering of God, he presents the case for divine impassibility clearly and persuasively'.

⁵ The approach in this paper differs from the "purely synchronic" approach which according to Yates (2013) is "indebted to postmodern thought" and "focuses solely on the reader and the connections she draws between two or more texts". Though not strictly following the "diachronic approach" proposed by Yates (2013), this study agrees with Yates' (2013) proposition that calls for a focus on "identifying the specific connections that the author wants the reader to perceive, as well as determining which texts predate the others, and consequently, have influenced the others." This study therefore focuses on inner-biblical exegesis as suggested by Yates and exemplified in the following works noted by Yates (2013:287): Steve Moyise, *In Paul and Scripture: Studying the New Testament Use of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2010); Steve Moyise and Maarten J. J. Menken, *Deuteronomy in the Old Testament* (New York: Clark, 2007); idem, *Isaiah in the Old Testament: The New Testament and the Scriptures of Israel* (New York: Clark, 2005); idem, *Psalms in the New Testament* (New York: Clark, 2004); G. K. Beale and D. A. Carson, eds., *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007); Richard B. Hays, *The Conversion of the Imagination: Paul as Interpreter of Israel's Scriptures* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005); Mark J. Boda and Michael H. Floyd, eds., *Bringing out the Treasures: Inner Biblical Allusion in Zechariah 9-16*, *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement* (London: Sheffield Academic, 2003); J. Ross Wagner, *Heralds of the Good News: Isaiah and Paul in Concert to the Letter to the Romans* (Leiden: Brill, 2003); David W. Pao, *Acts and the Isaianic New Exodus*, *Biblical Studies Library* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002); Rikki E. Watts, *Isaiah's New Exodus in Mark*, rev. ed., *Biblical Studies Library* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001); Richard L. Schultz, *The Search for Quotation: Verbal Parallels in the Prophets*, *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1999); Benjamin D. Sommer, *A Prophet Reads Scripture: Allusion in Isaiah 40-66* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998); Richard B. Hays, *Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1993); and Michael Fishbane, *Biblical Interpretation in Ancient Israel* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989).



The pain of God, the suffering of his prophet and his people

Suffering in Jeremiah's call narrative

Jeremiah is known as the "the weeping prophet". This identification is most likely in connection with passages that reflect weeping such as Jer. 8, 23; 9, 17; 13,17;14,17). The fact of Jeremiah's weeping status finds a more dramatic expression in Jer. viii 23: "O that my head were a spring of water and my eyes a fountain of tears so that I might weep day and night for the slain of my Daughter People!" Jeremiah's identity is cast as a prophet whose pain and anguish necessitated a flood of tears.

From the beginning pages of the book of Jeremiah, particularly in the call narrative recorded in chapter 1:10, the account does not downplay the full import of what lay ahead:

See, I have set you this day over nations and over kingdoms,
To pluck up and
To break down,
To destroy and
To overthrow,
To build and
To plant.

After assuring Jeremiah⁶ of the call to take up the prophetic assignment, YHWH outlined the nature and involvement of the call. Of the six verbs, four had negative implications, 'to pluck up, break down, destroy and overthrow'. It was clear that Jeremiah's Job was not an easy one, and the people were about to experience pain and suffering of great proportions. Brueggemann (2007:37) explains that, 'The four negative verbs -pluck up, tear down, destroy and overthrow-refer in context to the destruction of Jerusalem, the razing of the temple and the city, and the termination of the Davidic house'. He explains further that 'the two positive verbs-plant and build refer to the restoration of the city (and the temple and perhaps the monarchy) after the destruction'.

Without a doubt, Jeremiah's prophetic assignment entailed the proclamation of YHWH's judgement leading to exile, whose practical implication would entail pain and suffering. In Jeremiah's prophecy, death, doom and destruction loomed largely. The theme of suffering as an implication of the impending judgment is unmistakably evident. Following Brueggemann's explanation above, Jeremiah's prophecy then portends the loss of the city through destruction, the loss of the much-treasured temple and the much-revered Davidic dynasty. However, 'the God who plucks up, tears down and enacts the loss of the city, temple, and dynasty, that same God is capable of planting and building a new' (Brueggemann, 2007:40). Therein rests the theme

⁶ Jeremiah lived during a time of great upheaval and most importantly the destruction of the First Temple in 586 BCE and the exile of the Jews to Babylonia. Lack of faith in YHWH, false and insincere worship and failure to trust YHWH in national affairs led Jeremiah to warn the people of the destruction to come if they do not repent. Jeremiah pronounced God's judgment on the people of his era for their wickedness and denounced all social injustices that he witnessed.



of suffering alongside hope in Jeremiah, all belonging within the capacity of YHWH as the divine sovereign.

A scholarly attempt has been made by Becking (2009:183-202) to argue that the exile should not be equated with suffering and pain. Though his argument is situated in the context of Psalm 137, his thesis is that based on archeology and epigraphy, those in exile were living in relatively good conditions, and the real suffering was alienation from Zion only. Fair enough, he concedes alienation from Zion as a form of suffering, but Becking fails to take cognizance of the reality of the severity of the pain of alienation from Zion, which in itself is nothing less than suffering. In addition, his view does not seem to take into account Jeremiah's prophetic portrayal of the intensity of pain and suffering resulting from the exile as discussed above.

Jeremiah the suffering prophet

The question of the historical Jeremiah is not the thrust of this section. The Biblical material in Jeremiah does open us to the person of Jeremiah. However, Biblical records, as presented by Fretheim (2002:12), indicate that Jeremiah's prophetic ministry lasted for over forty years ranging more or less from about 627 to 587 BCE.

Kuist (1960:8) affirms that 'conflict is the keynote of Jeremiah's public career'. He goes on to summarise the account of Jeremiah's sufferings as follows:

His life was threatened by his people at Anathoth (11:21-23), he was tried for his life due to his temple sermon and had to be protected thereafter (26:24), he was put in the stocks (20:1-6), he and Baruch had to flee for their lives (36), he was publicly humiliated by Hananiah, a prophet from Gibeon (27-28), and was lowered into a cistern of mire (38) among others. A tradition about Jeremiah preserved in the apocryphal book referred to as 'the lives of the prophets' declares that Jeremiah was stoned to death by the people of the remnant at Tahpanhes (modern Tall al-Dafana) in Egypt.

Jeremiah cuts the picture of God's prophet that knew suffering, pain, rejection and even death. He called the people repent and to turn away from their wicked ways, stop dependence on idols and false gods and to return to their early covenantal loyalty to Yahweh, and then strive to live in obedience to Yahweh's will for themselves and their nation. In discussing Jeremiah 11:18-12:13, Melvin (2011:99) avers that, Jeremiah's relatives plotted against him, causing him to cry out to God. He faced rejection by his people who wanted to kill him. In this passage mostly referred to as Jeremiah's lament, interpreters have pointed out an allusion to the suffering servant of Isaiah 53:4-12. Melvin (2011:102) explains that, interpreters (Melvin, 2011:102; Holladay, Jeremiah 1, 372); Origen, Homily 10, 4.2-3; and Thomson, Jeremiah, 350, have understood the mention of 'a lamb being led to the slaughter' in Jeremiah's lament) to be an allusion to the suffering servant of Isaiah 53:4-12: 'Christian interpreters throughout history have been keen to pick up on this and have thus understood both the sufferer of Isaiah 53 and Jeremiah as foreshadowing Jesus' atoning suffering...Jeremiah and the suffering servant of Isaiah 53 stand out as persons whose carriers are defined by their suffering.

While we may not be able to take the discussion on Jeremiah's allusion to the suffering servant further, especially in keeping with the scope of this paper, we can at least point out that commentators are agreed that Jeremiah as a result of his calling, stands as a representative of the people and as God's representative as well. However, he suffers in the hands of the people.



Nevertheless, YHWH will punish the people's sin and infliction of suffering on Jeremiah. From the coming suffering on the people, the prophet has no insulation, because by the very nature of his calling, he is bound inextricably to the people and their suffering will be his suffering as well (Melvin, 2011:104). Suffering then becomes the lot of both Jeremiah and the people.

Apart from Jeremiah and the people, 'YHWH himself suffers in punishing the people. Indeed, YHWH's suffering is the most intense, for he must will himself to inflict the fatal blows upon his people whom he loves (12:7-8).' It becomes obvious that, Jeremiah as the prophet of God suffers innocently, the people suffer due to God's judgement against their sin, and God suffers the most albeit willingly, as a way of reflecting his compassion. He allows the coming suffering due to his justice as a way of righting the situation righteously. As YHWH's response to Jeremiah in 12: 5 indicates, contrary to Jeremiah's expectation, suffering along with its perpetrators will not just vanish. Actually, it will become more intense, but according to Stulman (2008:13), 'In the prophetic persona, we discover that suffering is not shameful but rather a mark of faithful service to God'

In the sufferings of Jeremiah, we see a God who does not insulate his prophet from suffering. In fact, Jeremiah struggled a great deal against despair for his suffering and the suffering of the people while giving the people hope for the future. Even though he allows the suffering of his servant the prophet and his people, he does not condone it but bears the pain, and he will right the situation by his righteous Judgement.

The suffering people of God

As mentioned above, the people's sin was a necessary corollary to God's judgement out of which suffering results. The point needs to be made clear however that the sin of the people that necessitated the judgement of God was not just the fact that they inflicted suffering on Jeremiah. Their painful dealing with Jeremiah was actually a reflection of a bigger existing problem. YHWH had a covenant with the people, which they were failing to observe. They were no longer walking in the way of the covenant. Even before Jeremiah appeared on the scene, something was fundamentally wrong between the people and YHWH. The Deuteronomic covenant understanding that shaped the book of Jeremiah and indeed was the basis of YHWH's relationship with his people was out of view. The failure of covenant keeping and failure to walk in the way of the covenant then meant a failed relationship. The terms of the covenant reflected that failure to walk in the covenant would result in a loss, exile and even death. Jeremiah in 2:1-3:5 therefore indicted the people, calls them to repent (and that having failed) announced judgement (Fretheim, 2002:59). This is in keeping with Jeremiah's prophetic assignment in chapter 1:10 which entailed the proclamation of YHWH's judgement leading to exile, whose practical implication would entail pain and suffering. Jeremiah's pronouncements especially the temple pronouncements in chapter 7 show that the covenant has failed, indeed the law and the monarchy has failed as well. Therefore, God's solution, which is the judgement that results into exile, becomes inevitable.

The suffering pain of God in Jeremiah's poetry of lament

My grief is beyond healing, my heart is sick within me.
Hark, the cry of the daughter of my people from the length and breadth of the
land:



'Is the LORD not in Zion? Is her King not in her?' 'Why have they provoked me to anger with their graven images, and with their foreign idols?' 'The harvest is past, the summer is ended, and we are not saved.'

For the wound of the daughter of my people is my heart wounded, I mourn, and dismay has taken hold on me. Is there no balm in Gilead? Is there no physician there? Why then has the health of the daughter of my people not been restored?

O that my head were waters, and my eyes a fountain of tears, that I might weep day and night for the slain of the daughter of my people!

O that I had in the desert a wayfarers' lodging place that I might leave my people and go away from them! For they are all adulterers, a company of treacherous men.

They bend their tongue like a bow; falsehood and not truth has grown strong in the land; for they proceed from evil to evil, and they do not know me, says the LORD.

(Jeremiah 8:18-9:3. RSV)

In approaching this passage, the question of the speaker is very important. Thomson (1980: 304) asserts that the passage contains 'two independent oracles 8:18-23 (Eng.9:1) and 9:1, 2 (2, 3), the first of which shows Jeremiah mourning for Israel, and the second his desire to leave forever'. According to Thomson, therefore, the passage is a portrayal of Jeremiah's grief for his people. Though he admits that, the insertion of the words '...for they proceed from evil to evil, and they do not know me' in 9:3 is actually an interruption of Jeremiah's lament by YHWH to explain why he has forsaken Jerusalem (Thomson, 1980:305).

McKane (1986:193-197) posits that the passage consist of the lament of Jeremiah and an attempt to fit into the structure YHWH's answer creates a dissonance to an otherwise cohesive lament. He, therefore, concludes that, Jeremiah as a person is identifying with his people in the passage, 'but it is not personal in the sense that it is associated with a surge of private feeling. Jeremiah, in cultic context, is discharging a representative function⁷ as an intercessor'. Even though McKane adduces careful scholarly evidence to buttress his assertion, it still does not seem to have convincingly explained why the similarity of speech in the text with that attributed to YHWH elsewhere in the wider context of Jeremiah.

Huey (1993:116) rightly argues that the passage reflects the weeping of both Jeremiah and God. 'This passage earns Jeremiah his reputation as the weeping prophet, but God is also weeping in this passage⁸'. Huey points to the evidence of the phrase 'my people' as 'a phrase frequently expressing God's covenantal relationship with Israel'. This view seems more cognizant of the similarity of a speech attributed to YHWH in the wider context of Jeremiah. O'Connor (1998:179-180) advances the argument for the presence of divine speech in the passage by asserting that, '...The God who executes war and the God who casts off his unfaithful bride is the God who weeps (8:18-9:22 [MT. 21]). In this cluster of poems about weeping, YHWH weeps (8:19-9:1[MT 2]) and orchestrates the weeping of others (9:10-11, 17-22 [MT 9-10, 16-21]).' O'Connor is in concordance with Brueggemann (1988:88) who avers, 'That divine pathos structures the poem

⁷ Carroll (1986:235) agrees with McKane and suggests that the speaker is the city or the community metaphorically with Jeremiah as the mouthpiece. That is, Jeremiah is voicing the pain of the city.

⁸ Huey also cites Fretheim (2002:148) in support of this view. Indeed, Fretheim engages the question of the speaker in this text more fully. (See Fretheim, 2002:148-52).



gains specificity from a number of speech markers that indicate that YHWH is the poem's principal speaker'

The purpose of establishing the fact of divine speech in the above passage is that, such an understanding makes it easier to see the portrait of YHWH as Jeremiah (indeed the Old Testament) would want us to see Him as the God who is pained by the suffering and the pain of His people.

The portrait that begins to emerge is that of a God who has the tears of compassion over the pain and suffering of his beloved people. The emerging portrait should help to correct the wrongly viewed portrait of 'the angry old man of the old covenant' as opposed to the 'compassionate Christ of the new'.⁹ According to Scalise (2004:99), God's anguish is the first evidence of his reluctance to judge. The most memorable expressions of God's compassion and love for Israel articulate anguish over the way the people will suffer when the planned judgment will fall upon them. In the poems of Jer 4:19-22 and 8:18-9:1 God's voice emerges from the prophets voice.¹⁰

By ascribing weeping and pain (a human term) to YHWH, Jeremiah wishes us to see YHWH as the God who is compassionate and weeps for the suffering of his people and will ultimately bring suffering to an end. In the words of Childs (1993:358)¹¹:

God is God and not human, yet he has become God with us (Isaiah 8:10)... the Biblical language of depicting God in a human form is not an unfortunate accommodation to human limitation, but a truthful reflection of the free decision of God to identify with his creation in human form and yet to remain God.

The function of Jeremiah 32 in the suffering pain of God, his prophet and his people

We have earlier established that Jeremiah 8:18-9:3 reflects both the anguish of the prophet Jeremiah as well as that of God. Brueggemann (2006:185) therefore suggest that, in reading 8:18-9:3 alongside 32:1-15, the unqualified depth of grief that touches both YHWH and the prophet matches with the unqualified hope those chapter 32 offers. 'The lament of the poem provides a glimpse of the broken heart of God. The promise in chapter 32 opens the buoyant heart of God. In both, Jeremiah has been very near to God, near in despair and near in buoyancy. This completes the 'two-stage theology of the Jeremiah tradition' in reference to the 'build' and 'plant' verbs in Jeremiah 1:10. Because, the God who causes exile ('scattered') is the God who will create homecoming ('gather') as Brueggemann (2007:125) rightly notes

Just as the poem of lament in 8:18-9:3 is said to have exposed a depth of grief in the heart of YHWH, Brueggemann rightfully point out that 'this savage expose' of YHWH's internal struggle suggests that beneath the ire of an offended sovereign is the care of a father, ..or even better, the

⁹ Using the illustrative categories of Scalise, 2004:1

¹⁰ In indicating that the tears of God articulate his compassionate love, care must be taken not to make his love 'analogous to human personal love' thus necessitating the tears. The theological understanding of God's love as unconditional must be maintained, which will be impossible if his divine love articulated in tears is made 'analogous to human personal love' (see Bauckham, 1984)

¹¹ Though this paper is focused on the Old Testament text of Jeremiah, admittedly, the portrait of YHWH that suffers in Jeremiah may require looking beyond the Old Testament text alone for a broader understanding. As Childs (1993:358) rightly notes, 'the theological issue at stake goes far beyond the confines of the Old Testament and reaches to the very heart of the New Testament's understanding of the incarnation and Trinitarian theology.'



tender love of a mother, who cannot in any case relinquish the child.' In the suffering of the people, Jeremiah intends for us to see that YHWH is himself pained, compassionate, merciful and will one day end all the suffering and restore his people.

Summary and conclusion

In this paper, we have seen that four of the six verbs that describe Jeremiah's call in 1:10 indicate plucking, breaking, destroying and overthrowing as situations that will result from the prophetic ministry of Jeremiah. His prophetic assignment entailed the proclamation of YHWH's judgement leading to exile, whose practical implication would entail pain and suffering for the people. In Jeremiah's prophecy, death, doom and destruction loomed largely. The theme of suffering as an implication of the impending judgment is therefore unmistakably evident.

This paper has established that we can see the portrait of YHWH as the God who is pained by the suffering of his people as an indication of his compassionate heart, which is not opposed to his attribute of impassibility. Thus, we can argue that Jeremiah 1-29 and 34-52 speak of the loss of Israel's blessings under the Mosaic covenant. Israel broke the conditions of the covenant with YHWH. However in Jeremiah 30-33, the Jewish people are promised a therapy for all the nations' covenant abuses and so a new covenant emerges but Israel would need to act upon the law, so as to stay in God's favour.

In the suffering of Jeremiah as God's servant, we see the portrait of God who does not insulate his prophet from suffering; rather Jeremiah's suffering was a mark of faithfulness to the calling of God. In the suffering of the people, we see the portrait of a God who is not only concerned and compassionate but actually does something about ending suffering and exile. Suffering and exile was not the last word, restoration was. The God who allows suffering in his and as his wise judgement also ends it eventually. He does this while holding all men accountable as the divine sovereign. He also deals with the sin that sits at the root of suffering by way of a new heart.

God is not capricious nor 'the angry old man'. Neither is he a helpless weakling. When YHWH's covenant people suffer persecution and the taunting of men, when it seems he has failed to insulate them from suffering and persecution, his people should bring to bear an understanding of the portrait of YHWH in Jeremiah. YHWH is the Lord who is gracious, merciful, compassionate and participates in the pain of the suffering of His covenant people as the lament of Jeremiah 8 shows. Yet, he will by no means acquit the guilty. All will account to him when he finally ends all suffering.

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