

THE DIVINE COUNCIL IN JEREMIAH 23:18-22: ITS FUNCTION, AND RELATION TO PASTORAL MINISTRY

WARREN SIMATELE, PhD candidate

Adventist International Institute of Advanced Studies, Silang, Cavite, Philippines

The passage in Jeremiah 23:18-22 contains practical lessons that affect pastoral ministry today, hence deserves special attention. The prophet Jeremiah contrasts the true prophet commissioned by the council of Yahweh¹ to proclaim judgment on Judah, with self-induced prophets who promise peace to a nation on the brink of disaster. Yahweh's council convenes in heaven (v. 24), attended by the true prophet (Jeremiah) in vision (v. 18), and decrees the fateful destiny of Judah (vv19, 20), but false prophets know it not; yet, they run as though sent, and prophesy as though God spoke to them (v. 21); consequently, their message lulls the hearers and confirms them in rebellion (v. 22).

Ever since the discovery and translation of the tablet of the ancient Ugarit in 1929, comparative studies of the ancient Israelite religion and the Ugarit have perceived similarities between them, claiming that the Hebrew Bible contains tantalizing evidences of a pantheon.² However, beginning in 1939 with J. Morgenstern's article on Psalm 82, probably the clearest to affirm the divine council in Israelite religion, and H. Wheeler Robert's seminal work on the

¹I use the phrases, "Yahweh's council", "divine council" and "throne council" interchangeably to refer to the highest decision-making body in heaven, which concern the affairs of heaven and earth, (see Ernst Jenni and Claus Westermann, *Theological Lexicon of the Old Testament (TLOT)* (Peabody, MA.: Hendrickson, 1997), 794.

²Michael S. Heiser, "The Divine Council in Late Canonical and Non-Canonical Second Temple Jewish Literature" (PhD Dissertation, the University of Wisconsin-Madison, 2004), 9; see also Max E. Polley, "Hebrew Prophecy Within the Council of Yahweh, Examined in its Ancient Eastern Setting" chap in *Scripture in Context: Essays on the Comparative Method* (ed. Carl D. Evans, William W. Hallo, and John B. White; Pittsburgh, PA: The Pickwick, 1980), 141.

subject,¹ which argued for the divine council as a continuing motif in the Hebrew bible, interest in the study of the divine assembly in Hebrew thought has increased.²

Supporters of the presence of the pantheon in the Hebrew bible see the primitive political setting in early Mesopotamia ("primitive democracy") as providing the context of the divine council.³ This assembly wielded the highest authority in the state; it appointed and removed rulers, and gave direction in times of crisis. The similarities in terminology between the "Council of Yahweh" in Hebrew thought with that of Mesopotamia and Canaan, is understood as borrowed from her Near Eastern neighbours.⁴ However, such conclusion seems unacceptable for it rests on supposed historical parallels with that of Oriental polytheistic neighbours, rather than on sound exegesis of the text itself. Second it undermines the divine origin of the Hebrew religion and its prophetic ministry. Third the approach is often inherent with speculation.

Against the comparative approach and its conclusion, this study pursues four goals: a) to establish the meaning and function of *sod* Yahweh in Jer 23:18-22 in biblical cosmology through the historical grammatical approach; b) to determine the origin and purpose of Yahweh's council from the text; c) to identify the place of the council and its members; d) lastly, to draw theological implications on pastoral ministry as a channel for broadcasting divine secrets from Yahweh's council to a perishing world. The study delimits itself to the council of Yahweh in Jeremiah 23:18-22 and Amos 3:7; passages outside this parameter will be cited only to the extent that they enhance the study. It will be argued that the divine council is a typical Hebrew concept; un borrowed, and original to the Israelite religion as evidenced by its usage in various OT passages. In order to fulfil this noble task more congenially, the

¹H. Wheeler Robertson in his "The Council of Yahweh," *Journal of Theological Studies* 55 (1944): 151-157, treats Jer 23:18-22 as literal not figurative.

²Heiser, p.9; see also Polley, 141.

³Ibid., 141.

⁴For example, the OT terminology for the council of Yahweh include *bēnē* (*hā*)- '*ēlōhīm* "sons of God" (Gen 6:2; Job 1:6; 2:1; 38:7); *bēnē* '*ēlīm* "sons of God" (Psa 29:1; 89:7); *bēnē* '*ēlyōn* "sons of the Most High" (Pss 82:6); *qēdōšīm* "holy ones" (Deut 33:2); *sōd*- *qēdōšīm* "council of the holy ones" (Pss 89:8); *sōd* '*ēlōah* "council of God" (Job 15:8); *sōd* *yēhōwah* "council of the Lord" (Jer 23:18, 22); '*ādat*- '*ēl* "midst of the gods" (Pss 82:1); and *qēhal* *qēdōšīm* "assembly of the holy ones" (Pss 89:6); according to Polley it is borrowed from Mesopotamia and Canaanite religions. Ibid, 144, 145.

historical grammatical approach is desired. Attention will be paid to the structure of Jeremiah 23:18-22, and to key words and their relation within the immediate and wider context of the passage. Theological implications will be elucidated from the text, and on its heels will be the summary and conclusion.

1. The Literary Context

1.1. Structure of Jer 23:18-22

The demarcation of this pericope remains a contentious issue among biblical scholars. Holladay¹ takes vv 16-20 as one pericope, and vv 21-22 as another believing that Yahweh speaks in the first person in vv 21-22, but in the third person in vv. 16-20, or perhaps he is not the one. Craigie, Kelley, and Drinkard, Jr., treat vv 16-22 as one pericope arguing that there are many ties between vv 21-22 and 16-20. However, it is best to agree with Lundbom who argues on MS evidence that the upper limit is indicated by a *petuhah* in MA and ML before v 16, but not in MP; medieval codices lack a section after v 17; therefore, clarity comes only by delimiting the pericope on vv 18-22. However, his view that vv 19-20 is an insertion, and vv 18 and 21-22 as the primary poem, is unacceptable.² Most commentators consider the text a poem (so Holladay,³ Robert P. Carroll, and EVV⁴). Lundbom observes three stanzas in the main poem of the text, with repetitions and balancing key words; for example:

¹William L. Holladay, *Jeremiah 1: A Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Jeremiah, chapters 1-25* (Hermeneia; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1986), 633.

²The view of an editor undermines the inspiration of Jeremiah and the unit of the text; as Keck argues, whether or not these verses were originally a whole, "they are now properly joined" (Patrick D. Miller, "The Book of Jeremiah: Introduction, Commentary, and Reflections," *The New Interpreter's Bible, 6: Introduction to Prophetic Literature: The book of Isaiah, the book of Jeremiah, the book of Baruch, the letter of Jeremiah, the book of Lamentations, the book of Ezekiel* (ed. Leander E. Keck; Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 2001), 751.

³Holladay, *Jeremiah 1*, 633.

⁴Robbert T. Carroll, *Jeremiah: A Commentary* (The Old Testament Library; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1986), 459.

- I ...who has stood in the council of the Lord
and let him hear his word! v 18
 Who.....my word and heard?
- II I did not send the prophets
 Yet they, they ran v 21
 I did not speak to them
 Yet they, they prophesied
- IIIthey had stood in my council
 And caused.....to hear my words v 22

According to Lundbom, Yahweh speaks throughout the text. In v 18, he poses a question in the third person, but the phrase "my word" (Kt) shifts to the first person, which is continued to the end of the poem. A similar shift of person occurs in Jer 22:24 in which the divine addresses Coniah. The chiasm below illustrates more appropriately the relationship of sentences in the pericope.

- A Who has stood in council of Yahweh (V 18a)
 B In order to see and hear his word (v 18b-d)
 C Storm wind of Yahweh gone forth (v 19)
 C' Yahweh's anger will not abate (v 20 a-c)
 B' Afterwards you will understand (v 20d-e)
 A' If they had stood in Yahweh's council (v 21 a)
 B'' They would have made people listen and turn (v 21 b-d)

The whole pericope portrays a parallel structure referring to prophets, their actions or words, and Yahweh's actions/words at the centre. Lundbom, suggests Yahweh speaks throughout the text except in vv 19-20. In v 18, he poses a question in the third person, but the phrase "my word" (Kt) shifts to the first person, which is continued to the end of the poem. A similar shift of person occurs in Jer 22:24 in which the divine addresses Coniah.

2. Key Words

This section deals with selected words that contribute to the overall meaning of the text. The verb *ʾāmaḏ* commonly means “approach”, “place oneself,” or “stand” depending on the context. In Jer 23:18, the phrase *ʾāmaḏ besôḏ Yhwh* means “stand in the council of Yahweh” or simply have access to the heavenly council. False prophets did not have this access. Similar usage occurs in 2 Kings 23:3 in which *ʾāmaḏ babberîḏ*, “stood to the covenant” also means “enter into the covenant.” Deut 29:11 uses *āḏar*, “enter into” in a similar context. *ʾāmaḏ* occurs 2 times in the text to emphasize Jeremiah’s access to Yahweh’s council. Whether the prophet Jeremiah had a direct access in the Spirit to the Divine council or not, depends on how the word *sôḏ*, meaning “council/counsel” is understood.

Thus, the study now examines *sôḏ*, the precursor to unlocking the meaning of the verb *ʾāmaḏ*, “to stand” or “to access”. There is ambivalence in the OT usage of *Sôḏ YHWH*, “Yahweh’s Council”. Hence, it is a translation choice whether to give it a concrete meaning (council), or abstract (counsel/secret). For example, the LXX and the KJV on Jer 23:18, 22 render *sôḏ* as “counsel”; the Tg. as “secret,”¹ but NAS, ASV, NIV, RSV etc. as “council”, and NLT as “the Lord’s presence”. The concrete meaning first appears in Gen 49:6, where *sôḏ* refers to “the assembly of the two tribes of Simeon and Levi”, even though their purpose is unclear. It continues in the pre-exilic time in reference to smaller groups of people (e.g. Jer 6:11 “circle of youth”; 15:17 “of the merry-makers”), and also in postexilic time (Job 19:19 “circle of friends”; cf. Ps 111:1 “circle of the faithful”).² Fabry suggests the word *sôḏ* probably developed during the “free meeting together in time of leisure. . . in the evening circle,” when the village people passed on ancient wisdom to the young (cf. Ps 55:15[14]; Jer 15:17; cf. also the *sôḏ* of the elders and older women in 4Q502 24:4).³ In objection, Sæbø attributes the development to the narrow circle of people who met (Psa 55:15; Job 19:19), or circle of

¹*The Targum of Jeremiah* (The Aramaic Bible, 12; trans., with Critical Introduction, Apparatus, and Notes by Robert Hayward; Wilmington, DE: Michael Glazier, 1987).

²Fabry, “סֹד,” *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament (TDOT)* (ed. G. Johannes Botterwick, Helmer Ringgren, and Heinz-Josef Fabry; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999), 10:173.

³*Ibid.*

confidants (Jer 15:17), in order to maintain social harmony.¹ Hence *sôd* has the idea of an “intimate fellowship . . . group” or assembly, and the “group-decision” arising “from that fellowship”.²

More than the concrete usage, however, the primary meaning of *sôd* is the abstract meaning as confidential speech, counsel, secret or advice.³ In its abstract form, *sôd* is used in connection with the proverbial wisdom associated to the era of the monarchy and it meant “resolution, plan, secret” (e.g. Prov 11:13; 15:22 *sôd* is an object of panel discussion; Prov 25:9; Sir. 42:1 *sôd* is a “secret” etc.).⁴ Semantically, however, the theological use of the abstract meaning of *sôd* is iridescent—whether one uses Yahweh’s counsel or Yahweh’s council makes no difference.⁵ Sæbø consents that *sôd* refers both to “Yahweh’s heavenly council” and to his “divine decision/plan/secret.”⁶ Amos 3:7 alone has a clear abstract usage of *sôd* as “secret”; that is Yahweh does nothing without revealing to the prophet his redemptive plan; however, the throne council bears the responsibility of delivering the decision within the human world, as such the distinction is artificial.⁷ Thus a true prophet was expected to stand in the *sôd* YHWH (e.g. Isa. 6; cf. Jer 23:18) not only in relation to the throne council, but also participating in the decisions in the abstract sense.⁸

Another important word to be examined is the verb *rā`â*, “to see”. Did the prophet Jeremiah have a physical sight of the throne council or if not, what then is the meaning of *rā`â*? Vetter opines the chief meaning of *rā`â* is “to see” with sensory perception—this precedes all other semantic developments.⁹ However, in Jer 23:18,22,

¹M. Sæbø, “סוד *sôd* secret,” *Theological Lexicon of the Old Testament (TLOT)* (ed. Ernst Jenni and Claus Westermann; trans. Mark E. Biddle; Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1997), 2: 794..

²Fabry, 174.

³R. D. Patterson, “Sôd,” *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament (TWOT)* (ed. R. Laird Harris; Chicago: Moody, 1980), 619; see also Sæbø, “סוד *sôd* secret,” *TLOT*, 2:794.

⁴Fabry, 176.

⁵Ibid.

⁶Sæbø, 795.

⁷Fabry, 176.

⁸Ibid.

⁹D. Vetter, “ראה *r`h* to see” *TLOT*, 3:1178.

rā`â carries the idea of wisdom and understanding revealed by Yahweh to discern the sequences of human events, and on this basis, provide an action plan and proper counsel.<sup>1</sup> The MT has a juss form “and see”, but BHS suggests “that he might see him”. Thus rā`â is employed to indicate an authentic prophet who receives oracles from Yahweh.² In fact the name for the nābî (prophet) is rō`eh (seer); it presupposes the act of seeing God’s message either by dreams or visions and the spokesman (nābî) was often called “one who sees divine things”, or a “seer” (I Sam 9:9, 11, 18, 19).<sup>3</sup> The repeated usage of rā`â in this text (v.18: 3 times; v.21: 1 time; v.22: 1 time), indicates Jeremiah considers himself a true prophet with special insight, or counsel given to him in a vision directly from the proceedings of Yahweh’s heavenly court. False prophets had no access to Yahweh’s counsel concerning his intentions for Judah, so they lacked wisdom and understanding.

Equally important for consideration is the verb šma’ “to hear”. It occurs twice in v. 18. The LXX lacks wēyišma’, but the Syr, Vg, and Tg include “and heard”; also the LXX lacks “his word”, but many MSS and editions include it. The writer adopts the same reading and translates the phrase as “and heard his word.” K has “my word.” Schult suggests the first šma’ connotes “hearing over seeing”, or “recognizing” (Isa 6:10; Eze 44:5; Job 13:1), and the second as “to give heed, to pay attention” (e.g. Eze 44:5; Isa 41:20).⁴ When ‘āmaḏ and šma’ are contrasted, a parallel between “standing in Yahweh’s council” and “paying attention” to his word emerges; as Craig and others note, the implication is that Jeremiah received the word/vision directly from Yahweh’s council in contrast with the self-generated message of the false prophet.⁵ The verbs šlh, “send” and dbr, “speak” suggest prophets are messengers of Yahweh. However, the niphal verb nbā’û, “they prophesied” indicates the unspecified prophets in the text sent themselves. Yahweh did not call them as he had called Jeremiah and other prophets (cf. 1:5-7; Isa 6:8; Eze 2:3; Amos 7:14). Probably these are false prophets—the repetition of the pronouns emphasizes the point.

¹Fuhs, “rā`â” *TDOT*, 13:226-227.

²William White, “ראה rā`â see, look at, inspect,” *TWOT*, 2: 823.

³*Ibid.*

⁴H. Schult, שָׁמַע (šma’) “to hear,” *TLOT*, 3:1377-1378; see also Jack R. Lundbom, *Jeremiah 21-36* (Anchor Bible 21B; New York: Doubleday, 2004), 196.

⁵Peter Craigie, Page H. Kelly, and Joel F. Drinkard, Jr., *Jeremiah 1-25* (Word Biblical Commentary; Dallas, TX: Word, 1991), 344.

On the basis of word study, it may be concluded that, although *sôd* carries dual meaning (as shown above), the abstract meaning ("counsel") suits the context better, for it resonates with three verbs in v 18: *ʾāmaḏ* "to stand", *rāʾā* "to see", and *wēyišma* "to hear"; hence, "who has *stood* in the council of Yahweh and has *seen* and *heard* his word (emphasis mine)?" All three verbs are fientive—they express action.¹ While a physical presence of the prophet in the *sôd* Yahweh may be urged, the connection of the verbs with *sôd* tilts the weight of evidence to abstract meaning, and allows the writer to infer that, in the Spirit, Jeremiah not only had access to Yahweh's council, but also saw it,² and heard Yahweh's word; this contradicts Craig and others who claim the rhetorical question "Who has stood in Yahweh's council?" expects the answer "no one".³ In support of the prophet's membership and participation in spirit to the *sôd* Yahweh, Fabry has argued convincingly that since early pre-exilic times, *sôd* was already understood theologically; for example, in Psa 89:7-8 "God is feared in the council of the holy ones" (*bʿsôḏ qʿḏôšîm*), that is a smaller circle of "Yahweh's heavenly entourage"; thus, "membership and participation" in the *sôd* Yahweh was understood as "the sign of a true prophet." He adds, because Prophets were Yahweh's co-educators, they were involved in the "divine cosmic pedagogical plan."⁴ Other members included *qʿḏôšîm* "the council of the saints" implying membership of humans (cf. Job 15:8; Psa 89:7-8), (primarily the prophets), and in the postexilic period (Psa 25:14) any person "who fears Yahweh."⁵ In this context, therefore, the *sôd* Yahweh fulfils two specific functions: 1) to declare judgment upon apostate Israel (vv 19-20), and 2) to reveal its secret to a chosen prophet and commissions him to announce the impending storm of Yahweh (vv 19-20).

Verses 19-20 are repeated in 30:23-24. Some scholars⁶ consider them an interpolation and so disrupt the flow of thought between v 18 and verses 21-22. However, as Nicholson notes, they serve

¹Ronald J. Williams, *Williams' Hebrew Syntax* (3rd ed.; rev. & expanded John C. Beckman; Toronto: University of Toronto, 2007), 97.

²Perhaps not physical sight, but understanding (mental perception)—see details on *rāʾā* "to see."

³Craigie, Kelly, and Drinkard, *Jeremiah 1-25*, 344.

⁴Fabry, 174.

⁵*Ibid.*

⁶Douglas Rawlinson Jones, *Jeremiah* (The New Century Bible Commentary (NCBC); Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1992), 310.

to emphasize the true word of God through Jeremiah, over and against the peace message of the false prophets.¹ The qal perfect verb *yāšē'â*, “has gone out” is fientive—it states a dynamic action;² Yahweh’s *hēmâ*, “wrath” like a raging storm would soon “dance above”, the NIV has “burst out” over the heads of the wicked. The same root is used of the storm of Yahweh against the boat when Jonah fled from God (Jonah 1).³ Nothing would stop Yahweh from punishing the doomed nation “in the days afterwards” signifying the near future,⁴ not in eschatology.⁵ The historical setting assigns the fall of Jerusalem to Babylon as fulfilment of 23:19-20; judgment vindicated Jeremiah and those who trusted Yahweh’s word, but punished the wicked and condemned false prophets as wicked. The date of chapter 23 is uncertain. Clements assigns no period to this particular indictment against false prophets considering their opposition to have been persistent despite his call for moral piety. However, it is reasonable to agree with those who assign it the year 597, since it is juxtaposed between the message given prior to Jehoiachin’s captivity (22:20-30) and another message following immediately after his captivity (ch 24). In vv 21-22, the legitimacy of the false prophets is denied; their message was false because Yahweh had not called them as he did Jeremiah and other prophets (cf. 1:5-7; Isa 6:8; Eze 2:3; Amos 7:14); so they had not stood in the *sôd* Yahweh (23:18); otherwise their proclamation would have turned the people to Yahweh, even though Jeremiah himself had preached for a long time with minimal results.

3. The Council of Yahweh in Amos 3:7

Perhaps Amos 3:7 is the only clear text with an abstract meaning of *sôd* as “secret”—Yahweh does nothing without revealing to the prophets his salvific plan—the throne council itself communicates

¹E. W. Nicholson, *Jeremiah 1-25* (Cambridge Bible Commentary on the New English Bible (CBC); Cambridge, at the University, 1973), 197.

²Williams, *Williams' Hebrew Syntax*, 57.

³Craigie, Kelly, and Drinkard, Jr., *Jeremiah 1-25*, 344.

⁴*Ibid.*

⁵F. B. Huey, Jr., *Jeremiah, Lamentations* (New American Commentary (NAC) 16; ed. E. Ray Clendenen; Nashville, TN: Broadman, 1993), 216.

the decisions of the sôd Yahweh within the human world.¹ Some consider Amos 3:7 a later insertion interrupting the flow of the chapter.² However, Hubbard argues for the unity of the text, although seemingly presents “a bit of a puzzle” — it of necessity sheds light on the God-given responsibility of Prophets to explain divine decisions. He sees it as linking the questions on divine activity in v 6, and the prophetic duty in v 7. Deliberately its literary function “postpones the climax” and enhances the “suspense of the sequence of the questions”; also it authenticates the prophetic message as true (v 6).³

4. Lessons for Pastoral Ministry

Eight important lessons for both the pastoral ministry and the church of God arise from this study and deserve special attention by all stakeholders.

1. *God superintends over the affairs of heaven and earth through his Divine Council* (Jer 23:18, 23-24; cf. Matt: 25ff). Decisions from the Divine Council are final, unquestionable, and they chart the course of the universe (23:20). Ministers of the Gospel and God’s church must strive to cooperate with, and align their lives with the decisions made from the highest council of the universe.

2. *The Divine Council appoints men/women to the prophetic ministry.* The wider context of the book of Jeremiah indicates God as the appointing authority of the prophet Jeremiah to the prophetic ministry (1:5-9). Likewise, true ministers of God receive their call directly from the Council of Yahweh long before men know about it. Therefore God-called ministers must guard their sacred office and remain loyal to the appointing authority in order to proclaim its true secrets in season (2Tim 2:1-26). False prophets are disloyal to the Divine council because they are appointed only by human councils (e.g. Executive committees of local conferences etc).

¹Fabry, 176.

²For the notion that 3:7 is a scribal insertion in the context, see Henry McKeating, *The Books of Amos, Hosea and Micah* (Cambridge Bible Commentary (CBC); Cambridge, At the University, 1971), 27; and James Luther Mays, *Amos: A Commentary* (Old Testament Library; London: SCM, 1976), 61; for the literally analysis of chapter 3 and how v 7 fits in, see Francis I. Andersen and David Noel Freedman, *Amos* (AB 24A; NY: Doubleday, 1989), 390, 391.

³David Allan Hubbard, *Joel & Amos* (Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries (TOTC); ed. D. J. Wiseman; Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity, 1989), 149.

3. *The Divine Council sends true prophets for mission.* God sent Jeremiah on a perilous missionary task to his own people (Jer 1:17-19; 2:1). God sends his ministers at times directly without human councils acting as mediums, as with Jeremiah; and at times through church council assignment to specific mission districts.

4. *God's true ministers have membership in the Divine Council.* The prophet Jeremiah stood in the council of Yahweh before his commission (23:18, 22). This may not have been a physical presence, but in the Spirit, Jeremiah not only had access to Yahweh's council, but he also saw it,¹ and heard Yahweh's word. In dreams and visions true ministers of God access the divine council and receive its counsels concerning men on earth (Jer 23:18; 1:13; cf. Num 12:6). Other participating members in Yahweh's council in the wider context of scripture are seraphims (Isa 6:6, 7), saints (Job 15:8; cf. Psalms 89:7-8), and all who fear God (Psalms 25:14; cf. Mal 3:16).

5. *God-sent-ministers have a Passion for souls.* Jeremiah could not keep silent because God's word burned in his bones (20:9). In the New Testament, the Apostle Paul was "compelled" (Gr. *anagike*) to preach, if not woe to him (I Cor 9:16). Likewise true ministers of the Gospel feel compelled by the Spirit to preach; yet not for gain, while that is necessary for survival, but for the salvation of souls from sin and the coming destruction (Jer 23:22, 19-20).

6. *God-sent-ministers preach only the message they hear from the Divine-Council.* Jeremiah preached the message of repentance (23:22) because it originated from the divine council, as with the prophet Milachi (3:7). False prophets preached peace sermons because they knew not about the heavenly secrets—they had sent themselves (23:21-30; 23:16).

7. *Israel as God's Church must obey the prophetic message for their survival.* The people of Jeremiah refused to heed his message and disrespected him. Consequently, judgment fell on them "afterwards" (23:20, KJV) in form of Babylonian captivity (c. 589 BC). Judgment vindicated God and Jeremiah as his true prophet and ushered in punishment for the wicked prophets and disobedient nation (v 22). In eschatology, the false prophets and all the wicked will suffer destruction for rejecting God's messages and his messengers, and God will be vindicated (Rom 2:5-8; cf. Rev 20:4, 9, 10).²

¹Perhaps not physical sight, but understanding (mental perception)—see details on *rā'â* "to see."

²F. H. Klooster, "Judgment, Last," *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* (fully rev., ed. Geoffrey W. Bromiley; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1982), 2:1163.

8. *Beware of false prophets.* False teachers are a constant snare to the people of God; their word must be rejected for it leads to destruction (Jer 23:21; cf. I Tim 1:3-7). The evils which Jeremiah condemns will ever be present in professional ministry. Men without qualification will join the vocation for their survival, they will preach the gospel even when they have not been sent, yet they run, but they have never stood in the council of Yahweh. Their message is adapted to the itching ears of their listeners, not about their sin.¹

In summary, the term *sôd* Yahweh arose from within the daily social meetings of the Hebrew people in which decisions were made. As far back in early pre-exilic times, the theological understanding of *sôd* is linked to small "circles of youth" (Job 19:9), to "circles of friends" (Job 19:19), and to "circles of the faithful" (Psa 111:1). The concrete usage of *sôd* can also be traced back to the book of Gen 49:6 in reference to "the assembly of two tribes of Simeon and Levi". Such biblical examples support this study's assertion that the original idea of *sôd* Yahweh in Hebrew thought was no foreign concept; rather, it emerged from within their narrow circles when they met to decide their course on various issues.² Thus the meaning and function of *sôd* Yahweh in Jer 23:18-22, refers to the decisions or plans from the Divine council, which determine the destiny of this world. In the Spirit, Jeremiah had the privilege to access the divine council and its decisions as a true prophet of God. Decisions from this council are final, irrevocable, and bear eternal implications on humankind (v20). Individuals who receive the great commission from this council must declare its messages in a trustworthy manner (vv 22).

5. Conclusion

Jeremiah's message pictures the sovereign God as directing world affairs through the Divine council, to fulfil his holy purpose, in spite of sin and rebellion. In the Spirit, the true servants of God access counsels from divine council, and proclaim them to a world on the brink of destruction. However, false teachers, remain a constant threat, they attempt to thwart God's plan through messages of compromise; but God eventually overrides all evil schemes, when the church heeds the clarion call through faithful ministers.

¹W. H. Bennett, *The Book of Jeremiah* (Expositor's Bible (EB); ed. W. Robertson Nicoll; (Hodder & Stoughton, New York, George H. Doran), 103, 106.

²Fabry, "סוד" TDOT, 10:173; also M. Sæbø, "סוד *sôd* secret", TLOT, 2: 794.