

THE RELIGIOUS SIGNIFICANCE OF LAND IN PRE-MONARCHIC AND MONARCHIC ISRAEL

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Introduction

The shift in biblical Israel's societal development from the village life of the premonarchic period to the period of urban development in the monarchic period must have had its attendant shift in its economic life where land surely played a significant role. Through the span of about four centuries, there must have been significant changes in the expressions of the covenant tradition. Thus, many students of the Bible have felt that in studying the shifting expressions of socio-economic life they could find the key to a unifying tradition wherein there was a continuity of the biblical message with regard to land. It is our hope that this notion of continuity in the Bible can help us deal with a similar situation in the Philippines today.

The problem we wish to address here deals with the following questions:

- 1.) What is the traditional concept of land in Pre-monarchic Israel?
- 2.) What is the concept of land defended by the prophets in Monarchic Israel?

- 3.) What is the historical context that brought about such concepts?
- 4.) What is the religious significance of land that runs through from Pre-monarchic Israel to Monarchic Israel?

The objective of the study is to clarify the traditional concept of land in Premonarchic Israel and the prevailing concept of land viewed in the writings of eighth century prophets of Monarchic Israel.

The erosion or alienation of the traditional land concept in the direction of latifundialization as it happened in Monarchic Israel has been explored elsewhere. With this study of the two periods, it is hoped that a more comprehensive understanding of the biblical tradition would be realized.

The religious significance of land in the Bible has serious implications to the Philippine situation. It is with great hope that the Church people, especially those who work for social transformation, will gain fresh insights from the most sacred of our Christian traditions, the Bible. Guided by the biblical tradition, they may hopefully become more conscious of the process of transformation that is underway here and thus take the lead as subjects of history rather than as mere passive objects allowing history to happen to them.

To arrive at an understanding of the religious significance of land in the Bible, the Israelite traditions of two periods, those of Pre-monarchic and Monarchic Israel, have to be interpreted in their original settings.

This study is anchored upon a macro-sociological model of Israel as a total social system with all its components: social, economic, political, cultural and religious

aspects interrelated and interlocking.

This approach is based on the theory propounded by N.K. Gottwald that shifts in land tenure, from communal family membership to private individual ownership, is one of the major interlocking structural effects of the monarchy.

This study has limited itself to the problem of land in the shift from the relatively egalitarian tribal organization of early Israel (1250-1050 B.C.E.) to the monarchic social forms introduced by David (ca. 1000-961 B.C.E.) and further developed by Solomon (ca. 961-922 B.C.E.) and which reached its full development in the northern kingdom during the period of Omrides (878-845 B.C.E.).

The period of the Divided Monarchies began after the death of Solomon (ca. 922 B.C.E.) when the north broke away from the south (cf. 2 Kgs. 12). It is the Omride period (9th century) and the subsequent period of the Jehu Dynasty (8th century), as pictured in the writings of 8th century prophets Amos, Isaiah and Micah, that were the focus of this study. It is the intention of the researcher to explore the implications of the shift in land tenure from tribal or Pre-monarchal Israel to Monarchic Israel as this was gleaned from the eighth century prophets Amos, Isaiah and Micah.

This study is a new attempt to look at religion or religious tradition from the perspective of the interrelated and interacting features of a social system. One main limitation of the study was the dearth of materials on the sociology of religion and of the latest references for biblical criticism. Materials on the history of religion were also wanting.

So much ground has been gained in recent years by

advancement in modern biblical hermeneutics or interpretation as to necessitate a brief review of its development. The science of biblical interpretation or biblical hermeneutics has undergone many phases of development. Firstly, with the advancement of scientific knowledge preceded by other earlier movements in Europe, namely, the major social changes, the Enlightenment, the Reformation and the Renaissance, and the rise of the national and historical sciences, the way to scientific biblical criticism was opened up. Secondly, from an exclusively doctrinal, confessional and church-centered ecclesiastical religious approach for the past many centuries, the historical methods had recently gained prominence and the interaction that ensued between the confessional and historical-critical approaches to biblical studies resulted in an explosion of several methodologies that affected different, even contradictory, interpretations of the Bible.

Richard Rohrbaugh wrote: "It is no longer possible to view hermeneutics as a simple matter of reduplicating the words of Scripture in a modern idiom. What was once a fairly manageable set of rules for interpretation has now become a whole series of disciplines through which the text must be passed."

This then called for the necessary use of sophisticated hermeneutical tools. Thus, the historical-critical method (HCM) uncovered more ground in understanding biblical history than the confessional religious approach while it explored its limits to the new questions on the social milieu of ancient Israel.

Thirdly, today there is a new phase of hermeneutical development in the new literary and social science approaches to the Hebrew Bible. According to Paul Ricoeur,

hermeneutics today is trying to understand the meaning that lies in front of the text, eclipsing the traditional exegesis, i.e. HCM, that seeks to identify the meaning of a text by investigating what lies 'behind it' (author, traditions, early literary form). Paul Ricoeur wrote, "Hermeneutics is much more than exegesis in the narrow sense. It is the very deciphering of life in the mirror of the text." Rohrbaugh recaptured the same idea in writing. Hermeneutics is essentially a task of translation - not in the narrow sense of reduplicating the words of one language into the more or less equivalent words of another, but rather in the broader sense of recreating meaning in new and different contexts.

The new hermeneutics that uses the sociological method can be a proper complement to literary and historical inquiry according to Norman Gottwald. Although differing methods, the sociological method and historical methods are compatible in reconstructing ancient Israelite life and thought. While the historical method includes all the methods of investigation rooted in the study of the humanities such as literary criticism, tradition history, rhetoric criticism, redaction criticism, history, history of religion and biblical theology, the sociological method is concerned with data collection and theory building in order to grasp the typical patterns of human relations in their structure and function in a given society. This means that a comprehensive collection of data is to be analyzed according to a particular social theory chosen - in order to understand society in ancient Israel. Thus social science models are adopted to explain the systems of development, structure and function of human groups.

Today, the social scientific mind has been developed to understand ancient Israel: either through the structural functional or typological model and the historical material model. The studies using the typological model contribute

to a clearer view of particular stages of societal development by elucidating typicalities and generalities in social formations and institutions.

The second classification of models, the historical cultural material or techno-environmental/techno-economic models, by using data on the social forms in history in relation to the means of production, is able to tell how phenomena originate and why and how they change. It is this model that explains the phenomena of change in society. It is not enough to look at Israel's history particularly unmindful of the role of the social system. Sociology has to be applied to the study of the Scriptures. From Severino Croatto's basic definition of hermeneutics as "the science of understanding the meaning that human beings inscribe in their practices, as well as in their interpretation by word, text, or other practices", there is now a wider field of study but which can be encompassed and understood with the use of a social hermeneutic.

Today's biblical hermeneutic is both transhistorical and cross-cultural when different cultures can be compared with each other, both synchronically and diachronically. It has been pointed out by sociological hermeneutics what while the Israelite tradition will be interpreted within their own original settings, their relevance can be applied to the situation of the modern interpreter. Thus, with this contemporary hermeneutical approach to the Scriptures it is possible to study Israel and any country in parallel even though these two societies are separated in them.

This present study used a sociological hermeneutic. Different but allied disciplines were used. The data from geography, archeology, history, literary criticism were put together to reconstruct the picture of Israel's society in the

Pre-Monarchic Period and in the Monarchic Period. By applying sociological analysis on historical data on each period one could see the interrelatedness of the different structures that composes Israel's society and how they influence each other. Sociological analysis could be further used to bring out the typicalities and differences between the two periods in Israel's history, thus making this study transhistorical. This transhistorical study could be a springboard for future cross-cultural studies between the land of the Bible and any other land.

Land in Pre-Monarchial Israel

There is a growing consensus today among biblical scholars as to the origins of Israel as a people. Israel began its existence in the central hill country of Palestine on the eve of the Iron Age (ca. 1250 B.C.E). The name "Israel" originally referred to the tribal groups located in the north-central hill country of Palestine and not the whole alignment of tribes that previously settled in Palestine.

Israel was the adopted common name of several underclass social groups who had gathered in the hill country and formed a coalition. The small tribal coalition gradually enlarged its membership and gained a wide-spread foothold in the rugged hill country in western Palestine and in Gilead across the Jordan. According to Aharoni, these settlements were especially noticeable in the southern extremity of upper Galilee which is the highest region of Galilee and the least convenient for settlement. The lowlands or coastal areas of Palestine were inhabited by Canaanites who composed the city-state system that survived through the late Bronze Age (1550-1200 B.C.E.). However, a major socio-political

upheaval took place in the latter part of the 13th century B.C.E. that devastated the land and facilitated the decline of lowland Canaanite civilization.

Canaan was under the imperial domain of Egypt for two to three centuries of what was generally called the Amarna Age of Palestine (ca. 1400-1350 B.C.E.) and later. The increasing deterioration of Canaanite society during the Late Bronze Age could be attributed to the very oppressive Egyptian domination that bred in turn an oppressive Canaanite society. It was against this oppressive system that some of those who became Israel revolted and/ or withdrew. Thus, the erstwhile dwellers of the plain, people indigenous to the land, had become sojourners and dwellers of the hill country (cf. Josh. 17:16-18). Later in the period of the judges, the people came down from the hills to the valleys to fight the Canaanites and to settle there. Evidence of this is found in the Song of Deborah (Judges 5:13-14)

Although it was difficult, if not impossible, to find a direct link between the Apiru of the Amarna Age, who were mentioned in the Amarna letters as causing trouble, and the early Israelites, the two groups shared a common characteristic. Like the Apiru of the Amarna Age, Israel was among the "declassed, fugitive, uprooted" elements of Canaanite society who withdrew from the adjacent city-states to the relatively inaccessible terrain on the hill country.

The Canaanite highlands were hostile to farming and much energy was required to eke out an existence until iron became plentiful for tool-making. There they mastered the skills for constructing terraces necessary for small-scale irrigation, and water systems carved out from rocks of which the lime-slake cisterns were the significant technological

innovations. Without these technological advances in the hill country, survival would not have been possible.

In a rugged scrub-hill country Israel was provided the unique opportunity for establishing alternative socio-ethical patterns that broke down the traditional exploitative class system characteristic of advanced agrarian societies in the plains. Thus, around 1250 B.C.E. Israel emerged as a relatively egalitarian tribally organized simple agrarian society.

There were three theories of Israel's settlement in the land: a) the Conquest Theory, b) the Peaceful Immigration Theory and c) the Peasant Revolt Theory.

The oldest theory was that of conquest culled from internal evidence of the Bible and from an archeological evidence of a violent destruction of some Canaanite cities in the late thirteenth century which coincides with the arrival of Joshua and the Israelites.

The second theory states that Israel's settlement was a long history of gradual nomadic infiltration from the desert. Israel's peaceful relationship with the other inhabitants of the land was marked by intermarriages and other alliances and only occasionally in the period of the Judges were there clashes, but no major conflicts. It had some external evidence to its claim.

The third theory, that of peasant revolt, was the most recent theory advanced by updated scholarship using both internal as well as external evidence from the ancient Near East. In this theory, the Israelites were indigenous to the land and engaged in agriculture. It did not negate, however, the presence of other sojourners, but instead highlighted the

significant role of the Levitical priesthood identified with Moses who came from Egypt and lived among them.

Early Israel society was relatively egalitarian. Gottwald described this society to be lacking in ranking and stratification in its social organizational arrangement. Politically, there was a diffusion of political functions; instead of centralization, there was a network of elders drawn from the village, the regional and tribal levels. It was a self-governing association defended from the outside by a citizen militia drawn from volunteers who were basically farmers, and not by a standing army.

As a socio-economic unit, the *mispahah* or the "protective organizations" and their members enjoyed equal access to the basic economic resources such as land. A system of periodic redistribution of landholdings was devised to ensure the survival of impoverished families. The problem of concentration of economic surplus in particular families was hindered by "the obligation to share with families through mutual aid" (i.e. the *mispahah*). Gottwald gave a general description of Israel's egalitarian socio-economic organization:

Ownership of the basic means of production (land, herds, and flocks) was vested in extended families (the primary residential and productive units) that were sub-clustered into the protective associations, backed by tribes, and charged with implementing measures to inhibit social stratification: prohibition against sale of land outside the family, prohibition of interest on loans, limitations on debtor servitude, periodic redistribution of land holdings, and obligations of mutual economic aid to prevent the destitution or demise of

extended families.

Israel's religion was sustained by the cult of YHWH which united them in covenant. The cult of YHWH played a great role in culturally unifying them as one people, Israel, right from the beginning. As long as Israel, the corporate body of equals, agreed to acknowledge YHWH as sovereign Lord and thereby to follow his commands, they would remain one people with an egalitarian socio-economic life. In other words, they must follow the way of righteousness and justice. Religion therefore played a significantly positive role in Israel.

Pre-Monarchic Israel was a cult community that had a more unified social system. Its religion was a social phenomenon within the social system and as such was "related to all the other social phenomena within that system." There was no formal distinction between the religious, economic and political components of society, as there is in modern society, since each element interpenetrated the other.

Allen Myers, in a review of the *Tribes of Yahweh* wrote, "Israelite religion, then, is neither an isolated nor a self-generating entity but rather an integral factor of Israelite society, one which is a function of it yet has an impact on that society."

The modern world looks upon religion as a separate entity from other aspects of society. Distinctions could be made between religion, economics and politics as though they were separate entities, not integral components of societal life. Bruce Malina wrote: "In our society, religion is a formal, independent, unembedded social situation. It was not such in the world of the Bible." The same is true of tribal peoples

everywhere.

Land

It was in this simple, undifferentiated or unified social system, characteristic of ancient societies with simple economics, that the understanding of land had to be situated. Land has an economic, political and religious significance. According to Marvin Chaney the whole system of land tenure was considered the most significant institutional arrangement produced by Israel as her most selfconscious expression, where "... the fields were held by the village as a whole and were periodically redistributed among its members to take account of demographic changes."

This repartitional system of land tenure always came into conflict with the prebendal domain or the patronage system. Under the patronage system, the lord would inherit a village as his matrimonial domain and, therefore, had the right of taxation; while in the prebendal system a land might be paid for by peasants in return for the exercise of some ecclesiastical or civil office.

Covenanted in faith in one God, pre-monarchic Israel regarded YHWH as the owner of the land and the Israelites as YHWH's tenants who received their portion of land periodically in cultic ceremony. This concept of land was communal and egalitarian. Land access was vested in the clan, even when supervised by the eldest male or female members of the extended families. Thus, land constituted the several collective properties of the individual households who made up the clan. The fee cultivators took charge of the production of the land even as they were direct consumers of its products.

Gottwald in *The Hebrew Bible* provided this description of Israel: "In the intertribal confederacy land had been held in perpetuity by extended families and could not be sold out of the family; protective associations of families guard the patrimony of each household."

The laws of Pre-Monarchial Israel expressed the concern that land would not be alienated from family or clan in terms of the right of patrimony of the extended family. Thus, there was no private ownership until Israel gradually developed into another type of social organization - the advanced agrarian economy. The process of latifundialization took place in a period of about four centuries (ca. 1000-600 B.C.E).

The historical background necessary for the understanding of the comments of the eighth century prophets concerning land must be approached from two angles: first, the shift from simple agrarian society to advanced agrarian society and its implications in terms of land tenure and second, the social situation of the eighth century Israel and Judah which constituted the world of the prophets Amos, Isaiah and Micah.

Israel did not remain a tribally organized and relatively egalitarian society with a simple agrarian economy. As it settled in the plains amidst the weakening Canaanite cities, it had to secure itself from the other enemies while accomodating new members into its alliance. An experiment at consolidation of forces versus external threat during emergency situations was initiated by the Judges. Eventually this led to a greater political consolidation in the election of Saul as Israel's military commander in control of a bigger territory than those of an ordinary chief (cf. 1 Sam. 9:16, 10

1:1b). However a strong centralized government to respond to the growing Palestinian threat and to the problem of a burgeoning population with the uneven development of the tribes was not achieved until David's rise to power as King of Judah and Israel.

Even before the institution of monarchy, there were already "imbalances in wealth and lapses in the tribal mutual aid system" as evidenced by the fact that David was able to gather several fugitive followers. 1 Samuel 22:1-2 said that when David departed from Saul's stronghold many went to him. "...And every one who was in distress and everyone who was in debt, and everyone who was discontented, gathered to him; and he became captain over them. And there were about him four hundred men." Backed by a strong military force and spurred by political ambitions, David paved his way through political maneuvers from the rugged life of a bandit chief to a more stable position of king.

With David as king, Israel waged wars of expansion and domination against her neighbors (Ammon, Moab, Edom and the Aramean states of the North). Thus was Israel established as an Empire under the Davidic and Solomonic dynasty.

What were the implications of these developments for the people of the land? Wars of aggression were at the expense of the peasant populace. Conscription of farm hands into the army (purpose of the royal census in 2 Sm. 24) meant a corresponding decrease in production output and yet the peasants were relieved of their agricultural surplus for the sustenance of a regular army (cf 1 Samuel 8:11-18).

Solomon's rule (ca. 961-922) aggravated the land

problem. The maintenance of a royal court with a hundred officials and their retinues taxed the people to the limit. Solomon devised a political and economic strategy of dividing the land into several equal districts and appointed his officials to exact taxation from them. The tribal portions were originally unequal in size and productivity. By demanding agricultural surpluses from peasants for his export products in exchange for timber and metal from abroad, i.e. Tyre, (1 Kings 5:1-10), Solomon indulged in massive construction projects (1 Kings 6-7). His policy of heavy taxation and corvee (1 Kings 5:11-18) fired up a rebellion (1 Kings 11:26-40) which eventually led to the succession of the northern tribes of Israel, splitting the kingdom into two.

It was the monarchy that bred an advanced agrarian society characterized by extreme social cleavage between the ruling elite and the peasantry. One enduring structural change caused by the shift from the simple agrarian society of pre-monarchic Israel to the advanced agrarian society of the monarchic period was the shift in land tenure. Thus Gottwald wrote:

As enterprunerial wealth accumulated through taxes, plunder, and trade, the upper class looked for investment opportunities. It is likely that much of this thirst could be satisfied, for a time, by purchases of land and extensions of loans at interest within the administrative urban centers and among the Canaanite regions of Israel unpracticed in old Israelite law... Gradually loans at interest were extended to needy Israelites and their property mortgaged; many of them ended up as tenant farmers, debt servants, or landless wage laborers. Tribal economic security and tribal religious identity

were undermined, and the social unity and political trust of the people in their leaders put in radical doubt.

A century and a half after the division of the kingdom into two, Israel in the North and Judah in the South made their rise to power. The reign of Jeroboam II of Israel (789-746 B.C.E.) and that of Azariah (Urriah) of Jerusalem (783-742 B.C.E.) marked the start of the period of material prosperity. But it was particularly in the North, during the reign of Jeroboam II, that the kingdom of Israel reached the summit of its material progress, far exceeding the richness of Solomon's kingdom. Excavations at Megiddo and Samaria yielded treasures, boasting of material prosperity under Jeroboam II. Jeroboam II was successful in extending Israel's domains northward and southward and to the east of Jordan (cf. 2 Kings 11:25). His reign, described as Israel's best years of peace, was actually marked by glaring socio-economic abuses. At the base of these abuses was the expropriation of family properties. A ruling elite of 1-3% lived on the labors of the rest of the population of whom 80% were peasants. Thus, it was in the eighth century that the so-called classical prophecy began.

The prophetic movement of the eighth century B.C.E. dealt with problems that arose as a consequence of the transition period from a relatively egalitarian to a socially structured society. One major problem was the problem of land loss with which the prophets Amos, Isaiah and Micah were concerned.

The classical story of land loss depicting the role of the prophet was that of Naboth's vineyard in 1 Kings 21. It was a story summarized in three acts: 1) the murder of the

farmer by royal decree; 2) the seizure of his land by the king; 3) the appearance of the prophet of God who confronts the king with his evil deeds. This dramatic episode reflected the situation in the period of the Late Monarchy in Israel (ninth century B.C.E.) but it projected clearly the socio-economic picture in Israel for the next century as well. The following dialogue occurred between the king, the first character, Ahab, and the free cultivator, Naboth; the second character, before the seizure of the land by force:

Ahab said to Naboth, 'Give me your vineyard to be my vegetable garden, since it is close by, next to my house. I will give you a better vineyard in exchange, or if you prefer, I will give you its value in money..

The Lord forbid', Naboth answered him, 'that I should give you my ancestral heritage. (1 Kings 21:2-3)

The third figure was Jezebel, Canaanite wife of King Ahab, whose treacherous scheme brought about Naboth's untimely death and Ahab's acquisition of Naboth's land. In a letter-writing campaign to the *horim*, nobility of the land, Jezebel proclaimed a fast in Jezreel where Naboth, as part of the landed gentry there, became a spokesman in the assembly. His challenge to the crown was met with opposition by two witnesses and by the whole assembly of *horim* present.

The fourth figure who came into the picture, after the farmer Naboth was silenced was the prophet Elijah. Thus, rulers, subject and prophet engaged in a struggle over land and sacred traditions.

The issue of land loss in 1 Kings 21 was much larger

than a small plot of land. Naboth's exclamation, *Halilah!* (God forbid!) explicated the sacredness of covenant traditions of which land heritage was a tangible sign. Land was the family's covenant heritage, and not the property of one man. Richard Rohrbaugh writes in the *Biblical Interpreter*: "... therefore to alter the status of the land would be to tamper with the covenant itself."

Jeroboam ben Joash (i.e. Jeroboam II, 786-746 B.C.E.) was the king of Israel when Amos, the shepherd from the Judean village of Tekoa, came to the northern kingdom of Israel to prophecy. His political success brought material prosperity for the ruling elite. This was shown by excavations at Tirzah, the capital (Tell-el-Farah), that revealed very sharp distinctions of wealth and privilege. Mays describe this situation thus:

While the city houses in the tenth century had been of uniform size, in the 8th century by contrast, there was a quarter of large expensive houses, and one of small huddled structures.

The middle class had been reduced greatly, if not eliminated completely. Instead, there was extreme polarization of two classes: the rich comprising less than 5% of the population and the poor comprising the vast majority. It was to the rich, who did not toil, that Amos addressed himself sharply:

Woe to those who lie upon beds of ivory, and stretch themselves upon their couches, and eat lambs from the flock and calves from the midst of the stall. (6:4)

As spokesperson for the grievances of the suffering masses, Amos indicted the rich ruling

following crimes against the poor:

Because they sell the righteous for silver and the needy for a pair of shoes - they that trample the head of the poor into the dust of the earth, and turn aside the way of the afflicted. (Amos 2:6-7)

The poor were mentioned four times, using four different Hebrew nouns, to show the intensity of the crime of injustice committed against them. Selling the just man for silver indicated a transfer of ownership, while selling the poor man for a pair of sandals referred to a legal transaction wherein a party would take off a sandal and gave it to the other to make binding a contract of redemption or exchange (cf. Ruth 4:7). The commodity of exchange was the poor man's parcel of land. Thus, Amos indicted here the rich for their crimes of landgrabbing.

The last three crimes of Israel explained how this happened and thus completed the summary of accusations against Israel. Bernad Lang renders a clear translation: "Father and son resort to the same girls. Men lie down beside every altar on blankets seized in pledge, and in the house of their (clan) god they drink wine got by way of exaction." (Ibid. 2:7b-8)

A major key to the interpretation of the passage lay in the meaning of the 'girl' which was traditionally interpreted as prostitute. A more researched reading renders the interpretation of the girl as broker for loans. Thus, the picture of son and father going to the same girl showed how loans were applied for with exorbitant rates of interest that two generations of peasants could not be relieved from it.

Furthermore, this shows that land which was family inheritance and passed on from father to son had become the collateral for exorbitant loans. Other collateral for these loans were fine blankets that were used as dresses by day and blankets at night and wine taken from the debtors.

Gradually, peasants were so overburdened with the never-ending cycle of indebtedness that they were forced to surrender all claims to their patrimonial domain and become tenants or permanent slaves to their overlords. The poor were at the mercy of the rich. This was the reality under rent capitalism which was described by Lang as the system wherein - "the urban propertied class skims off the largest possible income or rent claimed on the basis of liabilities or full urban ownership of land." It was to this urban propertied class that the merchants belonged and whom Amos addressed in the following passage:

Hear this, you who trample upon the needy and bring the poor of the land to an end saying, 'When will the new moon be over, that we may sell grain?

And the sabbath, that we may offer wheat for sale, that we may make the ephah small and the shekel and deal deceitfully great with false balances? That we may buy the poor for silver, and the needy for a pair of sandals, and sell the refuse of the wheat? (Ibid. 8:4-6)

The eighth century B.C.E. witnessed a shift in land tenure from patrimonial to prebendal domain. The land which used to be the inheritance of the family became the property of the urban elite who continually exploited them. Thus, the peasants of the land had been reduced to destitution as Amos

emphatically announced: "Gather about the mountains of Samaria, and see the great disorders within her, the oppression in her midst" (Ibid. 3:9).

The judgement of YHWH, therefore, against Israel was inevitable:

Therefore, because you trample upon the poor and take from him exactions of wheat, you have built houses of hewn stones, but you shall not live in them! You have planted pleasant vineyards, but you shall not drink their wine! ...Therefore, I will take you into exile beyond Damascus. (Ibid. 5:11,27)

Although the situation of Israel in the north, coupled with her illusion of grandeur, was worse than that of southern Judah, Judah no less than Israel came under the same prophetic critique. The first of the classical prophets or latter prophets of Judah was Isaiah of Jerusalem considered to be one of the greatest, if not the greatest, Old Testament prophet because of the "sheer range and vision of his prophecy." His preaching is considered the "theological high water mark of the whole Old Testament". The book which bore his name consists of 66 chapters and is usually divided into 3 parts by the scholars, each representing a different time frame: pre-exilic, exilic and post-exilic. Chapters 1-39 or First Isaiah is generally held to be largely the work of the 8th century B.C.E. or pre-exilic prophet Isaiah of Jerusalem.

Judah reached the height of its power in the eighth century B.C.E. in the reign of Uzziah, also called Azariah (ca. 784-742 B.C.E.). Although excavations in Judah did not reveal the great social cleavages as seen in Israel, nevertheless, Uzziah's reign was "second only to Solomon's"

in fame and likewise was ridden with socio-economic abuses. Isaiah's prophetic involvement came at a period of national emergency which was brought about by the rise of Assyria as a world power in the reign of Tiglath-Pileser III (745-727 B.C.E.).

Assyria's conquest of Syria- Damascus and later Samaria (722 B.C.E.) brought to an end the Syro-Ephraimitic alliance which tried to repel Assyria's advance and domination over these territories. To preserve their national independence, the two erstwhile warring nations of Damascus and Israel allied with each other and attempted to coerce Judah to join the coalition against Assyria. Judah rejected this proposition and appealed to Assyria instead. Eventually it was Assyria that put an end to the autonomous kingdom of Israel. When Assyrian domination reached Philistia, several cities revolted in succession with Judah playing a role in the connivance. Although Judah escaped the wrath of Assyria, it was in the reign of Hezekiah (ca. 715-687 B.C.E.) that Sennacherib of Assyria marched his armies down to Judah and sacked Jerusalem's environs. The years of national emergency to which Isaiah bore witness were long -- from Uzziah's death (ca. 742 B.C.E.) to the succession of Jotham, his son, (ca. 750-735 B.C.E.), to Ahaz (ca. 735-715 B.C.E.) and finally to Hezekiah (ca. 715-687 B.C.E.)- a period covering not less than 40 years.

The death of Uzziah signalled a year of foreboding when Judah's national confidence must have been shaken. Isaiah, prophet in the royal house of David, received his call at an appropriate time when he was very much needed: in the year King Uzziah died. This was Judah's hour of tragedy and crisis.

The national emergency situation was caused not only

by Assyria's rise to power, but by what John Bright termed Judah's "internal sickness" caused by "the progressive disintegration of ancestral patterns". Thus, Isaiah's address to Judah's ruling class revealed abandonment of her basic ethical laws which made her unholy:

Wash yourselves; make yourselves clean. Remove the evil of your doings from before my eyes; cease doing evil, learn to do good.

Seek justice, correct oppression, defend the fatherless, plead for the widow. (Is. 1:16)

The blame was put on the leaders of the people:

Your princes are rebels and companions of thieves. Everyone loves a bribe and runs after gifts.

They do not defend the fatherless and the widow's cause does not come to them. (Is. 1:23)

Material prosperity and peace had blinded Judah's leadership with over-confidence and, as such, Isaiah compared them with the Philistines:

Their land is filled with silver and gold, and there is no end to their treasures. Their land is filled with horses, and there is no end to their chariots. Their land is filled with idols; they bow down to the work of their hands, to what their own fingers have made. (Is. 2: 7-8)

As a prophet of noble birth, Isaiah was quite aware of the evil doings of higher officials and leaders in the kingdom and thus exhorted them:

The Lord enters into judgement with the elders and princes of the people: "It is you who have devoured the vineyard; the spoil of the poor is in your houses. What do you mean by crushing my people? by grinding the face of the poor?," says the Lord God of hosts. (Is. 3:14-15)

It was the leisure class and their abuses, similar to that found in Amos' prophecy, that Isaiah denounced:

Woe to those who rise early in the morning, that they may run after strong drink, who tarry late into the evening till wine inflames them! They have lyre and harp, and flute and wine at their feasts; but they do not regard the deeds of the Lord, or see the work of his hands. (Is. 5:11)

The official leaders of the kingdom were identified by Isaiah to be the perpetrators of oppression: "Woe to those who decree iniquitous decrees, and the writers who keep writing oppression, to turn aside the needy from justice and to rob the poor of my people of their right, that widows may be their spoil, and that they may make the fatherless their prey!" (Is. 10:1)

In Isaiah's opinion, a glaring manifestation of this sinfulness of these leaders was in the process of latifundialization which was happening in his own time. God's

justice, according to Isaiah, was directed against the wicked who prospered in commerce and who had now become the landed gentry: "Woe to those who join house to house, who add field to field, until there is no more room, and you are made to dwell alone in the midst of the land." (Is. 5:8-9) The depth of this national sin was so great that Isaiah prophesied Judah's downfall at the hands of Assyria.

The prophet Micah came from Moresheth or Moresheth-Gath, a small town in the Judean foothills or *Shephalah*. A contemporary of Isaiah in his later ministry, Micah prophesied in the days of Hezekiah as attested to by Jeremiah in Jer. 26:18.

A man of the countryside like Amos, he was steeped in the old tribal traditions of the village settlements. His biting indictments against socio-economic injustice must have come from a first-hand knowledge of abuses incurred by the urban elite against the rural population. It was understandable therefore that he identified the root of sinfulness in the hierarchical socio-political structure of the capital cities:

What is the crime of Jacob? Is it not Samaria? And what is the sin of the house of Judah? Is it not Jerusalem? (Mi 1:3b)

The capitals of the kingdoms, as the political, economic and religious center were the seats of oppression. Comparative sociological studies of pre-industrial societies have shown the relationship between urban and rural population as one of domination of the former over the latter. In agrarian societies monarchies thrived on the labors of a rural population engaged in subsistence economy. In order to derive more products from the peasants, state control of basic

economic resources such as land was resorted to.

Micah's condemnations were addressed directly to the leaders in Jerusalem, the public officials, priests and prophets of the court who were responsible for the deterioration of the old tribal order. "Hear this, you heads of the house of Jacob and rulers of the house of Israel, who abhor justice and pervert all equity, who built Zion with blood and Jerusalem with wrong. Its heads give judgement for a bribe, its priests teach for hire, its prophets divine for money..." (Mi. 3:9-11)

Micah's famous text against the latifundialists was not merely directed against the act of possession of vast estates but also connotes the callous and anti-social means by which such estates were acquired and maintained.

Woe to those who devise wickedness and work evil upon their beds! When the morning dawns they perform it, because it is in the power of their hands. They covet fields, and seize them; and houses, and take them away; they oppress a man and his house, a man and his inheritance. (Mi. 2:1-2)

This caricature of the urban elite indicated that Micah had direct, firsthand experiences of having been dispossessed of land. The man's inheritance, the *bavith*, was not just his house but the field on which his house stood and from which he earned his subsistence and thus provided the security for every Israelite family. This *bavith* stood for financial independence, equal political and social rights for every peasant in Israelite society.

To the big merchant landgrabbers, therefore, was addressed the tenth commandment as an indictment against

latifundialization. "You shall not covet your neighbor's house (the *bavith*)..." (Ex. 20.17).

The socio-economic situation that Micah witnessed from the vantage point of the oppressed countryside must have been so grim that his speeches were biting indictments similar to those of Amos. According to Heschel, he was the first prophet to predict the destruction of Jerusalem. Yet his promises and his vision of a new society created images far beyond the ordinary, "evoking an alternative world in the consciousness of Israel."

In 4: 3-5, Micah's vision of a new Messiah and a state of disarmament pointed to the fulfillment of the prophetic promise of peasants living in the security of their own land.

He shall judge between many peoples and shall decide for strong nations afar off; and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore; but they shall sit every man under his vine and under his fig tree, and none shall make them afraid.

These last lines reveal that Micah the poet was "in touch with deep agrarian dreams." Personal fulfillment for the peasant was to have his own vine, or his own fig tree in his small patch of land that was his inheritance, his *nahalah*.

More than the other prophets of the eighth century B.C.E., the prophets Amos, Isaiah and Micah had spoken strongly on the issue of the land. Their condemnations against those directly involved in landgrabbing and their defense of family land rights stemmed from their rootedness to the

ancient covenant traditions of Israel. Their prophecies brought to the fore the clash of two opposing concepts of land: that of pre-monarchial origin and that of the monarchial concept of proprietary rights over land.

To understand the continuing trend of social organization that bridged early Israel and monarchic Israel, the model of the pre-industrial agrarian society had to be resorted to. This was the type of society that continually existed all over the world for the span of about fifty centuries. Simple agrarian societies started around 3000 B.C.E. and gradually evolved to advanced agrarian societies until 1850 B.C.E. This model of society has abounded even at present in the underdeveloped and developing Third World nations where paleotechnic ecotypes in agriculture, varying from swidden to permanent cultivation, are employed.

In early Israel and in monarchic Israel paleotechnic ecotypes in agriculture were employed. These ecotypes were said to have been derived from the first agricultural revolution which started about 7000-6000 B.C.E. and which became more defined around 3000 B.C.E. with the adoption of animal plowed agriculture.

Agrarian societies are defined as those societies whose primary subsistence was a cultivation of fields which utilized the plow but not industrial technology. These societies began to make their appearances in the fertile valleys of the Middle East some five to six thousand years ago and constituted one of the great social revolutions of antiquity. The invention of the plow, the discovery of metallurgy, the harnessing of animal power and the use of the sail and the wheel provided the technology for a revolution from the old horticultural societies into that of developed agrarian societies.

Advances in technology and methods of production brought about by the invention of the iron plow and other tools combined to create agricultural surpluses. Together with the advances in agriculture were developments in military technology which led to the conquest of neighboring territories. The birth of monarchies which developed into true empires by conquest of bigger territories were maintained by continual warfare. Most agrarian states came into being by conquest. Because of internal struggles for power, peasant movements rose up. While the state ushered in the birth of national religions which legitimized the social order, the peasant societies produced different versions of religious history and tradition.

The peasant societies which eventually became Israel came from the land of Canaan which was under Egypt. While Canaan promoted a state religion, Israel produced a different version of religious history and tradition which was attested to by the Bible. It was this version of Israel's history and tradition that was examined in this study.

Pre-monarchic to Monarchic Israel

Since this study was anchored on the macro-sociological model of Israel as a total social system, an examination had to be made of the different interlocking elements in Israel's organizational shift from simple egalitarian agricultural society to a society characterized by a poor rural and rich and powerful urban dichotomy that existed in the period of the classical prophets.

One element in Israel's organizational shift from the pre-monarchic to the monarchial form of organization was the change from traditional village leadership to bureaucratic leadership to bureaucratic leadership based in the urban

center. The clan, the village or the tribe was originally the legal community whose political affairs were in the charge of the elders and tribal officials who sat at the city-gates to pronounce their judgements on issues and problems. There was a diffusion of functions through this network of village elders. Likewise, the defense of the land was done by a citizen militia called for by the village leaders. In the institution of the monarchy, however, the political power of the monarchy was backed by a standing conscripted army paid for through people's taxation.

The frontier village settlements of pre-monarchic Israel bred the simple agrarian economy characterized by egalitarianism. The protective association of families, originally instituted in the early days of Israel to cope with the harsh demands of survival, adopted economic policies of mutual aid and the practice of equal access to land. Land was held in common by village clans and periodically redistributed. However, the rise of the monarchy determined the control of power and eventually weakened the village clan structure. The economic policies of the State created a dual shift in the use and ownership of the land. From the original use of land for production of subsistence agricultural crops (wheat, barley) for peasant families' consumption, land became a source of investment with its produce of export crops (grapes, olives) increasing its commercial value. Ownership of the land was wrested from the family and clan through a process of debt, outright sale or forcible usurpation as in the case of King Ahab versus Naboth (1 Kings 21) where Naboth's *nahalāh* was added to the crown's property.

The cultural component is the area mainly of religious institutions and thus this will be explained further under religion. With the long history of the religion of Israel, which dated back to its prehistoric period, religion therefore deserves

a separate treatment.

Since the conquest of the land which seems to have really taken place under David, Israel reverted to Canaanite ways and culture. From the very beginning of kingship, the policies of the king came into conflict with the old village or tribal traditions. One major policy referred to land. For this reason the institution of kingship was a painful controversial issue preserved in the vivid account of 1 Samuel 8. Walter Brueggemann describes the trend as the "imitation of urban imperial consciousness of Israel's more impressive neighbors and a radical rejection of the liberation consciousness of the Mosaic tradition."

Religion in Israel had a long history which could be traced back to Israel's prehistory. Thus religion, although a part of culture, deserves a longer treatment. Israel started as a tribal or folk society belonging to the re-industrial agrarian world and as such had a premodern or a traditional world view. Their's was a unified cultic world, not compartmentalized into economic, political, and religious spheres. A characteristic of this world view was the understanding that all forms of life were interrelated. This understanding was enshrined in their old cosmology or myths of creation (cf. Gen. 1-2:25).

Biblical Israelites had in their background a primal religion where nature was filled with spirit-presence and endowed with psychic powers. Their regard of the mountain as the manifestation of God's presence was one of the vestiges of this animistic outlook. Thus Israel's ancient God, El Shaddai, was associated with the mountains.

In this animistic culture, which is regarded today as

holistic, human beings did not see themselves apart from or superior to land and created reality but rather as intimately linked with it. This intimate closeness with land is reflected in the myth of Israel's origin where the ancestress Rebecca ceased to be a human prototype but became a prototype of the land from whose womb nations sprang into being. Gen. 25:23 reads:

Two nations are in your womb,
and two peoples born of you, shall
be divided,
The one shall be stronger than the
other,
the elder shall serve the younger.

Aside from being a traditional people who had great respect for life and the source of life, early Israel saw land as the sign of the covenant. Land was understood to have been promised to their early ancestors. As covenanted land, it was a gift that had to be treasured, otherwise the covenant itself should be tampered. Walter Brueggemann explains land as a form of inheritance:

...it is held in trust from generation to generation beginning in gift and continuing so, the land management is concerned with preservation and enhancement of the gift for the coming generations. Thus, Naboth the Jezreelite could answer King Ahab: The Lord forbid that I should give you my ancestral heritage! (cf. 1 Kings 21:3)

All through the period of the Judges or premonarchic Israel, land was a dimension of family history with this traditional concept intact. However, because of the national emergency situation caused by the Philistine crisis, the tribes of Israel found in David a hero who would champion their

cause to fight the more efficient Philistine forces. This needed a consolidation of political power, backed by religious authority. Since popular support in the case of Israel was invoked by covenant relations, the monarchy's institution was secured by taking over the concept of a covenant relation. Such was the case of David's rise to kingship.

The building of the temple which was first envisioned by David and actualized by Solomon was a symbolic gesture of localizing religion in the center and installing the religious power in the royal priesthood as in the case of Abiathar and Zadok. Traces of diffused religious authority in the villages survived in the levitical priesthood. Although greatly weakened, those teachers of the Law who followed after Moses, taught and popularized among the village people the covenant traditions that were to be defended later by their more able descendants, the prophets of the eighth century B.C.E.

The Canaanization of Israel reached its climax during the days of the Omrides (878-845 B.C.E.). The Omrides enforced religious policies that threatened the old covenant tradition of Israel. The laws that governed the village life of the Israelite community before the institution of monarchy had to be invoked by the prophets. Faithful to the Mosaic tradition, the prophets were scandalized at the national disorder and deterioration brought about by the politico-religious center. They pronounced indictments against Israel and Judah in defense of the Mosaic covenant tradition.

The village prophets, particularly, had the unique role of standing their ground before the kings' policies on the question of land governance. The prophetic perception of land as YHWH's gift and the peculiar means of keeping it proved contrary to the kings' view; thus the prophetic warnings of

eventual land loss were included.

Eventually, however, the kings' resistance to the Mosaic tradition won over the prophets with their strong appeal to the royal covenant tradition traced to David. Thus, laws that governed ancestral land heritage or *nahalah* gave way to the kings' proprietary property rights (cf. 1Kngs 21). Rural economic life controlled by the urban center, with the rise of the merchants and politico-military elites, hastened the dissolution of ancestral lands. As a result, land became an alienable and tradeable commodity.

| Summary and Concluding remarks

By way of summary it can be said that, although there was a change in Israel's social structure in its shift from the premonarchic to the monarchic period, there was a stable aspect of culture promoted by tradition that remained essentially the same. Although the economic, political and social structures underwent change, there was a conservative force in biblical Israel's history, identified as its religion, which gave meaning to its historical experiences and wove them into a unifying tradition. To this area belonged the religious concept of land. It was this concept of land which ran through the two distinct periods of Israel's history in spite of the changes in land tenure.

The actual governance of land in Monarchic Israel ran contrary to the Mosaic tradition but the canon of biblical tradition itself defended the integrity of the prophetic message. Thus, the prophets' view of land prevailed over the current practices of land governance since it was regarded as an integral part of the canonical teaching of the Bible. In this way, the religious significance of land in Israel was established and maintained as one tradition.

On the basis of the results of the study in the preceding chapters, which was anchored on the theory of N.K. Gottwald, the following are the conclusions arrived at by this writer:

First of all, pre-monarchic Israel started like other peoples as a traditional society with a primal religion where land and all the life-forms it nourished were considered sacred. Land was regarded as the basic source of life. As part of nature it was created by God and therefore had great religious value.

Second, by the very peculiar nature of Israel's origin, land did not remain sacred only in itself. The land was not just part of nature but was now intimately linked with history and tradition. It was acknowledged as a gift from YHWH, a promise for future generations and was therefore Israel's covenant heritage. The very existence of Israel as a people found assurance and continuity in the land. Thus land, as the extended family's covenant heritage, as *bayith*, was ensured by the tenth commandment (Ex. 20:17).

Third, the prophets, specifically those of the eighth century, were for the pre-monarchic covenantal concept of land which regarded land as sacred and part of the clan's history and not for the monarchic concept of proprietary rights over the land. In the face of erosion and alienation of the traditional land concept, as in the case of latifundialization, the prophets' message on land use prevailed over the other voices.

Fourth, the understanding of the traditional concept of land as God's gift to humans was defined no less than by Israel's historical context.

Early Israel's emergence in the rugged hill country of Palestine and its settlement in the plains of Palestine was the end-result of a long process of struggle brought about by the social turmoil in Canaan and Egypt. Just as Canaan and Egypt became so oppressive that a group of people, the Hebrews, were marginalized and eventually turned into outcasts from the rich land, Israel emerged as an alternative society bound by covenant to the worship of YHWH. Life and its sustenance was given prominent value. Thus, YHWH's promise and gift of land was meant for the whole of Israel and not for some individual families. This was the core of Israel's covenant tradition to guide the future generations of Israel.

In a similar way, in a later period, in Monarchic Israel, when oppressive social structures deprived people of access to land as their basic source of life, the prophets, who were heirs to the Mosaic tradition, came up in the defense of poor people's basic right to land.

Thus, the religious significance of land or the value of land derived from the stable aspect of culture promoted by religious tradition remained the same from the period of early Israel to that of Monarchic Israel. The traditional concept of land was the same concept of land defended by the prophets in Monarchic Israel. In these two phases of Israel's religious history, and later, Israel's religious tradition pointed to the sacredness of land.

Seen from the light of a much later experience as the Post-Exilic Period, the preservation and editing of the prophetic documents in the Canon reveal the integrity of the prophetic message. By invoking the Mosaic covenant tradition, the prophets' view of the land was acknowledged by the sacred authors of the Bible to be an integral part of the canonical teaching of the biblical tradition.

Recommendations

In the light of the results of this study and the significant implications it has on the present Philippine land problem, the following are the recommendations addressed especially to those involved with land and religious traditions:

Firstly, the study of the Bible has to be promoted among Christian lay people and professionals. A critical and post-critical approach to the Bible is needed in this regard. Thus, results of studies exploring the origins and history of Judaeo-Christian faith and their implications to our present world are most welcomed.

Secondly, The Philippine community has to look to the vanishing Filipino *Lumad* and their indigenous culture for an appraisal of Philippine cultural identity from the standpoint of our *Lumad* roots and for the preservation of the nation's rich cultural heritage. Studies on Filipino *Lumad* are in line with this concern.

Lastly, cross-cultural and transhistorical studies of the Philippines' dual heritage should be undertaken to profit from both biblical and Filipino *Lumad* traditions. One concrete recommendation is a comprehensive study of the religious significance of land in both biblical Israel and in the Philippines.