# Prologue: An Introduction to the Scroll (1:1-19)

Like Isaiah, Ezekiel, and Hosea, the Jeremiah scroll begins with an entire chapter by way of introduction (more than a chapter in their cases). Like those other examples, it opens with a brief factual and chronological preface, then goes onto something more substantial and more distinctive in form as well as in content. As is the case in Hosea, this more substantial introduction takes the form of a narrative account of Yahweh’s commission that anticipates the scroll’s contents as a whole in terms of threat and promise. As is the case in Ezekiel, however, the narrative introducing Jeremiah takes first-person form, talks about the prophet’s own reaction to Yahweh’s commission, and homes in on the provision of words to speak. And as is the case in Isaiah, the introduction incorporates material from much later than the time of the commission in order to give a balanced account of where the commission led.

The chapter comprises a four-part introduction to the scroll.

Vv. 1-3 A preface introducing Jeremiah and his times

Vv. 4-10 Jeremiah’s self-introduction describing his commission with its challenge to speak boldly and its promise of protection

Vv. 11-12 Jeremiah’s report of a message from Yahweh about the coming fulfillment of his message

Vv. 13-19 Jeremiah’s report of a second (double) message from Yahweh:

1. Yahweh’s intention to bring disaster on Judah by mean of enemy invasion (vv. 13-16)
2. Yahweh’s renewed commission to Jeremiah with its challenge to speak boldly, and its promise of protection (vv. 17-19)

This analysis broadly corresponds to the divisions in MT, which has section markers after vv. 3, 6, 10, 12, and 19. Jer 1 thus makes a coherent section to introduce the scroll. It does so by bringing together some originally separate units. Vv. 1-3 is a third-person preface that corresponds to the prefaces in many prophetic scrolls. In substance, though not in form or structure, the first-person account in vv. 4-19 then follows an abb’a’ order. Vv. 4-10 tell of a commission. Vv. 11-16 relate two occasions when Yahweh enabled the prophet to “see” something through looking at something ordinary – they might be two separate experiences, though they have become the subject of a linked testimony. Vv. 17-19 continue this second report but in content revert to the theme and focus of vv. 4-10.

## A Preface (1:1-3)

1The words ofa Jeremiahb ben Hilkiah, one of the priests who were in Anathoth in the territory of Benjamin, 2to whom Yahweh’s message camec in the time of Josiah ben Amon King of Judah, in the thirteenth year of his reign, 3and camed in the time of Jehoiakim ben Josiah King of Judah, until the ending ofe the eleventh year of Zedekiah ben Josiah King of Judah, until the exile of Jerusalemf in the fifth month.g

LXX has “the word of God that came to,” a formulation more like the one in Hosea, Joel, Micah, Jonah, and Zephaniah (“God” rather than “the Lord” is unique, though it corresponds to v. 2 here), whereas MT’s formulation compares with that in Amos. In 1 – 2 Kings *dibrê* denotes the deeds (of a king) and in Amos and Jeremiah it might imply both words and deeds (cf. Neh 1:1); but at the beginning of a prophetic scroll it likely suggests words (cf. Vg).

On the name, see J. J. Stamm, “Der Name Jeremia,” *ZAW* 100 (1988): 100-6; he concludes it means “Yahweh gives life.”

The formulation recurs in the introduction to messages in 14:1; 46:1; 47:1; 49:34, with the meaning “what came/happened.” Here the *’ăšer* has an antecedent, as in 1 Kgs 18:31, and the clause is a regular relative clause with a resumptive pronominal suffix on *’ēlāyw* (Rudolph, *Jeremia*,2). Cf. also 25:2, with a different antecedent.

Vv. 1-2 could have led directly into v. 4, and v. 3 might have been added to adapt the preface as part of the introduction to the entire scroll.

LXX lacks *the ending of*, perhaps omitting it because of the tension with the subsequent reference to the fifth month; or perhaps it is an MT expansion of the shorter text represented by LXX.

The expression involves a metonymy: it is the people of Jerusalem who are taken into exile.

MT has a marker here.

The preface answers three questions that its author evidently thought were important to anyone reading the scroll, using the conventional form of the preface to a prophetic scroll.

* Who was Jeremiah?
* Where did his message come from?
* What was it about?

People need to know about the person, to know the times, and to recognize who gave Jeremiah the message. The answers in vv. 1-3 are preliminary ones that raise as many questions as they resolve; vv. 4-19 will elaborate on them, and the scroll as a whole will fill them out. The preface simply offers preliminary pointers to guide the scroll’s readers. It functions to “impose order on chaos,” on “the messy and terrible events of history” as these unfolded in the period it covers, and it hints at the replacement of defunct priestly and kingly lines by a prophetic line.[[1]](#footnote-1) It also suggests a framework of order for the messy scroll that it introduces.

The prefaces to Jeremiah and Ezekiel are the longest prophetic prefaces. Jeremiah’s also compares particularly with the Hosea’s and Amos’s in giving the prophet’s name and family background, the time of his commissioning, and the names of the kings during his ministry as a whole. Presumably it was the work of the theologian-curators who compiled the Jeremiah scroll, for whom the conventional scholarly term is the Deuteronomists,[[2]](#footnote-2) who wanted to offer guidance to people reading it; the third-person form underscores the objective, factual nature of the preface’s contents.

On the kings and their dates, see the section on “Background” in the Introduction to this commentary.

**1** In answer to the first question, the preface gives Jeremiah’s name and family background. Anathoth can presumably be linked with the modern village of Anata, three miles north of Jerusalem.[[3]](#footnote-3) It is thus across the boundary between Judah and Benjamin, so that technically Jeremiah is a Benjaminite and a northern Israelite in Jerusalem.[[4]](#footnote-4) The reference to Anathoth would make clear that Jeremiah’s father was not the Jerusalem Hilkiah, senior priest in his time (2 Kgs 22 – 23); he would hardly be described simply as one of the priests who were in Anathoth, and the name is common.[[5]](#footnote-5) The expression “Jeremiah of Anathoth” (29:27) would similarly serve to distinguish the prophet from other Jeremiahs. It is tempting to infer that a priestly family in Anathoth comprised descendants of Abiathar, the senior priest in David’s day who was banished to Anathoth after backing Abimelek rather than Solomon as David’s successor, Anathoth being one of the towns where priestly families lived (Josh 21:13-19; 1 Kgs 2:26-27).[[6]](#footnote-6) With irony, then, from the place to which Solomon banished Abiathar comes a man who will speak the word against Solomon’s edifice.[[7]](#footnote-7) It wouldn’t be surprising if Abiathar’s family had continued to act as priests at a shrine at Anathoth, and if their shrine was one that was closed down by Josiah (2 Kgs 23), there might well then be animosity in Anathoth towards the Jerusalem authorities as well as animosity in Jerusalem towards someone who could be called “Jeremiah of Anathoth.” It might mean that Jeremiah got caught in the crossfire between the two priesthoods through being not obviously loyal to either (see Jer 11 – 12). On the other hand, neither would it be surprising if the Anathoth priesthood kept alive an awareness of Israelite faith going back to Eli and behind Abiathar to Moses, the faith that had shaped Jeremiah and made him the man he was. There’s no hint that Jeremiah functioned as a priest in Anathoth, though his priestly connections might lie behind the liberty which he relates to the temple (e.g., 19:1; 35:1-4).[[8]](#footnote-8)

**2** The answer to the second question is: Yahweh spoke to him, in Josiah’s time and subsequently. *The words of Jeremiah* (v. 1) were thus also *the message* [word] *of Yahweh*. Vv. 7, 9 will expand on the interrelationship of the expressions. *Came* or “happened” (*hāyâ*; cf. vv. 3, 4, etc.) suggests the objective factuality of this message. It did not issue from Jeremiah’s wise reflection but from elsewhere. “The incongruence between the word of a human being and the word of Yahweh is abolished.”[[9]](#footnote-9) The expression *the message of Yahweh* *came* suggests a “word event”[[10]](#footnote-10) that represents “the incursion of potent, sovereign word into the life of prophet and nation.”[[11]](#footnote-11) This coming of Yahweh’s word initially happened on the occasion of Jeremiah’s commission in the thirteenth year of Josiah’s reign, 626 B.C. (see further v. 7). On the reckoning in 1 Kgs 22 – 23 it was five years before Josiah’s reformation, though according to 2 Chr 34, the reformation had already been initiated. Jeremiah’s commission would then come between these two stages in the reformation. Given that Jer 1 and Jer 25 constitute the beginning and midpoint of the scroll, the date will turn out to make a link with 25:3.[[12]](#footnote-12)

**3** Whereas the initial reference to a message coming suggested a one-time event (the event on which vv. 4-19 will say more), v. 3 refers to a recurrent series of events over subsequent decades: cf. the plural *words* in v. 9. The preface thus provides information on the chronological/political background to the bulk of Jeremiah’s ministry. The other two kings listed reigned for nearly the entire time between their father Josiah and the fall of Jerusalem. The preface omits reference to Jehoahaz, the further son of Josiah who immediately succeeded him but reigned for only three months, to Jehoiakim’s son Jehoiachin who also reigned for only three months between Jehoiakim and Zedekiah, and to events after the fall of Jerusalem that Jer 40 – 44 relate.

The list as a whole and the place where v. 3 ends indicate that they are tough times. Josiah lost his life in battle. Jehoahaz was deposed by the Egyptians. Jehoiakim experienced invasion and attack from the Babylonians and other local peoples. His son Jehoiachin was deposed and taken off to Babylon (though in 52:31-34 he is implicitly a symbol of hope). Zedekiah was killed in the aftermath of the fall of Jerusalem. In addition, with varying degrees of specificity 2 Kings sees all these kings as going back on Josiah’s reformation, as thus bringing trouble on their people, and as thereby earning the trouble that came to them. Zedekiah did not see his year eleven to its end; the *ending* of his eleventh year likely denotes the terminating of his reign, which came in his eleventh year (for which see 39:2; 52:5-6). The fifth month of a year reckoned to begin at Passover will refer to July/August (see 52:1-16). The preface’s omitting to mention Zedekiah’s ousting and death is not remarkable in light of its leaving out equivalent information about the other two kings, though it might still be a telling omission. The scroll will name Zedekiah more often than the rest of the Judahite kings put together, and will portray Jeremiah involved in ongoing conflict with him.

Nevertheless, the event that counts in 587 is not the humiliating and horrifying end of Zedekiah’s reign, nor his exile, imprisonment, and death (52:1-11). It is the city’s exile. V. 3 thus concerns not merely the chronology of Jeremiah’s time but the content of his message. While prophetic prefaces often mention kings, they do not mention events, as Jeremiah’s does. Further, this event is key in buttressing the idea that he was a true prophet. This closing reference to the exile in 1:1-3 pairs with the account of the city’s fall and the exile that concludes the scroll as a whole in 52:1-34. The two – especially in combination – imply a point about the fulfillment of Jeremiah’s message. The scroll as a whole will refer to events that followed on the fall of Jerusalem (see Jer 40 – 44), as it will refer to Jehoiachin. But v. 3, by stopping where it does, draws attention to the event which constituted the fulfillment of the warnings on which Jeremiah had been long focusing. Its stopping point is hardly a basis for hypothesizing that the preface originally introduced an earlier version of the scroll. Ending where it does, the preface makes a theological point. The fact of the exile hangs over the scroll; “the book of Jeremiah holds the record for the variety of *verbal phrases* used to denote exile.”[[13]](#footnote-13) Whether it will happen is an open question through most of the scroll, but the preface knows that it will. And the scroll is written for people who know that the exile has happened, who need to understand it, and who need to know how to look to the future.

The patient God was offering a respite even, so to speak, down to the day before the Captivity, urging hearers to repent so that he may prevent the misfortune of the captivity. Hence it is written, Jeremiah prophesied until the captivity of Jerusalem, until the fifth month. The Captivity begins, and still he prophesied, saying something like this: “Become captives, provided in such circumstances you can repent! For when you repent, the misfortunes of the captivity will not transpire, but God's mercy will be realized for you.”[[14]](#footnote-14)

A converse of the fact that Jehoiakim and Zedekiah are the prominent kings in the scroll is that events in the reign of Josiah with its great reformation are less prominent than one might have expected. Admittedly, any prophetic scroll is selective. There is no reason to think that the “Minor Prophets” (i.e., the Shorter Prophets) said less than the “Major Prophets.” For one reason or another, fewer of their prophecies were preserved. Perhaps a related dynamic gave the Jeremiah scroll the length and the balance it manifests. The disastrous early death of Josiah and the religious and moral reversion that followed meant that his reformation failed to generate the escape from calamity that one might have hoped and that Jeremiah might have envisaged. As the Jeremiah scroll sought to bring its challenging and encouraging message to the next generation or three, the failure of Josiah’s reformation was hardly a dynamic to draw attention to.[[15]](#footnote-15)

## Jeremiah Gives an Account of His Commission (1:4-10)

4Yahweh’s message came to me:a

5Before I formed youb in [someone’s] insides I acknowledgedc you

before you went out from a womb I sanctified you,

the nations’ prophetd I am making you.e

6I said, “Oh no, Lord Yahweh! There, I don’t know how to speak, because I’m a kid.”f 7But Yahweh said to me,

Don’t say “I’m a kid,”

because to everyoneg that I send you to, you are to go,

and everything that I order you, you are to speak.

8Don’t be afraid before them,

because I am with you to snatch you away (Yahweh’s affirmation).h

9Yahweh extended his hand and made it touchi my mouth. And Yahweh said to me,

There, I’m putting my words in your mouth;

10see, I’m appointing you this day

over the nations, yes,j over the kingdoms,

To pull upk and to pull down.

and to wipe out and to smash;

to buildl and to plant.m

Here and commonly elsewhere the text includes the word *lē’mōr*, literally “[by] saying,” which functions like a colon introducing a quotation in English. Some LXX mss have “to him” not “to me.”

Q has *’eṣṣorkā* from *yāṣar*; K implies *’eṣṣûrkā* from the byform *ṣûr*.

The common verb *yāda‘* meaning “know” is frequently used with the connotation of “acknowledge” (e.g., 2:8; 5:4-5) and then with the more precise sense of “choose” (cf. Gen 18:19; Exod 33:12; Amos 3:2): “a knowledge not intuitive only, but also approbative” (Trapp, *Commentary*, on the passage).

While Vg translates “I gave you to the nations as a prophet,” Tg takes *laggôyim* to imply “against the nations” and has Jeremiah commissioned to make them drink the chalice to which 25:15 will refer; it then takes the negative verbs in v. 10 to refer to the nations. Syr and some LXX mss have “to the nation” (cf. 18:7, 9; *HUB*).

I take this third qatal verb as declarative/performative and denoting what Yahweh is doing at this moment, not what he did before Jeremiah was born; cf. the verbs in vv. 9, 10, and 18 (see the comment).

MT has an intriguing marker here.

Vg has “to all things,” Tg “to every place” (implying the assumption that he will go to the nations).

This extrametrical phrase recurs through the scroll, more often in MT than in LXX; McKane (*Jeremiah* 1:6) nicely paraphrases “you have my word.” The entirety of v. 8 reappears in 42:11 as the promise that Jeremiah passes on to the rebels after the fall of Jerusalem.

*Wayyagga‘*, hiphil from *nāga‘*, as in Isa 6:7; LXX, Vg “touched” imply qal *wayyigga‘*.

The *wә* is explicative.

Vg translates all six verbs “so that you may….”

LXX, Vg, Syr prefix the verb with “and”; MT’s omission of “and” marks the switch from the negative infinitives to the positive ones.

MT has a unit marker here. Plant is *nāṭa‘*, which makes for a further assonance with the first pair of verbs, though the similarity has a more paradoxical significance; it belies the contrast in the words’ meaning.

Vv. 4-19 parallel other accounts of a prophet’s commission, and the accounts of the commissions of Moses and Gideon.[[16]](#footnote-16) As is the case with the giving of testimonies in some churches or the formulating of prayers, the existence of a familiar way of giving such an account facilitates an individual’s articulating their experience and also enables the listeners to recognize that the experience is real and that the prophet is the real thing; it constitutes his “credentials.”[[17]](#footnote-17) A comparison with other commissions helps highlight their typical significance while also drawing attention to the distinctive significance of a particular account.

* Jeremiah’s account comes at the beginning of the scroll (after the note about its time period), like Ezekiel’s and Hosea’s but unlike Isaiah’s and Amos’s. It forms part of the scroll’s framework.
* Like the preface, it summarizes the agenda of the scroll as a whole, like the preface to Hosea but unlike that to Ezekiel (which refers only to the equivalent of pulling up and pulling down). It thus seems likely to have been composed to introduce a collection of Jeremiah’s message as a whole.
* It specifies that this message relates to “the nations.”
* It takes first-person form, like Ezekiel’s and Isaiah’s but unlike Amos’s and Hosea’s. It thereby draw attention to the extent to which Jeremiah is personally involved in his commission; he is not simply a messenger.
* It emphasizes Yahweh’s initiative in issuing the commission, as is the case with Amos. It is an initiative that antedates Jeremiah’s birth; it does not suggests that Jeremiah was seeking to discover what his vocation might be or had a sense of vocation or thought in any way along these lines (and I avoid the word “call,” which carries considerable baggage). Jeremiah is not a volunteer like Isaiah, and there is no suggestion that Yahweh chooses him because he has the right gifts. If vocation is "the place where your deep gladness and the world's deep hunger meet,” Jeremiah has no vocation, or his vocation is “a call to dissent.”[[18]](#footnote-18)
* It comprises a report by Jeremiah of dialogue between Yahweh and Jeremiah, but it is not a Bakhtian dialogue; Jeremiah contributes only an objection that Yahweh overrules and a pair of observations that Yahweh then interprets. The vast bulk of the “dialogue” is Yahweh’s words.
* Like the preface, it underlines the factual or objective nature of what happens, as is the case with Ezekiel: “I am putting my words in your mouth.” Its dialogic form also points up the reality of the event, as is the case with the commissions of Isaiah and Ezekiel.[[19]](#footnote-19)
* It relates Jeremiah’s resistance to his commission, like Jonah’s (and Moses’s and Gideon’s) but unlike Isaiah’s, Ezekiel’s, and Hosea’s. It thereby underscores the implication that Jeremiah really is fulfilling Yahweh’s commission. He is not doing what he wants to do.
* It incorporates a reassurance of Yahweh’s presence and a sign, like Moses’s and Gideon’s.
* It emphasizes the opposition Jeremiah will receive.
* Like the other accounts, it makes no direct reference to Jeremiah’s final response to Yahweh’s commission. The focus lies on Yahweh’s commission; implicitly, the rest of the scroll relates Jeremiah’s response.[[20]](#footnote-20)

Unlike Isaiah and Ezekiel, Jeremiah does not speak in terms of a vision,[[21]](#footnote-21) nor does he speak of hearing the sound of Yahweh’s voice like Samuel. I have myself had the experience of seeing God’s hand pointing at something, of sensing God embrace, and of having a conversation with God in which sometimes I might take an initiative and sometimes God might – though either way, God’s words were not an articulating of something that I was thinking anyway – and I am able to distinguish these experiences from the sense that an idea has come to me and from a conviction that God has been present with me that is based on things that have happened. Whereas it is proper to be concerned about literalism in interpreting accounts of a prophet’s experience, reductionism is a greater danger in the context of modernity, of the familiarity of Buddhism, and of new age thinking, and Jeremiah’s account invites readers to infer that “‘God’ is not a device for objectifying inner convictions.”[[22]](#footnote-22)

Along with vv. 1-3, vv. 4-19 thus forms a prologue to the scroll as a whole. It provides more detailed answers to the three questions noted in connection with vv. 1-3 and opens up themes and introduce key motifs:

* The person of Jeremiah himself is important to the scroll
* Jeremiah is to be a prophet who has to speak about the nations
* Yahweh is committed to implementing his threats and promises when it doesn’t look as if he is
* Disaster from the north is a central focus of Jeremiah’s message
* The background to the disaster is Israel’s unfaithfulness to Yahweh
* The restoration of Israel is also a motif in Jeremiah’s message
* People will oppose him
* He must live in ongoing obedience to Yahweh’s commission
* Yahweh will protect him as he meets with opposition
* He will need to be resolute in the fulfillment of his commission
* Yahweh will be committed to enabling him to be resolute and unstoppable

Vv. 1-3 and 4-19 thus comprise parallel introductions to the entire scroll, the first with more stress on concrete chronology, the second with more stress on Jeremiah’s commission and on the scroll’s themes.

How did vv. 4-19 come into being? There are a series of subsets to that question.

* What were the roles of Jeremiah and his disciples? An obvious assumption is that whereas a disciple wrote vv. 1-3, Jeremiah dictated vv. 4-19. But a creative writer can write about someone else in the first person as a person can write about himself or herself in the third person.
* Are vv. 4-19 a transcript of what happened when Yahweh commissioned Jeremiah, or are they a fictional dramatization of the event as Gen 1 is a fictional dramatization of creation, or are they something in between, an adaptation based on fact?
* Were they composed at the time of the event which they seem to describe in about 626 B.C., or were they composed from scratch as a dedicated introduction to the scroll sometime after the last events it relates, or do they represent a reworking of an account with a prehistory going back to that time?

These subsets open up eighteen possibilities, which themselves embrace further alternatives (e.g., did the final work on the scroll and therefore on this introduction happen in the Babylonian period or in the Persian period?). The attempt to answer this question and to interpret Jer 1 may profit from comparing and contrasting the chapter with Hos 1:1 – 2:1 [3].

* The Hosea scroll, too, begins with a third-person preface
* The preface leads into a narrative account of the beginning of Hosea’s ministry
* This account derives from a period later than his original commission (Hosea has had time to marry and have several children)
* It incorporates a number of statements by Yahweh presented as verbatims
* It offers a perspective on the message of the scroll as a whole
* It puts the emphasis on threat but incorporates promises
* It presupposes the downfall of the nation, which fulfilled the threats
* It presupposes a time when the promises have not yet been fulfilled.

The major difference is that Hos 1:2 – 2:1 [3] take third-person form while Jer 1:4-19 takes first-person form. As is the case with Jer 1:1-3, one cannot simply infer that Hoseanic theologians composed the Hosea narrative while Jeremiah himself composed the Jeremiah narrative, but my best guess is that this assumption is actually correct and that the most plausible scenario is that a theologian wrote vv. 1-3, that Jeremiah dictated vv. 4-19, that in doing so he adapted the facts and his memory of his commission so that the account could function as an introduction to the deposit of his work, and that he did so in the 580s or 570s. Vv. 4-19 are then “a mature reflection on a youthful experience.”[[23]](#footnote-23) But that view is just one possible one.[[24]](#footnote-24) I have more confidence in the conviction that whoever were the authors of vv. 4-19, they were inspired by the Holy Spirit to picture Jeremiah having the experience it describes, in light of the actual process whereby he came to be a prophet and of the ministry he then exercised, so that the scroll’s readers might take it as an introduction to the scroll that would help them understand it and respond to it.

The versesare mostly Yahweh’s words, and most of them manifest rhythm and parallelism that suggests they are poetic lines, which enhances their importance and eminence. Even the lines that lack parallelism are sufficiently rhythmic to make it possible to lay out the entirety of Yahweh’s words as poetry, albeit prosaic poetry. They comprise four tricola with one bicolon at the center (4-4-3, 3-4-4, 2-3, 4-4-2, 2-2-2). In the first tricolon the opening two cola are closely parallel; in the second tricolon, the closing two cola are closely parallel, in the third tricolon the opening two cola are broadly parallel; in the final tricolon all three cola are parallel and they incorporate metaphor and paronomasia. In substance vv. 4-10 follow an abb’a’ order:

Vv. 4-5 Yahweh speaks, recalling his past preparation of Jeremiah as a prophet to the nations

V. 6 Jeremiah objects

Vv. 7-8 Yahweh’s responds

V. 9-10 Yahweh acts, implementing now his preparation of Jeremiah as a prophet to the nations

The formal parallels with other accounts of a commission such as those of Moses, Gideon Samuel, Isaiah, and Ezekiel are especially clear in vv. 4-10:

v. 4 a revelation from Yahweh

v. 5 a commission from Yahweh

v. 6 an objection

v. 7 a reply and a restated commission

v. 8 a reassurance

v. 9 a sign

v. 10 a restated commission.

Comparison with these other accounts indicates that here the revelation is brief (esp. compared with Samuel and Ezekiel) and the objection is brief (especially compared with Moses). The objection becomes mainly the opportunity for a twice-restated elaboration on the commission, which is put briefly in v. 5, slightly more fully in v. 7, and most elaborately in v. 10. In the focus on the content of the commission Jeremiah compares with Samuel and Isaiah.

**4** Jeremiah’s opening formulation picks up the words in v. 2a: this is the message that came to him in the thirteenth year of Josiah’s reign.

**5a** Forming or shaping like a potter (see Jer 18) is an image for God’s original creation of the human and animal world (Gen 2:7-8; Ps 95:5; Isa 45:18) but also for his bringing each person into being (Pss 33:15; 94:9; 45:7); see 10:16. It is in particular an image for his bringing into being someone with a specific role to play in his service (Isa 49:5), and an image for Yahweh’s bringing Israel into being (Isa 44:2).[[25]](#footnote-25) More than one of these ideas might apply here. Yahweh shaped Jeremiah as he shapes everyone. But here (paradoxically) Yahweh first *acknowledged* or chose or destined Jeremiah for a particular role, and then shaped him accordingly. Yahweh could have used the verb “chose,” which the First Testament applies to Abraham (Neh 9:7); Levi (Deut 18:5), Aaron (Ps 105:26), Saul (1 Sam 10:24), and David and Solomon (1 Chr 28:4-5). But “choice” simply implies Yahweh taking responsibility, whereas “acknowledgment” implies Yahweh making a commitment, as Jeremiah’s frequent use of the verb will reflect (e.g., 2:8; 4:22; 5:4-5). Yahweh had made a commitment to Jeremiah before Jeremiah existed. To judge from the scroll, he shaped him as someone with a commitment to Yahweh, with imagination, and with sensitivity. Yahweh’s designation did not take place *in* the womb but before he was even conceived. It is a unique designation in the First Testament, though paralleled by the designation of Jesus in Luke 1:26-38. Paul generalizes its point in Rom 8:29,[[26]](#footnote-26) and Jeremiah may help one understand Paul’s point: God foreknew people in the sense of acknowledging them ahead of time as people he intended to make part of his people because of something he wanted to achieve through them. In themselves, Yahweh’s words do not indicate whether he formed Jeremiah in a way that he did not form other people. The First Testament elsewhere assumes that Yahweh forms everyone in the womb. But it can also speak in general terms about “opening the womb” while elsewhere applying that expression to particularly significant births, and Yahweh may have in mind a forming that applies to Jeremiah in a distinctive way because of the role he intended for him. But it’s the aim rather than the process that’s different.

The second colon forms a perfect complement to the first:

before I formed you in [someone’s] insides I acknowledged you

and before you went out from a womb I sanctified you

The temporal expression repeats; the verb adds Jeremiah’s action (he had to come out) to Yahweh’s action; the second prepositional expression makes the first more precise; the final verb rephrases the parallel one. The most significant new note in the second colon is that Yahweh had *sanctified* Jeremiah, made him holy or sacred or dedicated him or set him apart for his service (*qādaš* hiphil). “Sanctifying” implies choosing someone in order to do what you wish with them, which is the regular connotation of the notion of choosing in the Scriptures. Sacredness is not a common theme in the Prophets except in Ezekiel, who is the priestly prophet; this difference illustrates how Jeremiah’s priestly background does not mean he thinks like a priest. Yahweh’s sanctifying Jeremiah is not equivalent to his cleansing Isaiah (Isa 6:5-7), or to his choosing kings and having them anointed (e.g., 1 Sam 9; 16), where the language of sacredness does not occur, or to his separating Israel from the worship commitments of the Canaanites (Deut 7:6). The focus on birth makes it closer to the sanctifying of firstborn (e.g., Num 3:13; 8:17), which is also the only context in the First Testament for the use of this (hiphil) verb with a human object. Jeremiah is especially claimed by God like the firstborn of human beings and animals. Within the Jeremiah scroll, its nearest parallel is the sanctifying of warriors (the piel verb; e.g., 22:7; 51:27-28; where sanctifying is associated with appointing); so sanctifying suggests dedicating someone for a special task that relates to Yahweh’s purpose, and the aggressive nature of the vocation that Yahweh is giving Jeremiah (v. 10, also vv. 17-19) fits with this parallel.[[27]](#footnote-27) But the people who are most often the object of this piel verb in the First Testament are priests (e.g., Exod 28 – 29), so the verb does deserve reading in light of v. 1. Jeremiah is like Ezekiel after all. Both prophets had priestly lineage; neither prophet could function as a priest; both are appointed as prophets in a way that for Jeremiah is explicitly an act of consecration. In Israel and its royal court there was such a thing as a prophetic office; people such as Nathan occupied it (e.g., 2 Sam 7; 1 Kgs 1). Jeremiah does not occupy this position and it is misleading to speak of his being appointed to it.[[28]](#footnote-28) On the other hand, in Yahweh’s court there is a prophetic office that one could say that Jeremiah occupies (see Jer 23:21-22), and one could say that he is here reporting his appointment (see v. 10) to that office.

**5b** Given that the 4-4 bicolon was neatly complete, at one level a third colon is a surprise, though at another level not so. One of the ways in which parallelism functions is by the first colon leaving open a question that the second resolves, and v. 5 as a whole functions in this way. But in substance the opening two cola are incomplete in the sense that they raise a question they do not answer. What did Yahweh shape Jeremiah for? What did he come out to do? The third colon answers the question. To put it another way, the middle colon functioned only to raise suspense, which the third colon resolves in the manner of the second colon in a bicolon. *The nations’ prophet I am making you*. It is a speech act, equivalent to “I hereby make you.” The word order, with the description of Jeremiah as a prophet coming before the verb, underscores the significance of the designation. Admittedly, *prophet* (*nābî’*) could indeed have various resonances, like “minister” in English. In Israel there were many prophets linked with sanctuaries or functioning on the king’s staff, offering advice to ordinary people and to the administration. Some would be committed to the faith in Yahweh that the First Testament affirms, some would be more open-minded. Some would be identified with the administration, some would find it easier to be more independent. To call Jeremiah a prophet is not an unequivocal compliment nor an unequivocal encouragement.[[29]](#footnote-29) Yet here the designation is free of polemical undertones,[[30]](#footnote-30) despite the narratives that will follow in Jer 27 – 29, and in contrast to Amos 7:10-17.

What does it mean to be *the nations’ prophet* (*nābî’ laggôyim*)? “This is a very strange designation of a prophet.”[[31]](#footnote-31) While v. 5b clarifies, it thus also tantalizes. Who are these nations? Ephraim and Judah (so that the nations are not set over against Israel – Israel is one of the nations)?[[32]](#footnote-32) The regional and imperial powers, Egypt, Assyria, and Babylon? Neighbors such as Philistia, Moab, and Ammon? While most prophets have to say things that relate to the nations, for Jeremiah this role will be more central, as will emerge as the scroll unfolds. In v. 10 Yahweh will speak of Jeremiah being appointed about or against (*‘al*)the nations; in 25:9 that formulation recurs and *‘al* means unequivocally “against,” and Jer 25 – 28 expands on this theme. The description recurs again in 46:1 in the introduction to the messages about different nations in Jer 46 – 51. In the shorter term within the scroll, Jeremiah will speak of the nations coming to acknowledge Yahweh (3:17; 16:19), of their seeking blessing like Israel’s (4:2), of Yahweh attending to them (9:25-26 [24-25]), of Yahweh’s pouring out his wrath on them (10:25), and of them witnessing to what Yahweh does and who Israel is (4:16; 6:18; 18:13). As far as we know, none of this speaking will be addressed to the nations themselves (unless in Jer 27). It will be addressed to Judah’s kings and their cabinets, to priests and people (see v. 18), pointing out implications for foreign policy and religious policy and thus for what they therefore have to decide to do. The Jeremiah scroll as a whole will suggest developing the idea of *the nations’ prophet* in at least two directions. It means Yahweh’s judgment is coming against the entire world of nations. It also means that they may turn to Yahweh and thus be built and planted.[[33]](#footnote-33)

Jeremiah’s account prompts reflection on divine sovereignty, election, determination, and freewill,[[34]](#footnote-34) invites (as often happens) a rethinking of modern categories if we are to understand, and offers an alternative way of thinking about the issues they seek to articulate. Did he have a choice about being who he was and about being a prophet? It’s a logically odd question. Can I choose to be someone other than the person I am? Can I choose not to be myself? Sure! Will God let me make that choice? Maybe, maybe not. A vineyard owner (who stands for God) told his son to go and work in the vineyard but he didn’t go (Matt 21:28-32). On the other hand, there are people who try to decline God’s commission but fail (Moses, Saul, Jonah) and none about people who succeed in declining. Was Saul of Tarsus free to decline God’s “choice” (Acts 9:15) after Jesus knocked him off his horse? Was Jonah free to decline Yahweh’s commission after emerging from the fish? Sure! The dynamics of election are the dynamics of a personal interaction, and personal interactions don’t follow systematic rules. Jeremiah is about to join the company of people who try to resist God’s commission (people who decline to be themselves) and about to discover how Yahweh deals with his attempt as part of his relationship with him.

**6 “**What different answers God’s chosen ones give to his voice!” (consider Amos, Isaiah, Moses).[[35]](#footnote-35) Whereas Yahweh’s words were poetically and vividly symmetrical and rhythmic, Jeremiah’s response is un-poetic and un-rhythmic, suggesting his confusion and sense of panic. Paradoxically this feature forms part of the passage’s rhetoric; it helps establish that Jeremiah does not deliver his message of judgment because he wanted to.[[36]](#footnote-36) *Oh no* (*’ăhâ*: the traditional translation “alas” is not far out). Jeremiah addresses *the Lord Yahweh* but there is an illogic about his response. He is not treating Yahweh as the Lord. With further irony, he picks up one of Yahweh’s verbs, *yāda‘*. Yahweh knew/acknowledged him; he doesn’t know/acknowledge speaking. How can he address nations or take part in cabinet debates? He is a just a *kid* (*na‘ar*). As a term denoting youth, the word might cover anything from a child to a young adult; David describes Absalom as a kid (2 Sam 18:5, 12) and King Solomon describes himself in the same terms – indeed, as a little kid (1 Kgs 3:7). While not much more than half of the First Testament occurrences of “kid” refer to someone of youthful years,[[37]](#footnote-37) nearly half refer to someone who is (for instance) a servant (the first “kids” in the Scriptures are men capable of marching many miles to take part in a battle: Gen 14:24) or an apprentice, which is the nuance suggest by Jeremiah’s reference to knowing *how to speak*. While he may not be very old, and “understanding is gray hair for men” (Wisdom 4:9),[[38]](#footnote-38) his point concerns not his youthfulness but his lack of expertise or training or gifting. His objection is not so different from that of Moses in Exod 4:10-17. He is like someone praying in a lament-like way.[[39]](#footnote-39) After v. 5, his response is and is not a surprise. It’s significant that his first words should be a lament.[[40]](#footnote-40)

**7** “God’s only answer was to make His instructions clearer.”[[41]](#footnote-41) Like Moses, Jeremiah subsequently shows a magnificent capacity to speak. It seems unlikely that God simply grafted on that capacity. Either Jeremiah didn’t know he had it or he had had never tried to exercise it or he means he doesn’t know what he would say. It is the last possibility that leads best into Yahweh’s answer here. Yahweh does not simply ignore Jeremiah’s objection, but answers it, though the point is not immediately explicit. Again Yahweh speaks in a tricolon, though here it is the second and third cola that are neatly complementary, again comprising 4-4 cola through MT’s judicious use of hyphens:

because to everyone that I send you, you are to go

and everything that I order you, you are to speak

Jeremiah must go wherever he is told. Who is the *everyone* or where is the everywhere? The nations are the antecedent of the statement, and 25:15 will have Jeremiah sent to them.[[42]](#footnote-42) So this command does nothing to solve the problem Jeremiah raised; it simply ignores it. But the parallel colon provides an answer as it covers the action that will follow on the first. First there is sending, and therefore a place (everywhere!), which makes things worse, and then there is to be the obedient going. Sending raises the question “sending in what connection?” People are sent to do things, to discover things, to say things. But the designating of Jeremiah as a prophet makes the specifying not surprising: Jeremiah is sent *to speak*, sentas a kind of messenger. In connection with the fulfillment of the first instruction, there is the ordering, and therefore the content of the order (anything!), and therefore the obedient speaking, which solves the problem of Jeremiah’s correct apprehension that there is no way in which he can fulfill Yahweh’s commission on his own. This complementary colon corresponds to Yahweh’s promise concerning a prophet like Moses, “he will speak… everything that I order him” (Deut 18:18). We do not know whether Deut 18 antedates or postdates Jer 1, though in isolation from the broader considerations it makes better sense to see Jer 1 as portraying Jeremiah as a prophet like Moses than to see Deut 18 as promising someone like Jeremiah.[[43]](#footnote-43) Jeremiah fulfills the qualifications for being recognized as fulfilling Moses’ criteria for counting as a true prophet, though he needs not to be limited to re-saying what Moses said.[[44]](#footnote-44) The audience is then implicitly challenged to respond to Jeremiah in a way that recognizes his identity is in this connection.[[45]](#footnote-45)

**8** Yahweh does now offer reassurance in a way appropriate to a lament-like protest such as Jeremiah has uttered,[[46]](#footnote-46) but it relates to a different problem, which Jeremiah hasn’t raised and apparently hasn’t thought of. Yahweh’s words make for a parallel with his response to that earlier problem:

v. 7 Don’t say… because…

v. 8 Don’t be afraid… because…

Literally, Yahweh bids Jeremiah not to be afraid of people’s faces, an unusual expression. It wouldn’t be surprising if he were afraid of the presence of the king and his cabinet or of other prophets (cf. vv. 17-19). But the other occasions where Jeremiah uses the expression it relates to the Babylonians (41:18; 42:11), and here the antecedent of *them* is the nations (v. 5). Within v. 8, the first colon thereby raises a question (How can Jeremiah not be afraid?) which the second colon answers. *I am with you* is then a key promise (cf. Exod 3:12; Judg 6:16; Isa 41:10; 43:5),[[47]](#footnote-47) as is the undertaking *to snatch you away*, more prosaically “to rescue you,” with the backing *Yahweh’s affirmation* that Jeremiah himself will attach to words from Yahweh to the people, on countless occasions.

**9** Yahweh adds action to his words. So far the commission has involved only a conversation. Jeremiah has simply had an awareness of Yahweh saying something, of responding, and of Yahweh replying. Although Jeremiah has indicated its objective nature in the form of his words in v. 4, there need have been no divine words that anyone else heard and no words that Jeremiah outwardly articulated. But Yahweh now adds an action with an even more explicitly objective nature. Although again maybe no one else would have been aware of it, simply to call it a vision might be misleading. Touching (*nāga‘* hiphil) recalls Isa 6:7 (also 1 Kgs 19:5, 7, and passages in Daniel, though there the verb is qal). For both Isaiah and Jeremiah on the occasion of their commission there is a touching which deals with a problem they raise in connection with the commission, though the problems are different and so is the significance of the touching. In Isa 6 Yahweh applies a coal from the altar as a sacramental rite of cleansing. Here Yahweh’s touch overlaps in significance with Ezekiel’s eating a scroll that Yahweh gives him (Ezek 3): they are two ways by which Yahweh ensures that the prophet will speak Yahweh’s words. The action in Ezekiel suggests that Yahweh causes Ezekiel to internalize his perspective. The action in Jeremiah suggests that Yahweh causes Jeremiah to externalize his perspective. It is a performative action. Putting words in someone’s mouth means giving, them a message that they will restate (Exod 4:15; 2 Sam 14:19; Ezra 8:17). Yahweh is here doing so in a once-for-all way for Jeremiah, opening his eyes (to use a different image) so that he sees how Yahweh views his people and grasps the message that has to be brought home to it. Yahweh thus continues the verbal performative action to which he referred in v. 5b, as he implements the plan formulated before Jeremiah’s birth: *I am putting* is the same verb (*nātan*) as *I am making* in v. 5, and Yahweh’s *there* (*hinnēh*) corresponds to and confronts Jeremiah’s *there* in v. 6. At the same time, Yahweh’s words correspond further to his words concerning a prophet like Moses (Deut 18:18, except that there the verb is *śîm*). The correspondence again marks Jeremiah as a fulfillment of that promise. These words “will tear down much that his audience believes.”[[48]](#footnote-48)

**10** The performative action and the implementing again continue. *The nations’ prophet I am making you* (v. 5) becomes *I am appointing you… over the nations, yes, over the kingdoms*. If there was a touch of ambiguity in v. 4 (which one could translate as “I am giving you to the nations”), it is removed; Jeremiah is not a nice gift that Yahweh is “giving” to the nations. He is appointing Jeremiah over them, as (ironically) Nebuchadrezzar will “appoint” Gedaliah “over” Judah (40:11). Yahweh adds reference to these nations being kingdoms, making more explicit that it will be kings such as Nebuchadrezzar, Pharaoh Neco, and the Median kings (e.g., 46:2; 51:11) over whom Jeremiah will be exercising authority – though in the immediate context the reference to kingdoms will be taken up in v. 15. Jeremiah is to be in charge of them. The implications are not explicit. Are the nations to be the victims of calamity from Yahweh? Or are they to be Yahweh’s agents? Vv. 14-15 will suggest that the answer to both questions is “yes.”

Yahweh has said nothing yet about Jeremiah being a prophet in relation to Israel, and one would initially assume that the six infinitives that now follow refer to action against these nations and their kings. Jeremiah will indeed involve himself with the potential fall of Babylon, and with the uprooting and wiping out of Judah’s neighbors and their reestablishing (12:14-17). But he focuses more on the fall and recovery of Israel itself, and it is this connection that these verbs recur in 18:1-12; 24:6; 31:27-28, 40; 42:10; 45:4. The six infinitives thus raise a question that will be clarified only as the scroll unrolls. Nor does Yahweh indicate the verbs’ subject. Is it Jeremiah? Is it the nations and kingdoms? Is it Yahweh himself? It will be Yahweh in the other passages that talk in their terms.

The balance between the six verbs is simultaneously solemn and encouraging. On one hand, four have negative implications; on the other, at least Yahweh does not stop there. The balance between negative and positive is more favorable than it is in the eighth-century prophets, though less so than it is in Ezekiel (whose chronological location makes a difference). John Cassian nicely notes that it is twice as hard to drive out vice as to acquire virtue,[[49]](#footnote-49) though Jeremiah is talking about material as well as inward building and planting, not salvation in an abstract sense.[[50]](#footnote-50) The balance is also more favorable than the one in Jeremiah’s actual messages. The difference would be encouraging for people reading the scroll in a content when pulling up, pulling down, wiping out, and smashing have happened and hope is needed. At its very outset, the Jeremiah scroll, “which is so preoccupied with ‘exile’… can anticipate the destruction of Babylon and the restoration of Jerusalem in the word pair ‘plant and build.’” The scroll is “designed to walk Jews into, through, and beyond the reality of destruction and exile.”[[51]](#footnote-51) Perhaps the wording reflects the formulation of vv. 4-10 in that context.

*Pull up* presupposes the image of a people as a plant such as a vine or an olive, apparently securely planted in its land, but actually destined to be dug up. The image can apply to other peoples (12:14-17; 18:7) but it commonly applies to Israel in particular, as a people planted in Canaan but in danger of being thrown out from that country (1 Kgs 14:15; 2 Chr 7:20; Pss 44:2 [3]; 80:8 [9]). It can also be a general metaphor to describe a people thriving like a plant or being uprooted on its land (Jer 31:40; 45:4; 2 Sam 7:10; 1 Chr 17:9; Ps 80:15 [16]; Dan 11:4). While uprooting and planting is thus a familiar metaphor, *pull down* otherwise generally refers to the literal demolition of a structure (e.g., Jer 33:4; 39:8). The verbs for *pull up* and *pull down* are similar (*nātaš*, *nātaṣ*), which adds to the force of the double expression. *Wipe out* is a slightly less concrete term for terminating the life of something; *smash* has similar concrete implications to *pull down*. The language is the language of war – of siege and deportation.[[52]](#footnote-52) But the four negative verbs do lead into two positive ones taking up the same imagery in abb’a’ order: *pull down* will give way to *build*, and *pull up* to *plant*. The building metaphor is again more innovative, whereas the planting metaphor is familiar as a term for placing a people (back) on its land and/or causing it to flourish there (cf. 2:21; 11:17; 32:41; 42:10; Amos 9:15).

Typically, Yahweh’s words leave open whether demolition/uprooting and building/planting are alternatives between which Judah must choose (which is indeed the situation up until 587), or experiences that will follow one another if Judah does not respond to the prophet (which was how things worked out), or alternatives between which the recalcitrant and the repentant will *de facto* choose. Whereas in v. 3 with hindsight the future was closed, here it is open. “The choice before us,” Jeremiah would urge, is “repentance or ruin.”[[53]](#footnote-53) And if/when God decides to demolish, demolition will happen. But if/when God decides to plant, planting will take place. Jeremiah’s audience might hope that the four negative verbs indicate Yahweh’s intention for the nations, which facilitates the action on Israel’s behalf indicated by the positive verbs.[[54]](#footnote-54) If anything, the opposite is the case.[[55]](#footnote-55) But subsequent chapters of the scroll will imply that the two possibilities applying to Judah indeed also apply to the nations.[[56]](#footnote-56)

With a side look at the spiritual teachers and theologians of his day, Jesus comments that any plant that his Father has not planted will be pulled up. He also declares that structures built on sand not rock (that is, not built on obedience to his teaching) will be demolished. Indeed, he will consume it with the breath of his mouth. So his servant’s work had better take into account that the people of God is God’s planting, God’s building (Matt 7:25-27; 15:13; 2 Thess 2:8; 1 Cor 3:19).[[57]](#footnote-57)

## Jeremiah Reports a Message from Yahweh: He Is Going to Do What He Has Said (1:11-12)

11Yahweh’s message came to me: “What are you looking at, Jeremiah?” I said, “A watcher cane is what I’m looking at.” 12Yahweh said to me, “You’ve done well in looking, because I’m keeping watch overa my message, to act on it.”b

Syr, Tg have “hastening.”

MT has a marker here.

As the poetry added weight to the message in vv. 4-10 (it will do so again in vv. 17-19), here the quasi-visionary form, the questioning of the prophet, and the eventual responsive message from Yahweh have the same effect. To put it another way, in this subsection v. 12b alone contains Yahweh’s message. In content vv. 11-12a do nothing, but in giving the message impact, they make a significant contribution. There is no indication that the report relates something that happened soon after the commission described in vv. 4-10; it would make sense somewhat later when the question concerning Yahweh’s fulfilling his threats became pressing.

**11** Jeremiah sees something everyday, a *cane* that one might use while walking; it happens to come from an almond tree, whose Hebrew name can also mean *watcher*. Perhaps Jeremiah sees it only in his imagination, though that idea complicates things unnecessarily.[[58]](#footnote-58)

**12** Now the almond tree blossoms in a way that heralds the approach of spring, and the Syriac version of the Story of Ahiqar (2:7) urges, “Be not in a hurry, like the almond tree, whose blossom is the first to appear, but whose fruit is the last to be eaten.”[[59]](#footnote-59) But it seems unlikely that the Hebrew name of the almond tree (*šāqēd*) actually means that it is watching (*šāqad*) for spring, which makes little sense, and anyway Jeremiah does not see a blossoming branch but a stick. More likely the point depends on a paronomasia: the tree’s name happens to recall the word for *keeping watch*. In connection with the six verbs in v. 10 Jeremiah will later speak of Yahweh keeping watch over Judah (31:28), though in the short term that watchfulness or keeping an eye on Judah will not be a comfort (cf. 44:27; Dan 9:14; see also Isa 29:20). Keep watch is not a comforting verb (see 5:6). Here the expression involves a metonymy: Yahweh is keeping watch over his message, which means he is paying attention to it and intends to act on it. In the arrangement of vv. 4-12, *my message* suggests the intention indicated by v. 10, so the metonymy extends the lack of specificity concerning the object of the verbs there. In the broader context of vv. 1-3 and of the chapters that will follow, the message would be that terrible trouble is on its way, but then wondrous renewal. The first will seem never to arrive, though eventually it does. The second will seem hopelessly implausible, and Jeremiah will not see it arrive. But Yahweh will be watching over both aspects of the message. He does not declare the intention to act soon. He is rather promising definitely to act in due course. The promise is significant in the context of there being the long gap between his declarations and his actions, to which Jeremiah periodically refers.

It is tempting for the church to think that it is responsible to see to its future. Here, watching is God’s responsibility, not Jeremiah’s. “He does not have to worry and wonder about the success of the word…; he is only to be faithful in speaking and embodying that word.”[[60]](#footnote-60) “If God's people are selected for some special mission, if God's people speak God's word, and NOTHING HAPPENS, what then? What then? The answer that is preserved in this text… does not seem to answer the question. God's response is that his word is his word! The prophet is to speak all God directs him to speak. The prophet is not to set himself as judge to determine whether God is fulfilling his word.”[[61]](#footnote-61)

## Jeremiah Reports a Second Message from Yahweh: He Intends to Bring Disaster on Judah, and Jeremiah Must Be Bold (1:13-19)

13Yahweh’s message came to me a second time: “What are you looking at?” I said, “A fanneda pot is what I’m looking at, its face facing from northwards.”b 14Yahweh said to me, “From the north there will open out dire trouble on all the people who live in the country.c 15Because here am I, calling to all the kin-groups of the kingdoms to the northd (Yahweh’s affirmation). They will come and put each one his thronee at the opening to Jerusalem’s gateways, against all its walls all around, and against all Judah’s towns. 16I will speak out my authoritative decisions to themf because of all their dire action, in that they have abandoned me, and burned offeringsg to other gods and bowed down to things their hands made.h

17So you – you are to belt around your hips,

and set to and speak to them

everything that I myself will order you.

Don’t break downi from before them,

so that I don’t break you downj before them.

18But I: here,

I am making you today

A fortified town, an iron pillar,k

bronze wallsl over against the entire country,

For Judah’s kings and for its officials,

for its priestsm and for the people of the country.n

19They will battle against you but they will not win over you,

because I will be with you (Yahweh’s affirmation) to snatch you away.”o

The expression involves another metonymy; it is the fire under the pot that is fanned.

Literally, “its face from before northwards”: while the expression is thus tortuous, its meaning is clear enough. In a word such as *ṣāpônâ* the apparently locative ending need not be pressed: *mibbābelâ* (27:16) simply means “from Babylon,” *bәriblātâ* (52:10) simply means “at Riblah” (GK 90e); and cf. v. 15.

In light of vv. 4-10 readers could assume that *hā’āreṣ* means “the world” (cf. 25:29, 30), but in vv. 15-16 Jeremiah is making a transition to talk about disaster for Judah (cf. the same phrase in 6:12; 10:18).

The double phrase combines expressions that appear separately in 25:9 (and cf. e.g., 10:25; 25:26), and LXX omits “the kin-groups of.” In MT, kin-groups (*mišpāḥ*) appropriately arrive to deliver authoritative decisions (*mišpāṭ*).

The sentence involves a further metonymy: it is the kings rather than the kingdoms that will set up their thrones.

MT has *’ôtām*, a second object for the verb, as in 4:12; 12:1 (cf. DG 94, remark 4; *IBHS* 10.3.1c); some medieval mss imply *’ittem* “with them” as in 39:5; 52:9 (*BHS*).

“Burned incense” (KJV) is too narrow; D. Edelman (“The Meaning of *qiṭṭēr*,” *VT* 35 [1985]: 395-404) suggests the verb referred specifically to burning food offerings.

For MT’s plural *ma‘ăśê*, Vg implies singular *ma‘ăśēh*.

*Tēḥat* from *ḥātat* might be qal (BDB) or niphal (*HALOT*, *DCH*); if it is niphal, the meaning will be intransitive rather than passive.

Vg “don’t be afraid… because I will not let you be fearful” is suggestive and profound, but “because” is not a plausible rendering of *pen*, and if one translates *pen* “lest,” then “don’t be afraid… lest I make you fearful” makes poor sense. LXX “nor be terrified before them” also raises difficulties over the verb and over *pen*.

LXX lacks *an iron pillar*.

Possibly intensive, “a great bronze wall” (Lundbom, *Jeremiah 1 – 20*, 245); LXX, Vg, Syr, Tg have singular as in 15:20.

Syr nicely adds prophets (cf. 2:26; 32:32), while LXX lacks *for its priests*.

*‘Am hā’āreṣ* (cf. 34:19; 37:2; 52:25) may denote the Judahites in general or may be a technical term for landowners (see E. Lipiński, *TDOT* 11:174-75).

MT has a unit marker here.

Like vv. 11-12, vv. 13-16 use prose to report what Jeremiah sees and Yahweh’s interpretation of what he sees. Yahweh’s instructions and promises to Jeremiah himself (vv. 17-19) then take poetic form, as was the case in vv. 4-10. As happened in vv. 11-12, the initial report of the quasi-visionary experience in vv. 13-14 reveals Yahweh’s message only in the second part, but the introduction in v. 13 gives the message impact. Vv. 15-16 then expand on the message in v. 14 that emerges from the vision. In vv. 17-19, the poetry is even more prosaic than that in vv. 4-10, but the lines manifest rhythm, parallelism, and metaphor (v. 18aγδ). After an opening tricolon, five bicola follow, the middle three being syntactically interdependent. Whereas Yahweh’s declarations of intent concerning Judah are thus expressed straightforwardly and factually in vv. 13-16, his instructions to Jeremiah are again enhanced in their importance and eminence by their mildly poetic form in vv. 17-19.

**13** Jeremiah again spots something (perhaps only in his imagination) which Yahweh uses to trigger an awareness of a message. Jeremiah sees a seething cooking pot on a fire with its opening facing towards him; he is aware that he is south of it. The reference to its face may suggest it is tilted and thus about to boil over, though there is no need for that assumption; the quasi-vision again operates at least much verbally as visually, working first with an assonance between *fanned* (*nāpûaḥ*) and *from northwards* (*ṣāpônâ*).

**14** In an extension of the assonance Yahweh enables the pot to trigger an awareness that something is going to *open out* (*pātaḥ* niphal). Opening is what gates or windows or a mouth or ears or a fountain do, which makes one anticipate something good.[[62]](#footnote-62) But this pot is going to open out *dire trouble* that will overwhelm everyone. “Jeremiah threatens disaster, indeed only disaster.”[[63]](#footnote-63) The picture complements the one in vv. 11-12. That earlier image simply affirmed that something was going to happen, without indicating whether it was good or bad; this image resolves the ambiguity. The calamity will pour out from the north, the direction from which invaders commonly come. Assyria is in the north in Zeph 2:13; Babylon is in the north in Jeremiah; Media is implicitly in the north for Babylon itself in 50:9; and Gog is the north in Ezek 38:15. The multiple applications of the motif suggest that it combines political and supra-political reference, and geographical and supra-geographical reference; *ṣāpôn* can suggest the divine abode.[[64]](#footnote-64) The northern threat for Judah will recur through Jer 1 – 13, though only in 20:4-6 will Babylon be named, and only in 25:9 will Babylon at last be identified as the invader from the north. But already here “God testifies that the fire was already kindled in Chaldea and Assyria.”[[65]](#footnote-65) Meanwhile “the absence of a historical referent for the 'boiling pot, tilted from the north,’ at the beginning of the book strikes an ominous note and is all the more fearsome for its lack of specificity. The threat from the north is greater than any human enemy. Boiling, burning fluid, tipped over and uncontrolled, advances upon Judah and Jerusalem with unstoppable horror.”[[66]](#footnote-66)

**15** Whereas vv. 11-12 incorporated only a one-line interpretation of the watcher cane, vv. 15-16 offers a more substantial amplification of the cooking pot. While the audience could assume even in vv. 13-14 that Jeremiah is talking about the nations as the victims of Yahweh’s attack, now its objects become explicit. Jeremiah’s rhetoric compares with that in Amos 1 – 2: first open up the possibility of trouble coming for other people, then when the Israelite audience is sitting pleased with itself, put the boot in.[[67]](#footnote-67) His picture is hyperbolic or mythic,[[68]](#footnote-68) though slightly reminiscent of the invasion by four northern kings in Gen 14; it imagines the arrival of an enhanced version of such a coalition. Prosaically speaking, a commander-in-chief sets down his royal seat outside a capital city that he intends to capture and has his officers take their places around the city’s *walls* and around the other fortified *towns* in the country. *Jerusalem’s gateways* could include the gateways of the temple courtyard (e.g., 7:2; 22:4), and the image of a pillar in v. 18 suggests the temple (e.g., 27:19; 52:17, 20-22). The commander-in-chief waits for the city to surrender when it runs out of food and water (if he has plenty of time), or orders an assault (if he wants to be able to move on to the next recalcitrant people) before in due course walking through the gates as the city’s conqueror. A northern king will take this action in 597, and in 587 (39:1-3).

**16a** There is a further ambiguity to Jeremiah’s report. The idea of nations gathering around Jerusalem and planning to assault it recurs in the First Testament: see Isa 28 – 32; 36 – 37; Pss 46 – 48; Joel 3 [4]. In each case, in varying ways, the scenario works out other than they expect, giving Jerusalem reason for relief and rejoicing as it turns out that the nations have gathered to be judged not to judge.[[69]](#footnote-69) Jeremiah’s audience could hear his vision report within one of these frameworks, but then be as mistaken as they imagine the nations being mistaken. The rhetoric again works against them. There is also a further metaphorical aspect to the report. While a royal commander-in-chief may take a suitable seat on a campaign, a *throne* belongs in another context. It is where a king sits to exercise authority, to announce *authoritative decisions* (*mišpāṭ*), to issue judgments. And it is for this reason that the king will sit on his throne outside Jerusalem. He is there to issue Yahweh’s judgment against the city, against *them*. Yahweh’s bringing dire trouble (v. 14) is thus a response to Judah’s *dire action*. Jeremiah frequently uses the same word (*rā‘â*) to denote both the action and the consequence, suggesting that the consequences issue “naturally” from the action and/or that Yahweh ensures that they do.

**16b** There are three overlapping charges. They *have abandoned me*: they owe Yahweh faithfulness, and they have not shown it. It is a charge that will recur. They have *burned offerings to other gods*: the verb (*qāṭar* piel) comes from the word for incense (*qәṭōret*) and strictly suggests the offering up of a sacrifice in flames accompanied by the fragrance of incense, but it functions by synecdoche to denote the entire process of sacrifice. And they have *bowed down to things their hands made,* in contravention of a fundamental requirement of Israel’s relationship with Yahweh (Exod 20:4-5); indeed, human religion is all humanly-made. All three charges have parallels in the critique Huldah issued to Hilkiah (2 Kgs 22:17) and all three will recur through the Jeremiah scroll (e.g., 2:13, 17, 19; 5:7, 19; 7:9; 8:2; 10:3, 9; 11:12, 13, 17; 13:10). “Idolatry” in the sense of “worship of false gods” is “fundamentally the most serious charge that any ancient Israelite could face.”[[70]](#footnote-70) Yahweh is thus commissioning Jeremiah to confront Judah in connection with its faithlessness towards him rather than with people’s faithfulness towards one another; and the question with which he faces the church is whether it is faithful towards God.

**17a** There is no break in Yahweh’s words and no suggestion of a formal transition from one section to another, but the last three verses in Jeremiah’s report lift their eyes to drive home the implications of the report for Jeremiah himself, in a way that continues the theme of vv. 4-10. “To work,” then, Yahweh says.[[71]](#footnote-71) As a bidding addressed to Jeremiah, the words make a transition to verse to underscore their importance for him. A prophet’s words such as the ones in vv. 13-16 can always give the impression of declaring something that is inevitably going to happen, but Jeremiah makes more explicit than other prophets that their fulfillment depends for good and ill on the response they receive (see 18:1-11). Jeremiah’s job is to declare Yahweh’s intentions so as to elicit a response. So he is to secure his clothing around himself so it doesn’t get in his way (compare the English phrase “roll up your sleeves”) as he takes up the challenge Yahweh has put before him.

**17b** The first colon in Yahweh’s prohibition restates a earlier one:

v. 8 Don’t be afraid before them

v. 17 Don’t break down before them

Earlier, the potential object of Jeremiah’s fear was the nations whose prophet he was to be. Here the fear relates to Judah, of which the immediately preceding verses have now explicitly spoken.[[72]](#footnote-72) In v. 8 the exhortation included a promissory reassurance, which will recur in v. 19. In the meantime, if readers expect simple repetition, they get something different, a threatening warning. Like the English expression, *break down* (*ḥātat*, niphal then hiphil) can have both a physical and a psychological meaning. Yahweh works with both. If Jeremiah breaks down psychologically because of them (literally, “from their face/presence”), Yahweh will bring physical disaster on him through them (“to their face/presence”).

**18** But a promise backs up the exhortation. It takes the familiar form of a divine undertaking to protect and deliver,[[73]](#footnote-73) which can be addressed to someone about to do battle, though here Jeremiah’s battle is a verbal one. Yahweh again speaks performatively. In the very act of speaking with Jeremiah in the way that he is, Yahweh is acting on him psychologically and physically. The sequence of Jeremiah’s “I,” then Yahweh’s “I” quoting Jeremiah, then Yahweh’s own “I,” in the pronouns in vv. 6-8, continues in Yahweh’s “I” (v. 15) followed by his “you” (referring to Jeremiah, v. 17) and his further “I” here. There is something Yahweh must do and something Jeremiah must do.[[74]](#footnote-74) Once again Yahweh picks up the verb *I am making* (see v. 4). He is making Jeremiah a prophet; he is also necessarily making him invincible. Only here (and when Yahweh refers back to this moment in 6:27) is a *fortified town* a metaphor for a person. A fortified town (4:5; 5:17; 8:14; 34:7) is a town with a wall that makes it hard to take, but it is not invincible, so perhaps that metaphor is insufficient. On the other hand, there is no such thing as *an iron pillar*. Wooden pillars held up the Gaza temple, but they didn’t withstand Samson’s pushing (Judg 16:25-30). An iron pillar might be a different matter.[[75]](#footnote-75) There is also no such thing as *bronze walls*. Again, regular stone walls can be penetrated (39:8; 50:15; 51:44), but bronze walls might be a different matter. These metaphorical ones will be capable of withstanding *kings, officials, priests, and people*. Whereas the towns, pillars, and walls of Jerusalem and Judah will fall (v. 15), Jeremiah will not.[[76]](#footnote-76) “In contrast to Jerusalem, Jeramiah is the true invincible city.”[[77]](#footnote-77)

**19** He is called to wage a *battle* for his people’s minds and they will oppose him, but they will not overcome him.[[78]](#footnote-78) Jesus’s promise to Peter (Matt 16:18) makes a similar promise to him.[[79]](#footnote-79) Jeremiah will be under attack from Judah as Judah will be under attack from Babylon. Their fighting against him will link with his being a kind of embodiment of Yahweh’s word.[[80]](#footnote-80) They will opposes him because they are opposing Yahweh; the implicit reference to this dynamic is an aspect of the way some central themes of the scroll are flagged in the account of his commission.[[81]](#footnote-81) Once again the first colon raises a question which the second has to answer. Jeremiah will stand not because of strength in him but because Yahweh is with him to rescue him, *to snatch you away*. Yahweh exactly repeats v. 8b except for the order of words at the end, completing the repetition that was initiated in v. 17 but broken off in threatening fashion.

“There is no happier man… than the man who, having been called by God to be a spokesman for God, has been obedient to the heavenly vision and has answered the call with a resounding "Here am I. Send me!" (Isa 6:8).”[[82]](#footnote-82) Jeremiah does not claim that response here, but what follows speaks louder than the omission.

# Part One: Confrontation, Exhortation, Warning (2:1 – 6:36)

Jer 2 – 6 as a whole is “a giant oracle of disaster,”[[83]](#footnote-83) a compilation of messages that confront Judah about refusing to follow Yahweh, warn it about trouble that will follow, urge it to turn back, and promise Yahweh’s restoration.[[84]](#footnote-84) While individual messages within the compilation may combine a number of these features, the compilation focuses on one or other of them at different times in a way that mostly corresponds to the medieval chapter divisions:

2:1-37 mostly confrontation/critique

3:1—4:4 mostly exhortation to turn, and promises

4:5-31 mostly warnings

5:1-31 mostly confrontation/critique

6:1-30 mostly warnings

Although the compilation thus includes only one section that comprises explicit exhortation (exhortation does resume in Jer 7, but it takes a different form), the object throughout is to get Judah to turn.

Jer 36 tells a gripping story about Jeremiah putting into writing the messages Yahweh had given him over the two decades from the time of Josiah to that of Jehoiakim. If he did indeed dictate his messages from memory in that way, it would not be surprising if the resultant scroll included something like Jer 2 or even if Jer 2 – 6 is a (perhaps expanded) version of that scroll. And heuristically, to think of Jer 2 – 6 in that way facilitates an imaginative interaction with the chapters and with events in the time of Jehoiakim. The chapters make hardly any concrete historical references (3:6 is a general one, and 2:16 may be an exception). But they make clear that they presuppose a situation in which Judah has abandoned Yahweh, is following other deities and has Egypt as political overlord and resource, yet does not see itself as in the wrong in relation to Yahweh. A scroll with this background would include elements of what Jeremiah had begun saying at the time of his commissioning, before Josiah’s reformation, but one would not expect to be able to separate out particular messages so as to link them with such earlier contexts. The sayings “correctly communicate the earlier message of Jeremiah, but never assumed precisely this form until he dictated them to Baruch.”[[85]](#footnote-85) They have become part of a statement focusing on what needs to be said in Jehoiakim’s time when Judah’s life again manifested the dynamics that Josiah’s reformation had aimed to eliminate, and when Egypt is a key factor in Judah’s life (2 Kings 23:31 – 24:7).[[86]](#footnote-86)

# Mostly Confrontation (2:1-37)

Printed Bibles treat Jer 2 as one unit, and it does hang together. The chapter as a whole is not an established form of speech but a monolog of an abandoned God.[[87]](#footnote-87) It confronts people about going back on their commitment to Yahweh (which they deny) by turning to other religious resources and other political resources, both of which are useless, and it warns them about disaster that will result. It attributes to Judah a sequence of claims, declarations of intent, denials, and pleas that suggest a confused lack of ability to think straight.[[88]](#footnote-88) It does not tell them what to do about it; such exhortation will come in 3:1 – 4:4. It offers a kaleidoscope of images for understanding aspects of the story of Yahweh and Israel and of their relationship, allowing the images and aspects of the understanding to tumble over one another and interweave rather than expounding them systematically or aiming to generate an argument or structure for the whole. In this connection it uses a variety of communicative devices to seek to get its message home and provoke a response. It uses rhetorical questions, and it puts series of statements on the lips of Israel and its leadership (vv. 6, 8, 20, 23, 25, 27[×3], 31, 35[×2]) that may sometimes indicate what people actually say but are often articulating the implications of their attitudes or parodying them, all as part of seeking to communicate with them.[[89]](#footnote-89) The chapter moves between speaking “as” Yahweh and speaking “as” Jeremiah, and both Yahweh and Jeremiah speak in poetry. It also moves between speaking to and about Jerusalem as a city (in the feminine singular), Judah as a nation (in the masculine singular), and the people of city or nation or household (in the plural).[[90]](#footnote-90) Both forms of variation (who speaks and who is spoken to or about) have different communicative or rhetorical effects. Repetitions constitute a feature of its rhetoric, of the way it seeks to communicate and persuade (go after, dire, household, empty, country, could not be any use, argue, changed, cisterns, abandon, path, what do you have for a path… to drink the water).

The images that Jer 2 exploits express a theology. They are:

* Yahweh as Jerusalem’s husband, Jerusalem as Yahweh’s bride. In the personal relationship of love and mutual commitment between Yahweh and Israel, the bride was full of love and commitment at the beginning. But she looked to other lovers – nations and deities. She turned into a whore, an alien woman. She is promiscuous, looking in all directions religiously and politically. It’s as if she has put out of mind her bridal finery.[[91]](#footnote-91) Argument is a feature of the relationship: Yahweh argues with Israel, challenges it to listen, asks it questions.
* Israel as a good-quality vine. The trouble is that it has produced corrupt grapes.
* Yahweh as Israel’s master, Israel as Yahweh’s servant. Yahweh’s being master means he is provider and protector. Israel’s being servant in the relationship means it is expected to rely on him in this connection, and to accept control and restraint. It prefers to be free, to make its own decisions. People want “religious freedom” and “the right to choose whatever deity they wish.” As a result the master will see to the servant’s disciplining.
* Jerusalem as being on a path. Who it follows or goes after is vital to walking on this path. The trouble is, it is inclined to be wayward, to choose its own path, to follow other guides, to wander all over the place like a camel or a wild donkey.

The chapter also works with a series of contrasts and with an understanding of Israel’s story; they, too, express a theology. The contrasts are:

* Wilderness and cultivable land; the world divides into wilderness and orchard. Wilderness is characterized by steppe and pit, emptiness and darkness. Cultivable land means the fruitfulness of garden or orchard. Related is the fact that water is a key to life. Yahweh is the source of such provision; other deities are not, and neither are other political powers.
* The ordinary and the sacred. There is nothing wrong with being ordinary (six days are ordinary), but Israel is sacred to Yahweh (like the Sabbath), and Yahweh’s land is his domain and must be treated as such. It must not be defiled and made offensive by the importing of other deities. Israel itself has become stained through its engaging in worship that purports to honor Yahweh but actually defiles.
* The real God and the so-called gods. The real God has acted in Israel’s experience. The so-called gods are empty. They are useless. They are non-gods. There is nothing behind the image of wood and rock. Yahweh is the only deity who can do anything useful.
* Honor and shame. Israel’s being Yahweh’s servant is the source of its honor. Following other masters is Israel’s shame. Self-deceit is a key feature in its waywardness. Its religious and political leadership is particularly at fault.

And the understanding of Israel’s story is:

* Yahweh got Israel out of Egypt, made it his personal domain, and protected it.
* Yahweh brought Israel through the darkness and emptiness of the wilderness, and Israel followed him on that path.
* Yahweh brought Israel into the fertile land of Canaan, but there Israel turned to other religious and political resources and defiled the country, forgetting the story.
* Yahweh has been engaged in harsh discipline of Israel, designed to turn it back, but this discipline has not worked.
* Yahweh intends to impose such discipline in a more devastating way. It will then look to Yahweh, but he will look the other way. It will be shamed by its religious and political resources.

I outline the chapter as follows:[[92]](#footnote-92)

vv. 1-8 A wistful remembering

vv. 9-13 An extension to the argument

vv. 14-20a An explanation of why has Israel become plunder

vv. 20b-25 The defilement

vv. 26-31aα The shameful community

vv. 31aβ-37 The shaming to come

## A Wistful Remembering (2:1-8)

1Yahweh’s word came to me: 2Go,a proclaimb in the ears of Jerusalem:

Yahweh has said this:c

I have been mindfuld about you, of youre youthful commitment,

of your bridal love,f

Of your going after me in the wilderness,

in a country not sown.g

3Israel was something sacred to Yahweh,

the beginning of his yield.h

All who ate it would incur liability –

dire trouble would come to themi (Yahweh’s affirmation).j

4Listen to Yahweh’s message, household of Jacob,

all the kin-groups of the household of Israel.

5Yahweh has said this:

What did your forebears find in me by way of fraud,k

that they went far away from me?

They went after something emptyl and became empty,

6and they didn’t say, “Where is Yahweh,

The one who got us up from the country of Egypt,

who enabled us to go through the wilderness,

Through a country of steppe and pit,

through a country of desert and deathly darkness,m

Through a country that no one passed through,

and where no human being lived?”

7I enabled you to come to orchard country,

to eat its fruit and its good things.

But you came and defiled my country;

my domain you made into something offensive.n

8The priests – they have not said, “Where is Yahweh?”;

the people controlling the instruction – they have not acknowledged me.

The shepherds – they have rebelled against me;

the prophets – they have prophesied through the Master;o

after things thatp could not be any use,q they have gone.

Yahweh uses the infinitive absolute rather than the imperative of *hālak*, a characteristic Jeremianic usage(3:12; 13:1; 17:19; 19:1; 28:13; 34:2; 35:2, 13; 39:16), with more peremptory or solemn effect (also 2 Sam 24:12; 2 Kgs 5:10; Isa 38:5) (GK 113bb, noting that here it is followed by *waw-*consecutive).

Theod translates *qārā’* “read”: see the comment.

LXX and Vg, here and elsewhere, have “says this,” but the verb is qatal: literally, “thus Yahweh has said.” The expression “reflects the prophetic consciousness of having received a message” from Yahweh (DG 57d remark 3). LXX has a much shorter introduction to vv. 1-8, simply “And he said, these things the Lord says.”

*Zākartî* is also qatal, but it refers to an action whose effect continues into the present (GK106g); one could call such a verb quasi-stative (JM 112a).

The suffixes in this line might be objective (Vg, also Jerome, *Jeremiah*, 8; Qara in *miqrā’ôt gәdôlôt* on the passage) or subjective (LXX, Tg, Rashi in *miqrā’ôt gәdôlôt* on the passage): see the comment.

LXX has *agapē*, neatly in light of that word’s New Testament resonances, but those overtones mean it is really more an equivalent to *ḥesed* (for which LXX has its regular equivalent *eleos*, “pity”; cf. Vg *miserans*).

For *after me in the wilderness, in a country not sown* LXX has *after Israel’s sacred one*.

*Tәbû’ātô*; K *tbw’th* may imply “its [the country’s] yield,” though see GK 7c, 91d.

The yiqtol verbs suggest that Jeremiah is making a general/logical statement; past imperfect fits less well.

MT has a unit marker here.

*Mah* is followed by accusative of specification: see *IBHS* 18.1e, 18.3b; DG 8 remark 2; JM 144d.

*Hahebel* with the article, as in 2 Kgs 17:15, may be a pejorative substitute for *habba‘al* “the Master” (Bright, *Jeremiah*,15).

*Ṣalmāwet* may be a repointing of *šalmût* (see BDB, *HALOT*), but it gained a life of its own: cf. Tg, Syr, Aq, Sym, Th. Vg has a composite rendering, “deathly image”; on LXX “fruitless” see Holladay, *Jeremiah* 1:49, also *HUB*.

The line works abb’a’. It brings to an end a sequence of five lines where the word *country* plays a key role, with a sequence of different forms of parallelism (cf. *CHP*, 281.

LXX gives *Baal* a feminine article, here and elsewhere, which encourages an association between *Baal*  and (feminine) *bōšet*, “shame” (see 3:24; 11:13).

An unmarked relative clause follows the construct (see DG 11-12; GK 155n; *IBHS* 9.6c, 19.6b).

“Could [not] be any use” (*yô‘ilû*) makes for paronomasia with “Master” (*ba‘al*) and thus comments on it.

Cf. H.-D. Neef, “**Gottes** Treue und Israels Untreue,” *ZAW* 99 (1987): 37-58 (though he treats vv. 1-13 as a unit).

The opening section in this chapter provides an example of the ambiguity attaching to possible section breaks. One could get the impression that vv. 1-3 are a section and that v. 4 makes a new start (MT treats vv. 1-3 as a complete unit). But in substance vv. 1-3 don’t make sense on their own: Yahweh recalls the past here, but to what end? What is his point? It is the confrontation that now follows, which begins in v. 4, that indicates the point.[[93]](#footnote-93)

Each of the major parts that comprise Jer 1 – 25 begins by undermining an aspect of the faith that Judah was committed to – not because the faith was wrong, but because it had got twisted in Judah’s thinking. Part One of the scroll begins with the exodus. The section comprises an innovative and thereby attention-drawing variant on the recurrent pattern whereby a prophet reminds Israel of how Yahweh had dealt with it in the past and thus of how things used to be and confronts it with the anomalous nature of how things are and of its rebelliousness. Other examples are Isa 1:2-3; Amos 3:1-2; Mic 6:1-8; and a series of such unhappy recollections in Hos 9:10 – 13:16 [14:1].[[94]](#footnote-94) *Die Geschichte ist das Gericht*, the history is the judgment.[[95]](#footnote-95)Here Jeremiah places a distinctive emphasis on Israel’s original commitment to Yahweh as opposed simply an emphasis on Yahweh’s commitment to Israel. The section thus outlines as follows:

vv. 1-2aα introduction to 2:1 – 6:30

v. 2aβ introduction to vv. 2aγ-3

vv. 2aγ-3 Yahweh’s positive memory

four bicola, the first two linked by enjambment

v. 4-5aα introduction to vv. 5aβ-8

vv. 5aβ-8 Yahweh’s negative memory

eight bicola, five linked by enjambment, and a closing tricolon

**1-2aαβ.** Jeremiah begins with a testimony that repeats the phrase from 1:4, 11, 13, *Yahweh’s* *message came to me*, and thus suggests that what follows corresponds to what was happening there. Yahweh’s commissioning of proclamation in *Jerusalem* also continues the commissioning that began there; vv. 1-2aα introduces Jer 2 – 6 as a whole. As this chapter follows on Jer 1 and suggests the beginning of Jeremiah’s prophetic activity, the order to *go* might encourage the scroll’s readers to imagine Jeremiah taking the hour’s walk and making the move from Anathoth to Jerusalem. But *go, proclaim* recurs in 3:12 and *proclaim* [*qārā’*] *in the ears of Jerusalem* is also the expression for “read out in the ears” of Judah in 36:6, 10, 13, 14. This link encourages the scroll’s readers to take Jer 2 – 6 as the content of what Jeremiah read out on the occasion related in Jer 36, when he was long-settled in the city. The relationship between Jer 2 and Jer 36 then parallels that between Jer 7 (a message Jeremiah delivered in the temple) and Jer 26 (the story of that message’s delivery). In effect, the scroll itself implies, if you wonder what Jeremiah said in the story told in Jer 36, you won’t go far wrong if you read Jer 2 – 6; and if you wonder what it was like when Jeremiah proclaimed Jer 2 – 6, you won’t go far wrong if you read the story in Jer 36. Presumably Yahweh generally expected Jeremiah to preach where the maximum number of Jerusalemites would hear, which would include the temple gateways and grounds and the other gateways in the city itself (e.g., 7:2; 17:19; 19:2, 14; 22:2; 26:2; 28:1; 36:10). *Yahweh has said this* (Jeremiah speaks as the King’s messenger) then leads into what immediately follows in vv. 1-8, or perhaps into Jer 2 as a whole.

**2aγδ** Like other towns, Jerusalem is grammatically feminine, which opens up the possibility of addressing it as a girl or woman, through much of the chapter. And immediately, Yahweh addresses Ms. Jerusalem as his one-time bride. A metonymy is involved; it was the city’s population whose forebears journeyed through the wilderness. Yahweh is being *mindful* of the past: as commonly happens, Yahweh’s “remembering” (the traditional translation of *zākar*) is not an accidental recalling but a deliberate action, an intentional mental act with practical implications. Near the beginning of the scroll is this indication that for Yahweh there is a past, a present, and a future.[[96]](#footnote-96) Further, the remembering is not just a past act but one with “an abiding significance, with continuing effects.”[[97]](#footnote-97) Yahweh’s remembering is usually good news (31:20; cf. Pss 98:3; 105:8, 42; 115:12), though not always (Jer 14:10; 44:21), and the audience will do well to keep both possibilities in mind. After all, the picture of the community as Yahweh’s wife goes back to Hosea, where the background is the wife’s unfaithfulness, and this fact is the yet-unspoken implication here. Jeremiah anticipatorily underlines the horrific nature of the bride’s unfaithfulness by picturing the idyllic early years of the relationship. They were characterized by the formidable combination of *commitment* and *love* (*ḥesed*, *’ahăbâ*), which ought to make for a wonderful marriage. The juxtaposition of *youthful commitment* and *bridal love* is subtle: love is a more general word than commitment, but bridal is a more concrete and precise word than youthful. *’Ahăbâ* is an even more all-purpose word than the English word “love.” It covers romantic love, other forms of affection, friendship, and a liking for food, but it can additionally imply loyalty and submission, and it can operate in the political sphere as well as the interpersonal (cf. 1 Kgs 5:15).[[98]](#footnote-98) *Ḥesed* also operates in both spheres. It expresses itself in two related ways. It can denote a commitment that someone undertakes when under no obligation to do so (so it overlaps with grace or favor); it can denote a commitment that someone maintains when the other party has forfeited any right to expect it (so it denotes a faithfulness or truthfulness that goes beyond what was required).

**2b** Elsewhere, Yahweh’s remembering commonly concerns the way he himself has related to Israel (cf. 31:2-3 in a recollection of the wilderness years), and here one might initially understand him to be recalling his own loving commitment to Jerusalem when it was his young bride. But this parallel line in the double bicolon resolves any ambiguity and indicates that Yahweh is recalling his bride’s loving commitment.[[99]](#footnote-99) *Your bridal love* expands on *your youthful commitment*, then *your going after me in the wilderness* expands on *your bridal love*, and *in a region that was not sown* expands on *in the wilderness*. It’s the only occasion where Jeremiah speaks of *going after* in a positive way.[[100]](#footnote-100) The (patriarchal) marriage presupposes that the bride’s love and commitment expresses itself in submission to her husband, which means she does not walk alongside him: he leads the way and she follows. If this assumption worries Western readers, one might add that Jeremiah implies no model for marriage; he is simply picking up the way marriage works in a traditional context in order to communicate something. But it does imply a model for our relationship with God. We are not equal partners in an egalitarian relationship. He is the boss. But Hosea had complained about the commitment that faded too quickly and the love that Israel showed in another direction (Hos 6:4; 2:5-13 [5-15]), and Jeremiah is about to do the same. In substance, Yahweh is first recalling the commitment Israel made to the *bәrît* or pact[[101]](#footnote-101) at Sinai after leaving Egypt. That word does not feature, even if the idea is there in the background: Judah has gone back on a relationship.[[102]](#footnote-102) But Jeremiah makes no reference to the exodus (though he will make one shortly), to Sinai, or to a pact. While Hosea had spoken of a pact and of the exodus, he overlaid the exodus/pact theme with the talk of a marriage relationship, and it is this theme that he links with talk of the wilderness (see esp. Hos 2:15 [17]). Jeremiah takes up the marriage-wilderness theme without referring to exodus or pact at this point. To put it another way, the pact metaphor can operate within the framework of marriage, adoptive parenthood, or politics; Jeremiah focuses on the last.[[103]](#footnote-103) Yahweh is simply the husband and Jerusalem is the wife; Jeremiah presupposes the love and commitment of husband to wife, though they are not mentioned. The point about characterizing the wilderness as a place where not much grows is that the husband looked after his wife there. Jeremiah is not giving expression to a wilderness ideal. “It is… a matter of history rather than of culture.” When things went wrong, “the fault lay with Israel and not with Canaan.”[[104]](#footnote-104) Further, in Jeremiah the marriage between Yahweh and Israel/Jerusalem is more a model (and here an incidental one) than a ruling metaphor, as it is in Hosea.[[105]](#footnote-105)

**3** Jeremiah now speaks of *Yahweh* in the third person, though the closing *Yahweh’s affirmation* inhibits the reader from making a sharp distinction. Jeremiah is still passing on Yahweh’s message. The wilderness journey had a further characteristic. It was also dangerous, because of the attacks of people such as Amalekites and Amorites (Exod 17:8-15; Num 21:1-3). But a patriarchal husband is protector as well as provider. The commitment and love are indeed mutual. Yet Yahweh’s point in v. 3 is a more self-regarding one. A patriarchal husband is entitled to feel proprietary in relation to his wife. Or to put it another way, Jeremiah’s point is a more theocentric one. Actually Yahweh changes metaphor. It is almost as if the talk about a region where nothing grows reminds him of things growing and of harvest, which suggests another image. The harvest reference would have particular resonance if Jeremiah delivered his message at the Sukkot festival.[[106]](#footnote-106) At harvest time, the first-fruits, *the beginning of* *his* *yield*, belong to Yahweh (e.g., Exod 23:19; 34:26). By rights, the whole harvest does; it’s his produce. But he is willing to share, if people keep off what he claims. It’s the principle that operates in connection with Sabbath and tithes. And as he claims first-fruits, Sabbath, and tithes, so he claims Israel. If other people try to take over what he claims, they get into dire trouble, like people who eat the first-fruits. It happened to Amalek and to the Amorites of Arad (Exod 17:8-15; Num 21:1-3). The threat recalls the way disaster could come to an adulteress through the ritual described in Num 5:11-31.[[107]](#footnote-107) In the preceding line the second colon had made something explicit in relation to the first or answered a question it might raise: Why was Israel *sacred to Yahweh*? He claimed it as he claimed the first-fruits of the harvest. In this line the question might be, Did it make any difference to anyone to *incur* *liability* (one can break rules and get away with it)? And the parallel colon responds, You bet it did. As sacredness means Yahweh has claimed something, liability and guilt (the verb *’āšam/’āšēm*) imply that one indeed must make recompense one way or another (the verb links theory and action, like the verbs for love, remembering, and knowing). The two lines thus also have a similar interrelationship to that of the cola. Does the sacredness of Israel as the people Yahweh claims have any implications for people who ignore that claim? You bet it does.

**4** We still have not discovered the point of that touching and encouraging recollection. In light of it, Yahweh has something to say to Jacob/Israel. His “wife” now becomes the huge family of which he is head. Jeremiah is speaking mostly to Judahites, who form the main surviving expression of the *household of Jacob* and the *kin-groups of the household of Israel,* though among people living in Judah were people from Ephraim who had moved south before or after the fall of Samaria. Delivering a declaration addressed to the entire community would again be especially appropriate if the occasion was a pilgrimage festival such as Sukkot.[[108]](#footnote-108) And recollecting the marvels of the relationship of Yahweh and Israel, which the festival celebrated, would fit such an occasion.

**5a** It now becomes clear thatthe recollecting in vv. 2-3 is but the background to putting the boot in (cf. Amos 1 – 2). “The words are a setup.”[[109]](#footnote-109) Jeremiah still allows for some suspense as he proceeds, when he moves from the wilderness generation to the *forebears* of the Israel of his day; he is not yet talking about people alive in the present. These forebears are not now the wilderness generation, who were faithful. Admittedly, they had their own moments of going after something empty (Deut 32:21), so the memory is rose-tinted; but it is in our interests that God has a “selective memory.”[[110]](#footnote-110) Nor are the forebears Ephraim, who were not the Jerusalemites’ forebears. Nor are they Manasseh’s generation in Judah, since Yahweh is reflecting on a more distant abandonment. They are the generation that entered into Canaan and its successors; Judges relates how *they went far away from me*. Don’t be far away from me, Israel sometimes pleads, implicitly accusingly (e.g., Ps 22:10, 18 [12, 20]). This verse resembles one of the occasions when Yahweh expostulates “What? *You* accuse *me* of going far away?” The possibility of their suggesting that there is *fraud* (*‘āwel*) in Yahweh seems monstrous. Fraud is the opposite of truthfulness or faithfulness; it suggests being deviant , perverse, false, unreliable, faithless; it is the opposite of *ṣedeq/ṣәdāqâ* or *’ĕmet/’ĕmûnâ*. There is no fraud in Yahweh (Deut 32:4; also the antitheses in 25:15-16). Jeremiah “by his rhetorical question forces the listener to conceive the inconceivable,” and Yahweh’s willingness to raise the possibility suggests a kind of self-denying self-emptying, a *kenosis* (Phil 2:7).[[111]](#footnote-111)

**5b-6** The grievous truth is that instead of going after Yahweh (v. 2) they *went after* other deities. And the odd truth is that these entities whom they decided to follow constituted *something empty* (*hebel)*, a favorite word in Jeremiah to describe gods other than Yahweh.[[112]](#footnote-112) They are something as evanescent as breath. There is no substance to them. They are hollow. Going after them rather than Yahweh is so illogical. And further, following them means you end up like them (cf. Ps 115:8). It is indeed what happened to Ephraim(2 Kgs 17:15). Equally illogical is the fact that the forebears didn’t ask *Where is Yahweh*? While this question can be a disbelieving one (e.g., Ps 42:3, 10 [4, 11]), it can be the question people properly ask when they are in trouble (Job 35:10; cf. Ps 89:49 [50]; Isa 63:11, 15). It is the way they seek God (e.g., Jer 29:13). It was illogical for them not to ask the question, furthermore, because they had that experience of Yahweh’s provision in the wilderness of which vv. 2-3 spoke. It’s at this point that Yahweh goes behind Sinai to the exodus itself, an important theme in its own right in Jeremiah.[[113]](#footnote-113) The following three lines involve an enjambment in which Yahweh describes the *wilderness* itself in scarier terms. In general, wilderness is not a bad word or place; while wilderness has insufficient rainfall to grow regular crops, it can provide pasturage. But *steppe* (*‘ărābâ*) is the word for the rainless area around the Dead Sea, *the* Arabah. And a *pit* is something you fall into and may not be able to get out of; the word here suggests the deep clefts characterizing the area south and east of Judah proper, and/or the Jordan Rift itself. *Desert* is waterless wasteland where you can die of thirst. *Deathly darkness* (*ṣalmāwet*) suggests a region of extreme and unpredictable danger (cf. Ps 23:4). It’s not surprising that no one *passed through*, still less *lived* there; in the middle and last of the three lines, the second colon goes beyond the first each time. You could say the problem was that the people stopped telling the right stories, which is associated with “the banalization of God”; and “wrong stories can lead to death.”[[114]](#footnote-114) (I wondered whether *banalization* was a typo for *ba‘alization*; I assume not, but it anyway makes for a paronomasia worthy of Jeremiah, linking neatly with his characterization of *ba‘al* as *hebel*, which implies banal. Further, maybe the word *hebel* suggests that Cain and Abel [*hebel*] lie buried in this passage.)[[115]](#footnote-115)

**7** Yahweh has been exaggerating; the wilderness isn’t that bad. But the exaggeration points up the contrast with the land flowing with milk and honey, and underscores the horrific nature of what followed. Canaan was *my country* and *my domain*: the second term again enhances the first and makes the description more specific. A family’s *domain* or possession (*naḥălâ*, traditionally “inheritance”) is its tract of land that in theory no one can take away. Canaan has that status for Yahweh. It’s special to him, as Naboth’s vineyard (part of his *naḥălâ*) was special to him (1 Kgs 21:3). But the forebears *defiled* it (*tāmē’*) and made it *something* *offensive* (*tô‘ēbâ*). “A central contrast in Jeremiah 2:1 – 4:4 is that between a pure and a perverted land.”[[116]](#footnote-116) Through their recourse to other deities the land moves from one extreme to another, from being something precious to being something disgusting. “Yahweh’s action leaves the land fruitful and good. Israel’s action leaves it defiled and abominable.”[[117]](#footnote-117) Actually Yahweh doesn’t say *they* did it, but *you* did. *I enabled* *you to come* and take possession of my country, and *you defiled* it. His audience stands in continuity with its forebears. He does not imply that they share in the guilt of their forebears even though they have not continued the same lifestyle;[[118]](#footnote-118) he does not imply that people may be punished for wrongdoing they did not undertake. His words do recognize that one generation’s wrongdoing can have an effect on the next generation and the one after and the one after, as those succeeding generations may yield to their forebears influence. That dynamic has operated in Judah. It continues to operate as Josiah fails to root out Manasseh’s wrongdoing, and Manasseh bears terrible fruit in 597 and 587.

**8aαβ** Yahweh makes another seamless transition from talking about the failings of the forebears in general, in the distant past, to talking about the failings of the leaders of the community in the recent past, as they continue into the present. He does so most specifically as he begins by taking up the critique in v. 6 and applying it to *the priests*. The way he makes this first reference to priests among the community’s religious leaders shows that he is not anti-priest. He does not critique priesthood as such (after all, the came from priestly stock himself), nor does he imply that the Jerusalem priesthood is intrinsically illegitimate.[[119]](#footnote-119) One of the priests’ roles was to lead people in prayer when they brought their sacrifices, and one can imagine them thus calling on Yahweh on behalf of people when they were in need, as Joel exhorts (Joel 2:17). Their particular responsibility is to ask *Where is Yahweh* on people’s behalf.But they are not doing so. The people *controlling* or holding or wielding (*tāpaś*) *the instruction* (the *tôrâ*)might be the people who are called the scribes, the experts who possess Yahweh’s instruction, in 8:8-9.[[120]](#footnote-120) They appear with priest and prophet in 18:18. But there *instruction* is the business of priests, and here the parallelism would work well if *the people controlling the instruction* is another way of describing the priests. They hold onto the *tôrâ*. Deut 9:17 uses this verb to describe Moses holding the stones inscribed with the Decalogue before smashing them, which might provide a metaphor for the people Jeremiah is describing. The verb comes more frequently in the Jeremiah scroll than anywhere else, commonly to denote taking control of someone to stop them acting or speaking (26:8; 34:3; 37:13-14; 52:9), which is also metaphorically suggestive. If only they were holding the instruction in order to wield it in accordance with its design, like warriors with their weapons or like farmers with their implements (46:9; 50:16). But whether they are priests or scribes, *they have not acknowledged me*, a horrifying comment on either group; it is another key verb in the Jeremiah scroll.[[121]](#footnote-121) “To know YHWH is to recognize him as the Lord, as the center of life, and this recognition is binding. But the Judahites have a problem of knowledge… due to a crisis of memory.”[[122]](#footnote-122) If the problem is not that they don’t name the name of Yahweh but that they have assimilated Yahweh to the Master,[[123]](#footnote-123) then Jeremiah is making an acerbic comment about the significance of their prayer and their teaching. They do call on Yahweh by name, but only nominally. Jeremiah functions by means of the device of “antilanguage,” of redefining what people mean by their words – because they have already redefined them. “He tars all the religious expressions of his contemporaries with the same brush.” Even if they don’t see themselves as serving the Master, he talks as if they are.[[124]](#footnote-124) They resemble modern congregations that refer to Jesus but have so reconceptualized him that their acknowledgment is in name only. It is also a worrying comment for scholars.[[125]](#footnote-125)

**8aγb** *Shepherds* is another favorite expression in Jeremiah (e.g., 3:15; 6:3; 12:10; 23:1-4) and also a metaphor whose referent is not identified. Tg simply translates “kings,” but the First Testament does not take over the Middle Eastern enthusiasm for “shepherd” as a description of the king. “Only very hesitantly… did the OT connect the shepherd concept with the leadership exercised by kings and by God…. There is no evidence that the term ‘shepherd’ ever served as a title for a reigning king,” though shepherding can be a metaphor for leading or ruling (2 Sam 5:2; 7:7).[[126]](#footnote-126) Maybe shepherds is a metaphor for leaders in general. What is explicit is the nature of their wrongdoing: *they have rebelled* [*pāša‘*] *against me*.If they are rulers, it would be an ironic indictment, as rebelling denotes defying the authorities’ expectations. These people would be against rebellion when they were its object but they are for it when they are its subject. In 10:21 the problem with the shepherds is that they have not been enquiring of Yahweh, which is another way of picturing rebellion. And enquiring of Yahweh is a prophet’s job (21:1-2), so shepherds as leaders might at least include prophets; here, *the prophets* in the next colon might then clarify who are the people Jeremiah has in mind. Like the prophets in 1 Kgs 17, these prophets *prophesied* with the help of *the Master* (*ba‘al*). Tg translates “false prophets,” which they are, but the trouble is that they are at the same time simply prophets,[[127]](#footnote-127) as priests are simply priests. “He calls the false prophets ‘prophets’ as he calls those who are not gods ‘gods.’”[[128]](#footnote-128) In another sense one could say there is nothing false about them at all. They really are prophets. The trouble is they are prophets in the service of the Master. They are false prophets insofar as they serve false gods. They are deceptive prophets because they serve one who embodies deception. But the Masters’ help is empty (as Yahweh put it earlier). They cannot *be any use*. Yahweh closes with that terrible verb that describes how people *have gone* *after* them instead of going after Yahweh. It is the thing that defiles Yahweh’s own country and makes it disgusting. The extra colon to make the line a tricolon forms an unexpected follow up to the previous four similarly-structured cola and also closes off the section, with its reversed word order and its reuse of the expression “go after” which was where we began (v. 2),

## An Extension to the Argument (2:9-13)

9Indeeda I will argue with you some more (Yahweh’s affirmation),

and with your grandchildrenb I will argue.

10Because cross over to the Kittites’ shores,c and see,

and to Qedar – send.

Consider well, and see,d

if something like this has happened.

11Has a nation changede gods,

and those were non-gods?

But my people – it has changed its honorf

for something thatg could not be any use.

12Be desolate, heavens,h at this,

shudder,i be totally devastatedj (Yahweh’s affirmation).

13Because two dire things my people have done:

me they have abandoned,

The fountain of living water,

to dig themselves cisterns –

Breakablek cisterns,

ones that can’t hold the water.

LXX, Vg have “therefore,” the common meaning of *lākēn*, not least when a prophet announces consequences that will follow from wrongdoing (e.g., 6:21; 7:20), but Jeremiah does not announce a consequence here. And *lākēn* can also signify “that’s why…” in a looser sense, introducing “the development of what is implicit” in what precedes, as in v. 33 (BDB); cf. 15:19; 18:13; 32:28. It is thus the resumptive beginning of a new section.

For *bәnê bәnêkem* Vg implies simply *bәnêkem*, which might indicate dittog or haplog; see the comment.

LXX, Vg have “islands,” but *’iyyîm* denotes more generally places at which one arrives by sea.

Repetition is a feature of Jeremiah’s rhetoric in this chapter (see the introduction to the chapter).

*Hêmîr* looks like a form from *yāmar* which would be a byform of *mûr* (see *HALOT*).

Another traditional reading is “my honor” (see McKane, *Jeremiah* 1:34).

Cf. v. 8 and the note.

*Šômmû* might be a parody of *šim‘û* in Isa 1:2 (Holladay, *Jeremiah* 1:91); it leads nicely into *šāmayim*. Jeremiah is not merely asking the heavens to do something for which they are ill-equipped (they have no ears) but to be something that goes against what they are: it is the earth not the heavens that can get desolated or made a desolation (see v. 15; also e.g., 4:7, 27; 6:8; 10:25; 12:10-11). Only here does the word apply to the heavens.

Etymologically, “let your hair stand on end.”

The further catachresis involved in this closing verb underscores the paradoxical point made by the first verb. *Ḥārab/ḥārēb* can mean both “be devastated” and “be dried up” (BDB thinks of homonyms, *HALOT* of one verb, *DCH* seems ambivalent). Both meanings apply naturally to the earth not the heavens (e.g., 7:34; 25:9, 11, 18; 26:9). LXX reads *harbēh* (make much), making things more straightforward (it also has finite forms for the first two verbs: the heavens already are appalled).

LXX, Vg have “broken,” but for this meaning one would expect qal passive not niphal (JM 121q).

*Indeed* marks the resumptive beginning of a section within Jer 2; thus v. 9 faces both ways. An indictment like the one in vv. 2-8 might have been expected to lead into a “therefore” declaring the consequences of what precedes, but the *indeed* (*lākēn*) does not introduce such a declaration; it rather announces Yahweh’s intention to take further the critique in vv. 2-8, which he will do through vv. 9-13 in expounding the scandalous and nonsensical nature of Israel’s turning to other deities. The implications of vv. 2-13 as a whole are thus that the people of God whose life seems to be falling apart needs to ask why it is in a reduced state, why it is a shadow of its former self. Jeremiah’s perspective is:

* Israel has forgotten the story of Yahweh’s relationship with it, the story of the way Yahweh had related with it at the beginning and how it had related to Yahweh, and it has failed to ask where Yahweh was when things went wrong.
* Something has gone wrong with its relationship with God’s written word. What people say is the written word is nothing of the sort.
* It has turned away from the resources that lie in its story and in the proper written word and turned to other resources that are about as useful as a leaky humanly-made water cistern. The cistern stands for the resources offered by the surrounding culture. The extent to which Israel was doing so was masked by the fact that it continued to talk in terms of Yahweh, but it had come to picture Yahweh as if he were the Master.[[129]](#footnote-129)

To sum it up: Judah’s religion is characterized by degeneracy, sensuality, double-mindedness, and unreality.[[130]](#footnote-130)

Vv. 9-12 comprise six bicola; v. 13 then comprises three bicola linked by enjambment.

**9** So Yahweh will take up the confrontation *some more*; the declaration that this is *Yahweh’s affirmation* functions resumptively and supports the opening declaration (rather than suggesting that v. 9 marks the end of a section). The section first takes the argument further by moving from a focus on *your forebears* (literally, “your fathers”) and *you* to a focus on *you* and *your* *grandchildren* (literally, “your children’s children”). Yes, the wrongdoing of parents does have repercussions, and not only in the next generation whom Jeremiah here skips (are they the audience when Baruch reads the scroll, as described in Jer 36?) but in the third generation, the *grandchildren* who will read Jeremiah’s scroll in the exilic period and will have to think about this comment.[[131]](#footnote-131) In both cola in his declaration of intent, Yahweh declares *I will argue* (*rîb*); verbs and indirect objects work abb’a’ at the center of the line:

Indeed some more I will argue with you (Yahweh’s affirmation)

and with your grandchildren I will argue

As English can speak of “arguing a case” in court, so Jeremiah’s verb can denote a confrontation before the elders at the town gateway, when a person brings a claim against another member of the community (e.g., Isa 1:17; cf. the noun in Exod 23:1-3, 6); in Genesis it can also refer to conflicts between different groups over matters such as pasturage and water supplies (13:7; 26:20-22; 31:36). So Yahweh is not the judge (v. 12 may identify the metaphorical decision-makers). For him to be prepared to argue with his people as if he were just another citizen looks like another expression of self-denial or kenosis.[[132]](#footnote-132)

**10** *Because* (*kî*)is another indication that v. 9 was not the end of a section; even taken as simply asseverative, it would be a stark beginning to one. Kition was a town in Cyprus that provided the First Testament with its name for Cyprus as a whole. *Qedar* was a people in the northern Arabian Desert, to the east beyond the area of settled peoples such as Moab and Ammon. The exhortation encourages the audience to imagine going a long way west and east (in other words, towards the extremes of the known world).[[133]](#footnote-133) But it doesn’t reveal the aim; the line thereby makes the audience wonder why. The second line gives half an answer, clarifying a little the object of the investigation. The two lines in v. 10 are mutually parallel, but by providing only half an answer, the second line also heightens suspense. People are to ask *if something like this has happened*, but what is the “this”? Like the first colon in a bicolon, the verse raises a question that it doesn’t answer.

**11** Paradoxically, the answer constitutes another question, a reformulating and sharpening of the accusation in vv. 5-8. It is this reformulation that constitutes the elaboration of the argument that v. 9 announced. Abandoning Yahweh and going after the Master becomes the comment that the nation has *changed gods*. Ezek 27:21 describes Qedar as a trading people (they were Ishmaelites, after all: see Gen 25:13; 37:25), and the same connotation would obtain for Cypriots as people whose island sat in the Mediterranean. Both people were used to exchanging or trading things.[[134]](#footnote-134) Would they ever trade gods? Nations did sometimes add new gods to their pantheon, though not throw out the old ones.[[135]](#footnote-135) But the point lies not in the mere fact of change, but in the trade’s stupidity (the Kittites and Qedar would never make such a trade), which is asserted in the following colon (*non-gods*) and corresponds to the point made in vv. 5 and 8. There is no parallelism within the lines in v. 11, but the second line parallels the first as happened in v. 10. Here the verse works aba’b’: the two opening cola are parallel and the two subsequent cola are parallel. Within the second line, the first distinctive expression is that Yahweh is talking about *my people*; it is the first occurrence of this term, which carries some poignancy, sadness, resentment, and sense of outrage. What Yahweh observes is that Israel has surrendered *its honor* (*kābôd*), the God who is honorable and splendid and is the one whom it is committed to honoring (cf. Ps 3:3 [4]). The following colon underlines the implausibility of the trade that the verse is recording by picking up the description of the non-gods as things that *could not be any use* (v. 8).

**12** Like Isaiah (1:2), Jeremiah appeals to the *heavens* in connection with his argument.[[136]](#footnote-136) It fits the model of Yahweh taking the position of a plaintiff at the town gateway. A plaintiff asks the elders to register their appalment at the action of another member of the community toward him, and to make a decision accordingly. Looking around for someone equivalent to the elders, Yahweh fixes on the heavens.

**13** Jeremiah goes on to re-express once more the nature of Judah’s wrongdoing, using another metaphor. There are two sides to the *dire* action of *my people*, something dire in relation to Yahweh and dire in relation to themselves: Jeremiah thus uses the word “dire” or “bad” (*ra‘*) with both connotations and juxtaposes the two significances of the word, hinting at the link between them that he has already suggested in 1:14, 16.[[137]](#footnote-137) Direly, the people have *abandoned* Yahweh: Jeremiah picks up the verb from 1:16. And they have thereby put themselves in a direly vulnerable position. Water is a life or death matter in Canaan.[[138]](#footnote-138) Fortunately, Jerusalem has a *fountain of living water* (running water), the Gihon spring on the east side of the hill on which the city is built. Towns are regularly built near such a water supply, but most springs dry up during the summer, so town also have *cisterns* for collecting rain during the winter to keep them going through the summer until the rains come again – though running water is much nicer than rain water stored in a tank.[[139]](#footnote-139) So the first weird thing about Yahweh’s people is that they have abandoned their source of running water for water from a cistern. Then, the crucial thing about a cistern is that it is well-plastered and thus sealed and watertight. But the metaphorical cisterns Yahweh describes are insecure – they haven’t been plastered, or the plaster isn’t thick enough, or it has cracks. They are *breakable*. They *can’t hold the water*. That’s how useless they are. It is the second aspect of Israel’s dire action. As well as doing wrong by Yahweh, they are doing wrong by themselves. To what does the metaphor refer? Again Jeremiah works by raising suspense which the subsequent verses will resolve, in the next section.[[140]](#footnote-140) Meanwhile, this section comes to an end with this three-line sequence in v. 13 with its enjambment. *The fountain of living water* expands on *me*, then *to dig themselves cisterns* identifies the second of the dire things, *breakable cisterns* gives further detail on their direness, and *ones that can’t hold the water* identifies the consequence of their fragility.

## An Explanation of Why Israel Has Become Plunder (2:14-20a)

14Was Israel a servant,

or was he a house boy:

why has he become plunder?a

15Over him cougarsb roar,

they have given their voice.

They have made his country into a desolation –

his towns have fallen in ruinsc so that there is no one living there.d

16Yes, the people of Memphise and Tahpanhes – f

they shepherd youg on the skull.h

17This is what it does to you, isn’t it,

your abandoning Yahweh your God,

at the time he’s getting you to go on the path.i

18So now what is there for you in the path to Egyptj

to drink Sihork water?

What is there for you in the path to Assyria

to drink Riverl water?

19What is dire in your lifem should restrain you,

your turnings – they should rebuke you.n

So acknowledge and seeo how dire and bitter

your abandoning Yahweh your God,

And there being no awep for me in you (an affirmation of the Lord Yahweh of Armies),q

20becauser of old you brokes your yoke.

You tore off your restraints,t

and said, “I will not serve.”u

While *bûz* indeed means *plunder* and this meaning fits what follows, after v. 14a one might initially be reminded of the root *bāzâ* which could suggest being treated with contempt (*CHP*, 159).

*Kәpîr* is a less common word for lion than *’aryēh* (v. 30 – which Jeremiah prefers to *’ărî*); *BDB*, *HALOT*, *DCH*, and *TDOT* translate “young lion,” but the distinction between the words is unclear; they function simply as poetic alternatives.

Q has *niṣṣәtû* from *yāṣat*; K implies *niṣṣәtâ* which could be the singular of the same verb or could be from *nāṣâ.* The verb *yāṣat* commonly appears accompanied by a phrase indicating “with fire” (e.g., 49:2; 51:58), which indicates that it means “burn.” But it also occurs in contexts such as the present where the context points to ruin and desolation and makes no reference to fire (e.g., 9:10, 12 [9, 11]; 46:19), which suggests that the verb is here a byform of *nāṣâ* III (see 4:7; and cf. Tg, Sym). Here, the feminine singular subject in K would be *’ārṣô* in the previous colon. The asyndetic clause with the subject before the verb is subordinate to the previous clause.

Literally, “from lack of one living” (see BDB, 115b).

The Egyptian city Men-nepher, in Hebrew *Nōp* (elsewhere *Mōp*), in Greek Memphis.

For *Taḥpanḥēs* K has an alternative spelling without the second ḥ.

*Yir‘ûkā* from *rā‘â* (cf. v. 8); Aq, Sym imply *yәrō‘ûk* from *rā‘a‘* with the more straightforward meaning “break [your] skull.” LXX presupposes a form from *yāda‘*, implying the common confusion of *r* and *d*, and Vg “ravished”may also presuppose this reading (see *CTAT* 2:466). The address changes to feminine singular as in vv. 2-3, a move back from masculine plural in vv. 4-12, 13b and masculine singular in vv. 13a, 14-15.

LXX “and mocked at you” implies a form from Postbiblical Hebrew *qrqr*, again misreading *d* for *r* (*HUB*).

LXX lacks this last colon (haplog, or MT dittog? cf. v. 18a) and has an extra “the Lord your God says” (anticipating the phrase at the end of v. 19).

*Miṣrayim*; English “Egypt” comes from Greek *Aiguptos*, which apparently goes back to another term for Memphis.

*Šiḥôr* is a Hebrew equivalent to a term meaning “pond of Horus” (Rudolph, *Jeremia*,18; see also *HALOT*, 1477-78). On LXX *gēōn,* see S. Olofsson, “The Translation of Jer 2,18 in the Septuagint,” *SJOT* [2] (1988): 169-200.

The Euphrates, known as *pәrāt* elsewhere in the First Testament, but thought of as *the* river.

Literally simply “your direness”; the translation seeks to preserve the ambiguity over whether it is dire action or a dire fate.

LXX, Vg take the verbs as yiqtol, but in light of the next line they are more likely jussive (Volz, *Jeremia*, 14). The line works abb’a’, the verbs thus enclosing the nouns, a structure of which Jeremiah is fond (e.g., 4:7, 9).

On these imperatives following jussives, see GK 110i.

LXX “I took no pleasure in you” implies a verb *pāḥadtî* for MT’s hapax noun (elsewhere *paḥad* not *paḥdâ*); LXX has translated the verb in a more plausible way than “I was in awe of you” (*HUB*). One could take the verb as an example of the archaic second-person feminine, which recurs in v. 20 (see the note), but it is then necessary to emend “of you” to “of me” (*BHS*). Aq, Sym have “fear”: like *yir’â/yārēh*, *paḥad*/*paḥdâ/pāḥad* covers both (negatively) being afraid (e.g., 30:5; 36:16) and (positively) being in awe (e.g., 33:9; 36:24). It is doubtful whether *paḥad*/*paḥdâ/pāḥad* implies a stronger fear/awe than *yir’â/yārēh*.

On this translation of *yhwh ṣb’wt*, see J. A. Emerton, “New Light on Israelite Religion,” *ZAW* 94 (1982): 2-20. This long formulation of the affirmation recurs in Jeremiah only in 49:5; 50:31, both times in the middle of a line as here. LXX lacks *of Armies*, as it usually does in Jeremiah, perhaps out of a desire not to encourage belief in lesser deities (A. Rofé, “The name YHWH ṢĔBĀ’ÔT and the Shorter Recension of Jeremiah,” in R. Liwak and S. Wagner [eds.], *Prophetie und geschichtliche Wirklichkeit im Alten Israel* [S. Herrmann Festschrift; Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1991], 307-16).

Vg omits “because,” perhaps taking *kî* as asseverative.

*Šābartî*, and *nittaqtî* in the parallel colon, are usually first-person forms; understood thus, they refer to Yahweh’s graciousness to Israel (cf. Aq, Theod, Tg, Syr), and the third colon then describes Israel’s response (B. A. Bozak, “Heeding the Received Text,” *Biblica* 77 [1996]: 524-37). But they are also archaic second-person forms (cf. LXX), which are frequent in Jeremiah (see GK 44h). Jer 5:5 uses these expressions with Israel as subject in an unambiguously negative way, 30:8 with Yahweh as subject in an unambiguously positive way.

Vg has “my yoke” and “my restraints.” *Môsēr* apparently comes from *’āsar* not *yāsar* (the verb in v. 19), which generates *mûsār* (v. 30), but I have assumed that Jeremiah’s audience would associate the words in vv. 19, 20, and 30.

So K *’‘bd*; Q has *’e‘ĕbôr* “I will not pass [to other deities]/transgress [your instruction]” (cf. Tg). The two lines in vv. 19b-20 work abb’a’: *there being no awe* and *said* *“I will not serve”* are parallel; *you broke your yoke* and *you tore off your restraints* are also parallel.

A jump in the imagery (servant/house boy), a jump in the rhetoric (questions), a tricolon, and a jump in the substance (Israel has become plunder) mark a new section whose content expands on and varies that of vv. 8-13. It focuses on the dire actual consequences for Israel of abandoning Yahweh by relying on political resources in Egypt as well as on other deities. It outlines:

vv. 14-17 the questions about the past raised by Judah’s dire experiences

an opening tricolon, three bicola, and another tricolon at a pausing point

vv. 18-19aαβ the issues for present and future policy

three bicola

vv. 19aγ-20a the challenge about what Judah needs to acknowledge

three bicola, the first two form a linked pair by enjambment

**14** The audience gets a questioncomingout of the blue whose subject bears no immediately obvious relationship to what preceded. There’s been no indication so far that Israel is in trouble, only that it deserves to be and risks being, because it is relying on resources that will turn out unreliable. The tricolon begins with two parallel cola asking one question in two slightly different forms. The right answer to the first question might not be immediately obvious. Or rather, the right answer is evidently “yes” in the sense that *Israel* is indeed Yahweh’s *servant* (30:10; 46:27-28). After all, Israel is sacred to Yahweh (v. 3).[[141]](#footnote-141) But it will become clear that in this context being a servant lacks those positive implications. Likewise there is nothing wrong with being a *house boy* (*yәlîd bêt*), someone born into a household as the child of a servant: see e.g., Gen 14:14; 17:12-13. You are a member of the family, you can be a valued one, and you count as within Yahweh’s people. But Israel is a servant more in the sense to which Jer 34 refers; no doubt Jer 34 hints at how things really were for many houseboys, too. The expression also recalls how Israel was once a bunch of servants in Egypt – with negative connotations. Further, *servant* can have political connotations; a servant nation is the underling of an imperial power. That kind of servanthood can be okay, too, but actually Israel as a people has *become* *plunder*, as a family servant or house boy can be subject to abuse.[[142]](#footnote-142) It is what “his servants the prophets” had said would happen, in the time of Josiah’s father (2 Kgs 21:14), and it is what did happen in 597 and 587 (Isa 42:22), as Jeremiah warned (20:5). To put it another way, Israel is the kind of servant whose servitude issues from having been captured in war.

**15** Or it is as if Israel has become the victim of ravenous beasts that have made it their prey. The *cougars* are the victors who have turned Israel into serfs or slaves. The two lines repeat the sequence of v. 14: first a metaphor, then a literal description, which here becomes more concrete. Israel has been subject to invasion and destruction such that makes it uninhabitable. Who do the cougars stand for? Who are the *they* in v. 15b? What experience of *desolation* is Jeremiah referring to? A century previously Assyria wrought terrible devastation in Ephraim, but that event belonged to another place and time.[[143]](#footnote-143) The Egyptians marched through Judah in 609 on the occasion when Josiah took them on and lost his life, but it was not an event that brought great devastation – Pharaoh was on his way somewhere else and was just brushing off a flea. More likely this invasion is one Jeremiah has seen in his mind’s eye, as was the case in 1:13-16; he is referring (though he doesn’t know it) to the Babylonian invasions and destructions of 597 and 587.

**16** He adds an even more specific picture, though also one heavy in metaphor. *Memphis*, near modern Cairo, was at one time the capital of Lower Egypt. *Tahpanhes* was closer to Egypt’s northeastern border and was thus on the route between Egypt and Canaan (see Jer 43 – 44). Jeremiah’s enigmatic comment reflects Judah’s ambivalent relationship with Egypt. Egypt was the major power in Judah’s region in between the decline of Assyria and the hegemony of Babylon. At different times Judah treated Egypt as a potential or actual senior ally or as enemy, and Jeremiah’s formulation captures this ambiguity. Second Kings 23:28 – 24:7 indicates something of the political background to Jeremiah’s observations about Judah and Egypt. Between 609 and 597, relations between Judah and Egypt (against the background of Babylon’s rise as the regional power) were tortuous and changeable. In this context v. 16 provides a collection of dots that can be connected in various ways with the aid of some creative imagination.[[144]](#footnote-144) Egypt could *shepherd* Judah with its power both as authority and as protector. But in 609 it hit Judah *on the skull* only too literally. Maybe Jeremiah had originally (earlier in Josiah’s day?) been speaking of what he knew would happen, which in this event has now become reality.[[145]](#footnote-145)

**17** Jeremiah picks up the theme of *abandoning*, which goes back to his commission (1:16; 2:13), and the associated motif of going (after) (2:2, 5, 8). His verb is again yiqtol so it could be translated as future or as present and could be describing something Jeremiah had known would happen and now has happened. In restating his indictment he adds another key motif, that of *path* (*derek*). Israel’s life is a path or journey on which Yahweh leads it. He is *enabling you to go on the path*, as long as you go with him and don’t go after other deities. Yahweh had enabled Israel to go through the wilderness, way back (v. 6), but in the last colon the present participle suggests that this enabling was not confined to the past. Israel is on a journey now, and Yahweh is the one who enables it. The tricolon thus brings vv. 14-17 to a stinging semi-conclusion. *This* (what vv. 14-16 described) is *what it does to you*. What is the “it”? *Your abandoning Yahweh your God*. To underline how shocking that action was, note the circumstances when it happened: it was when he was *getting you to go on the path*. The unexpected third colon encourages a moment’s pause.

**18a** Introducing the reference to Egypt in v. 16 and the image of a path in v. 17 opens up the way to an aggressive question. Judah is supposedly committed to a path on which it follows Yahweh. Jeremiah sets against that commitment any journeying on a literal and/or metaphorical *path to Egypt* to get support and resources from there. Is there anything for Israel to gain in taking such a path? The answer to the rhetorical question was implicit in what Jeremiah just said about the actual and potential cost of abandoning Yahweh when he is the one who enables Israel to go on its path. Jeremiah thus simply dismisses political policies and religious commitments that would have seemed reasonable and responsible;[[146]](#footnote-146) they were neither reasonable nor responsible. We have no information on such moves in Jeremiah’s day, but it could be an angle on aspects of what was going on in the late 600s according to 2 Kgs 23:28 – 24:7. Recourse to Egypt had been policy in the past and it could be a recurrent temptation (cf. Isa 30:1-7; 31:1-3). Metaphorically, Judah would then be going to drink from the Nile, of which the Sihor was a branch or lake on the Canaan side of the country. So the reference to Egypt picks up the more concrete allusion to Memphis, and the reference to the Sihor could recall the mention of Tahpanhes, which was also on the Canaan side of Egypt. There is an ironic contrast between Egypt as attacker in v. 16 and Egypt as resource here. Can they not see it? The imagery ought to help to make the point. Once more Jeremiah talks about an alternative water source and invites Judah to think again about who is the real source of running water.

**18b** The verse again comprises two lines that are parallel, with the two opening cola parallel and the two following cola parallel. While Assyria is still a military and political player during the earlier part of Jeremiah’s lifetime, it is in terminal decline. Indeed, a presupposition of Josiah’s reformation is that Assyria is finished as an imperial power and that Josiah can take action that signifies a claim to independence as well as a commitment to religious reform. Nineveh fell to Babylon and Media in 612, though Jeremiah the prophet to the nations does not refer to this event.[[147]](#footnote-147) Assyria is not totally done even in 609; when he fought and killed Josiah, Pharaoh Neco was on his way to support Assyria against Babylon, whose ascendancy Neco wanted to oppose. But Assyria was hardly any longer a potential resource for Judah. In v. 18 Egypt and Assyria may therefore be simply a conventional word pair (cf. Isa 52:4; Lam 5:6; Hos 11:11) and Jeremiah may speak of the path to Assyria purely as makeweight for the idea of the path to Egypt;[[148]](#footnote-148) Hosea does the converse (Hos 11:5). And/or maybe Jeremiah speaks sarcastically: “in Israelite experience, looking to Assyria hasn’t work very well, has it?” (cf. v. 36). And/or maybe the non-feasible nature of recourse to Assyria supports the possibility the recourse to Egypt was also only a theoretical option, not one we have to fit into known historical events.

**19aαβ** Recourse to Egypt or Assyria would have *dire* implications. In v. 13, direness characterizes both Judah’s action and its consequent fate, and here the opening colon trades on this duality. It’s possible to derive a lesson from your mistakes even before you pay the full price for them. In effect, Jeremiah is inviting Judah to learn from the dire nature of its action in order not to have to learn from the dire nature of its results. In parallelism with the reference to *dire*, he casually introduces another of his key themes in speaking of *turnings*: this noun will recur (for instance) in 3:6, 8, 11, 12, 22, and the verb “turn” in 3:1, 7, 10, 12, 14, 19, 22. It belongs to the same semantic field or controlling metaphor as “going after” and “abandoning” and “path.” Israel is inclined to turn away (and needs to turn back). Turning to Egypt or Assyria is turning away from Yahweh as provider, protector, and lord. Turning to the Master has the same significance. The verbs *restrain* or discipline (*yāsar*) and *rebuke* (*yākaḥ*)suggest that Israel is a schoolboy. His teacher is life itself, but “Israel is like the incorrigible son or pupil who is incapable of submitting to parental or scholastic discipline, or of deferring to wisdom and experience.”[[149]](#footnote-149) Restraining or disciplining can be a matter of words (Isa 8:11; 28:26), but words tend not to be enough (Prov 29:19), and they certainly haven’t been enough for Judah. So the idea that dire action and turning should be a restraint and rebuke can involve another metonymy; it is the dire consequences of the turning that will need to function as rebuke and teach restraint. The implicit good news is that even then, when Yahweh makes dire things happen to his people, it is not so much punishment but chastisement, which can teach them.[[150]](#footnote-150)

**19aγ-20aα** Will Judah ever learn? It has not done so yet. It needs to *acknowledge* the facts. Things being *bitter* denotes their being tough and unpleasant; direness now refers unequivocally to the *dire* consequences of dire actions. In the complex double line, the middle cola redefine *abandoning Yahweh* as lacking reverence or *awe* for Yahweh, lacking the kind of worshipful trembling that is appropriate before God.[[151]](#footnote-151) Twice Yahweh has used the poignant but aggrieved expression “my people” (vv. 11, 13); twice he has now used the poignant but aggrieved expression *your God* (vv. 17, 19).[[152]](#footnote-152) The double line comes to an end by revisiting the idea of serving with which the section began. In this connection it implicitly adds the image of Israel as an ox, which needs a *yoke* in order for the farmer to direct it. In itself there’s nothing negative about wearing a yoke and working as an ox, as is the case with being a servant. “The question… is not the presence or absence of yoke, but which yoke is to be present.”[[153]](#footnote-153) But an ox may prefer to wander free or just lie about, like a human being, preferring an “unyoked life.”[[154]](#footnote-154) The *of old* (*mē‘ôlām*, practically from eternity)makes one think of the ancestors of v. 5, whose example their descendants follow.

**20aβγ** Literal*restraints* (*môsēr*, 2:20; 5:5; 27:2; 30:8 – Jeremiah uses this noun more than any other book) are the ropes tying the wooden part of a yoke around the ox, which a wise farmer will make sure fits well. The word recalls the verb for the “restraining” undertaken by a teacher (*yāsar*; v. 19; cf. 6:8; 10:24; 30:11; 31:18; 46:28 – more than any book except Psalms).[[155]](#footnote-155) *Serve* takes up from v. 14. A yoke is commonly a political image, like the image of being a servant (e.g., 27:8-12), and in that context it can have negative connotations. But the city’s throwing off its servanthood and its restraints way back is what now necessitates its letting its dire actions and their consequences “teach it a lesson.” It was unwilling to serve, so it has found itself serving in a dire way. This closing colon is the first example of Jeremiah’s stratagem of quoting statements by Israel that it hasn’t made but has implied or should have made or could have made; more examples will follow.[[156]](#footnote-156) Israel hasn’t said *I will not serve*, but its behavior has implied this refusal. Jeremiah’s rhetoric points to the mysterious ease with which human beings hide the real truth from themselves, which may be more of a problem with the people of God because we cannot afford to recognize the truth about ourselves (or we think we cannot). The pseudo-quotation in v. 20a compares with Paul’s in the same connection.[[157]](#footnote-157) Shall we sin in order that grace may abound, he imagines people asking (Rom 6:1)? If you ask that question you show you’ve fundamentally misunderstood the relationship between God and his people and the reason why he’s been involved in its story. Thinking you could belong to God but not serve God betrays the same misunderstanding.

## The Defilement (2:20b-25)

20bBecause on every high hill

and under every verdant tree

you are bending over as a whore.

21Whereas I – I planted you as a red vine,a

all of it true seed,

How you transformed yourself in relation to me,

as people corruptedb vis-à-vis the vine –c an alien woman!d

22Even if you laundere with soda,f

and use much cleanserg for yourself,

your waywardness will be stainingh before me (an affirmation of the Lord Yahweh).

23How could you say, “I haven't defiled myself,i

the Mastersj – I have not gone after them”?

Look at your path into the Ravine,

acknowledge what you have done.

A light-footed she-camel criss-crossing her paths,

24a wild donkey taught about the wilderness,

In her consuming desirek she has panted after wind;

her season –l who can turn her back?

Any who seek her will not get weary –

in her month they will find her.m

25Hold back your foot from being bare,

and your throatn from thirst.

But you say, “Futile,o no,

because I love foreigners,

and it is after them that I will go.”

A *śōrēq* (cf. Isa 5:2) as opposed to a common or garden *gepen*. LXX, Vg, take the term to mean a high-quality vine, which is doubtless right; etymologically *śōrēq* suggests specifically a red one.

LXX and Vg paraphrase the obscurely-constructed colon; according to *CTAT* 2:470, J. D. Michaelis in his *Orientalische und exegetische Bibliothek* described it as “grammatically deformed” (*vicieuse*). But LXX and Vg incorporate words for bitterness/corruption which supports the suggestion that the passive participle *sûrê* comes from a *sûr* which is a byform of the verb *sārâ* in Aramaic meaning decay/stink (see *DCH*; *DTT*, 1026).

The allusive construct is epexegetical (see *IBHS* 9.5.3c).

LXX, Vg assume that “alien” describes “the vine,” which the lack of the article makes difficult; rather it describes “you,” Jerusalem as whore.

*Kābas* (piel) usually denotes washing clothes not washing the person (for which the verb is *rāḥaṣ*); the piel suggests something intensive (Thompson, *Jeremiah*,176).

Strictly natron, a sodium compound used for cleaning.

This parallel term *bōrît* suggests a plant-based cleanser (see McKane, *Jeremiah* 1:42).

*Kātam* (stain, here niphal participle and thus suggesting odious or offensive) comes only here in the First Testament, but it is well-known in Post-biblical Hebrew.

LXX has a passive verb, but the verb is again niphal.

LXX has singular and as usual gives *Baal* a feminine article (see the note on v. 8).

“The desire of her being” (*nepeš*);Q has feminine suffix which fits what follows, K *npšw* implies masculine which fits the preceding reference to the masculine donkey.

The noun comes only here in this “exclamation” (Allen, *Jeremiah*,44). Vg “love” perhaps infers its meaning from the parallelism with the preceding colon, but see BDB, 58; *season* rather implies an anticipatory parallelism with *month*.

The asyndetic clause with the prepositional expression before the verb is subordinate to the previous clause.

Q has the expected spelling *gārôn*; K *gwrn* is “presumably a slip of the pen influenced by *gôrān* “Threshing-floor” (Holladay, *Jeremiah* 1:53).

More literally *It’s desperate* (cf. Vg); see BDB, 384.

Like the “indeed” which introduced vv. 9-13, the “because” which opens vv. 20b-25 suggests continuity with what precedes, but it introduces another tricolon and a change of image for Jeremiah’s critique of Judah. Instead of speaking in terms of an ox or a servant, Jeremiah speaks in terms of a wife, reverting to the image with which the chapter began – except that she is a whore, an alien woman, indeed a donkey in heat that is interested in only one thing. The section outlines:

vv. 20b-22 Yahweh’s critique

a tricolon, two linked bicola, and another tricolon at a pausing point

vv. 23-25a Yahweh’s response to denials

six bicola, the middle two linked as the first again cannot stand alone

v. 25b Judah’s refusal

a single tricolon closing off the section

**20b** A further *because* introduces a re-expression of Jeremiah’s point by means of another image for Judah’s abandoning of Yahweh – indeed, a series of images: a whore, a vine, a washerwoman, a camel, a donkey. All are based on everyday life but also reflect the influence of Jeremiah’s prophetic predecessors.[[158]](#footnote-158) The first two cola are exactly parallel

because on every high hill

and under every verdant tree

The cola lack verbs, so they raise suspense, though in general terms their implication is obvious enough: in 1 Kgs 14:23 the same phrases describe Judahite worship practices (similar phrases in 2 Kgs 16:4; Ezek 6:13), and in 2 Kgs 17:10 they describe Ephraimite worship practices (similar phrases in Jer 3:6). Yet one waits to discover the explicit accusation, aware that Jeremiah might be playing yet another trick on the listeners. In Judah they could imply practices involved in the worship of Yahweh, not of other gods. Judahites could say that they didn’t serve other gods, like those renegade Ephraimites, did they? Jeremiah has already indicated that he doesn’t see it that way; actually they have abandoned Yahweh and gone after other deities. Here the third colon makes the point in a dreadful insult. They are not simply worshiping Yahweh in an innovative fashion. They are behaving as a *whore*, like the Ephraimites (e.g., Hos 1:2; 2:2, 5 [4, 7]; 4:10, 12, 13, 14, 15, 18). In Jeremiah as in Hosea, whoring (*zānâ*)need not imply being in the sex trade, engaging in sex for money. It rather denotes engaging in sexual activity outside the framework accepted as proper by the community, so it’s closer to the idea of sexual immorality; it would include promiscuity and adultery. The colloquial use of the English word “whore” fits. Jeremiah adds a graphic extra verb to describe a whore making herself available, *bending over*. There is little evidence that traditional (Canaanite) worship involved sexual rites and little reason to see Jeremiah as implying that sexual rites are part of Judah’s worship. Sexual promiscuity is a metaphor for religious and political promiscuity, of which Jeremiah does accuse Judah, whereas Jerusalem doesn’t see its religious or political practice as promiscuous.[[159]](#footnote-159)

**21** Yahweh adds yet another metaphor, reverting to an image he used in commissioning Jeremiah (1:10).[[160]](#footnote-160) There he promised eventual replanting; here he recalls how Yahweh had originally *planted* the people in the land, as not merely an ordinary vine but a *red vine*, one that produces red grapes and/or red wine and/or has red leaves, which were valued for their medicinal qualities. The parallel colon reinforces his statement. Its *seed* was *true* or reliable – *all of it*. There was no reason why it should not produce good grapes. In convoluted language that matches the convoluted nature of the event, Jeremiah declares that Jerusalem the *vine* has become *corrupted*, and produced rotten grapes (cf. Isa 5:4). To revert to the earlier image, Jerusalem has turned into *an alien woman*. It’s another way of calling her a whore: “A whore is a deep pit, an alien woman is a narrow cistern” (Prov 29:27).[[161]](#footnote-161)

**22** For a moment Jeremiah changes images once again. The tricolon works like the one in v. 20b. The first two cola suggest complementary possibilities about getting clean. Jeremiah might be referring to removing a stain of guilt (so Tg), whose existence they actually deny (cf. Matt 27:24) or whose reality they acknowledge (like Lady Macbeth when she tried to wash the blood off her hands: see Shakespeare’s play *Macbeth*). But he may simply be starting from an aspect of everyday life. Jerusalemites no doubt like their clothes clean and like being clean, especially on special occasions. They *launder* and wash themselves thoroughly, with *much cleanser*. Why does Jeremiah mention this fact? The third colon provides the answer. Such washing can cleanse the body in a superficial sense, but it doesn’t remove the body’s more serious *stain,* andYahweh will still be able to see it (Jeremiah continues to have the body in mind: he is not contrasting outward and inward). The stain is the one that results from the city’s *waywardness* (*‘āwōn*): Jeremiah introduces another key term. In 3:21 he will use the verb lying behind this noun (*‘āwâ*) in a way that links with the noun’s etymology. Verb and noun suggest going astray by choosing the wrong path. The noun links with the image of a path and of going after the right person or the wrong person.

**23a** Wherein do the waywardness and thus the stain lie? Jerusalem has been stained with blood (Isa 1:15), and the verb in v. 22 commonly suggests bloodstain (again compare Lady Macbeth). But here the parallel denials with the expression *defiled myself* move to the more common religious language used in v. 7. “I’m not like the adulterous woman in Num 5:11-31.”[[162]](#footnote-162) Actually, the holy city has indeed incurred defilement, because it has *gone after the Masters* instead of Yahweh and/or as well as Yahweh. Jeremiah again takes up the motifs of going after and of the path, and repeats the charge that dominates the chapter. The Masters are here plural, which may reflect the assumption that the Master had different names and identities as he supposedly made himself known in different places as (e.g.) Master of Hazor and Master of Peor (2 Sam 13:23; Hos 9:10), a little like “Our Lady of…” or “Jesus of….” Although they really can’t deny it, of course Jerusalem does; Jeremiah therefore draws attention to the evidence. *The Ravine* can refer to a number of places, including Beth-pe’or (Deut 3:29), which would be relevant in this context (cf. Tg). But it most commonly denotes (Ben-/Bene-)Hinnom, the valley to the west and south of Jerusalem. LXX here calls it the cemetery and 19:1-15 links burial with the Hinnom Ravine, where people burned children (see 7:31-32), while 2 Kgs 23:6 locates a common burial ground in the adjacent Kidron Wadi. It would be a natural location for making offerings in connection with burials and with maintaining relationships with family members who had passed.[[163]](#footnote-163) Josiah put an end to these practices for a while but 2 Kgs 23-24 and Ezekiel imply that they revived. While some people engaging in them might be consciously worshiping other deities, others could see themselves as worshiping Yahweh while using those traditional forms and means of worship, and they could therefore issue the denial that Jeremiah quotes. Jeremiah doesn’t imply that they are insincere in their faith; they may be quite sincere. But worship that takes such forms cannot really be a way of serving Yahweh. It implies serving the Masters, even if people don’t *acknowledge* it. It’s time they did, instead of claiming they are not defiled because they haven’t gone after the Masters.

**23b-24** In light of the reality he has portrayed, Jeremiah has two insulting comparisons for Jerusalem. The city is a camel and a donkey. These comparisons would not in themselves be insults; camels and donkeys were valuable and appreciated creatures without which human life would be much harder. But on her own a *light-footed she-camel* would run about in an aimless way. Jeremiah further reworks the *paths* image from earlier in v. 23, as he did in vv. 17-18; see also v. 36. Jerusalem could think that its missions to Egypt were very purposeful, but they were not so at all. Something similar is true of the *wild donkey* that knows the *wilderness* well and wanders about in it but does so in an apparently directionless and purposeless way (now if only it were a domesticated donkey…). The donkey in the first colon in v. 24 seems to be male, but then it becomes female; perhaps the switch is influenced by the addressing of Jerusalem as feminine in previous lines. She is a donkey keen to find a mate when she is in heat. The bicolon in v. 24aβγ works aba’b’: *her consuming desire* occupies her when it is *her season*. It means she has *panted after wind* and caught the whiff of a male, and so no one would be able to *turn her back* from seeking him out. There’s no stopping her. The subsequent bicolon in v. 24b extends the point: it’s easy for *any* male donkeys to locate her: *in her month*, her time in heat,she’ll be looking for them. If it’s not too allegorical, we can infer that Jeremiah’s point is that anyone who wants to find the Jerusalemites seeking the Masters will easily find them. They are full of enthusiasm and they don’t hide.

**25a** Yahweh has one more thing to say about Jerusalem’s path before changing the subject. He first picks up two ways that a journey along a lengthy path (in a climate like Israel’s and/or in the wilderness) may take a toll on you:

hold back your foot from [being] bare

and your throat from thirst

The opening colon thus has a verb applying to both cola, a feminine noun, then an adjective at the end; the parallel colon has a masculine noun and then a noun at the end. Boots may wear out and you may die of dehydration, Yahweh says. Don’t do it. He’s not talking about an ordinary hike but about the costly nature of the journey that the Jerusalemites are engaged in. It’s not the kind of path he imposed on them. In v. 20 he had talked about a yoke; he did not impose a heavy yoke on them (Matt 11:30). He didn’t ask them to sacrifice their children in the Ravine, in the demanding way of serving God hat the ttraditional religion of Canaan expected (see v. 23). Nor does he want them to trudge through the wilderness to Egypt to do political deals, which was the context of the earlier yoke talk (Isa 30:1-7 implies a complementary argument).

**25b** The reference to *foreigners* in the closing tricolon could suggest both religious resources (3:13; Deut 32:16) and political resources (5:19; 30:8; 51:51). The former would link with vv. 20b-23a; the latter would link with the allusions to Egypt and Assyria earlier in this chapter. Religion and politics were interwoven. “If Israel does not embrace Yahweh, perforce she will embrace the political might of foreigners and their deities.”[[164]](#footnote-164) While it may confuse Western readers that Jeremiah declines to in speak in a way that makes a clear distinction between religion and politics,[[165]](#footnote-165) his declining to dissociate them is instructive. When Jerusalem says it’s *futile* for Jeremiah to seek to wean it from its alien commitments, Its reference to its love of foreigners could cover both religion and politics; we have noted that the Hebrew word translated *love* can cover political commitments as well as religious and romantic ones.[[166]](#footnote-166) Jerusalem’s response could imply either “I can’t stop” or “I won’t stop.” Perhaps both are true. With regard to politics as well as religion, Judah need not see itself as serving masters other than Yahweh. It could take the view that responsible political policies (as it saw them to be) were part of serving Yahweh.[[167]](#footnote-167)

## The Shameful Community (2:26-31aα)

26Like a thief’s shame when he’s found out,

so have Israel’s household acted shamefully,[[168]](#footnote-168)

They, their kings, their officials,

and their priests, and their prophets,[[169]](#footnote-169)

27Saying[[170]](#footnote-170) to wood, “You’re my father,

and to rock, “You’re the one who gave birth to us.”[[171]](#footnote-171)

Because they have faced me with the back of their neck,[[172]](#footnote-172)

not their face.

At the time of their dire trouble they will say to me,

“Set to and deliver us.”a

28But where will be your gods,

the ones that you made for yourself?

They should set to, if they can deliver you,

at the time of your dire trouble.

Because the number of your towns –

so your gods have become, Judah.b

29Why would you argue with me? –

all of you have rebelled against mec (Yahweh’s affirmation).

30To no effect did I strike down your children –

they did not accept restraint.

Your sword devoured your prophets

like a devastating lion:

31you are the generation.d

*Deliver us* is *hôšî‘ēnû*, one of the common forms of that imperative; another of them, *hôšî‘â nā’* (Ps 118:25) becomes “Hosanna” (e.g., Mark 11:9).

MT has a marker here. LXX has an extra line equivalent to 11:13b.

The asyndetic clause with the subject before the verb is subordinate to the previous clause; cf. v. 30aβ with the object before the verb.

Jerome (*Jeremiah*, 17) thus links v. 31aα with v. 30; cf. A. J. O. van der Wal, “Jeremiah ii 31,” *VT* 41 (1991): 360-63.

Once again Jeremiah changes the subject; he now speaks about making divine images. The section outlines:

vv. 26-27a Judah’s turning away (1)

another three-line enjambment and a single bicolon

vv. 27b-28a Judah’s predicament

three self-contained bicola

vv. 28b-31aα Judah’s turning away (2)

three self-contained bicola and another tricolon to close

**26** Jeremiah introduces another of his recurrent motifs. Whereas honor means acting in a way society recognizes and praises, *shame* means acting in a way society critiques as unworthy; it means public disgrace not merely feeling chagrined.[[173]](#footnote-173) Shame implies a sense of exposure and humiliation, the opposite of (proper) pride. It is an oversimplification to say that Western cultures are guilt-focused and traditional cultures are shame-focused. If reviewers accuse this commentary of bad judgment, ignorance, or plagiarism, I will be shamed and ashamed. Further, the Western notions of identity, self-worth, and especially dignity overlap with the notion of shame. But shame is indeed a significant issue in traditional cultures. Admittedly *a thief’s shame* is the least of his problems (see e.g., Exod 22:1-8 [21:37 – 22:7]). But Rachel would have been shamed if she had been *found out*, and Achan was shamed when he was found out (Gen 31; Josh 7). In his deceit and unfaithfulness, Achan had behaved shamefully, and he was shamed by the exposure of his deceit and unfaithfulness. Shame is both an individual reality and a community reality, and similar dynamics apply to Israel, though there is some pregnancy in Jeremiah’s formulation. The shameful action is actual; the shaming is still future. The shamefulness that Jeremiah sees and the shaming that he foretells affect the entire community and all its strata of leadership (cf. 1:18). What is its cause? V. 26 sets up the question. The following lines will answer it.

**27a** Jeremiah begins with another quotation of something that people don’t quite say – the people being the ones he is actually addressing. It’s part of trying to shake them to their senses. Revering images implies that they are deities, and the shame will lie in their exposure as people who implicitly hold that assumption. Another line combines parallelism with variation:

saying to wood father of me you [masculine]

and to rock you’re the one who [feminine] gave birth to us

The participle applies to both cola, rock complements wood, feminine complements masculine, verbal predicate complements noun predicate, “us” complements “me”; and in the opening colon the subject follows the predicate (the way Hebrew usually works) while in the complementary colon the subject precedes the predicate (because the predicate is a verb, the “you” was unnecessary, but its inclusion helps further the parallelism as well as adding emphasis). Wood is the main thing an image was made of; Jeremiah is ignores the gold or silver overlay to underline the stupidity of the statement that people make to the image (compare and contrast 10:1-16). Rock appears rarely in this connection and might be a makeweight (cf. Deut 4:28; but cf. 3:9). Literally, it would refer to stone obelisks (43:13), and there could be variation in whether people regarded them as images of a god.[[174]](#footnote-174) Whereas images were always forbidden, obelisks were fine in Genesis (e.g., 28:18, 22), but they were banned when they came to be associated with the Master. Both wood and rock might refer concretely to totem poles that could be understood as standing for Asherah and pillars that stood for Yahweh himself (Deut 12:3; 2 Kgs 23:14) – in which case Jeremiah speaks sarcastically, since the totem pole would represent a mother figure and the pillar a father figure. People would not actually think that the wood and stone were father and mother, but Jeremiah presupposes a kind of syllogism. Yahweh was Israel’s father and mother (e.g., Deut 32:18). Yahweh cannot be imaged with something material. People pray to something material. Therefore they are not praying to Yahweh even if they think they are. But perhaps they did think they were praying to Asherah.[[175]](#footnote-175) Corporately, Israel may have come into the country as outsiders who have experienced Yahweh revealing himself to them, rescuing them, and bringing them here. But ask the average Israelite about his or her background, and it was not so different from that of the average Canaanite.[[176]](#footnote-176) Whatever they think they are doing, they are turning their back on Yahweh, which is an indication of ignoring him. “How can Yahweh carry on a relationship with the back of a neck?”[[177]](#footnote-177) In contrast, turning one’s face means “looking to” him, as we say in English.

**27b-28a** Yahweh jumps a stage in his argument and returns to a picture of Israel having to handle disaster. He makes his point in abcc’b’a’ format:

At the time of their dire trouble they will say to me,

“Set to and deliver us.”

But where will be your gods,

the ones that you made for yourself?

They should set to, if they can deliver you,

at the time of your dire trouble.

If this chapter represents material in the 604 scroll, then Jeremiah is again speaking in anticipation of *dire trouble* he knows is coming – the calamity that will come in 597 and more finally in 587. People may then come before their images and plead for help, but Jeremiah knows they will not get any help from these Ersatzgöttern,[[178]](#footnote-178) and he pictures them thus realizing their stupidity and turning to the real Yahweh as people do in temple worship: their plea *set to and deliver us* comes in 1 Chr 16:35; Ps 106:47 (“set to and deliver me” come in Jer 17:14 and Ps 3:7 [8]).[[179]](#footnote-179) But Yahweh will give them a dusty response. You have your gods you made. Where are they now? The acerbic question nicely reverses the one Yahweh sometimes had to listen to (Pss 42:1, 10 [4, 11]; 79:10; 115:2). The question recalls the comment about people’s failure to ask “Where is Yahweh, the one who got us up from the country of Egypt”(v. 6), and both questions recall Jeroboam’s declaration, “Here are your gods who brought you up from the country of Egypt”(1 Kgs 12:28), by which Ephraim lived.[[180]](#footnote-180) In asking his question, Yahweh moves to addressing the people directly; here he does so in the masculine singular, implicitly speaking to Judah. Don’t turn to me then, says Yahweh. He speaks rhetorically, like a mother who threatens to divorce her kids. He speaks out of a sense of offence and/or pain, and his confrontational language is designed to shake them to their senses. Yet in the event he did let the city fall in 597 and 587. In his mind’s eye, Jeremiah has seen it and has already seen Israel shamed.

**28b-29** After all, they have lots of gods, don’t they? Any town would have a shrine (a “high place”) and each shrine would have an image; people might see it as an image of Yahweh but it cannot be (because by definition there is no such thing). It is therefore really an image of another deity. Yahweh then reverts to addressing people in the plural. Back in v. 9 he had declared the intention to argue with them. He knows he has a case. He does not grant that they have one. The *why* implies that their attempting to *argue* with him would be pointless. Again he jumps a stage in his argument. Bringing a case would involve them challenging him as people do in the Psalms, urging him to act on their behalf. They would do so on the basis of being people committed to him to whom he therefore has an obligation but whom has let down or is ignoring. Yet the fact that they have *rebelled* makes their case collapse. They can’t argue that way.

**30-31aα.** Whatletdown could they be protesting? To presuppose another jump, their charge is that he has struck them down as if they were Egyptians or Canaanites (cf. 14:19; also 5:3); the image of the lion, and the verb *devastate* (*šāḥat*), are important through the Jeremiah scroll.[[181]](#footnote-181) On a gloomy day they could see their history as dominated by invasions and defeats. They and Yahweh might thus be looking back on the history of *your* *children* in the sense of the “children of Israel,” who are part of the *all of you*. Sure I struck them down, he says, and reintroduces from vv. 19-20[[182]](#footnote-182) the motif of restraint or discipline (*mûsār* - cf. 5:3; 7:28; 17:23; 32:33; 34:13 – only Proverbs uses the word more). Maybe his point is that he hit them because they rebelled and did not *accept restraint*, so that they deserved it, or maybe that striking them down was designed to achieve something positive by way of restraint or discipline, but alas, it failed. Slaughtering *prophets* (cf. 26:7-24; 1 Kgs 19:10, 14) will have been a horrific expression of that rebellion and resistance to restraint, and a concrete indication that they have no *case* to bring. But *your children* also recalls v. 9, where “the children of your children” featured in Yahweh’s argument. This link might suggest that Yahweh is again anticipating the time after 597 and 587. For the audience in 604, *your* *children* are then the coming generation. The confrontation in v. 31aα would then point out to subsequent audiences that *you* *are the generation* that needs to apply Jeremiah’s message to yourselves. This direct challenge brings the tricolon and the section to a close.

## The Shaming to Come (2:31aβ-37)

31aβLook at Yahweh’s message:

A wilderness – is that what I have been to Israel,

or a country of supernatural gloom?a

Why have my people said, “We have wandered about –b

we will not come to you any more”?

32Can a young girlc put her adornment out of mind,

a bride her bows?d

But my people – they have put me out of mind,

days without number.

33How good you make your path

for seeking love!

Thus, yes, dire things –

you have taught them to your paths.e

34Yes, on your sleevesf is to be found

the life bloodg of the needy,h people who are free of guilt;i

it was not in breaking in that you found them.j

Because for all these things:

35You have said, “Indeed I am free of guilt,

in truth, his anger has turned back from me.”

Here am I, entering into the exercise of authority with you,

for your saying,k “I haven’t done wrong.”

36How very casually you go about,l

in changing your path!

Yes, through Egypt you will be shamed,

as you were shamed through Assyria.

37Yes, from this you will go out,

your hands on your head.

Because Yahweh has rejected the people on whom you rely

and you will not succeed through them.

*Ma’pēlyâ*, which comes only here, is a lengthened version of words such as *’ōpel*. It parallels *šalhebetyâ* (Cant 8:6) and could thus make people think of “Yahweh’s darkness” (Qimchi in *miqrā’ôt gәdôlôt* on the passage), which would fit in the context.

The asyndeton might suggest a concessive cause – “although we have wandered about.” LXX “we will not be ruled,” with “free add[ition]” of a negative (*HUB*)(!) apparently derives *radnû* from *rādâ* (Craigie *Jeremiah 1 – 25*, 39, 40) rather than *rûd*.Syr “we have gone down” implies a form from *yārad*; Vg, Aq, Sym “we have gone back” might imply *rûd* or *yārad*.

See the note on 18:13.

*Qiššureyhā*, from a verb meaning tie or bind, suggests elements in her outfit that are tied on or tied together.

*Lāmad* piel can take two objects, and thus (e.g.) NRSV takes the line to signify teaching your paths to bad women, but the adjective *ra‘* is set against the opening verb *yāṭab*, so the context and the parallel in 3:5 suggest that *hārā‘ôt* denotes bad things not bad women and the line dignifies teaching bad things to your paths.

Literally, “your wings/edges.” For *bikәnāpayik* LXX, Syr imply *bәkappayik* “on your palms.”

Literally, “blood of lives.”

LXX’s lacks *’ebyônîm*, perhaps a later elaboration in MT making Jeremiah’s point more general; see the comment.

Vg *innocens* for *nāqî* generates the English translation “innocent,” which is not exactly wrong but changes the emphasis. *Nāqî* means free of liability, in various senses – free of obligation, free of guilt, free from punishment, in the clear.

LXX, Vg have “I found them.”

Rashi (in *miqrā’ôt gәdôlôt* on the passage) infers “saying in your heart.”

I take *tēzәlî* as a composite form: consonants from *zālal* “make light of” (cf. LXX, Vg, Syr) and pointing from *’āzal* “go about” (BDB).

A bidding to pay attention opens the chapter’s final section of indictment and threat, incorporating more pseudo-quotations (vv. 31b, 35a, 35b), more questions (vv. 31a, 31b, 32), and a series of word pictures (vv. 31, 32, 34, 37).

v. 31aβ introduction

vv. 31:aγ-34abα Yahweh’s indictment

six bicola and a tricolon before the pause

v. 34bβ introduction

vv. 35-37 Yahweh’s threat

six bicola

**31aβgδb** With the catachresis[[183]](#footnote-183) *look at Yahweh’s* *message* (one doesn’t look at a message!), compare 23:18 and Amos 1:1, while Ecclesiastes comments that he has “seen” much wisdom and knowledge (Eccl 1:16).[[184]](#footnote-184) Maybe it’s significant that Yahweh now paints a number of further word pictures. His challenge again suggests a response to protests Israel has voiced. While *wilderness* is not too bad a place if you are a shepherd, Jerusalemites would find the city preferable, as vv. 2, 6-7 have presupposed. *A country of supernatural gloom* complements the expressions there. Someone from Anathoth, from where the land falls straight down into the desert of the Rift Valley and the Dead Sea, might be even more aware of the nature of wilderness.[[185]](#footnote-185) The further pseudo-quotation that follows carries some irony. Yahweh pictures the people as seeing themselves to be wandering about (as if in some trackless wilderness) but not actually protesting to him, implicitly because they see Yahweh himself as a wilderness and a country of supernatural gloom. They see no point in consulting him about their policies.

**32** In response to that declaration, Yahweh segues to a second picture, returning to the marital imagery of v. 2, though it is a moment before the point is explicit. First he invites us to imagine a pretty girl. The line is neatly parallel:

Can put out of mind a young girl her adornment,

a bride her bows?

In the parallelism *bride* makes explicit what kind of *young girl* we are talking about, and *bows* makes explicit what kind of *adornment*. The next line then makes a double comment. Israel has been able to do the impossible thing; indeed, *put me* *out of mind* is no recent phenomenon. Isa 49:14-18 will turn Jeremiah’s point upside down.[[186]](#footnote-186)

**33** Following the reference to a bride, Yahweh naturally enough reverts to second-person singular feminine address. The corollary of putting out of mind is *seeking love* elsewhere. Yahweh again picks up the path image. Having put Yahweh out of mind, how good Jerusalem has been at finding other lovers, other deities to follow instead of Yahweh[[187]](#footnote-187) and/or other political allies.[[188]](#footnote-188) Jerusalem has thus been able to teach *dire things* to its *paths*. Yahweh compliments Jerusalem on how good it is at doing what is bad.[[189]](#footnote-189)

**34abα** What are the dire things? So far, dire behavior has been unfaithfulness to Yahweh expressed in alien worship forms, alien political policies, and the killing of prophets. In the section’s third picture, Jerusalem walks around in a flowing robe on whose hems or sleeves one can see the blood of *people who are free of guilt*. The blood noted in 2 Kgs 24:4 still sits on them. It would initially be the blood of those prophets, people it has put to death when they had done nothing to deserve it. It is in connection with such a threat to him that 26:15 warns Jerusalem about shedding “innocent blood.” But Jeremiah also cares about innocent blood more generally (e.g., 22:3, 17) and about the needy (5:28; 22:16). Thus his message now incorporates talk of unfaithfulness within the community. There can be excuses for shedding blood; if you tackle someone whom *you found* was *breaking in* to your house and you killed him, it was not murder (Exod 22:2-3 [1-2]). But Jerusalem does not have this kind of excuse. The flowing outfits worn by people in leadership might have blood on them both because they were actively engaged in action like that taken against Jeremiah and Uriah (Jer 26) and Naboth (1 Kgs 21), and because they simply failed to exercise their authority in a way that protected the innocent.

**34bβ-35** The final colon in v. 34 forms an introduction to the chapter’s conclusion and thus to Jeremiah’s challenge: *for* (‘*al*) might imply “because of” or “despite.” The situation is made worse by people’s living in denial. They killed or colluded with the death of prophets or needy people on the basis that they were false prophets and dishonest people. Ironically, those people were innocent but were treated as guilty, whereas Jerusalem is guilty but assumes innocence. According to the further convictions that Yahweh puts on its lips, it knew that Yahweh’s wrath had hung over it (2 Kgs 22), but Josiah had cleaned it up. It therefore believed that Yahweh’s *anger had turned back* from it and thus that it could turn to Yahweh in the way the Psalms do on the basis of being right with Yahweh. But see 2 Kgs 23:26. The reformation did not reach far enough, or did not do so in a way that Jehoiakim and Zedekiah could not reverse. So Yahweh is going to argue things out with Jerusalem. In v. 9 he had spoken of arguing a case (*rîb*) with them and against them, which implicitly described what he had already been doing in vv. 1-8. Here, the expression *entering into the exercise of authority with you* (*šāpaṭ* niphal) implies some mutuality of argument, but the implication is ironic (cf. 25:31). There’s no doubt that the city is guilty, even though (or especially because) it claims otherwise. V. 35 works abb’a’:

you have said, “Indeed I am free of guilt,

in truth, his anger has turned back from me”

here am I, exercising authority with you,

for your saying, “ I haven’t done wrong”

**36** Jeremiah once again addresses the city about its path, and begins as he did in v. 33 with a *how* about *your* *path* and another twofold *yes*. Yahweh has a path he wants Jerusalem to take, but it has made its unilateral declaration of independence in *changing* its path so that it could wander about. This time Jeremiah doesn’t refer to love but he does refer to *Egypt* and *Assyria*, who are the city’s traditional political love-objects. Assyria had that position in the past but is a spent force by Jeremiah’s day. Egypt belongs to the present. While we have no concrete references to Judah seeking alliance with Egypt in Jeremiah’s time (contrast Isa 30 – 31), this policy option was flagged in vv. 13-19. In connection with such possibilities, Jeremiah returns to the theme of being *shamed*, with another abb’a’ sequence:

yes through Egypt you will be shamed

as you were shamed through Assyria.

If Judah trusted in Egypt in the decades before 587, 2 Kgs 23:29, 33-35; 24:7 would vindicate Jeremiah’s point.

**37** His fourth word picture at the close of this section and of the chapter hints allusively at Jerusalem’s going out to exile. *Hands on head* would be a plausible image for the distraught shame that will then be involved (2 Sam 13:19). Passages such as Isa 30:12-15 from the context of Judah’s Egyptian adventures in Hezekiah’s day remind Judah about the disastrous consequences that follow when people *rely* on the wrong support and protection. They will *not succeed* in saving the nation that way. “All the addresses of the prophets” aim “to make the people to rest contented under the protection of God.”[[190]](#footnote-190)

# Mostly Exhortation: Turning and Turning Back (3:1 – 4:4)

The themes, motifs, and images of Jer 2 recur in 3:1 – 4:4, but they are now set in the context of an emphasis on turning (*šûb*).[[191]](#footnote-191) Jer 2 has hinted at the potential offered by this verb and its derivatives.

Your turnings – they are to rebuke you (2:19).

Her season – who can turn her back? (2:24)

In truth, his anger has turned from me (2:35).

Jer 3:1 – 4:4 exploits the word’s possibilities, particularly its capacity to denote both “turn away” and “turn back,” and a physical return from exile. The medieval chapter division recognizes this change at 3:1 and thus makes it a beginning. While the end of the medieval chapter at 3:25 corresponds to a section break in MT, the talk of turning continues in 4:1-2, after which MT has another section marker. So neither tradition has a division after 4:4. But 4:3-4 continues the theme, even though it does not use the word, and it concludes this hortatory section of the Jeremiah scroll. So 3:1 – 4:4 makes a section.[[192]](#footnote-192)

One could call 2:1 – 4:4 as a whole “a *teshuva* speech.”[[193]](#footnote-193) Jer 2 was implicitly concerned with Judah’s turning back to Yahweh, but it didn’t make the point explicit. Even 3:1 – 4:4 comes at the point only indirectly: first it presupposes it and secondly it raises problems about it, before issuing a straightforward exhortation to which it then adds some promises. The combination of confrontation, exhortation, and promises in 3:1 – 4:4 means that it encompasses the main themes of the entire scroll: “Nothing in the remainder of the book – save the judgment upon the nations – adds substantially to this.”[[194]](#footnote-194) The section shifts between prose and poetry (though some of the prose is rhythmic enough to be laid out as poetry), with gender shifts roughly corresponding to this alternation,[[195]](#footnote-195) but an argument develops through the section:

3:1 Prose: a problem about Israel’s turning, from Yahweh’s side

(second singular feminine addressee)

3:2-5 Poetry: a problem about Israel’s turning, from Israel’s side

(second singular feminine addressee)

3:6-10 Prose: a recollection concerning Ephraim’s failure to turn and Judah’s faulty turning

(third singular feminine subject)

3:11-18 Prose: a challenge to Ephraim to turn, and promises to Ephraim and Judah

(second singular feminine then second plural masculine addressee)

3:19-25 Poetry: an explicit exhortation to Israel to turn

(second singular feminine then second plural masculine addressee)

4:1-4 Poetry: the need for the turning to be real

(second plural masculine addressees)

It broadly works to read 3:1 – 4:4 in connection with the scroll whose origin is described in Jer 36, as is the case with Jer 2. But a distinctive feature of this section is that its long prose paragraphs in 3:6-18 are also the only part of the entire Jeremiah scroll that carries a date in Josiah’s time. Yet any transcription of Jeremiah’s messages from Josiah’s reign apparently happened in connection with the production of the 604 scroll, and attempt to identify the original form of individual messages as Jeremiah preached them in (say) the 620s is made impossible by the process that has turned them into the text we have. The immediate context for reading 3:1 – 4:4 as a whole is the reign of Jehoiakim. On the other hand, since 1:1-3 set the Jeremiah scroll as a whole in the context of the time of Josiah, Jehoiakim, Zedekiah, and the period after 587, the section can profitably be read against all those contexts. And the message might have been further elaborated as these contexts unfolded. In particular, the promises in vv. 16-20 seem to presuppose the presumed destruction of the “ark of the covenant” in 587, and they bring good news to people in that context.

## The Impossible Possibility? (3:1)

1Saying:a If a man sends off his wife, she goes from being with him, and she comes to belong to another man, can he turn back to her again?b That country would be polluted, polluted,c wouldn’t it. But you – you have whored with many partners; turning back to me….e (Yahweh’s affirmation).

The terse introduction might be a way of introducing a question that seeks a ruling (cf. Hag 2:11) or introducing a ruling that needs to be applied to a question. M. I. Gruber compares with the “it has been said” formula in Matt 5:21 (“Jeremiah 3:1 – 4:2 between Deuteronomy 24 and Matthew 5,” in C. Cohen et el. [eds.], *Birkat Shalom* [S. M. Paul Festschrift; Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2008], 233-49).

LXX has a denial of *her* being able to return to *him*, which might seem to fit Deut 24:1-4 and Jeremiah’s allegory better.

An infinitive precedes the finite verb, underlining the fact. On this common usage in Jeremiah, see Y. Kim, “The Tautological Infinitive in the Book of Jeremiah,” *Korean Journal of Christian Studies* 66 (2009): 23-38. LXX, Vg have the woman being polluted, which again fits Deut 24:1-4.

LXX, Syr “shepherds” implies *rō‘îm* as in 2:8; 3:15 for *rē‘îm* as in 29:23.

Vg, Syr, Tg take the infinitive absolute *šôb* as equivalent to an imperative (cf. 2:2; DG 103, remark 2). LXX may take the clause is an unmarked question, “have you turned back to me?” (cf. *NETS*; JM 123w; GK 113q, ee).

This prose question[[196]](#footnote-196) takes up the rule in Deut 24:1-4, though it is shorter than that rule.[[197]](#footnote-197) In Deut 24:1 the man had discovered “the nakedness of a thing” in his wife, which likely refers to sexual misconduct. Jeremiah does not include any reference to the reasons why the man *sends off* *his* *wife* (the usual term for divorce), notwithstanding the fact that such background would have been quite apposite, nor any reference to her second husband divorcing her. The focus lies on the ban regarding the husband’s marrying her again, as Deut 24 puts it, or turning back to her; the verb in Jer 3 is *šûb*, which will be key to the chapter. Deut 24 is thus concerned with a rule for the man not a rule for the woman, Jer 3 with whether she may go back to him. But everybody would know the answer to the question. There’s nothing controversial here, as is the case with the questioning in Hag 2:10-14.

Deut 24 does use the verb *šûb* but not with the meaning “turn back,” only as a quasi-auxiliary verb signifying the repeat of an action. In addition, it refers to defilement, but only to the woman’s defilement through her first marriage rather than to the country’s defilement, and it uses the verb *ṭāmē’* (be defiled/unclean) rather than Jeremiah’s stronger verb *ḥānap* (pollute). On the other hand, Deut 24 does go on to say that the remarriage would put the country in the wrong and in need of purification (*ḥāṭā’* hiphil). Deuteronomy is not banning every second marriage after divorce, only a woman’s remarriage to her first husband. It is solely in relation to him that she is defiled. It does not explain why she is defiled nor why Israel needed a rule to cover this exceptional circumstance; fortunately, we don’t need to know the answers to the questions raised by Deut 24 in order the understand Jeremiah’s argument. But given that a remarriage would cause defilement, the husband’s ignoring this consideration would inevitably put the country in the wrong or bring pollution on it – like the ignoring of any rule about defilement. Becoming defiled does not imply you have sinned; it can be just something tied up with life. It happens through contact with a corpse, for instance, which is inevitable if you need to bury a family member. You just then have to follow the appropriate observance, like Mary when she has give birth to Jesus (Luke 2:22-24). But becoming *polluted* implies desecration, a deliberate profaning, “an act or attitude through which a state of sacral relation to the Godhead is intentionally set aside.”[[198]](#footnote-198)

While Jeremiah’s audience would have no problem nodding their heads at his opening question, by doing so they have skewered themselves. They are like David when impaled by Nathan; in effect Jeremiah says, “You are the man.”[[199]](#footnote-199) Except that he says, “You are the woman”: and he is speaking to an audience that might be mostly men, especially when it is Jehoiakim’s cabinet. But his confrontation is aided by his addressing the city of Jerusalem which is thought of as a woman. *A fortiori*, he implies, a man could not *turn back* to a woman who has been with a number of men, could he? Even more *a fortiori*, is *turning back* to Yahweh a possibility for Jerusalem when she has been with a number of *partners*? Could she turn back? Could he agree to it? The message then ends in mid-air or mid-sentence, with a deliciously ambiguous verb.[[200]](#footnote-200) It could be translated “but turn back to me”: I don’t have to be bound by that rule – it needn’t apply to you and me. “I am above law, saith God, and will deal with thee, not according to mine ordinary rule, but according to my prerogative.”[[201]](#footnote-201) Or it could be a question: “so would you turn back to me?” Could I accept you without polluting myself? In light of the ambiguity, the closing *Yahweh’s affirmation* is ironic. Surely it’s always possible for people to return to Yahweh? Is it? One can imagine the verse as designed to raise questions for Judah in Josiah’s day, or Jehoiakim’s day as part of the 604 scroll, or during the years up to 587, or in the context of the exilic period. The rest of the section will explore possibilities with regard to whether Yahweh could or would have Judah back.

## The Implausibility (3:2-5)

2Raise your eyes to the bare heightsa and look,

where have you not been laid?b

By the paths you have sat for them,

like a Bedouinc in the wilderness.

You have polluted the country,

with your whorings, your dire behavior.d

3Downpourse have held back,

late rain – it hasn’t happened.

But you have had the forehead of a whorish woman –f

you have refused to feel disgrace.

4Just now you calledg to me, didn’t you,

“Father, you are the guideh of my youth.

5Does he hold onto things for all time,

or does he keep things perpetually?”

There, you have spoken,

but you did dire things, and you had your way.i

LXX, Vg “straight ahead” reflects uncertainty about the meaning of *šәpayim* (most of whose occurrences come in Jeremiah). Here it apparently denotes places people look up to; they are or can be locations where people gather and pray (3:21; 7:29; 12:12; 14:6); they are or can be in the wilderness (4:11), where wild donkeys stand (14:6). But as bare heights maybe they are simply “open plains in contradistinction to woodland” (Blayney, *Jeremiah*, 243-44).

For Q *šukkabt* (cf. Aq, Sym) K implies *šuggalt*, the equivalent of the F word (Carroll, *Jeremiah*,141), which is therefore regularly replaced by something a bit more delicate.

*’Ărābî*; Tg has the gloss “who dwell in tents,” Vg has “bandit.” LXX has “raven,” implying *’ōrēb*.

Literally, “your whoring and…”: a hendiadys.

Vg “drops of rain” suggests that *rәbibîm* were just showers, but etymology suggests that they were a more copious provision (BDB, and Qimchi in *miqrā’ôt gәdôlôt* on the passage), as LXX implies (see McKane, *Jeremiah* 1:60; he also notes that LXX’s “snare” implies *môqēš* for MT’s *malqôš*, *late rain*).

The word order (subject preceding verb) and the asyndesis suggest that this clause is subordinate to what follows.

Vg has imperative as in v. 1 (cf. Tg).

LXX, Vg; *’allûp* hardly means companion/friend (BDB, *HALOT*, *DCH*) in this context, following directly on the invocation as father.

MT locates a chapter marker here rather than after 2:37.

This confrontation links with 3:1 in taking up the references to the country being polluted, to whoring, and to the nation having many sexual partners, but it does not refer to turning, and poetically and thematically it stands in more obvious continuity with what preceded in Jer 2. If 3:1 had not intervened, 3:2-5 would simply be a continuation of Jer 2 – as 3:1-5 is in MT. Thus 3:1-5 as a whole binds the confrontation of 2:1-37 and the material on turning back in 3:6 – 4:4 in a small-scale version of the binding of Isa 34 – 39 to Isa 1 – 33 and 40 – 66 (where Isa 34 – 35 links forward with Isa 40 – 66 and Isa 36 – 39 links backward with Isa 1 – 33). The two sections (2:1-37 and 3:1 – 4:4) cannot be prized apart because of this overlap.[[202]](#footnote-202)

Vv. 2-5 comprises eight straightforward bicola, except that v. 3b is one of Jeremiah’s signature 5-2 lines. The discipline of this structure is matched by a prosaic style of expression. Only two of the lines are characterized by classic complementary parallelism (vv. 3a, 5a); in most lines the second colon simply completes the line to form a prosaic sentence, with no enjambment. The imagery continues that of Jer 2 except for the new simile in v. 2aδ.

**2** Jeremiah continues to use the second-person feminine and continues to expound his theme from Jer 2, the quasi-sexual unfaithfulness of Jerusalem and its people. The exhortation to *raise your eyes* suggests a deliberate action; it’s a call to look facts in the face and own them. To judge from the second colon, the *bare heights* to which people are urged to look are the places where traditional shrines were located in the area around Jerusalem (and no doubt further afield) – the “high places,” places of worship (cf. v. 21). The city is urged to think about what happens at those places of worship. People fool themselves that that they are honoring Yahweh there (see v. 4) but they need to face the truth. They go there for multiple worship events in honor of a variety of deities (v. 13) and they need to acknowledge the nature of these events. Bedouin sat *by the paths* along which people travel *in the wilderness*, with wares for sale such as metalwork objects, and Jerusalem sits there like Tamar (Gen 38:14-16; cf. Prov 7:12) waiting for “companions” (v. 1). It has *polluted* the country (*ḥānēp* hiphil: cf. v. 1) by its involvement with other deities like the hypothetical man or woman in v. 1, though in a different way.

**3** Dire consequences have followed the city’s *dire behavior* (cf. 2:13, 19). Maybe there is a link between the references to bare heights and to the wilderness and to the fact that the rains have failed—more than one link. While the shrines would be places where people prayed, their very treeless nature could testify to the prayers’ failure. The pollution has caused the drought, and “the connection between harlotry and drought is ironic,” since the practices of traditional religion that Judah had observed “were designed to guarantee the cycle of nature.”[[203]](#footnote-203) Perhaps it was this drought that prompted Jehoiakim’s fast and thus Baruch’s reading of Jeremiah’s original scroll (36:9).[[204]](#footnote-204) If a focus of the worship was prayer for rain (cf. Jer 14), it was counter-productive. The parallel cola in v. 3a talk in general terms about *downpours* and then about the *late rains* in about April which help bring the crops to maturity. The cola describe how the rains *have held back* (*māna‘* niphal) as if they had a mind of their own, and how the spring rains simply *haven’t happened*. They don’t say that God prevented them. They rather imply that “moral order affects cosmic order.”[[205]](#footnote-205) One can imagine farmers anxiously looking to the sky through the fall and early winter and then through the late winter and spring and inviting people to pray some more and sacrifice some more…. But people didn’t get it, didn’t get that they were thereby making matters worse. Perhaps some wrongdoers were ashamed of their behavior, but a whore needs to be brazen, and this whore was. She could look the world straight in the eye. She *refused to feel disgrace* (*kālam* niphal and the noun *kәlimmâ*, v. 25, are alternatives to the words translated “shame,” *bôš* and *bōšet*: see 2:26, 36). The two neat brisk brief parallel cola of the first line, describing the toughness of the situation all too succinctly, lead into a second line with a first colon whose length breaks all bounds, matching the scandalous disorderliness of what it refers to.

**4** Jerusalem didn’t think she was doing anything wrong (cf. 2:35). She *called to me* in worship and prayer – e.g., for rain. She addressed God as *Father* with that confidence in God’s fatherly care and love that the First Testament characteristically shows – no negative fear of God here. She addressed God as *the guide of my youth*. With irony the phrase recalls 2:2, and with further irony 2:19 and its reference to learning and its implication that Yahweh is the people’s teacher, like the father in Proverbs.[[206]](#footnote-206)

**5** But the rains’ consistent failure suggests that God is carefully preserving and stoking his attitude. The people move from speaking to Yahweh to asking themselves a question about him. The trouble is, their question is rhetorical; the query is articulated about him rather than addressed to him. The exactly parallel cola underline the question that (they think) Yahweh himself needs to face.

Does (*hă*) he hold onto [things] for all time,

or does (*’im*) he keep [things] perpetually?

What about Yahweh’s famous long-tempered-ness? In effect, they are claiming the theology of Exod 34:6-7[[207]](#footnote-207) (see also Pss 30:5; 79:5). But they wisely appeal to the way its wording and theology is reflected in Ps 103:8-9, 13 with its reference to God being father-like (cf. v. 4) and not “holding onto” his anger (the verb *nāṭar* comes only six times in the First Testament outside Ps 103 and Jer 3). The trouble with rhetorical questions is that someone may reply to them, and Jeremiah gives the obvious reply. People who *have* *spoken* as they have in v. 5a need to ask whether they have deliberately done the kind of *dire things* that make it impossible to complain about Yahweh’s keeping his anger going. *And you had your way*: literally, you did them “and you could” (*yākōl*),as much as you could, and you got away with it. There’s an incoherence about Jerusalem’s attitude that implies not only self-deception but a naivety in its assumptions about how ingenuous Yahweh himself is. It talks about him as her father-teacher but in its life it takes no notice of his teaching, which is moral and religious as well as pragmatic.

## Judah’s Faulty Turning (3:6-10)

6Yahweh said to me in the time of Josiah the king:

Have you seen what Turninga Israel did when she was going onto every high mountain and under every verdant tree, and whoringb there? 7I said, “After she has done all these things, to me she will turn back.”c But she didn’t turn back; and False, her sister Judah, saw.d 8I sawe that for all the occasions when Turning Israel committed adultery, I sent her off, and gave her the cutting off document, but False,f her sister Judah, wasn’t in awe.g She went and whored, she too, 9andh through the lightness of her whoring she was polluted, with the country.i She committed adultery with rock and with wood. 10Even through all this, False, her sister Judah, did not turn back to me with her entire heart but with deception (Yahweh’s affirmation).j

LXX *katoikia* (“settlement") derives *mәšubâ* from *yāšab* rather than from *šûb* (cf. Syr).

The finite verb continues the participial construction, though its form is anomalous (GK 75ii).

LXX, Vg, Syr translate *tāšûb* as imperative.

For Q *wattēre’* K implies the alternative spelling *wattir’eh*.

Syr (also some LXX mss) “she saw,” implying *wattēre’* for MT *wā’ēreh*, assimilates to the verb in v. 7.

Whereas vv. 7 and 10 have the adjective *bāgôdâ*, vv. 8 and 11 have the participle *bōgēdâ* – without apparent difference.

In the context, “being in awe” works better than “being afraid” (cf. 5:22, 24). Either way, there ought to be a link between looking (*rā’â*; v. 7) and being in awe/being afraid (*yārē’*), but there isn’t.

The verse begins *wәhāyâ* “and it happened,” when one would have expected *wayyәhî*; this oddity recurs in 37:11; 38:28; 40:3.

LXX lacks the phrase, which may be an expansion in MT (*CTAT* 2:481-82). Vg, Aq, Theod “she polluted the country” imply *wattaḥănēp* (hiphil) instead of *watteḥĕnap* (qal) (cf. v 1).

MT has a unit marker here.

The new section picks up the talk of turning, whoring, and polluting the country from vv. 2-5 and the talk of turning back and sending off from v. 1. Like vv. 1-5 it also picks up earlier motifs, with slight variation: for *onto every high mountain and under every verdant tree* and *rock* *and wood*, see 2:20, 27. One could call it a midrash[[208]](#footnote-208) on vv. 1-5 or “a narrative reinterpretation” of those verses,[[209]](#footnote-209) though it takes the form of a testimony to Yahweh’s addressing Jeremiah. But in substance, Yahweh is addressing Judah in another attempt to get it to see itself. The new device Yahweh is using is the contrast of Ephraim and Judah. Jeremiah shares the imagery of marriage and whoring with the Hosea scroll, which also periodically digs Judah in the ribs with an exhortation to learn from Ephraim’s mistakes in this connection, so Jeremiah may derive these motifs from there.[[210]](#footnote-210) Like Hosea, Jeremiah aims to get Judah to learn from Ephraim, or rather, he mourns over its resistance to doing so. Maybe he wrote his own midrash, or maybe a curator ghosted it later. The section’s eventual reference to Judah’s deceptive turning might allude to events back in the time of Hezekiah or Manasseh that are related in 2 Chr 29 – 33. But Josiah’s reformation is more obviously in the time frame for Jeremiah; this section will refer to a time later Josiah’s reign and thus just before Jehoiakim’s, when there was a basis for disappointment with that reformation.[[211]](#footnote-211)

**6** So the scroll invites readers to imagine themselves *in the time of* *Josiah the king*, a time when people did turn back to Yahweh, but not in a serious way. In the context of the production of the 604 scroll, this section would make sense as a recollection in Jehoiakim’s day of dynamics that Jeremiah had come to recognize later in Josiah’s reign, in the 610s. He reports a conversation that Yahweh initiated, as happened in 1:11-14, though in this case he simply reports something that *Yahweh said to me*; no response from him is required. Yahweh begins by immediately playing with the motif of turning. He asks Jeremiah a rhetorical question in order to draw his attention to something, and in order to give him a message to transmit in dramatic form to Judah. He could have given Jeremiah some poetry like that in vv. 2-5; the report of a prose conversation in which Yahweh shares a reflection communicates in a different way. In the title *Turning Israel*, it is the first time the name *Israel* has referred to the northern kingdom rather than to the people of Yahweh of which Judah (with some surviving northerners) is now the embodiment. Israel as denoting Ephraim will be a recurrent usage from now on in the Jeremiah scroll, though sometimes the reference of “Israel” will be less clear. For clarity, in my own comments I will refer to the northern kingdom as Ephraim, as Jeremiah occasionally does (e.g., 7:15) and Hosea often does. The noun *Turning* is an appellative (a noun qualifying the name of a person) only in this passage. Even as a common noun it is mostly a Jeremianic usage (e.g., 8:5), though Jeremiah maybe got it from Hosea (see 11:7; 14:4 [5]; it otherwise comes only in Prov 1:32). It always denotes a negative turning.

**7** Yahweh had hoped that Ephraim would *turn back* (more literally, simply “turn”), but his hope was disappointed. It is a characteristic divine experience. Yahweh had hopes for the world when he created it, and for Israel when he married her, and for the church when he brought it into being, but his hopes tend not to find fulfillment. Yet he doesn’t give up (as this message shows). Unlike Hosea, who envisages the restoration of Yahweh’s wives, Jeremiah makes no such reference,[[212]](#footnote-212) because his aim is to win Judah back not to have to throw her out. While there is some sense in which Yahweh knows everything that happens before it happens, at some other level he lives in narrative sequence with the world and with his people and thus lives with hope, anticipation, and uncertainty, waiting to see how people will react and how things will turn out. The notion of being *false* is another that will recur in Jeremiah (e.g., 3:20; 5:11). It suggests making promises and commitments (e.g., in marriage) and not keeping them. It connotes deception, betrayal, letdown, and disappointment, characteristics that led to Samaria’s fall in 722. Although Yahweh could have called Judah False on the basis of its behavior before and after that time, the following verses suggest that he has in mind its failure over more recent decades – or perhaps has in mind the inner nature that finds expression in those failures. Yahweh also notes that Judah and Ephraim are sisters; Yahweh married two sisters and both are unfaithful. It’s another aspect of “the prophets’ rhetoric of horror designed to terrify their audience into reform” in the way it talks about women.[[213]](#footnote-213)

**8-9** Jeremiah adds explicit reference to Ephraim’s having *committed adultery* (he has not used this expression so far, though he has implied this judgment) and adds that it was not just a one-off mistake. Yahweh therefore *sent her off* (cf. v. 1), and confirmed the process by giving her a *cutting off document*, divorce papers which put her status in writing and thus establish that someone who has a relationship with her is not committing adultery with her as a married woman (another link with Deut 24:1-4). Noting that he metaphorically fulfilled this part of the process confirms that he really did cast Ephraim off; actually, what he did was let Assyria eradicate her as a people. There was no literal divorce document, but “the downfall and mass deportation of Israel was evidence of divorce, God’s final break in the covenant relationship.”[[214]](#footnote-214) Of course it wasn’t a final break, as this section will make clear. Isa 50:1 takes up the divorce image in a way appropriate to its context and in a way that may indeed imply that Yahweh did not divorce Israel at all,[[215]](#footnote-215) and thus in a way that can worry readers who do not keep in mind that Jer 3 and Isa 40 – 55 are using a metaphor and doing so in different ways in their different contexts. But such readers may also be on the verge of recognizing a theological conundrum that can hardly be resolved. Can God finally cast off his people? Well, yes, if they persist in their turning away! Well, no, if he is faithful! One might have hoped that Judah would learn from what happened to her sister, but she *wasn’t in awe* and *she went and whored, she too*. Given the chronological sequence, Jeremiah might be referring to Hezekiah’s Egyptian ventures (which Jer 2 would implicitly regard as whoring), but what follows will suggest he is especially referring to the religious innovations of Manasseh’s reign. Judah was quite casual and unthinking about the way she followed Ephraim’s example instead of learning from it. She operated with a *lightness* that matched that of the she-camel in 2:23. It was casual sex.[[216]](#footnote-216) So she *polluted* the country (cf. v. 1) with her *adultery* (cf. v. 8) *with rock and with wood* (as 2:27 said).

**10** Jeremiah makes a jump. He implies that Judah did *turn back* (through Josiah’s reformation), as Ephraim did not, but not *with her entire heart* or mind as the Torah scroll urged (see Deut 6:5; 4:29; 10:12; 11:13; 13:3 [4]; 26:16; 30:2, 6, 10)[[217]](#footnote-217) and as Josiah challenged (2 Kgs 23:3). Images could be destroyed and the Shameful Fireplace could be defiled and obelisks could be shattered (2 Kgs 23), but such means of worship met with needs that people felt and the reformation did not change those felt needs. The next generation could reverse the reformation, and did. It had happened after Hezekiah’s reformation and it happened after Josiah’s. Judah’s turning thus involved *deception* (*šeqer*), yet another key Jeremianic word; it comes more in Jeremiah than anywhere else (e.g., 3:23; 5:2, 31; 6:13; 7:4, 8, 9). Whereas falsehood suggests words you say but then don’t live by, deception suggests words you say but never meant, or words that have no correspondence in reality. It links with the notion of emptiness in 2:5; both words apply to the nature of the non-gods that people inexplicably serve. In reality “Judah has learned nothing from the fall of Israel to the Assyrians,”[[218]](#footnote-218) and it is easy to follow Judah’s example.

When he speaks first that I sent away Israel due to her sins and I sent her into exile, but Judah did not turn back when she heard about what happened to Israel, he speaks about our sins. When the events which refer to Israel and the mistakes of that people are known, we should be fearful and say: “If he did not spare the natural branches, how much more will he not spare us….” For *note the kindness and severity of God*. For he is not *kind* without being *severe* nor *severe* without being *kind*…. We men who repent need his kindness, but those of us who persist in sins need his severity.”[[219]](#footnote-219)

## The Implausible Model (3:11-18)

11Yahweh said to me:

Turning Israel has made herself more faithfula than False Judah. 12Gob and call out these words northwards, and sayc “Do turn back,d Turning Israel (Yahweh’s affirmation). I won’t make my face fall against you, because I am committed (Yahweh’s affirmation). I don’t hold onto things for all time. 13Only acknowledge your waywardness. Because against Yahweh your God you have rebelled and scattered your paths to foreigners under every verdant tree, and to my voice you have not listened (Yahweh’s affirmation). 14Turn back, turning children (Yahweh’s affirmation), because I am the one who was husband to you.e I will get you, one from a town and two from a kin-group, and enable you to come to Zion. 15I will give you shepherds in accordance with my thinking,f and they will shepherd you with acknowledgment and understanding. 16And when you become many and become fruitful in the country:

* In those days (Yahweh’s affirmation) people will no more say “Yahweh’s pactg chest.”h It will not come up into their thinking, they will not be mindful of it, they will not attend to it, and it will not be made again.
* 17At that time people will call Jerusalem “Yahweh’s throne,” and all the nations will gather to it, to Yahweh’s name, to Jerusalem. Peoplei will no more go after the determination of their dire thinking.j
* 18In those days the household of Judah will go, along with the household of Israel, and they will come altogether from the northern countryk to the country that I gave by way of domain to your ancestors.

In the sense of declaring herself, the declarative or linguistic factitive piel: see *IBHS* 24.2f. Duhm (*Jeremia*, 38) compares Luke 18:14.

The infinitive absolute is used imperativally (cf. 2:2 and the note).

The *waw*-consecutive continues the imperative.

Yahweh uses the form of the imperative with an additional sufformative, *šûbâ*, which might suggest emphasis and/or be honorific (JM 48d).

LXX “I will be lord over you” takes the verb as an anticipatory qatal (see the introductory comment on 13:18-22).

Literally, “heart” or “mind”; cf. vv. 16, 17.

On this translation of *bәrît*, see the comments on 11:1-17.

The English word “ark” for *’ărôn* derives from Vg *arca*, but that Latin word is not a technical term; it means a chest, as does *’ărôn*. It can also denote an offerings box in the temple and a coffin.

Not “the nations,” since dire determination is Israel’s problem (e.g., 7:24; 9:14 [13]); *no more* has the same implication (Allen, *Jeremiah*, 53). The verb’s subject is impersonal, like that of the other verbs in vv. 16-17.

MT has a section marker here.

LXX adds “and from all the countries.”

Yahweh takes further the comparison between Turning Ephraim and False Judah; v. 12 picks up the language of turning back from v. 1, of maintaining it for all time from v. 5, of things happening under every verdant tree from v. 5 and behind that from 2:20, of foreigners from 2:20, and of shepherds from 2:8. A question arising from vv. 6-10 is, what is now Judah’s position in relation to Yahweh? The introduction at the beginning of v. 11 is resumptive (one could treat vv. 6-18 as one section), and rhetorically Yahweh again addresses Jeremiah, but now the first surprise is that rhetorically Jeremiah is to address Ephraim – though Judah continues to be the actual audience both of Yahweh’s words to Jeremiah and of Jeremiah’s proposed words to Ephraim. Yahweh utters these words for Judah’s benefit. They are for Judah to learn from. The content of vv. 11-13 is a surprise, and the following verses offer more surprises.

Yahweh speaks of Israel as feminine in v. 11, addresses it as masculine singular then as masculine plural in v. 12, and addresses it in the feminine and then in the masculine plural in vv. 13-18. As is the case with v. 1, there is a rhythmic aspect to Yahweh’s words in vv. 12-15 but little imagery or other poetic language and little parallelism; the section is rhythmic prose than poetry.

**11** Yahweh’s words intriguingly compare with the ancestor Judah’s words in Gen 38:26. But Yahweh here speaks hyperbolically for the sake of making a contrast. *Turning Israel* has not truly *made herself faithful* or shown that she is in the right or even counted herself as in the right (*ṣādaq* hiphil: this key First Testament root is not very common in Jeremiah). She was perhaps less guilty than *False Judah* who had her example to learn from – or better, not to learn from.[[220]](#footnote-220) Judah got the warning example and still didn’t turn.[[221]](#footnote-221)

**12** But the hyperbole opens up the possibility of painting the imaginative picture that follows. While I assume Yahweh really did engage in this (one-sided) conversation, I don’t imagine he really meant Jeremiah to *go and call out these words northwards* and issue this exhortation and invitation to Ephraim to *turn back*, any more than he literally intends Jeremiah to do as he says in 25:15 or to give the message he specifies in 25:27 or 30, or in 46:14 or 50:2.[[222]](#footnote-222) He is giving Jeremiah a piece of rhetoric to use on Judah, as he is in those other passages. For one thing, there is no corporate Ephraim to address; there are only Ephraimites scattered where Assyria had transported them, or living as refugees elsewhere, or living a discretely anonymous life in the old country having escaped deportation, or living in Judah. Jeremiah cannot go and address Ephraim as he can go to Jerusalem and more-or-less address Judah in the temple courtyards or address the king and his cabinet in the palace. *I won’t make my face fall against you*: it would be the opposite of lifting his face, making it shine, blessing, keeping, and making life work out well (Num 6:24-26). Only here and in Ps 145:17 is Yahweh described as *committed* (*ḥāsîd*), though there are many ascription of commitment (*ḥesed*) to him. There is some irony in his declaring that he has this human quality, given that some people couldn’t make that claim (see 2:2). No, *I don’t hold onto things for all time*: he responds to the anxious question that Judah articulated in v. 5. “There is nothing that a man is more ready to keep than his wrath.”[[223]](#footnote-223) Fortunately Yahweh is not human-like in this respect.

**13** You just have to *acknowledge your waywardness*. But such acknowledgment is more demanding than it sounds, given that acknowledging means doing something about it (see 1:5; 2:8, 19, 23). The image of waywardness works with the image of turning back: they have gone astray and chosen the wrong path, and they need to change their path. In case the image of waywardness is too mild (poor them, they lost their way, they missed the path), Yahweh adds that they lost their way only because they *rebelled* against going his way. To put it in a more original and vivid fashion, you *scattered your paths*. The reference to *every verdant tree* (see 2:20; 3:6) helps to interpret the image. Instead of making their way to the one Yahweh, they had lots of shrines all with their own god, as Jeremiah perversely sees it when he speaks of Judah in this connection (2:28). Scattering may also be an image for sexual promiscuity.[[224]](#footnote-224) And these gods were *foreigners* (2:25), which in this context means alien religious resources. There is some irony in the term, because these objects and forms of worship were ones that were native to the land, but they were foreign to what Israel was supposed to be. *And to my voice you have not listened*, Yahweh adds: listening, like acknowledging, means doing something (so *šāma‘* is often translated “obey”).

**14a** *Turn back* restates the exhortation in v. 13 but resumes terms from v. 12, though its verb is now plural, like *you* in v. 12 and *you have not listened* in v. 13; Yahweh keeps switched between singular and plural. So *turning children* corresponds to Turning Israel and Yahweh keeps utilizing the two meanings of *šûb*. It’s surprising that Yahweh says he is *the one who was husband to* the Ephraimites, who are his *children*. The metaphors clash, but the oddity arises through his combining the reference to Deut 24:1 (which has the verb “be husband to”) with references to his people as his “children” (Jer 2:9, 30; 3:19, 21, 22). But the reminder of Deut 24:1 makes for a more profound surprise, as is hinted by the fourth *Yahweh’s affirmation* in these three verses that say what might be especially unbelievable. Yahweh is ignoring the implications of the Deuteronomic rule, showing he is not bound by his own laws,[[225]](#footnote-225) or presupposing that Deut 24 is simply his rule for human beings whereas “Yahweh is God, not ‘man’” (Hos 11:8-9).[[226]](#footnote-226) It doesn’t resolve all the ambiguity about the infinitival *turning back* in v. 1, but it rules out one discouraging way of understanding its implications. On the other hand, Yahweh’s calling the Ephraimites his children suggests another point about referring to marrying them, because he uses the patriarchal term for being a husband in Deut 24:1 which rarely appears in the First Testament, the verb *bā‘al* with its multiple resonances. It’s not “the Master” (*ba‘al*) who is their master, and Yahweh is their master, not their buddy or daddy. The verb recurs once in Jeremiah, in 31:31-34, of which the present passage is a kind of anticipation and an anticipatory widening, as v. 17 also goes on to embrace the nations.[[227]](#footnote-227)

**14b** Perhaps even more astonishing is the following promise to *get you, one from a town and two from a kin-group, and enable you to come to Zion*. Something of this kind had happened after the fall of Samaria in 722, and again as an aspect of Josiah’s reform program. So it provides an image for a promise to Ephraim. A hundred Ephraimites were transported to Assyria for every Ephraimite who made it to Judah, and Yahweh promises that at least some will come back – not back to Ephraim, but back to Zion, where that Ephraimite remnant is, and where Ephraim should be as it gives up its deviant attachment to Dan and Bethel. If that remnant includes people who are still living discretely in the old northern kingdom, well and good. In the context, *one* and *two* need not imply only a small number; the emphasis lies rather on there being representatives from every town and every extended family or clan. If Jeremiah had profound uneases about Judahite attachment to Zion, as if it guaranteed Yahweh’s presence with them, evidently these uneases did not mean he had turned his back on the importance of Zion.[[228]](#footnote-228) Further, while Jeremiah has given no indication that Yahweh had moved away from (rhetorically) addressing Ephraimites, addressing Ephraim was always a way of indirectly addressing Judah, and after 597 and 587 the talk of children and of individuals from towns and families would surely make Judahite survivors of the fall of Jerusalem, refugees, and exiles think about their own people returning to Zion; it could contribute to their recovering from their own trauma.[[229]](#footnote-229)

**15** Likewise the talk of *shepherds* would ring bells for Judahites as it counters 2:8.[[230]](#footnote-230) Now Judah and Ephraim will have shepherds (leaders in general) *in accordance with my thinking*, people who think my way and shepherd in the way I have in mind, unlike Ephraim’s past shepherds or Judah’s present shepherds. *They will shepherd you with acknowledgment* (see v. 13) *and understanding* (which is also a moral and religious as well as an intellectual capacity). The three main connotations of shepherding are feeding, protecting, and leading; the third is the one in focus here.[[231]](#footnote-231)

**16** *Become many* and *become fruitful* recur (In the opposite order) as God’s commissions and promises in Genesis (1:22, 28; 8:17; 9:1, 7; 17:20; 28:3; 35:11). So Yahweh is now presupposing that for Ephraim (and by implication for Judah) his longstanding promise will find fulfillment – if they do turn. *Say “Yahweh’s* *pact chest”* compares with “say ‘Yahweh lives,’” an expression people use in taking an oath (4:2; 5:2), or “say ‘Yahweh’s palace” (7:4) which could belong in the same context (Matt 23:16-22). Yahweh’s pact chest was a symbol of the relationship between Yahweh and Israel. Inside it were the rocks inscribed with the basic terms of the pact. In the absence of images of Yahweh, it could also symbolize Yahweh’s presence. It could be thought of as the base or footstool of the invisible Yahweh’s throne as he sat enthroned above it (cf. 1 Sam 4:4; 2 Sam 6:2; 2 Kgs 19:15; Ps 80:1 [2]). Even Ephraimites might miss it (Jeroboam oddly did not seek to replace it in Bethel or Dan). But now *it will not come up into their thinking, they will not be mindful of it, they will not attend to it, and it will not be made again*. People might naturally think about it and think about making a new one, like twenty-first century people making plans to build the Third Temple. But the Ephraimites (and the Judahites) won’t think about it anymore. Along with 2 Chr 35:3 in connection with Josiah’s reformation, this verse is the last reference to the pact chest in the First Testament. Perhaps it had already disappeared,[[232]](#footnote-232) or perhaps it was still in the temple in 604 and it then disappeared or was destroyed in 587 and never seen again; this reference might reflect a post-587 origin of this verse and of more of vv. 11-30. The phase *in those days* (cf. vv. 17, 18)shares in this ambiguity, though there is nothing inherently “eschatological” about such expressions.[[233]](#footnote-233) They can simply refer back to a time just mentioned, and/or denote a time of awesome fulfillment that will certainly come (without any implication that it is far off or refers to a new world order); vv. 14-16 suggest they have that significance here.

**17** How will it be possible not to miss the chest? It will be on the basis of seeing *Jerusalem* and not just the chest as *Yahweh’s throne*, the place to which *all the nations will gather* in order to acknowledge Yahweh enthroned there (cf. Isa 2:2-4; Mic 4:1-3; Rev 21:22-25).[[234]](#footnote-234) *En passant*, Jeremiah thus notes that Israel’s turning back serves God’s mission in relation to the world as a whole.[[235]](#footnote-235) “In this expectation a revolution in the history of the faith comes about.”[[236]](#footnote-236) For people who know Yahweh, *Yahweh’s* *name* suggests the reality of Yahweh in the fullness of what the name means and refers to, as the name Jeremiah suggests all that the name denotes for people who know him. If Yahweh’s name is there, Yahweh is there (cf. 7:12). And people like the Ephraimites will acknowledge Yahweh enthroned in Jerusalem not just nominally but really, because they will give up the *determination* *of their dire thinking.* Jeremiah introduces yet another distinctive expression (e.g., 7:24; 11:8). Etymologically *determination* (*šәrirût*) shouldn’t have negative connotations, but in the First Testament its implications are always negative; it suggests stubbornness.

**18** There has been some ambiguity about the addressees in this section, and about the chronological context of vv. 14-17. Rhetorically, it’s the Ephraimites in the time of Josiah or Jehoiakim, but indirectly Jeremiah speaks to the Judahites, and the verses hint at a context after 587. V. 18 sidesteps or resolves one aspect of the ambiguity by talking directly about both *the household of Judah* and *the household of Israel*,in the third person. It more directly implies that later chronological context in presupposing that both peoples need to be brought back from *the northern country*, which for Ephraim means especially Assyria, where they are already in 604, but for Judah will mean Babylon after 597 and 587. The talk of the two households undermines any gloomy interpretation of *one* or *two* in v. 14, as does the word *altogether* (*yaḥāw*), which suggests both abundance and togetherness; Ezek 37:15-28 develops the togetherness motif. In speaking of the country that he *gave by way of domain* (*nāḥal* hiphil) *to your ancestors*, Yahweh again looks back, though not to promises in Genesis but to later in the Torah (e.g. Deut 12:10; 19:3; 32:8).

## The Explicit Urging (3:19-25)

19I for my part said

how I would put you among the children.

I would givea you a desirable country,

the most beautiful domain of the nations//

the beautiful domain of the armies of the nations.b

I said: youc will call me “Father,”

and not turn from going after me.d

20Actually, a woman being false because of her partner –

soe you have been false with me,

household of Israel (Yahweh’s affirmation).

21A voice on the bare heights is making itself heard,

a crying that pleads for grace by the Israelites.

Because they have made their path wayward,

they have put Yahweh their God out of mind.

22Turn back, turning children,

so I may heal your turnings.

Here we are, we have come to you,

because you Yahweh are our God.f

23Actually, [what comes] from the hills belongs to deception,

[from] the mountains – [to] noise.g

Indeed, in Yahweh our God

is Israel’s deliverance.

24But the Shame – it consumed

the earnings of our ancestors from our youth,

Their flock and their herd,

their sons and their daughters.

25We must lie downh in our shame so that our disgrace may cover us,i

because by Yahweh our God we have done wrong,

We and our ancestors,

from our youth and until this day.

We have not listened

to the voice of Yahweh our God.j

The simple *waw* plus yiqtol suggests that this verb is coordinate with the verb in v. 19a.

MT combines two versions of this colon: *ṣib’ôt* has the consonants of the word for armies and the vowels of the word for beauties. The first version corresponds to Q, literally “the domain of the beauty of beauties,” which incorporates a regular way of expressing a superlative. But K implies *ṣәbā’ôt* “armies” (cf. LXX, Vg).

K, LXX, Syr have plural, Q, Vg, Tg singular, in both cola.

The line might state what Yahweh expects Israel to do or what he expects Israel will actually do. LXX and Vg keep the ambiguity but Tg resolves it as making clear that these are Yahweh’s requirements. But v. 7 unambiguously referred to Yahweh’s assumptions that were disappointed, and v. 20 likely follows.

One would have expected an “as” to lead into this “so,” but Hebrew comparisons sometimes lack it (GK 161b).

In the context, this understanding of the noun clause is more likely than LXX, Vg’s “You are Yahweh our God.”

The two prepositions thus carry over from the parallel colon. LXX, Vg, Syr imply *hămôn* “the noise of the mountains” for MT *hāmôn* – for which *CTAT* 2:485 suggests “brouhaha.”

*Niškәbâ* is cohortative.

LXX has past tenses for this colon.

MT has a section marker here.

In theme v. 19 continues from v. 18 with its reference to the gift of the land; the references to children and father also link back with vv. 4 and 14. But the section goes on to take further the motifs of turning and falsehood, moving away from promises back to confrontation and issuing a more direct challenge to turn back. Initially it uses the feminine singular instead of the masculine plural. It becomes more rhythmic and manifests parallelism and imagery, indicating a switch to poetry that last through the section. It outlines:

vv. 19-20 Yahweh’s recollection, hope, and disappointment

three bicola and a tricolon signaling the pause point

vv. 21-22a Israel’s prayer for grace and Yahweh’s responsive exhortation to turn

three bicola

vv. 22b-25 The prayer Yahweh wishes Israel would actually pray

eight bicola, two linked by enjambment

**19a** SoYahweh resumes speaking to his bride in the feminine singular, combining that move with talk of *how I would put you among the children*; both take up from v. 14 and suggest that Jeremiah once more rhetorically addresses Ephraim (the *household of Israel* in v. 20 will mean Ephraim, as in v. 18). *Children* combined with the implicit bride image again mixes metaphors, but here Deut 32:8-9 suggests an aspect of the background of thinking:

When the One On High gave domains to nations,

when he divided the children of humanity,

He set the boundaries of peoples

in relation to the number of the children of Israel.

Deut 32 goes on to describe what a wonderful allocation of land he gave Israel, though they were then unfaithful and they incensed him with foreigners; Jer 2 – 3 has other general and particular links with Deut 32 on the way to 3:18 (see specifically 2:5, 25, 27). So Yahweh is “a loving father, yearning to give the best to his daughter,”[[237]](#footnote-237) and treating her the way a father treats his sons, by giving her an inheritance. In a neat heightening parallelism he describes Canaan as not only *a desirable country* (*ḥemdâ* from the verb *ḥāmad*: see Exod 20:17) but as an extraordinarily *beautiful domain* among the domains of *the nations*.[[238]](#footnote-238)

**19b-20** He goes on with a reference back to v. 7, in his recollection of what *I said* and in the way this recollection concerns whether she would turnback, though it concerns whether she will *turn* *from going after me* (which takes up Jer 2). In the recollection of how *I* *said:* *you will call me “Father,”* the parallel lies with v. 4. But *actually…*:how wrong Yahweh was again. “Yahweh seems shaken by the former infidelities.”[[239]](#footnote-239) Jeremiah picks up the word *partner* from v. 1, though with irony, and once more takes up the reference to being *false* from v. 14. The tricolon and the reminder that these words are *Yahweh’s affirmation* prepare us for a pause and a jump.

**21-22a** Suddenly *a voice is making itself heard*. It is *on* *the bare heights*, which reappear from v. 2, where Israel sits looking for lovers; it is presumably not addressing Yahweh. The plea people utter as they pour out their tears is a supplicatory crying, onethat *pleads for grace*: the word comes from the term for grace (*taḥănûnîm* from *ḥēn*). They need to pray because *they have made their path wayward* as Jer 2 has said; by way of parallelism *they have put Yahweh their God out of mind*. Perhaps they are praying for rain, in the context of drought. But the second line implies that the crying and the praying do not mean they have turned back to Yahweh, even if they think they have (as vv. 4-5 may imply). Does the verse contain a note of mockery?[[240]](#footnote-240) Perhaps this is a crying that makes matters worse, that expresses waywardness as well as being necessitated by it. There needs to be a proper turning back (compare the words in v. 14), to Yahweh. Then Yahweh may *heal*. He is now the prodigal father of Luke 15:11-32.[[241]](#footnote-241) When Jeremiah speaks of healing, it normally relates to the wounds that have issued from the people’s wrongdoing (30:17; 33:6), so Yahweh will be referring to the trouble that has come as a result of their waywardness, the trouble they were lamenting in v. 21. If they do turn from their waywardness, Yahweh will do something about their troubles. The collocation of healing with shame (vv. 24-25) will recur in 6:14-15; 8:11-12: healing suggests a deep restoration of the deeply and publicly wounded person.[[242]](#footnote-242)

**22b-23** There follows a prayer that would constitute turning, if Israel prayed it (perhaps Jeremiah prays it on their behalf).[[243]](#footnote-243) When we respond to God’s invitation “and say, *We will be yours*, let us remember that we submitted ourselves to God” and remember that “we belong to no other.”[[244]](#footnote-244) If only they would pray, *we have come to you, because you are Yahweh our God*. If only they would recognize the deception of what they trust in (“the hills are a swindle”),[[245]](#footnote-245) which their deception (v. 10) mirrors (*they went after something empty and became empty*: 2:5). Yes, they were praying *to deception*. If only they would recognize that the worship they offer at the shrines on the *hills* and the *mountains* (see 2:20; 3:6) was just noise as it was addressed *to noise*. If only would recognize that *in Yahweh our God is Israel’s deliverance* (see 2:27-28). The proposed prayer is part of a “liturgy of repentance”;[[246]](#footnote-246) it is also an appeal to the imagination.

**24** They need to recognize that the Master was actually *the Shame*, the Shamefulness, or the Shaming. In names such as Ishbosheth, the name of the Master, *ba‘al*, has been replaced by the word for shame. HereJeremiah replaces the *habba‘al*, the Master, by *habbōšet*, the Shame. The substitution suggests what a disgrace it was, what a deeply offensive and degrading thing, that Israelites worshiped the Master. So Jeremiah gives them a prayer to pray that owns the fact. They acknowledge that not only have they gained nothing from serving the Master – they have lost everything. They have given him *their flock and their herd, their sons and their daughters.* It was what Israelites were expected to do in relation to Yahweh, too, but not in the same devastating sense, and not in order simply to lose out. The way they lost out may have involved politics and economics not simply direct punitive action by Yahweh, insofar as the state identified with the Shame/the Master and took advantage of people’s commitment to it.[[247]](#footnote-247)

**25** Ideally, people need to go in for serious turning because it’s right and not because of what they get out of it (see the story of Achan in Josh 7). The turning Jeremiah would like to see is not undertaken because people think they will thereby escape the consequences of their waywardness. He pictures them accepting their *shame* and *disgrace* (*kәlimmâ*; to the recurring word *shame* Jeremiah adds the synonym whose related verb he used in v. 2). Perhaps the implication is that they would *lie down* in sack like Ahab (1 Kgs 21:27 cf. Isa 58:5), or lie down as in bed, with disgrace as their blanket (or does Jeremiah have in mind lying down and going to sleep as an escape, like Jonah?).[[248]](#footnote-248) They need to acknowledge that they *have done* *wrong by Yahweh* through the nation’s life, even from the time of *our ancestors* and thus *from our youth* – as 2:5-8 said (and cf. v. 24). “The sins of the individual and the sins of the generation that is addressed” are part of a long history of defiance of Yahweh, “part of Old Testament ‘church’-history as a whole.”[[249]](#footnote-249) No, *we* *have not listened* *to the voice of Yahweh our God* in the sense noted in connection with v. 13. So Jeremiah brings to an end the litany he wants to put on their lips. But it’s “a litany that hasn’t been used.”[[250]](#footnote-250)

## Make It Genuine (4:1-4)

1If you turn back, Israel (Yahweh’s affirmation),

[if] to me you turn back,a

If you remove your detestable thingsb from before me,c

and don’t quiver,d

2And swear “Yahweh is alive,”e with truthfulness –

with authority exercised with faithfulness,f

Then nations will pray for blessing by him,

and by him give praise.

3Because Yahweh has said this to the individual in Judah and to Jerusalem:

Till the tillage for yourselves,

but don’t sow into the thorns.

4Circumcise yourselves in relation to Yahweh,g

remove the foreskins from your mind (individual in Judah and people who live in Jerusalem),

So that my fury does not go out like fire,

and burn, and no one is going to put it out,

in the face of the dire nature of your practices.h

The force of the “if” carries over into the second colon. Vg has “[Then] to me you are to turn back” (cf. LXX); but the fronted position of “to me” would then imply that there was some question of turning back to anyone else, which is surely not so, notwithstanding 3:21.

LXX nicely adds “from his mouth” (its entire version is third person).

For *mippānay*,C has *mippāneykā* “before your face.”

Again, Vg understands “then you will not quiver/wander,” and takes v. 2 as continuing this promise.

*HALOT* takes *ḥy yhwh* to mean “[by] the life of Yahweh,” but this understanding does not work with phrases such as *ḥay ’ānî* “[as] I am alive” (cf. the long list in *DCH*). More likely *ḥay* is always an adjective in such expressions (cf. LXX, Vg, Tg).

Literally, “with authority and with faithfulness” – these two are thus held together as a hendiadys (see the comment).

The imperative makes it less likely that Yahweh is saying “be circumcised by Yahweh” (R. Althann, “*mwl, ‘Circumcise’ with the lamedh of Agency*,” *Biblica* 62 [1981]: 239-40).

The noun *rōa‘* (rather than the adjective *ra‘*) followed by *ma‘alәlêkem* make a construct phrase that recurs distinctively in Jeremiah (e.g., 21:12; 23:2, 22), which one could render more idiomatically “your active/practical direness.”

“Judah did not turn back to me with her entire heart but with deception” (3:10). The section on turning comes to a conclusion with an exhortation about what is needed to put that situation right. As would happen in a worship liturgy when the community articulated its prayer, there follows Yahweh’s response to the (proposed) confession in 3:22b-25. The response is equivocal.[[251]](#footnote-251) Yahweh answers the people’s (proposed) self-abasement with a challenge to a real turning.[[252]](#footnote-252) It comprises two short messages that express themselves in different ways but now reinforce each other.

vv. 1-2 an implicit exhortation by way of conditional clauses, but leading into a promise

four bicola, all linked by enjambment

vv. 3-4 an introduction then an explicit exhortation and a warning

two bicola and a tricolon of warning closing off the section and the unit.

**1** Initially the exhortation thus takes “if” form. It’s possible therefore to slide over it. The second line safeguards against that possibility by spelling out negatively what turning back looks like. *Detestable things* (*šiqqûṣîm*) is another term for what 2:7 called things that are offensive (*tô‘ēbâ*). They are the images of wood and rock that people use in worship, which Jer 2 has attacked and which pollute Yahweh’s country. They are *before me*: which likely implies they are present in the temple, but whether they are there or elsewhere in some other shrines or in people’s homes, they sit there insulting Yahweh and he cannot ignore them (cf. Exod 20:3, though the expression is not quite the same). The parallel colon with its condition that you *don’t quiver* (*nûd*) underlines the point and reflects the realities of what happened in Jeremiah’s day. Judah had removed its detestable things in the course of Josiah’s reformation (2 Kgs 23:13, 24) but then surreptitiously (or not) put them back, as if it thought he wasn’t looking. Quivering might suggest being aimless and willful like the camel in 2:23 or like Cain as he is condemned to settle in the land called Nôd (Gen 4:14, 16). It’s also Jeremiah’s word for shaking in grief or sadness or horror (15:5; 16:5; 18:16; 22:10; 31:18; 48:17). So Yahweh is saying, get rid of those things and don’t regret it and don’t look at them wistfully and think about bringing them back…. Only Ezekiel complains about *detestable things* more often than Jeremiah, which implies that Judah did not meet this challenge.

**2a** Positively put, the condition is that Israel starts operating with sincerity in the way it refers to Yahweh. [*As*] *Yahweh is alive* is a declaration you might make to add credibility to a statement or an undertaking (e.g., 5:1-2; 38:16). It is an alternative to “[as] the Master is alive” (see 12:16). The temptation is to take Yahweh’s name thus but to attach your statement to something empty (Exod 20:8). You might do so in worship or in giving evidence or in making a promise to someone. Yahweh says, do it *with truthfulness* (*’ĕmet*), a characteristic of Yahweh himself (10:10; 42:5) and thus a characteristic of Yahweh’s involvement with Israel (2:2). And do it *with authority exercised with faithfulness* (*mišpāṭ* and *ṣәdāqâ*); Jeremiah introduces a recurrent First Testament word pair (cf. 22:3; 23:5; 33:15).[[253]](#footnote-253) The conventional translation “justice and righteousness” is misleading. Authority suggests legitimate power and the capacity to make decisions; faithfulness suggests doing so in the right way, in a way that recognizes a responsibility to do the right thing by the people with whom one lives in community. In the account of Josiah’s reformation in 2 Kgs 22 – 23 there is no reference to action on behalf of truthfulness or the faithful exercise of authority in the life of the community, and Jeremiah has a nose for such falsehood or “ideology,”[[254]](#footnote-254) though he does later commend Josiah in these terms (22:15).

**2b** At last we reach what the three-line if-clause leads into, and it is a surprise, though it links neatly with 3:16-17. The move from if-clauses to then-clauses (protasis to apodosis) also corresponds to a move from second person to third person. Israel’s action will have implications for other people; they stand at the center of the line:

they will pray for blessing

by him

nations

and by him

they will give praise

Perhaps there is also an implication that the nations will flock to Jerusalem (as 3:17 envisaged) to pray thus because Yahweh causes Israel to become many and fruitful. There is such a link in Genesis; the expression *pray for blessing by* (*bārak* [hitpael] *bә*)comes otherwise only in Gen 22:18; 26:4 with reference to Abraham’s people, Ps 72:17 with reference to the king, and Isa 65:16 with reference to Yahweh. *Give praise by him* or by his name (*hālal* [hitpael] *bә*), on account of him and on account of his name (Isa 41:16; 45:25; Pss 34:2 [3]; 105:3) contrasts with giving praise by or on account of godlets (97:7) – as Ephraim and Judah have been doing. By implication, at present “God’s mission to the nations is being hindered because of Israel’s continuing spiritual and ethical failure.”[[255]](#footnote-255)

**3** The final lines of 3:1 – 4:4 begin by dramatically re-expressing the point of the entire section in two new ways. These lines could originally have stood on their own, and Jeremiah might or might not have included them at this point in the 604 scroll. But the heading *because Yahweh has said this to the individual in Judah and to Jerusalem* now attaches them firmly to the “turning and turning back” material, so that they offer these two new images of what genuine turning back looks like – new in Jeremiah, though not novel in the First Testament. Both relate to the negative aspect to turning, in v. 1.

First, there is a farming image. *Tillage* is new land or fallow land that one needs to plow or *till*. The phrase exactly repeats one in Hos 10:12; they are the only occurrences of the verb in the First Testament. It might be an aphorism; but “the influence of Hosea (never far away from 3:12-25)” may be present here.[[256]](#footnote-256) The parallel colon makes the complementary point that the sensible farmer will *sow* only after removing *the* *thorns* which will otherwise choke the growing crop. Judah and Jerusalem need to do some removing. “Repentance in the biblical sense is not just the repairing of some damage but a new beginning from the ground up.”[[257]](#footnote-257)

**4** *Circumcise yourselves for Yahweh* makes the same point in a different way. A *foreskin* is an appendage that is of only nuisance value. It gets in the way; it encourages infection. And minds also have foreskins. So remove them, too, though it would be wise to be aware that circumcision “is a cutting that makes for blood and pain.”[[258]](#footnote-258) The negative male image complements the negative female one of the whore.[[259]](#footnote-259) It is at least as radical in its implications. “To depict Israel as an uncircumcised male” is to say that “Israel no longer belongs to the covenant community simply on the basis of an external cutting.”[[260]](#footnote-260) Whereas the first image recalls Hosea, the second image recalls Deut 30:6 (where Yahweh acts) and 10:16 (where it is people’s responsibility, as here).[[261]](#footnote-261) The image reappears in Rom 2:29,[[262]](#footnote-262) but Jesus reaffirms the reality to which it refers when he says that anyone who wants to “go after me” (that key image in Jer 2—3) has to prepare for crucifixion (Mark 8:34).[[263]](#footnote-263)

The negative action symbolized by the two images is vital; otherwise terrible consequences will follow. In the closing tricolon, the first two cola both portray divine wrath as the agent of destruction, which contrasts with or complements the idea that Yahweh himself is simply the agent (as is the case esp. in Ezekiel) or that wrongdoing issues in trouble by a kind of natural process.[[264]](#footnote-264) While these cola are thus parallel, the second takes the first for granted and goes beyond it in a frightening way:

So that there does not go out like fire my fury

and burn and no one is going to put it out.

The unexpected third colon *in the face of the dire nature of your practices* then restates one of the key motifs in this section (3:2, 5, 17) and the previous one (2:13, 19, 33), and brings the section to a close. Chillingly, the answer to the question in 3:5 can be yes (cf. Mark 9:42-48).

# Mostly Warning: The Whole Country Desolate (4:5-31)

If Judah does not take seriously Yahweh’s confrontation (2:1-37) and heed Jeremiah’s exhortations (3:1 – 4:4), Yahweh’s fury will blaze out (4:4). What will then happen? Jer 4:5-31 begins to provide the answer, spelling out the danger in a sequence of vivid warnings.[[265]](#footnote-265) Warnings of trouble have been a subordinate motif in 2:1 – 4:4, but there they were less prominent than critique of Judah’s unfaithfulness and challenges to turn back. Here, the balance is the reverse. There is still critique (v. 22) and still indication that turning is possible (v. 14). To describe wrath falling does not mean it is inevitable, and the section incorporates references to the reasons why Yahweh must act. But its emphasis lies on warning about the action itself. The balance will reverse again in 5:1-31.

Like 2:1—4:4, the section brings together messages that were separate in origin but have been assembled into sequences, so that they become mutually reinforcing and illuminating, though without taking the form of a systematic, structured argument. One could again think of the section going back to Jeremiah’s dictating in 604 an assemblage of messages he had delivered over the preceding two decades, perhaps then enlarged by him or Baruch or later curators. But the individual messages make no specific reference to contexts or people and they might have their origin any time in the period referred to in 1:1-3. “The undefined character of the threat invites the hearer to focus less on historical and political identities and facts than on the real danger and the reasons for it. The oracles of Jeremiah are more interested in the specifics of the reasons than the specifics of the danger.”[[266]](#footnote-266) If Jeremiah knew during those earlier decades that the invader from the north would be Babylon, he apparently kept quiet about it, and does not even refer to it in his 604 version of the messages. “The fundamental cause of the coming calamity is the Holy One’s intention not to let such evil go unpunished.”[[267]](#footnote-267) Babylon will be merely his means of acting.[[268]](#footnote-268)

I divide the section into two halves. In vv. 5-18, the portrayal mostly comprises literal (though imaginary) descriptions of what invasion will be like, though it also incorporates one or two images (the lion, the wind). In the second half (vv. 19-31), this balance, too, reverses: the account is mostly a figurative presentation, though it also incorporates one or two elements of literal portrayal.

## It’s War[[269]](#footnote-269) (4:5-18)

5Announce in Judah,

in Jerusalem make it heard.a

Say “Blastb a horn in the country,

call out, do it fully.c

Say, ‘Gather together,

we must come to the fortified towns!’

6Lift up a flag,d to Zion,

make safe,e don’t stand around.”

Because I am making dire trouble come from the north,

a great shattering.

7A lion has gone up from its thicket,

a devastator of nations – he has made his move.f

He has gone out from his place

to make your country into a desolation.

Your towns will fall into ruins,

so that there is no one living there.

8Because of this put on sack,

lament and wail,

Because it has not turned back –

Yahweh’s angry blazing – from us.g

9And on that day (Yahweh’s affirmation):

The king’s mind and the officials’ mind will give up the ghost,

the priests will be desolate,

the prophets – they will be bewildered.h

10I saidi “Ah, Lord Yahweh, therefore you have deluded, deludedj this people and Jerusalem, saying ‘It will be well with you,’ and the sword has reachedk right to the throat!l

11At that time it will be said of this people and of Jerusalem:

A scorching windm on the bare heights in the wilderness,

the path of my dear people!n

Not to winnow,

not to sift!o

12A wind too full for these –p it comes for me;

now I too will speak out authoritative decisions to them.

13There, like clouds he goes up,

like a tornado his chariots.

His horses are lighter than eagles,

alas for us, because we are destroyed!

14Wash your mind of dire behavior, Jerusalem,

in order that you may find deliverance.

How long will it lodge within you,q

your banefulr plans?

15Because a voice is announcings from Dan,

it is making something banefult heard from the highland of Ephraim.

16”Make the nations mindful, ‘There,’

make it heard, ‘against Jerusalem!’”

Watchersu are coming from a country far away,

they are givingv their voice against the towns of Judah!

17Like people keeping guard of the open country they have come against it all around,

because it has rebelled against me (Yahweh’s affirmation).

18Your path and your practices –

they have donew these things for you.

This is your direness, because it’s something bitter,x

because it has reached right to your inner being.y

The abb’a’ order of the line with the verbs enclosing the noun phrases makes for a strong beginning.

K prefixes the verb with *wә* (cf. Vg; haplog in Q or dittog in K). The prospective announcers through v. 5 are then lookouts addressing Judah and Jerusalem rather than supernatural aides told to commission the lookouts.

The use of *mālē’* piel is unique; the nearest parallel is the hitpael meaning “mass together” (cf. the noun *mәlō’*; Rashi in *miqrā’ôt gәdôlôt* on the passage). Following *qārā’* asyndetically, it looks like an auxiliary verb, though such verbs usually precede the main verb (GK 120h; JM 177g).

LXX has “flee”: see the note on v. 21.

Whereas LXX, Vg imply an intransitive qal meaning, “take refuge, be safe,” *hā‘îzû* is hiphil (see BDB), suggesting “get people to safety”; *make safe* can be understood either way.

Like the verbs in vv. 5aαβ and 9b, the verbs enclose the broadly abb’a’ line.

LXX has “from you.” MT has a unit marker here.

The verbs again enclose the abb’a’ cola in v. 9b (cf. v. 5aαβ), hold the parallel cola tightly together, and add to the force of the tricolon in bringing vv. 5-9 to a close. A has a section marker here.

The Alexandrian ms of LXX has “they said,” which enables v. 10 to read as the response of the leadership to whom v. 9 referred.

The infinitive precedes the finite verb, underlining the fact. Tg reworks the text so that it’s the false prophets who have deluded, Syr so that it’s Jeremiah who has done so.

DG 84 sees the verb with simple *waw* as referring to the same time as the previous verb but expressing contrast, though it does not really have this relationship with *hiššē’tā*; perhaps it continues the infinitive *lē’mōr* with overlapping implications.

LXX, Vg have “the life”; see *HALOT* for this concrete meaning of *nepeš*.

Perhaps literally, “a wind of scorching” (Rudolph, *Jeremia*, 34).

*Bat-‘ammî*, a defining genitive like “city of Jerusalem; but “daughter of my people” gives the wrong impression.

*Bārar* means “purify,” but it gains its nuance here from the fact that *bar* denotes grain (cf. 23:28).

The paronomasia *mālē’ mē’ēlleh* generates some ambiguity. Vg has“a spirit full from these”—from the bare heights? Vg thus takes *rûaḥ* to denote wind in v. 11, spirit in v. 12. Tg, having understood v. 10 to refer to false prophets, takes the wind to refer to the (false) spirit of prophecy. LXX has spirit both times. LXX and Vg thus imply that the “I” in vv. 11-12 is Jeremiah, as in v. 10. While it is difficult to envisage Jeremiah as the one who dispenses “authoritative decisions,” the verses do illustrate how it can be difficult to distinguish the “I” of Yahweh and the “I” of Jeremiah.

LXX, Vg, Tg thus take *tālîn*  as third person feminine singular qal (even though the subject is plural) rather than second person singular masculine hiphil “you allow to lodge,” despite the feminine subject.

LXX, Aq, Vg, take *’āwen* to denote trouble experienced, Sym to denote wickedness.

LXX, Vg have “a voice of one announcing.”

Vg assumes that *’āwen* refers to idolatry.

*Nāṣar* is used with the connotation of *ṣûr* (besiege) and/or *ṣārar* (attack).

The finite verb continues the participial construction.

For ‘*āśô*, infinitive absolute, C has the expected qatal ‘*āśû*.

Rebelling (*mārâ*, v. 17) appropriately issues in bitterness (*mār*) (Allen, *Jeremiah*, 66) – the masculine gender of *mār* suggests that the word is being treated as a noun rather than as an adjective qualifying *rā‘ātēk*.

MT has a marker here.

Here “God declares war on his people…. There had never been war poetry quite like this in the Israelite tradition.”[[270]](#footnote-270) The section outlines:

vv. 5-7 Yahweh commissions his aides to warn Judah of an invasion

eight bicola

v. 8 Jeremiah urges Judah to mourn in light of this event

two bicola

v. 9 a warning of how Judah’s leadership will be confounded by it

a resumptive introduction followed by a tricolon concluding vv. 5-9

v. 10 Jeremiah’s own response

prose

vv. 11-12 Yahweh warns of a scorching wind coming

an introduction followed by three bicola

v. 13 the people react with horror

two bicola

vv. 14-18 Yahweh urges a response that can forestall the horror

eight bicola

**5-6a** Without announcement or introduction Jeremiah plunges into a series of commands. It is one of the occasions when he does not specify who is speaking or who is addressed – because he is not sure, and/or because it keeps the audience on their toes, and/or because the content is more important than the speakers. By implication, Yahweh speaks to his supernatural aides, as happens in Isa 40:1 with a message the reverse of the one here;[[271]](#footnote-271) Jeremiah has perhaps overheard Yahweh doing so in the divine cabinet to which he refers in 23:22. The implication is not that the invasion is happening but that Yahweh has taken the decision to make it happen and has begun implementing the decision. Jeremiah’s audience is therefore to picture it happening and to picture themselves as needing to do as the lookouts urge and/or as Jeremiah will urge in v. 8 – or in the way v. 14 will say, to forestall what the decision implies. The commission to *blast a horn… call out, do it fully* is the message the aides are to give to lookout-type figures in *Jerusalem* and *Judah*. The imperatives are all plural; Yahweh is not commissioning Jeremiah himself here. The lookouts are to urge Judah to get ready for the invasion by taking refuge where things may be safer. During an invasion, people who live outside towns may move inside them hoping to sit out any siege. Sounding a horn is the way lookouts herald the approach of unexpected visitors, possibly hostile (Ezek 33:1-6; Joel 2:1; Amos 3:6), or announce some other imminent event. *Do it fully* implies do it throughout Judah. Jeremiah is not talking about a little local difficulty. The sequence in the order to the lookouts is hurried and elliptical, reflecting its urgency. “Lift up a flag under which people can gather, get them to Zion, take them to refuge there, and do it now.” The *flag* (*nēs*) will mark the point where people are to *gather together*; the noun is uncomfortably close to the verb for “flee” (*nûs*). Referring to their goal as Zion rather than Jerusalem when they seek to *make safe* designates the place as the one to which Yahweh has made a special commitment; it is not just the capital city or the place with the best fortifications or the natural center of resistance.[[272]](#footnote-272) Yahweh will surely protect them on Zion.

**6b-7** An irony emerges: the one from whom they ultimately need protection is Yahweh himself. *Dire trouble* is what Jeremiah has been warning about (2:19, 27-28), and talk of *dire trouble from the north* goes back to 1:14, so it is appropriate that it should feature at the beginning of this section of warning. The country is going to be shattered like a pot or yoke or neck or leg or arm, or broken down like a wall. Human beings can shatter things; but this *great shattering* will be effected by someone who is more like a *lion*. Is this a ferocious human commander (cf. 2:30, with more irony, as the people themselves are the lion)? Or is it Yahweh himself (cf. 49:19; 50:44; Hos 11:10; Amos 3:6). Either way, at one level the problem is an advancing army; at another level it is Yahweh. Already (in Jeremiah’s imagination and in Yahweh’s decision-making) *the lion has gone up from its thicket.* To go back to literal reality, already (in Jeremiah’s vision) *a devastator of nations* *is on the move* to assert or extend its authority over its empire, as great powers like Assyria, Babylon, or Persia do. Perhaps the implication is that the reason he is coming *to make your country into a desolation* is that it has rebelled against his authority (as Judah did more than once not long after 604); otherwise destruction is hardly in his interests. But anyway, Yahweh is talking about an invasion of mindless ferocity. The warning that *your towns will fall into ruins, so that there is no one living there* constitutes another irony in light of the fact that the only other occurrence of that verb comes in Isaiah’s promise about Assyria’s destiny (Isa 37:26). In v. 5 Yahweh had bidden them take refuge in the towns, but now he indicates that his advice will be useless.

**8** Without any indication of transition, Jeremiah now speaks, to commission a further appropriate reaction to the message he has overheard and passed on. *Sack* is the coarse cloth out of which working clothes would be made. You would not wear it in public, but it is the appropriate clothing if you are going to *lament* *and* *wail*. Lamenting (*sāpad*) commonly implies mourning in connection with death, but it can denote a reaction to other calamities and a grieving over one’s wrongdoing, while wailing or howling can be a reaction to any distress. Jeremiah doesn’t make clear which significance attaches to this lamenting or what it might be designed to achieve. Maybe Yahweh can be prevailed on to have pity on the people? Maybe the divine decision can be revoked, the invader diverted? Jeremiah has reported the people’s conviction that Yahweh’s anger had *turned back* from the people (2:35), perhaps because of Josiah’s work. They need to face the fact that it hasn’t, as 2 Kgs 23:36 says. Indeed, it’s not just anger but *angry blazing*, “blazing of anger,” the phrase in 2 Kgs 23:36. But it remains unclear why people will be grieving and whether they are doing it before God or just doing it to express their distress. The point about mentioning it is rather that it is another indication of how horrific the coming catastrophe will be, and thus another note designed to have an effect on Jeremiah’s listeners.

**9** If this strong 4-2-2 tricolon was originally a separate unit, its attachment to vv. 5-8 is apposite, and if in some other context *that day* was the day of Yahweh, then here it simply refers back to the day of which vv. 5-8 spoke[[273]](#footnote-273) (which could indeed be thought of as at least *a* day of Yahweh). When trouble threatens, leaders may not see it and/or may be paralyzed, because they have to accept responsibility for its having happened and/or they don’t know what to do about it. It’s not an unfair description of the response the leadership gave in 604, as Jer 36 describes it. Here, Jeremiah may imply that the leadership will fail to make or to encourage the response that v. 8 prescribed. It is as if their *mind* stops functioning (literally, their minds “perish” [KJV]) or their courage fails; Jeremiah actually refers to their heart, and either mind or courage would be possible implications of the reference. *The* *priests* will be as *desolate* as the country is destined to be (v. 7). *The prophets* who are supposed to be a resource of guidance will instead *be* *bewildered* like everyone else. It is almost as if Jeremiah feels some sympathy for the leaders. Who could blame them in light of the advice they’ve been given by those prophets? Yet they ought to have expected it, for moral and religious reasons and because they ought to have paid heed to Jeremiah.

**10** Jeremiah’s own response follows on that strong line, in a verse of powerful prose that adds to the hint that Jeremiah felt some sympathy for Judah’s leaders: does it give the impression of a protest that bursts the bounds of verse? Again, it might be an originally separate unit, but it works as a footnote to vv. 5-9, and the parallel in v. 18 with the end of v. 10 is clever. It is the first of the many confrontational responses Jeremiah makes to Yahweh. Amusingly, he is inclined to call God *Lord* when he’s being rebellious (cf. 1:6). Like v. 7, the rare verb *deluded* (*nāšā’*) resonates with the Hezekiah-Sennacherib story, which includes a warning about not letting Yahweh delude you (Isa 36:14; 37:10). It also resonates tellingly with 29:8 where Yahweh warns exiles in Babylon about being deluded by prophets whom Yahweh did not send, who did tell people, *it will* *be well with you*, that you will have “shalom” (e.g., 6:14; 8:11; 23:17; 28:9). On the contrary, Jeremiah notes, the city is like an individual who has been attacked by an enemy in such a way *that the sword has reached right to the throat* and is about to take his life. The proclamation of *šālôm* would be at home in the worship of Jerusalem (see Pss 122; 147). People would pray for Jerusalem’s *šālôm*. Jerusalem is the source of *šālôm*;[[274]](#footnote-274) its name says it. One consideration that might lie behind Jeremiah’s protest is that Yahweh had indeed promised his people that things would be well with them; he did it quite regularly (e.g., Num 6:26; Pss 29:11; 85:8, 10 [9, 11]). The more subtle consideration is that (paradoxically) Yahweh sometimes accepts responsibility for the prophets whom he did not send. Sending (false) prophets can be an act of judgment (cf. 1 Kgs 22:19-23; Ezek 14:1-11), without it taking away their responsibility for delivering a deceptive message (as Sennacherib and Nebuchadrezzar did not escape responsibility for their military violence even though they were acting as Yahweh’s agents). But why does the scroll include this protest, as part of the scroll’s message for people? Is Jeremiah speaking sarcastically, deriding the bewildered prophets just referred to, who had promised that things would be well?[[275]](#footnote-275) They are people commissioned by Yahweh, as they said – but they are commissioned as deceivers. People reading the scroll need to think about this element in the picture.

**11a** Yahweh does not directly react to Jeremiah’s accusation, with answer or rebuke; there is a parallel with the many protest psalms that end without response or resolution. The verses that now follow look like an originally-separate message, but the phrase *at that time* now makes a link with vv. 5-10, and once more they make an apposite follow up to what precedes them; eventually they will imply some explanation of why Yahweh could have failed to make things go well for Jerusalem and/or could have sent those false prophets. In the meantime, the possibility of some explanation is hinted by the phrase *this people*, which can be a dismissive, contemptuous expression (e.g., 5:23). The beginning of the actual message comprises a sequence of noun phrases whose connections the audience has to provide. The *scorching wind* (the khamsin or sirocco) from the east, which often afflicts the Middle East in spring and in fall, blows over *the bare heights in the wilderness* and onto *the path of my dear people*—more literally, the daughter [who is] my people,” my people who are [like] my daughter. The *my* makes it a term of endearment; it recurs especially in Jeremiah. *This people* is also *my dear people*. Admittedly it would be grammatically simpler to infer that Israel’s path *is* the scorching wind on the bare heights, the place of their whoring; once more, then, the direness of Israel’s life is finding fulfillment in the direness of the trouble it brings on itself (see v. 18).

**11b-12** Either way, whereas wind is useful in fall for separating chaff from wheat and thus purifying it so that simply grain remains, this wind is too strong for that purpose; it will blow everything away. Like the lion and the destroyer who are doing what lions and destroyers do yet are fulfilling Yahweh’s purpose, the wind is doing what wind does and it isn’t commissioned by Yahweh, he says that nevertheless *it comes for me*. In following up that statement, Yahweh gets closer to answering the question raised by v. 10. Having *šālôm* fail and/or sending false prophets is a way that Yahweh is announcing judgment. *I too* – I as well as the wind, which makes its own decisions – *will speak out authoritative decisions to them*. Again the language goes back to Jeremiah’s account of his original commission (1:16).[[276]](#footnote-276)

**13** AgainJeremiah speaks, on the people’s behalf, and returns from metaphor to more direct description of the destroyer to portray the speed of his advance with his army (though still in similes) and the frightening implications *for us* of the destruction he pictures. He presents three similes in staircase parallelism.[[277]](#footnote-277)

there, like clouds he goes up

like a tornado his chariots

lighter than eagles his horses

The army could make people think of clouds racing across the sky, or of the overwhelming velocity of a tornado, or of the lightning swoop of an eagle. Jeremiah invites them then to imagine their response to what he presents.

**14** Yet all is not lost, notwithstanding the picture of authoritative decisions being implemented in the destroyer’s being already on his way. There is a justification for those decisions and thus for Yahweh’s failure to make things go well for Jerusalem. And there is still the possibility of *deliverance*. Now various forms of washing can apply to various forms of stain, some more useful than others. Cleansing can be an image for removing defilement through a physical rite (e.g., Lev 14—15) or for something God does in response to people’s turning (Ps 51:7 [9]). But trying to remove the stain that comes from wrongdoing when you’re continuing in the wrongdoing – it gets you nowhere; and the kind of washing Jeremiah described in 2:22 doesn’t solve anything in this connection. But to *wash your mind of dire behavior* is a different matter. It’s a parallel image to that of circumcising your mind. Yahweh follows up mention of Jerusalem’s mind with reference to *your baneful plans* which occupy your mind but must not be allowed to *lodge within you*, like an overnight guest to whom you properly offer hospitality. You must not give them house room. They must be thrown out. In the more conventional terms of 3:1 – 4:4, people need to turn back. The fact that Yahweh has formulated a plan to bring trouble and has even commissioned its implementation doesn’t mean everything is fixed (see 18:1-11). “Jeremiah never thought an appeal to repent was too late.”[[278]](#footnote-278) Indeed, why bother with all these messages if there was no prospect of their threat being withdrawn? Yahweh is the one who is planning to bring trouble, but Yahweh is also the one who is giving warnings. So there is no need to think that v. 14 must be a later addition to Jeremiah’s message.[[279]](#footnote-279) Indeed one might see it as the center of the section.[[280]](#footnote-280)

**15-16** *Baneful plans* will issue in *baneful* news: bane (*’āwen*) is another word suggesting a link between bad things that people do and bad consequences that follow (these two are the only occurrences of *’āwen* in Jeremiah). The line works with neat double-duty parallelism:

because a voice is announcing from Dan

is making heard something baneful from the highland of Ephraim.

Yahweh reverts to portraying the advance of an army from the north, now described in the form of the report of an imaginary anonymous voice, the voice of the army’s commander-in-chief. It is speaking from *Dan* on the far northern border of Israel and thus of old Ephraim, but long part of the Assyrian empire, and then speaking from the highland of Ephraim, the main body of the mountain ridge to the north of Judah, worryingly nearer. *The nations* are peoples such as Ammon and Moab. While they might need to know because they are also in danger, *against Jerusalem* rather suggests that the cpmmander is bidding his aides give them a summons to join in the attack – as they do in 597 and 587. The *watchers* are the troops who will be keeping watch on the city and on *the towns of Judah* as they besiege them.

**17-18** In one of Jeremiah’s distinctive 5-2 lines Yahweh compares the watchers to *people keeping guard of the open country,* keeping watch on the maturing crops in the fields to guard them from thieves or animals—except that these guards are *all around* as attackers not allies. And it’s *because she has rebelled against me* that Yahweh has deprived her of her *šālôm* (v. 10). The way she has walked her *path* and the *direness* of her practices(cf. v. 4) explain what is happening to her path (v. 11). The direnessof her fate (cf. v. 6) issues from the direness of her behavioror her nature (v. 14). That direness is thus *bitter* in its results, and bitter because *it has reached as far as your inner being* or mind (the formulation parallels that in v. 10). It “threatens the very core of her being.”[[281]](#footnote-281) Yet the challenge of v. 14 to “wash your mind” stands. Yahweh’s words are elliptical as he plays on the link between dire behavior or nature and dire trouble – perhaps because he treats direness as one thing, and moves between behavior and fate as aspects of the one thing. It would be less confusing for Western readers to think of the dire trouble as being bitter and of the dire behavior or nature as reaching as far as the inner being, but Jeremiah does not encourage this distinction. Jerusalem’s nature and life has found its organic outworking in the calamity that has come to it. Actions issue in consequences, which are aspects of the same reality.

## Formless and Empty (4:19-31)

19My insides, my insides, I writhe,a

the walls of my heart!

My heart moans for me,

I cannot be quiet.

Because the sound of a horn you have heard,b my spirit,

the blast for battle.

20Shattering upon shattering has been proclaimed,c

because the entire country has been destroyed.

Suddenly my tents have been destroyed,

in a moment, my tent walls.

21How long am I to look at a flag,d

am I to listene to the sound of a horn?f

22Because my people is stupid,

me it does not acknowledge.

They are foolish children,

they are not insightful.g

They are smart at doing dire things,

but they don’t know how to do good.

23I looked at the earth, and there, it was void and empty.h

and to the heavens, and there was no light in them.

24I looked at the mountains, and there, they were quaking,

and all the hills, they were light-footed.i

25I looked, and there, no human being,

and all the birds in the heavens – they had fled.

26I looked, and there, the orchard was wilderness,

and all the towns, they were demolished,j

From before Yahweh,

from before his angry blazing.k

27Because Yahweh has said this:

Desolation is what the entire country will become

(but I will not make an end).

28Because of this the country will mourn,

the heavens will be dark above.

Because I have spoken – I have schemed,

and I have not relented, I will not turn back from it.l

29At the voice of cavalryman and archer,

every townm is fleeing.

People have come into scrublands,n

onto rocks they have gone up.

Every town is abandoned,

so that there is no one living in them, not one.

30So you, one about to be destroyed,o

what do you do when you wear scarlet,

When you adorn yourself in gold adornment,

when you enlarge your eyes with mascara?

To no end will you make yourself beautiful –

your paramours despise you, they will seek your life.

31Because a voice like a woman writhingp I have heard,

distress like a woman having her first baby,

The voice of Miss Zionq –

she pants,r she stretches out the palms of her hands:

“Alas for me, please, me,

because my life is faint with the killers.”s

Following K, which implies *’āḥûlâ*; Q *’ôḥîlâ* should mean “I intend to wait,” perhaps “a mitigating reading” (Holladay, *Jeremiah* 1:142). The cohortative verb might imply “I must writhe,” but may be cohortative only in form – a pseudo-cohortative (GK 108g; *TTH* 53; JM 114c).

K has the archaic second-person feminine form: see the notes on 2:19 and 20.

Cf. LXX, Aq, Sym, Vg, deriving the verb from *qārā’* I. Tg, Syr “have happened” derive it from *qārā’* II.

*Nēs* as in v. 6;LXX, Vg, Syr “fugitives/a fugitive” suggests a different vocalization (*HUB*), deriving it from *nûs* – a paronomasia that listeners might pick up.

Perhaps another pseudo-cohortative (see the note on v. 19).

MT has a marker here.

The children (*bānîm*) are not insightful (*nәbônîm*): not surprisingly, as they are only children, even though the words are similar.

LXX has simply “nothing” for the two Hebrew words, which might indicate that its Hebrew text had only *tōhû* (K. M. Hayes, “Jeremiah iv 23,” *VT* 47 [1997]: 247-49).

*Hitqalqālû* from *qālal* (related words in 2:23; 3:9).

*Nittәṣû* from *nātaṣ* (cf. 1:10); LXX implies *niṣṣәtû* “are burned” from *yāṣat* (cf. 2:15).

MT has a section marker here.

LXX has a tidier version: “I spoke and I will not relent, I have initiated and I will not turn back from it.”

Vg’s “the entire town” makes sense in isolation, but the phrase recurs in v. 29b followed by “in them” and has to denote “every town”; the same meaning is likely here.

For *bā’û be‘ābîm* LXX suggests something like *bā’û bammә‘ārôt neḥbә’û* *be‘ābîm* “they have come into caves, hidden in scrublands,” implying homoioteleuton in MT; *CTAT* 2:491 thinks it would be “astonishing” if Jeremiah had omitted reference to taking refuge in caves.

Whereas *you* is suddenly feminine and the feminine is picked up and developed in the rest of the verse, the passive participle *šādûd* referring to what is about to happen is oddly masculine (hence *one*); it is omitted in LXX.

The participle presumably comes from *ḥûl* (cf. v. 19) though it looks like a form from *ḥālâ* which would mean “weak”; see GK 72p.

Literally, “Daughter Zion,” with almost the overtones of “Little Girl Zion” (and see the note on v. 11).

*Tityappî* (you beautify yourself, v. 30) becomes *tityappēaḥ* (a hapax chosen or invented as an alternative to a form from *nāpaḥ* or *pûaḥ* for the sake of the paronomasia?).

MT has a unit marker here.

Vv. 19-31 continue the warning about the approach of the destroyer, but they bring home this warning by means of a series of poetic tropes:

* personal horror (vv. 19-21)
* teacherly disenchantment (v. 22)
* cosmic dissolution (vv. 23-26a)
* divine fury (v. 26b)
* divine mercy (v. 27)
* ecological mourning (v. 28a)
* divine determination (v. 28b)
* urban flight (v. 29)
* fanciful denial (v. 30)
* parturient despair (v. 31)

The section outlines:

vv. 19-21 a lament reacting to the imagined catastrophe

six bicola

v. 22 Yahweh’s explanation for the catastrophe

three bicola

vv. 23-26 Jeremiah relates a vision of a disaster in nature as having happened

five bicola, the last two linked by enjambment

vv. 27-28 Yahweh makes an announcement of such a disaster as coming

an introduction followed by three bicola

v. 29 a portrayal of the disaster as a military invasion

three bicola

vv. 30-31 a bidding to Miss Zion to face the facts rather than hide from them

six bicola, the first two linked, the last three linked

The scroll brings together at least three messages in vv. 19-31. The second item in each of the three elements in this outline might also be of separate origin, but if so, in each case it has been given a link with what it now follows (*because*, v. 22; *because*, v. 27; *so*, 30).

**19** As often happens, Jeremiah starts in the middle of things and raises suspense. He is physically and emotionally overwhelmed by something, but what? He is again conveying his response to an anticipatory experience of the coming disaster. *I writhe…* and *my heart moans for me. I cannot be quiet.* Maybe he indicates that he already feels this way because of what he has already sensed, or maybe he imagines what it will be like for him and for everyone else when people hear *the sound of a horn* as it gives *the blast for battle*.[[282]](#footnote-282) Either way, his reason for describing this reaction is again to get them to see what the catastrophe will be like for him and for everyone else. He is inviting his audience into an act of imagination as he was in vv. 5-18, but a different kind of act of imagination. Conjure up what you will feel during the city’s siege and fall and the devastation of Judah’s towns. Your heart will pound and throb.[[283]](#footnote-283) The poetry is not a lament of the prophet as opposed to a lament of the people,[[284]](#footnote-284) even though it illustrates how “Jeremiah and all real historymakers have a profound sense of anguish, pathos, and incongruity that touches the historymaker quite personally.”[[285]](#footnote-285) Nor is Jeremiah embodying God’s suffering (well, he may be, but such an understanding does not emerge from this text). He voices the coming lament of people and prophet.[[286]](#footnote-286) “This anguish is not a means of gaining insight into his soul; it is itself prophecy.”[[287]](#footnote-287)

**20-21** So imagine that the invasion and destruction have happened, *shattering upon shattering*, and the awful news *has been proclaimed* to you,as a similar anonymous voice not so long ago reported forces advancing past Dan and through Ephraim. Perhaps an actual vision comes to Jeremiah, but as an act of communication the description is an appeal to the audience’s mind's eye. It is also an appeal to the mind’s ear; the word for voice or sound (*qôl*) comes more often in Jeremiah than in any other First Testament book (including Psalms),[[288]](#footnote-288) and vv. 19-21 are dense with references to sound.In the imagination, as in a dream, a siege and a destruction that in reality take some time can seem to happen *suddenly* and *in a moment*. Picture your own home precipitously *destroyed*; it’s possible to speak figuratively of people’s ordinary homes as their *tents* (e.g., 1 Kgs 8:66). Imagine longing for it to be all over. *How long*, you ask, as when you pray a prayer of protest from the Psalms (e.g., 6:4; 12:1-3; 78:5; 79:5-6). How long will the *flag* need to be there to lead people to some possible escape? How long will I still have to *listen to the sound of a horn*? These motifs reappear from the very beginning of the section (vv. 5-6), as if to say that this invasion and siege go on forever – as it will seem they do (see 52:4-5).

**22** As was the case in vv. 11-18, there follows Yahweh’s explanation of why it had to happen, which in the arrangement of the section thus offers further response to Jeremiah’s protest in v. 10 as well as a response to his rhetorical questions in v. 21. “Prophetic anguish” gives way to “divine frustration” at the people’s wickedness and moral obtuseness.[[289]](#footnote-289) A “stunning” contrast of mood comes about between vv. 19-21 and 22: Yahweh now speaks “as a schoolmaster would, marking his students,” and setting his *my* *people* (*‘ammî*)over against Jeremiah’s *my* *insides* (*mē‘î*).[[290]](#footnote-290) The city’s suffering comes about because it is *stupid* and *foolish* as opposed to *insightful*. The Judahites are smart all right – *smart at doing dire things.*[[291]](#footnote-291)They are “God’s uniquely dumb people.”[[292]](#footnote-292) They are unwilling to *acknowledge* Yahweh: Jeremiah again assumes the link between *acknowledge* and *know* (*yāda‘*). Yahweh’s explanations hold together insight, religion, and ethics in a way that parallels the aim of Proverbs, which is to enable people

To know smartness and discipline,

to understand words that express understanding,

To get discipline so as to act with insight,

faithfulness, the exercise of authority, and uprightness,

To give shrewdness to the naïve,

knowledge and strategy to the youth,

So that the smart person may listen and increase in his grasp,

the understanding may acquire skill,

So as to understand an aphorism and a parable,

the words of the smart and their conundrums:

The first principle of knowledge is awe for Yahweh;

dense people despise smartness and discipline. (Prov 1:2-7)

Insight, religion, and ethics are part of the same reality, though the human instinct is to separate them.[[293]](#footnote-293)

**23** There follows the report of another imaginative awareness, another visionary testimony,[[294]](#footnote-294) which presumably had separate origin from what precedes. Jeremiah imagines the country as a small-scale version of the world as a whole in its pre-creation state, its Gen 1:2 state, *void and empty*. The words say it: the world is *tōhû wābōhû*.It’s like the wilderness. It’s not chaos or disorderly, it’s simply shapeless and unstructured. The Septuagint captures the picture: “I looked at the earth and behold, nothing”; the Vulgate has “… and behold, it was empty and nothing.” The horror lies not in what it is but in the contrast with a creation that has been made into something shapely and beautiful. It’s as if God has not yet said “Light!” Darkness is all there is. All you can see is gloom. Which again is not evil. It’s just – well, gloomy. But it speaks of the absence of God, who has not come to it with his order and beauty. “According to this phrase the situation in which the earth finds itself is the very opposite of promising. It is quite hopeless.” The earth as *tōhû wābōhû* is “the earth which is nothing as such, which mocks its Creator and which can only be an offence to the heaven above it, threatening it with the same nothingness.”[[295]](#footnote-295)

**24** After making us think of Gen 1,[[296]](#footnote-296) Jeremiah makes us think of the Prophets and the Psalms, and here the word “chaos” might be more apposite. *Mountains* and *hills* stand for stability, but in Jeremiah’s picture they are *quaking* and *light-footed*, agile, able to jump up and down – not what you want of your hills and mountains. This picture, too, speaks of the absence of God, whose stability and steadiness form a reassuring contrast over against mountains quaking (Ps 46:3 [4]). It speaks of the disorder and chaos brought into political and historical events of which Jeremiah is warning (cf. Isa 13:13). It speaks of Yahweh’s wrath, which makes the earth quake (Jer 10:10).

**25** Or it’s as if he has not yet created the living beings. *No human being* is part of the description in Gen 2:5, except that the two words *no* and *human being* come in the opposite order. There were no *birds in the heavens*: it is not that creation has not reached this point but rather that they have *fled.* So there is a similar movement within v. 25 to the movement from v. 23 to v. 24 – at first it seems like a mere “not yet” but then it becomes explicit that creation has been undone. There were no birds to be seen at Birkenau; “they had fled the skies above all the death-camps.”[[297]](#footnote-297)

**26a** The dynamic recurs. It’s as if Yahweh has not yet planted the *orchard* and the land remains a *wilderness*; to extend the link with Gen 2, there is not yet a human being to serve the garden and look after it. But the second colon suggests that the problem is rather that the orchard has gone back to being wilderness, as the towns have become nothing but those remains of towns that characterize archeological tells in Israel, mute witnesses to there once having been a town here. The world bears the marks of a creation that has returned to being formless and empty, rather than one that has not yet left it.[[298]](#footnote-298) Whereas Yahweh had brought Israel from the wilderness into the orchard (2:6-7), now the orchard has become a wilderness. The use of the two words together “evokes the whole history of the Israelites.”[[299]](#footnote-299) The end is the same as the beginning, *Endzeit* the same as *Urzeit*.[[300]](#footnote-300) “War is… regarded here as the end of the world.”[[301]](#footnote-301) The implication is not that Jeremiah’s vision is apocalyptic[[302]](#footnote-302) or eschatological in the sense that it portrays an End that is far off or unrelated to this world or this time.[[303]](#footnote-303) Creation and uncreation find concrete expression in the experience of the people of God.

**26b** In vv. 23-26, each line is shorter than the last: “the progressively shorter lines simulate the undoing of creation, heightening the sense of loss and leaving the audience to experience an eerie silence at the end.”[[304]](#footnote-304) Except that it leaves them not with silence but with the judgment in v. 26b. The country is in a state of devastation that has come *from before Yahweh, from before his angry blazing*. At the end of creation God had said it was very good and then had rested. The end of this vision differs. “This poem is almost more than we dare to utter…. Its substance is too ominous. The poet, one element at a time, plucks up and tears down the whole of the created order.”[[305]](#footnote-305) And

although there might have been a time when such harsh images of death and destruction could have been ignored, those days are forever gone…. Death and destruction now shroud out own immediate vision of reality…. The prophet’s vision of a cohesive and orderly world reverting to chaos and formlessness clearly transcends his own time and space.[[306]](#footnote-306)

**27** Following on what Jeremiah has spoken of as actual, as already having happened, Yahweh adds a footnote to confirm that it indeed will happen, because he has determined on it. Whereas *hā’āreṣ* was the earth in v. 23, here it is presumably *the country* – the reference to the towns in v. 26 would facilitate this transition and it reminds us that Jeremiah’s description of uncreation in vv. 23 is itself really a description of the imminent fate of the country. Viewed either way, the vision in vv. 23-26 is a vision of *desolation* and it would have a desolating effect. In a sidebar, Jeremiah therefore includes a reassurance that Yahweh’s intention is not as final as that account sounds. Yahweh does not actually intend to bring creation or country to an *end*. The dynamics of vv. 19-31 parallel the dynamics of vv. 5-18. As Yahweh’s intention to bring calamity raised a question about the way he has encouraged people to understand him as a God who makes things work out well for them (v. 10), so his intention of total devastation raises a question about his ultimate commitment to his people and/or to his world. Once again it may be that this verse (or simply the last colon) has a different origin from the material on either side, but it deals with a question that one can imagine arising for Jeremiah’s audience and for the readers of his scroll – as it does for Paul in Rom 9 – 11. It’s a question that God has to live with. One of the ways in which the Jeremiah scroll can seem unreadable is its conflicting statements about whether the actual end has come/is coming.[[307]](#footnote-307) One could say that God is here indicating his ambiguity about bringing what looks like final devastation.[[308]](#footnote-308) Yet there is nothing novel about the reassurance that appears here, which will recur in 5:10, 18. “The idea of a remnant… was actually settled in passages such as Exod 32:9-14 and Deut 32:26-27”[[309]](#footnote-309) and Lev 26:44.[[310]](#footnote-310)

**28** The desolation will nevertheless mean that everything is dark in the *country*, as if it *will mourn*, and the gloom will indeed be as if the *heavens* *above* have not heard God say “Light!” Once again, cosmos and country mirror each other: “the whole world comes unglued when Israel is disobedient long enough”[[311]](#footnote-311) and “in a way the whole cosmos is in mourning for itself.”[[312]](#footnote-312) It is doing so because Yahweh has formulated an intention that he intends to implement. As in English, *schemed* (*zāmam*)is usually a bad word, and maybe it hints at people’s accusations: “you accuse me of formulating bad intentions toward you? – you bet I have!” And he does not intend to go back on them. Three times he speaks in the past tense – *spoken*… *schemed*… *not* *relented*. It is the basis for saying, so *I will not* *turn back*. Jeremiah thus juxtaposes the First Testament’s two words for repentance. The first (*nāḥam* niphal) can suggest the feelings that someone has in relation to the past, but it more consistently suggests making a decision to behave in a different way compared with the past.[[313]](#footnote-313) The second (*šûb*) is an action word explicitly referring to the future. One half-expects another sidebar to deal with the question whether Yahweh doesn’t sometimes turn back, but the scroll holds back, though what Yahweh says here is not his last word on the matter (see e.g., 12:15; 18:1-10), and 3:1—4:4 has already implied that everything depends on Jerusalem’s own stance, on its turning.

**29** The scroll adds yet another imaginative portrait, presumably Jeremiah’s again based on what actually happens in war. While one way of coping with invasion is for everyone to come into the fortified towns and sit out the siege, another way is to run for it, knowing you can come back later when the enemy is gone. So when *cavalryman and archer* arrive (like bank robbers, they work in pairs, one to drive, one to shoot), they don’t need to fire an arrow or charge. As they approach, the town’s inhabitants hear their *voice* (their shout or the noise) and they are *fleeing* to hide in the bushes of the *scrublands* or to climb *rock* faces and look for caves. It’s a wise strategy. It means *every town* is eerily empty when the foe arrives.

**30** The scroll appends another pointed message of Jeremiah’s, in which he addresses Jerusalem itself. While the wise inhabitants of an unwalled town are fleeing, what about Jerusalem? Its position and its walls make it less vulnerable and it has sat out sieges before, as it did when Sennacherib came (see Isa 36—37). Is that what you think you will do, Miss Jerusalem? And are you tarting yourself up instead of fleeing? We see the woman/city taking care of her appearance, putting on clothing, jewelry, makeup, as if getting ready to go out and enjoy herself.[[314]](#footnote-314) The city’s *paramours* are the allies who she might think will be her deliverance (see Jer 2). Who are you thinking of, Jerusalem? The Egyptians? Your cousins the Moabites, the Ammonites, and the Edomites? You are in for a rude awakening. At best they *despise you*. Actually they will join in with the Babylonians when the day comes. They *will* *seek your life*.

**31** Jerusalem is trying to anticipate the future and make it work her way. Jeremiah has heard the future. In his message contempt moves to compassion,[[315]](#footnote-315) but rhetorically the aim does not change. Everything is designed to get Jerusalem to come to its senses. He draws attention to a different woman, but it will turn out to be the same woman. It is *Miss Zion* whose *voice* he has *heard* *like* *a woman writhing* in laborinstead of being a whore prettifying herself. This woman in *distress* is *having her first baby*. It is commonly a tougher experience than subsequent births, even if not for Rachel (Gen 35:16-20), and there are no epidurals in seventh-century Judah.She is exhausted. All she can do is appeal incoherently for help – *alas for me, please*. “In the spreading of the hands and the *nā’* [please] lies the desperate plea: do help me!”[[316]](#footnote-316) She is in danger of losing her life like Rachel, but her death will not be life-giving but simply death-dealing. It is not actually a description of Miss Zion giving birth. Miss Zion is *like* a woman giving birth in the way she is crying out. Actually Miss Zion is experiencing the fate that often comes to the victims of invasion (e.g., Hos 14:1; Amos 1:13). Her cry is not the cry of a woman in labor, but the cry of a woman being raped and killed.[[317]](#footnote-317) Jer 4:6-31 began with Zion as refuge and we may be able to hear a woman’s voice through much of this section.[[318]](#footnote-318) It ends with Zion pleading for mercy from her killers. “Why such furious poetic descriptions of such terrible themes?... Many people had no sense of the impending calamity. The prophet must shock them into facing reality.”[[319]](#footnote-319) If these verses were part of the 604 scroll, “one understands more and more the terror of Jehoiakim’s ministers.”[[320]](#footnote-320)

# Mostly Confrontation (5:1-31)

Chapter 5 makes for a new start as the scroll reverts to a focus on attacking Jerusalem and Judah concerning its life and its unfaithful relationship with Yahweh, which makes it necessary for Yahweh to take action. It confronts a people in denial.[[321]](#footnote-321) Strings of imperatives appear in vv. 1, 10, and 20, and I have yielded to the temptation to treat these as the beginning of sections, which thus comprise three of similar length, vv. 1-9, 10-19, and 20-31. While another set of imperatives begins in 6:1, they mark the beginning of another unit; they constitute more warnings than confrontations. Designating the imperatives in 5:1, 10, and 20 as beginnings does not carry the implication that the entirety of what follows originally belonged with them. In each case, some verses introduced by imperatives are supplemented by further material. The bulk of the chapter can again be read against the background of the story in Jer 36, but once more it will be a reformulation by Jeremiah of messages given over the previous twenty years, so that one cannot try to try to relate it to particular times within that period. Further, some of it could have been added over the subsequent twenty years or more. In the context of the exile, it could function to justify Yahweh’s action in letting Jerusalem fall,[[322]](#footnote-322) but it is not expressed as if designed to function in that way. It indicates that Yahweh has taken action against Jerusalem, but not in a final way, and it focuses on action Yahweh will yet take.

Throughout, the material is formulated by Jeremiah or someone who speaks in his name, and throughout, it addresses the people of Judah and Jerusalem. But in form, it works in many ways. Yahweh speaks in v. 1 and addresses some aides, but it is Jeremiah who is informing us of that fact. In vv. 2-3, Jeremiah himself speaks to Yahweh, but leaves us to work this fact out, and readers would not know that Jeremiah speaks in v. 2 until they read v. 3. As the chapter unfolds, it continues to move between Jeremiah and Yahweh speaking, and it is neither possible nor necessary to identify the speaker at every point. It is always Jeremiah speaking, even when he speaks as Yahweh, and it is Yahweh’s message even when Jeremiah speaks in his own name. Even when Jeremiah speaks most explicitly in his own name, he is not sharing entries from his spiritual journal. Readers of the scroll have to ask, how does this account of something that Jeremiah experienced function as Yahweh’s message?

## The Universal Deceptiveness (5:1-9)

1Go about through the streets of Jerusalem,

look, please, and get to know.

Seek in its squares,

if you can find an individual,

If there is someone exercising authority,

seeking truthfulness, so that I may pardon it.a

2Even if they say, “Yahweh is alive,”b

then they swear to deception,

3Whereas Yahweh, your eyes –

they are to truthfulness, aren’t they.c

When you struck them down, they didn’t writhe,d

when you made an end of them, they refused to accept restraint.

They made their faces stronger than rock –

they refused to turn back.

4But I – I said,

those are only poor people who show themselves stupid,

Because they do not acknowledge Yahweh’s way,

the authority of their God.

5I’ll get myself offe to the big people,

and I’ll speak to them,

Because those people – they acknowledge Yahweh’s way,

the authority of their God.

Actually those people, altogether, had broken the yoke,

torn off the restraints.

6That’s why a lion from the forest has struck them down;

a wolf from the steppes – it destroys them.f

A leopard is watching over their towns –

anyone going out from them gets mauled.

Because their rebellions are many,

their turnings are numerous.

7How for this could I pardon you –

your children have abandoned me,

and sworn by non-gods.

I filledg them, and they have committed adultery,

and to the whore house they troop off.h

8Well-fed, sex-mad,i big-balledj horses they were –

they neigh, each at his fellow’s wife.

9To these peoplek I should attend, shouldn’t I (Yahweh’s affirmation),

and on a nation that’s like this

my spirit should take redress, shouldn’t it?l

1. LXX implies “(Yahweh’s affirmation)” here.
2. See the note and comment on 4:2.
3. The asyndetic sequence whereby v. 3a follows v. 2 suggests that v. 3 is subordinate to what precedes.
4. The accent on the first syllable implies a form from *ḥûl*; Syr “were sick” implies an accent on the second syllable and a form from *ḥālâ* (Rashi in *miqrā’ôt gәdôlôt* on the passage; contrast Qimchi there).
5. *’Alăkâ-lî*, the cohortative of *hālak* followed by dative of advantage.
6. An exactly parallel abb’a’ bicolon in which the verbs at either end (with complementary tenses) hold the entire line together.
7. Swear is *šāba‘*, fill is *śāba‘*: the similarity of the words belies the contrast between human swearing and divine filling.
8. For *yitgōdādû* LXX implies *yitgōrārû* (confusion of *d* and *r*) from *gûr* “lodge”; Vg, Syr assume *HALOT*’s *gādad* I “cut [themselves]” rather than *gādad* II “band together.”
9. I include both K, which implies *mûzānîm* from *zûn* (see BDB), and Q *mәyuzzānîm*,a hapax understood in light of LXX, Vg, Tg.
10. Explaining *maškîm* by *’ešek* “testicle” (Duhm, *Jeremia*, 59; *BHS* suggests *ma’ăšikîm*). Cf. Vg “stud.” Aq, Theod, Sym “dragging” imply *mōšәkîm*,participle from *māšak* (*HUB*). LXX omits.
11. Rather than “things”: see Holladay, *Jeremiah* 1:182.
12. MT has a section marker here.

Yahweh (by implication) commissions agents to investigate whether there are any faithful people in Jerusalem. There are none. That discovery explains why Yahweh has struck them down, cannot pardon them, and will take further action. The section outlines:

v. 1 the commission

three bicola, the second and third linked by enjambment

vv. 2-3 Jeremiah gives his initial response

four bicola, the first two linked by enjambment

vv. 4-6 Jeremiah reports his further discovery and reflection

eight bicola, the first four forming parallel linked pairs

vv. 7-9 Yahweh’s conclusion

two tricola framing two bicola

**1** Yahweh once again issues a commission to unidentified agents (cf. 4:5). To ask about their identity may be a bit like asking where Cain got his wife from. But if we should seek to identify them, they will be his heavenly aides, like the two in Gen 18 who go to check things out in Sodom. There are overlaps between this section and that story; it might also remind listeners of Isa 1, which told Jerusalem it was only too like Sodom, and also talked about acknowledging, authority, being truthful, rebellion, children, whoring, abandoning, moving away, aliens, consuming, striking down, and redress. The uncommon verb *go about* (*šûṭ*, here polel), fits a task like that of those other aides; it usually denotes a purposeful trek designed to find something or discover something (e.g, 2 Sam 24:2, 8; Job 1:7; 2:2).

*Exercising authority* and *seeking truthfulness* are the particular vocation of people with responsibility for justice in the city. In a village or an ordinary town, they would be the elders gathered at the gateway who sort matters out for the community, though in the big city it would be different. But the commission to look through the streets and in the squares implies the recognition that there are broader contexts in which authority is exercised and power is employed, and thus where truthfulness matters. The family is such a context; the heads of householders exercise authority there. Whereas 4:2 spoke of authority and faithfulness, Yahweh here speaks of authority and truthfulness, but it comes to the same thing. Nowhere in the city do the people with power operate in a way that respects truth. To understand this message as picturing Jeremiah as the naïve country boy who doesn’t realize that things are as bad in Jerusalem as they are[[323]](#footnote-323) is to allegorize it. It’s not about Jeremiah discovering something or engaging in reflection. It’s a story to appeal to his people’s imagination. It’s not a story that anticipates the modern Western preoccupation with theodicy – or insofar as it is, it works with a different framework for approaching that question. While its implications then overlap with Gen 18:22-33, it starts from a different assumption. When Yahweh has to reconcile the importance of taking waywardness seriously and of taking seriously his own commitment to the community and to his own purpose, then one way of doing so is to allow a remnant to survive, another is to let the entire community survive on the basis of the faithfulness of the few, but another is to let the entire community survive on the basis of the presence of just one person exercising authority with truthfulness. Yahweh is then not looking for just an ordinary individual but for someone like Moses, Aaron, Phinehas, or Samuel,[[324]](#footnote-324) someone who is pushing the city to live in a way that matches his concern for faithfulness. If there is such a person, then it suggests that all is not lost. It opens up the possibility of *pardon*. Pardoning (*sālaḥ*) differs from forgiving. Forgiving (*nāśā’*) means a person who has been wronged declines to make the wrongdoer “carry” the consequences of their wrong action; instead the wronged person carries the consequences. Pardoning is an act whereby a person with authority stops treating a rebel or transgressor as a rebel or transgressor.

**2-3aαβ** Unlike David in 2 Sam 24 or Yahweh in Job 1—2, Jeremiah does not have to wait for the return of the investigatory body before pronouncing on the results of its research, because of the rhetorical nature of the commission. A key factor in the maintaining of community life and the administration of justice is the people’s honesty. It’s not the whole of truthfulness, but it is an aspect of it. But community life, home life, trade, and decision-making processes are utterly screwed up by the willingness of people to lie, and to take Yahweh’s name in vain as they do so. They do not merely swear with or by deception (e.g., 3:10; 5:31) but *to deception* (e.g., 3:23; 7:9). The expression resembles the one used to describe foreigners coming to swear allegiance “to Yahweh” (e.g., Isa 19:18; 45:23); the Jerusalemites are people who have moved their allegiance in the opposite direction even though they go through the motions of swearing by Yahweh’s name. “The people mouth proper confessional statements… but this God-language is full of pretense.”[[325]](#footnote-325) It’s really addressed to non-gods.Jeremiah knows that what he has seen is gravely offensive to Yahweh; his eyes look for a commitment to *truthfulness*, for statements that correspond with reality and to the God whose being corresponds with reality (the antonyms of *deception* are words such as truth, truthfulness, and faithfulness).[[326]](#footnote-326)

**3aγb** Jeremiah’s awareness of the investigation generates a further revelation (or the awareness expressed in his parable has another facet). There’s nothing new about the facts that he has described, and Yahweh knows all about them. He has already acted in light of them. The city has experienced the results. Yahweh has *struck them down* (cf. 2:30); if one should look for a historical event not long before 604 to which Jeremiah might be referring, then the defeat by Egypt that brought Josiah’s death in 609 would qualify. Yahweh has *made an end of them*, notwithstanding 4:27; this reference to an end indicates particularly clearly that Jeremiah speaks hyperbolically (making an end of them is still a threat in 9:16 [15]). But they *refused to accept restraint*, like an ox throwing off the reins that held it to the yoke (2:19-20, 30).[[327]](#footnote-327) They were quite prepared to tough it out. They *refused* (cf. 3:3) *to turn back*. That comment also makes the hyperbole clear;[[328]](#footnote-328) if he had brought the community to an actual end, the question wouldn’t arise, and Jeremiah wouldn’t be preaching this sermon (Amos 4:6-11 is a more detailed hyperbolic comment on chastisement failing to make people “turn back”).

**4** The people whom the investigatory commission would have found in the city’s streets and squares would be the ordinary people, “merchants, craftsmen, porters, and so on,”[[329]](#footnote-329) and the people patronizing them. In their everyday life they operate in a way that nominally recognizes Yahweh but in reality leaves Yahweh out of account. They *show themselves* *stupid* and *they do not acknowledge Yahweh’s way, the authority of their God* perhaps both in the way they conduct their lives and in the way they don’t recognize what Yahweh is doing with them. In his comment Jeremiah risks looking elitist but he is operating rhetorically:[[330]](#footnote-330) let the more important people nod at the feckless proletariat, then put the boot in. He is speaking dramatically, and he is on his way to the indictment that follows.

**5** Whichever form of stupidity he means, he himself will go to do his own investigation, of *the big people*, not just the little people. *They acknowledge Yahweh’s way*, don’t they. Actually they too have *broken the yoke, snapped the restraints* – Jeremiah more systematically reuses the terminology of 2:19-20, 30.[[331]](#footnote-331) If anything, “the teachers were worse than the students.”[[332]](#footnote-332)

**6** So it is their fecklessness that explains the chastisements v. 3 refers to, which Jeremiah now describes more vividly and metaphorically, and with further hyperbole. Ethics is intrinsic to leadership, and ethical failure on the part of leaders means disaster.[[333]](#footnote-333) Jeremiah combines qatal, yiqtol, and participle, which fits with the implication in v. 3 that some assaults have already come but forbids any trust that they are now over; in light of later developments in visions such as Daniel’s, developments themselves with background in schemes not so distant chronologically from Jeremiah, the lion, the wolf, and the leopard come to be Babylon, Persia, Greece.[[334]](#footnote-334) People thought the towns were safe but Jeremiah again reminds them that things will not work out that way (cf. 4:5-7, 16). The verse closes with a final twist on “turning.” Jerusalemites wouldn’t turn back (v. 3); they were too set on their *turnings* – the word earlier used to describe “Turning Israel” (3:6, 8, 11, 12).

**7** Jeremiah moves on from “can Yahweh pardon?” (v. 1) to “why should he pardon?”[[335]](#footnote-335) *This* is the indictment that will follow in vv. 7-8, and the address in the second-person singular is a reminder that Yahweh was really speaking to the city of Jerusalem all along. In addressing her, he excludes the possibility of *pardon*. Here the basis for that judgment is expressed in the more familiar terms, that her *children* (cf. 2:30) have *abandoned* Yahweh (1:16; 2:13, 17) and have sworn by *non-gods* (2:11), which is in effectwhat v. 2 implied. Yahweh had provided them with all the food they needed and more – he had *filled them*. Their response: *they* *have committed adultery* in going after those other so-called gods (3:8-9). It was odd as well as ungrateful, given that Yahweh had shown that he was the one who could fill them. But *to the whore house they troop off*.

**8** Jeremiah develops the metaphor in more systematically explicit fashion than in 2:20. While he will (probably) refer later to literal adultery (7:9), the context here indicates that his graphic account refers allegorically to people’s (specifically, men’s) unfaithfulness to Yahweh – he focuses on “theological prostitution not on prostitution *per se.*”[[336]](#footnote-336) While he can picture infidelity in female terms, he can picture it in male terms.[[337]](#footnote-337) Perhaps the men are upstanding members of the community, not at all people who would think of being unfaithful to their wives or visiting the whorehouse, or who liked being compared to horses. Their being *well-fed* would make a link with v. 7b and add to the critique. If the audience knew that (apparently) horses have a strong sex-drive and reproductive instinct but are quite loyal, it would add to the effectiveness of the metaphor.[[338]](#footnote-338)

**9** *These things* and *this* tie off vv. 7-9 as *this* opened these four lines, and the questions form the converse of the opening question in v. 7.[[339]](#footnote-339) The tricolon brings the section to a close; the second and third cola together expand on the first:

to these people I should attend shouldn’t I?

on a nation that’s like this my spirit should take redress shouldn’t it?

*Attend* *to* (*pāqad*)is a sugestive First Testament verb whose negative or positive connotations emerge from its context. Here in the parallelism *take redress* (*nāqam* hitpael)spells out its implications. Translations of this second verb such as “take revenge” give a misleading impression of emotional overreaction, while translations such as “punish” give a misleading impression of cool objectiveness. *Redress* suggests an appropriate recompense that recognizes wrongdoing, yet one that is given by the person who has been wronged. Here including the word *spirit* (*nepeš*) and using the hitpael underlines the involvement of Yahweh’s emotions in taking action against his own people who have been unfaithful. “The LORD can… breathe easily when justice has been achieved.”[[340]](#footnote-340) He chastises for the people’s sake (v. 3) and for his own sake. He indeed declares that “vengeance is mine, I myself will repay” (Rom 12:19; cf. Deut 32:35). He is not a God who is simply a cool detached observer, in accordance with the ideal we might have for a judge. He is more like a father whose position and relationship with his children requires him to combine fairness with relationship, justice with commitment, and to work with the tension between the two.

## The Foreign Service (5:10-19)

10Go up among her terracesa and devastate,

but do not make an end.

Remove her tendrils,

because they do not belong to Yahweh.

11Because they have been false, been falseb to me,

the household of Israel and the household of Judah (Yahweh’s affirmation).

12They have duped Yahweh,

but they have said, “Not him! –

Dire trouble will not come upon us,

sword and hunger we will not see.

13The prophets – they will become wind,

what has been spokenc – it’s not in them;

this will be done to them.”d

14Therefore, Yahweh, the God of Armies, has said this (because youe have spoken this thing):

Here am I, putting my words in yourf mouth as fire;

this people are trees, and it will consume them.

15Here am I, causing a nation from far away to come against you,g

Israel’s household (Yahweh’s affirmation).

It’s an enduring nation,

it’s a nation from of old,

A nation whose language you won’t know,

so you won’t hear what it speaks.

16Its quiver is like a grave opened up;

all of them are strong men.

17It will consume your harvest and your bread,

they will consume your sons and your daughters.

It will consume your flock and your herd,

it will consume your vine and your fig.

It will pulverize your fortified towns,

on which you are reliant, with the sword.

18But even in those days (Yahweh’s affirmation),

I will not make an end of you.

19And when you say, “On what account did Yahweh our God do all these things to us”:

Youh will say to them,

“As you abandoned me,

and served alien gods in your country,

So you will serve foreigners

in a country that is not yours.i

*Šārâ* comes only here, though it resembles and overlaps in meaning with words such as *šûr* and *šûrâ*; see *HALOT*, 1453-54, 1653.

The infinitive precedes the finite verb, underlining the fact.

The noun *dibbēr*, which comes only here in the First Testament, denotes the word of God in post-biblical Hebrew (R. C. Steiner, “A Colloquialism in Jer. 5:13,” *JSS* 37 [1992]: 11-26).

Literally, “thus it will be done.” MT has a section marker here.

This *you* is plural.

This *your* is singular.

This *you* is plural.

This *you* is singular.

MT has a marker here.

The section again begins with a command, to take disciplinary action in light of the falsehood of Ephraim and Judah, continues with words to Jeremiah that spell out the implications of the action, reassures the listeners that it will not be the end, and adds a rationale implying that the punishment will fit the crime. Once again, the section juxtaposes several subsections that might well be of separate origin. It outlines:

vv. 10-13 Yahweh (by implication) commissions some hard pruning

three bicola, two linked bicola, and a tricolon closing the subsection

vv. 14-18 Yahweh announces that he is putting devastating words in Jeremiah’s mouth

an introduction and nine bicola, two linked.

v. 19 an explanation

a double introduction and two linked bicola

**10** Yahweh gives another commission, paralleling the one in v. 1. He is again not speaking to Jeremiah but (if it is proper to attempt to identify them) to unspecified aides, who now have a destructive job to do (cf. Ezek 9): *go up among her terraces and devastate*. While in origin the message that begins here may have been independent of what precedes, it has been appended to vv. 1-9 in a way that makes this commission the working out of Yahweh’s determination expressed in v. 9; the antecedent to *her* is the Jerusalem of vv. 1-9. Yahweh speaks of Jerusalem as if it were a vineyard whose vines have trailing tendrils, though one should not ask what the tendrils specifically represent; it’s not an allegory. Isa 5:1-7 speaks of Israel as a vineyard that Yahweh intends totally to destroy, though Isaiah’s statements on other occasions warn against taking that threat too literally. But sometimes for one reason or another vines do have to be uprooted and the vinedresser has to start again (cf. 1:10), and here, *devastate* might make one think in such terms. Yet immediately there follows the proviso that came in 4:27: *but do not make an end*. Although the proviso might have been added to a more radical commission, to qualify it and make it less devastating (v. 10 would then work as a tricolon), the further instruction to *remove her tendrils* likely has the same implications as the proviso; the aides are not told to uproot the vine. On the other hand, while pruning vines is a savage operation, Yahweh must be requiring something more radical than this familiar procedure. One might compare Paul’s talk of the savage lopping of a vine in Rom 9 – 11. The reason for the devastation is that these tendrils *do not belong to Yahweh*. That is, he disowns them.

**11**. The further reason is that Ephraim and Judah *have been false* to Yahweh in the way Jer 3 has expounded. The order of words, the subjects being held back until the second colon, corresponds to the regular Hebrew order whereby the subject follows the verb, yet it is an extreme example of this order, and it raises a little suspense, especially for Judahites who may think they will be let off the hook in disfavor of those pesky northerners, but who then find themselves appearing at the end of the line, followed by a *Yahweh’s affirmation* in case there was any doubt. It’s happened to Ephraim and it will happen to Judah.[[341]](#footnote-341)

**12** In being totally false, they have *duped* Yahweh or disappointed him (*kāḥaš*), as a vine or olive may disappoint its owner when it produces no fruit – a connotation that fits as v. 12 follows on v. 10. They are also duping themselves, in that they are saying, “He wouldn’t do that kind of thing.” *Not him* thus refers back to the commission in v. 10, but its connotations are spelled out in the second line, the standard piece of self-delusion and false self-reassurance that Jeremiah is continually having to deal with. “People say, ‘Yah doesn’t look, the God of Jacob doesn’t pay attention” (Ps 94:7).[[342]](#footnote-342) It is expressed in neat parallelism with two verbs enclosing the line, and with paronomasia:

will not come upon us dire trouble (*rā‘â*)

sword and hunger (*ḥereb, rā‘āb*) we will not see (*nir’eh*)

The wording thus links *dire trouble* and *sword and hunger* and also *dire trouble* and *see*, while the verbs hold the entire line together. The people’s words unconsciously convey the integral and inescapable unity of what they try to deny. The first colon exactly corresponds to Mic 3:11 where Micah quotes the other prophets in a verse that immediately precedes the declaration that will be taken up in Jer 26:18. *Sword and* *hunger* give specificity to *dire trouble* in a way characteristic of Jeremiah (e.g., 14:13, 15, 16; 16:4) and also of Ezekiel. Both prophets often add epidemic (e.g., Jer 14:12; 21:7). It is a horribly realistic analysis, as sword, hunger, and epidemic are the great killers in warfare.

**13** The self-delusion depends upon dismissing warning they are given. Plural *prophets* commonly refers to prophets who tell people things will be fine (cf. 4:9; 5:31), but here more likely Jeremiah continues to quote the people. They are therefore referring to prophets such as Jeremiah (cf. 2:30; 7:25), who is maybe less isolated than we may sometimes infer. This understanding will also be the one implied by verse 14 when it refers back to vv. 12-13. The Jerusalemites dismiss such prophets as mere *wind*: they may have claimed to be people possessed by *rûaḥ*, but the ambiguity of that word can be used against them. There’s nothing in *what has been spoken*,no real message from Yahweh, *in them*. The kind of thing they say when they declare “Yahweh has said this,” their threats of calamity, such things as are mentioned in vv. 10 and 12, is what *will be done to them*. It’s the sort of thing Jeremiah says about the false prophets, which we now hear is what people are saying about prophets like him. The implication is that they will pay a price. The third colon in the tricolon closes off their words and closes off what may have been originally a self-contained message.

**14** Once more vv. 14-17 or 14-18 may thus be an originally separate message, but by means of the *because* clause the introduction now links it with what precedes: *this thing* is what was said in vv. 12-13, and the plural *you* is the people as they were speaking then. But in speaking of *your mouth* Yahweh addresses Jeremiah, in a way that recalls his commission (1:9). There, it was a speech act; one could have translated Yahweh’s words “I hereby put….” Here, it’s a declaration of intent; one could translate Yahweh’s words as “I am going to put.” More chillingly, Yahweh adds to the earlier formulation an indication of what the *words* are going to do, which is in keeping with the commission (to pull up, pull down, wipe out, smash) but more specific. *Fire* is a standard image for God-implemented disaster in the Prophets (e.g., 4:4; 17:4); archaeological investigations reveal how fire was commonly the destroyer of towns, whether by accident or through enemy action (cf. 17:27). But only Jeremiah speaks of his own words as the means of igniting Yahweh’s destructive fire (cf. 20:9; 23:29). They are themselves a speech act. God said “Light!” and there was light (Gen 1:3). Jeremiah will say “Fire!” and there will be fire. The fuel is *this people*, who are thus *trees* (it’s a forest fire), and *it will consume them*.

**15** Yahweh goes on to interpret his allegory. When he originally put his words in Jeremiah’s mouth, they concerned nations and kingdoms, and one could ask whether the agents that were given a charge just now in v. 10 are the human armies that will do the job. Here, Jeremiah is to be the means of summoning *a nation from far away to come against you*: “you” is now again *Israel’s household* (which in this context means Judah). This is no fly-by-night nation, like some that Yahweh could mention; *enduring* is the word to describe a stream or river that flows reliably all year as opposed to a wadi that flows only from time to time, when it rains somewhere else. This nation is also *from of old,*[[343]](#footnote-343)not some Johnny-come-lately entity that may fade as quickly as it arises; Israel can’t say, “Don’t worry, it will soon disappear.” In keeping with its coming from far away, it’s *a nation whose language you won’t know, so you won’t hear what it speaks*. When an overlord gives you orders and you can’t understand them, what are you to do (see Deut 28:49-53)? It will be worse than it was with Assyria (see Isa 37:11).

**16** Nor is that fact the most disturbing thing about this nation. It has an insatiable appetite for killing; and its men are capable of doing their job. The simile of the quiver involves a transferred epithet or catachresis: it is the arrows in the quiver that bring death.

**17** When an ancient army goes on an expedition, it doesn’t worry too much about supply lines. It just eats what has been grown, bred, and nurtured by the people it has invaded. The army also kills the boys who fight, and rapes the girls who don’t. It’s not put off by *the fortified towns on which you are reliant* where Yahweh himself ironically told the people to take refuge (4:5). After *consume, consume, consume, consume* (*’ākal*),the ordinary word for “eat” here used both literally and metaphorically and suggesting that “the enemy will eat without stopping,”[[344]](#footnote-344) Yahweh brings his threat to a climax with a non-ordinary word *pulverize* (*rāšaš* – it otherwise comes only in Mal 1:4). He finally adds to the awfulness by means of the last word in the three lines, *with the sword*, which reaffirms that he is not talking merely about the demolition of buildings but about the slaughtering of people – the people who are listening to Jeremiah’s message (Tg expands on Jeremiah’s word by speaking of “the fortified cities of your land on which you rely to be saved from before those who kill with the sword”).

**18** In isolation that message would raise familiar questions. First, “what is this nation?” As usual, it is not a question Yahweh is interested in clarifying, though in the light of events, there is no doubt it is Babylon, and maybe it would be obvious to Jeremiah and his audience – as it certainly would be obvious by the time any version of the scroll came into being. Second, “is he talking about total annihilation?” Again, in the light of events the answer would be obvious, and the incorporation of *I will not make an end of you* would affirm the nature of Yahweh’s intention from the beginning. At the same time, it would not be surprising if Yahweh wanted to reassure Jeremiah and people like Baruch about the nature of that intention, and thus that these words of reassurance go back to them. In this chapter, the promise not to make an end of them (the noun *kālâ*)is set in the context of the claim already to have done so (the verb *kālâ* piel,v. 3). Indeed, if this line is a later addition to the message in vv. 10-17,[[345]](#footnote-345) it functions to complete a neat frame around the section, with v. 10. Either way, “no shadow of ambivalence or uncertainty betrays the Lord's fierce ability to do both things at once: passionately to rage against this way of life that must come to an end and in the same instant passionately to refuse to allow the story to come to this sort of an ending.”[[346]](#footnote-346)

**19** The third familiar question would be, “Why?” As was the case in v. 14, the movement between *you* plural, *you* singular, and *they* is confusing, especially in English where we cannot distinguish between *you* plural and *you* singular. Here the imagined perspective is explicitly that of people living the other side of the disaster. In the context rhetorically implied by the chapter, the message presses Jeremiah’s hearers in (say) 604 to think of themselves in that later situation asking the question to which they need to hear the answer now in their 604 context and respond to it, to obviate the necessity to ask it and hear it in the future. The answer to the question ought to be obvious, but the need to articulate it never disappears, and Jeremiah articulates it in a way that incorporates a new element. The initial explanation lies in *you abandoned me*, the declaration that again goes back to Jeremiah’s commission (1:16; cf. 2:13, 17, 19; 5:7); here Yahweh accompanies it with the reminder that *you…* *served alien gods in your country*; it’s the scroll’s first reference to “serving” other gods. In 3:13 they were “foreigners” (*zârîm*); Jerusalem herself had then become an “alien” woman (*nokriyyâ*) in2:21. Yahweh now adds that the punishment will suit the crime. *You will serve foreigners in a country that is not yours*. Foreigners were gods in 3:13, will be people in 30:8, and in 2:25 could be either, so they could be either here.[[347]](#footnote-347) It’s also the scroll’s first reference to exile (at least, since 1:3). The theme will grow in prominence as the scroll unfolds and as time goes by (e.g., 7:15; 9:16 [15]; 15:2, 14; 16:13; 17:4).

## The Way to Become Big and Wealthy (5:20-31)

20Announce this in Jacob’s household,

make it heard in Judah:

21Hear this, please, foolish people,

that has no mind,

Who have eyes but don’t look,

who have ears but don’t listen.

22Of me are you not in awe (Yahweh’s affirmation),

or before me do you not writhe,

I who set sand as the sea’s boundary,

a decree for all time, that it cannot cross over?

They heave but they cannot win –

its heaps roar but they cannot cross over it.

23But this people—

it had a determined and rebellious mind;

they were defiant[[348]](#footnote-348) and they went.

24So they did not say in their mind,

“Let us please be in awe of Yahweh our God,

Who gives rain, early rain[[349]](#footnote-349) and late rain in its time,

while the weeks decreed for harvest[[350]](#footnote-350) he keeps for us.”

25Your wayward acts – they have diverted these things,

your wrongdoings – they have withheld what is good from you.

26Because faithless people were to be found within my people;

one watches, like bird catchers crouching.[[351]](#footnote-351)

They have set up a devastator,[[352]](#footnote-352)

so they may catch – human beings.[[353]](#footnote-353)

27Like a cage full of birds,

thus their houses are full of duplicity.[[354]](#footnote-354)

That is how they have become big and wealthy –

28they have become fat, become stout.[[355]](#footnote-355)

Yes, they have passed over[[356]](#footnote-356) dire actions –

they have not decided a case,

The case of a fatherless person – so they might make it succeed,[[357]](#footnote-357)

and for the case of the needy they have not made decisions.

29To these people I should attend, shouldn’t I (Yahweh’s affirmation),

and on a nation that’s like this

my spirit should take redress, shouldn’t it?[[358]](#footnote-358)

30A desolating, horrific thing[[359]](#footnote-359) –

it has happened in the country.

31The prophets – they have prophesied by deception,[[360]](#footnote-360)

the priests – they rule in accordance with their direction.[[361]](#footnote-361)

And my people – they love it so;

but what will you do at the end of it?

The chapter’s third section again comprises two or three subsections that might originally be of independent origin. Again it begins with an imperative, here aiming to urge Israel to start taking notice of Yahweh. It implicitly details the background to that need – Israel will not learn the lesson from hurts it has experienced, whose background again lies in the lack of faithful exercise of authority in the community which facilitates the well-off becoming more well-off. And it adds the critique that spiritual leaders and people are in collusion in this connection. The section thus outlines:

vv. 20-23 Yahweh (by implication) charges agents to confront Israel about its heedlessness

six bicola (the middle four in linked pairs) and a tricolon suggesting a pause

vv. 24-29 Yahweh’s reflection on the people’s failure in love for God and for neighbor

two pairs of bicola enclosing five bicola, and a closing tricolon

vv. 30-31 Yahweh’s further horrified reflection, on prophet’s priests, and people

three bicola

**20** Once more Yahweh starts again, with another (plural) commission and another message that warns of redress but focuses on wrongdoing. Perhaps one should again assume that the notional addressees are Yahweh’s aides, though it is most obvious here that rhetorically Jeremiah’s point is that his audience needs to see itself on the receiving end of a message that has been commissioned. *Jacob’s household* is now *Judah*.

**21** The anonymous proclaimers are thus to address this audience with a “lecture of Yahweh the schoolmaster to his refractory people.”[[362]](#footnote-362) But the audience is still spoken of in the third person; they are thus “overhearing” the message that the proclaimers are commissioned to give them. And it is a snide message with its *please* combined with its imperative *hear*; “hear this, please” is usually hostile and threatening.[[363]](#footnote-363) The cutting tone continues in its characterization of this people as one *that has no sense*, no mind (*lēb*), and in its vocative *foolish people*, which combines nicely with “stupid” in v. 4 (both words came together in 4:22). They are supposed to be rational, but they are irrational, he might have added.[[364]](#footnote-364) Yahweh maintains the tone in the description that continues: they *have eyes but don’t look, have ears but don’t listen.* The expression is picked up by other prophets (Isa 43:8; Ezek 12:2) and elsewhere it is tellingly applied to the gods that attract the Judahites (the wording is the same in Ps 115:5b-6a and almost the same in Ps 135:16b-17a). Jeremiah might also say that the people he confronts embody a fulfillment of the two psalms’ further comment that people who revere the images that have these qualities become like them.[[365]](#footnote-365) The seeing and hearing may have as their object the news about political developments in the Middle East which were pointing in only one possible direction in 604, or Jeremiah may be more likely referring to the things people can see and hear in the city, of which he will say more in vv. 26-31.

**22** What follows makes that second understanding more likely, though a little inference is required. People who did not perceive the city’s religious and societal waywardness showed they were *not in awe* of Yahweh. That verb is quite a usual one for a proper submission to Yahweh, but in the parallelism Yahweh distinctively adds that they do *not writhe* (*ḥûl*, tellingly the verb in 4:19, 31; 5:3). In the parallelism:

are you of me not in awe (Yahweh’s affirmation),

or do you before me not writhe?

They ought to be squirming or torturing themselves in light of who Yahweh is, as the one who keeps the potential disorderly forces of creation under control. Notwithstanding their lack of great proximity to the sea, the Israelites were keen on the idea that Yahweh had set a *boundary* to it by his *decree* (*ḥōq*)so that it could not overwhelm the earth (cf. Ps 104:9; Prov 8:29). Its waves can *heave* and *roar* but *they cannot cross over* the bound God set for them, the bound here defined by the *sand* at the water’s edge. Nearly all the First Testament references to sand make it an image for great numbers or quantities. Only here is it a barrier for the sea, but it makes for a paronomasia, since there is a link between not writhing (*ḥûl*) and not recognizing the blessing that the sand is (*ḥôl*).

**23** The one who set bounds for *the sea* (*yam*) which it may not *cross over* also set bounds for *this* *people* (‘*am*) which they may not cross over – but they have.[[366]](#footnote-366) Yahweh repeats some standard charges(cf. vv. 11, 14). The people is *determined* inits *mind* (3:17) and *rebellious* (4:17), which is the description of a son who deserves death in Deut 21:18-20. So what does a people with a determined and rebellious mind deserve?[[367]](#footnote-367) Further, individually *they* *were defiant* (*sûr*; more literally, “movedaway”) and *they went* (after other deities). It is an abrupt, curt close to the tricolon.

**24** Yahweh takes further the comment on the people’s *mind* – now not on what characterized it (determination and rebelliousness) but on what they *did not say* within it, within themselves. The snide divine “please” of v. 21 is not matched by a mutual *please* of their own that might take them into the *awe* of which v. 22 spoke, which is here linked with a different aspect of divine provision. The importance of rain is underscored by the three words Jeremiah has the people using, only the last of which corresponds to the “rains and late rain” of 3:3. Here there is reference to *rain* in general then to the *early rain* and the *late rain*. It’s also important that the rain come *in its time* and thus ensures that *the weeks decreed for harvest* unfold. There is a decree that applies to the sea and keeps it under control (v. 22) and there are decrees (*ḥuqqôt*)that apply to the seasons, particularly in connection with the growth of crops, and that ensure that the seasons work out according to schedule – e.g., during the seven weeks that take the wheat crop to maturity between Pesach (Passover) and Shavuot (Pentecost). The tricolon encourages a moment’s pause.

**25** But the message belongs to one of the years when things have not worked out this way: compare 36:9, and again see 3:3. Again Yahweh repeats a standard charge and gives a standard explanation expressed in a neat parallelism that corresponds to the straightforward reasoning and puts the key words upfront:

*your wayward acts have diverted these things*

*your wrongdoings have withheld what is good from you*

There is an extra kick in the supernumerary *from you* at the end.

**26** Jeremiah goes on to spell out what the waywardness and wrongdoing consist in. Usually he focuses on wrongdoing in relation to Yahweh, in religion and politics; here he talks about abuse within the community, as he did in vv. 1-2. Different prophets focus on different things; it’s impossible to know why they should, but it is noteworthy that the Prophets (like the Torah) do show a concern with both questions about religion and questions about society, so that readers of the Scriptures can allow themselves to be confronted by things that they are not inclined to focus on. Once more the difference in the form of expression in these verses may indicate that they belong to a unit of separate origin, with a *because* added now to make the link. The verses provide a neat instance of its being hard to say who is the speaker or who is the addressee, though it’s clear that the Judahites are the subject. One might think that Jeremiah speaks; but by v. 29 it is Yahweh, so the addressee might be Jeremiah. But it matters little, because at another level the words are both Yahweh’s and Jeremiah’s, and the addressees are – the Judahites. *Faithless people* (*rәšā‘îm*) are the opposite of faithful people (*śaddîqîm*), people who ignore the obligations of community and the commitment they owe God and one another. They are *to be found* within the community, whereas an individual exercising authority, seeking truthfulness could not be found (v. 1). The nature of their faithlessness is spelled out in the rest of the vv. 26-28 as it moves from metaphor to literal description. Jeremiah’s opening comment is that the people itself simply *watches* what is going on. For a straightforward understanding of what follows, one might read vv. 26-28 in reverse order, but Jeremiah’s rhetoric suggests that people know the literal; what they need is metaphors to help them understand what they are doing and to recognize its enormity. So first, he invites them to think about *bird catchers crouching* to go about capturing their victims. A catcher *watches*,being *set up* as *a devastator* who will ultimately be the death of his prey. But these hunters set the trapper to *catch human beings*.[[368]](#footnote-368)

**27-28aα** Then imagine *a cage full of birds*, whom the bird catcher has caught and is keeping until he sells them and/or until he has fattened them up (Tg) and/or until the moment for killing and eating arrives. Set alongside that picture the image of the bird catchers’ *houses* which are also full – of things that they possess through the *duplicity* that hunters necessarily practice in order to catch birds. It has enabled them to become the *big* and *wealthy* people they are in the community, *fat* and *stout*.

**28aβγδb-29** How did the catching of men and the accumulation of things happen? Such people had *passed over*, turned a blind eye to, *dire actions* or dire words when a case came for consideration by the council that decides things – in the village in would be the elders, but there would be some more structured arrangement in Jerusalem. *They have not decided a case* in the proper way. A typical loser in a case of this kind might be someone whose father, the head of the household, has died and who is trying to get possession of the family estate but is being denied it by shady legal means. It would be the responsibility of the big people, the people with power and influence, to see that *the case of the fatherless* gets decided in his favor, that the case can *succeed*. But they don’t. More generally, *for the case of the needy they have not made decisions*. Maybe these are people who have got into economic difficulty and had to use their property as collateral, and now their creditor insists on taking possession of it. The fatherless and the needy are the people that the big and the powerful people have been able to “catch” so as to find ways of filling their own houses with things that should belong to them. The equivalent problem in the West might be that “It is much easier for prosperous people to acquire the best legal representation, something the poor and the orphaned cannot afford.”[[369]](#footnote-369) Yahweh’s closing rhetorical question (repeated from v. 9) requires no answer.

**30** Once again there is a transition of agenda to another subsection that may have been separate originally , though once more it reformulates familiar agenda. Something *desolating* *has happened in the country*. One would initially assume that Jeremiah is talking again about the desolation he has seen in his mind’s eye (2:15; 4:7). But the only other reference to a *horrific thing* (*ša‘ărûr*)relates to the behavior of the prophets (23:14), though Judah itself is also called *ša‘ărûrî* in 18:13 and the rotten figs are called *šō‘ār* in 27:16).[[370]](#footnote-370) Here, he will talk about the prophets in the next verse. The *desolating, horrific thing* is the thing he about to describe.

**31** Specifically, *the prophets – have prophesied by deception*. They are not consciously trying to deceive people. They are likely entirely sincere. But there is no correspondence between what they say and what Yahweh actually thinks and what is going to happen. It is because of the direction in which they are looking for their guidance. Whether they are conscious of looking in that direction or not, they are looking to deities that by their nature can only be deceiving. Then there are *the priests*. Usually Jeremiah simply lumps prophets and priests together as equally reprehensible (e.g., 6:13-15; 26:7-11), but here he makes a distinctive comment on their interrelationship. The priest’s job is to *rule* when someone comes to ask them for guidance (e.g., does this symptom count as skin disease [leprosy]? I did this wrong thing, can I still come to worship?). Jeremiah says they are following the alleged divine revelations of prophets (e.g., 27:16; 29:24-32).[[371]](#footnote-371) They are giving rulings on the wrong basis – following the direction of those misguided prophets (instead of giving a lead as guardians of the Torah?). The way the priests went astray “ought to be carefully noticed, that we may not at this day be too much disturbed, when we see the pastoral office assumed by ignorant asses.”[[372]](#footnote-372) *And my people love it so*. In the usual fashion, there is collusion between congregation and pastor. The pastor says things people want to hear; the people pay his salary. But it works only in the short term, only until there is a crisis. So *what will you do at the end of it?* The last colon indicates that the people are being indirectly addressed and accused in the previous four.[[373]](#footnote-373)

# Mostly (Final) Warning (6:1-30)

The question “What will you do at the end of it?” (5:31) could have served nicely as a conclusion to the 604 scroll, but actually it is Jer 6 that brings the scroll’s first opening chapters to a climax. They look back over where we have been, tighten the screw further on their argument, and conclude the nightmare vision in their collection of messages with a “massive announcement of disaster.”[[374]](#footnote-374) It is a paradigm “horror text.”[[375]](#footnote-375)

vv. 1-8 In a frightening ironic revisiting of 4:5-9, Yahweh declares that fleeing to Jerusalem won’t work: flee from Jerusalem.

vv. 9-15 He commissions the stripping even of the remains of the vine. His wrath will pour out indiscriminately.

vv. 16-21 He declares that the people’s worship is unacceptable.

vv. 22-26 He pictures the coming of the northern invader as a horrifying reality.

vv. 27-30 He engages in a chilling retrospective on the fulfilling of Jeremiah’s commission in 1:18.

With one modification I thus follow MT’s division of Jer 6 into sections; after the first, each begins with a form of the declaration “Yahweh has said this.” Each majors on announcing the disaster but also includes some account of the reasons for it and a little explicit or implicit exhortation to respond. The modification is to divide the fourth section after v. 26, notwithstanding the lack of any such declaration; v. 27 does make a new start.

## Sanctify a Battle (6:1-8)

1Make safe,a Benjaminites,b

from insidec Jerusalem!

In Tekoa blast the horn,d

over Beth Hakkerem raise a beacon!

Because dire trouble – it has peered down from the north,

a great shattering.

2The lovely pasture,e the daintily bred:

I am quashingf Miss Zion.g

3To her come shepherds and their flocks –

they have pitchedh tents against her all around –

they have shepherded each one his hand.i

4“Sanctifyj battle against her,

set to, let’s go up at noon.”

“Alas for us, because the day has turned,

because the evening shadows decline.”

5”Set to, let’s go up in the night,

and devastate her citadels!”k

6Because Yahweh of Armies has said this:

Cut her wood,l

pour a ramp against Jerusalem!

She is the city all of which has been handed over –m

fraud is in her midst.

7Like a welln keeping its water cool,o

so it keeps its dire behavior cool.

Violence and destructionp makes itself heard in her –

before my face continually are sickness and wound.q

8Accept restraint, Jerusalem,

so that my spirit does not recoilr from you,

So that I do not make you a desolation,

a country not lived in.s

LXX, Vg derive *hā‘izû* as from *‘āzaz* “be strong” rather than from *‘ûz* “take refuge,” and give the verb a qal rather than a hiphil meaning (see the note on 4:6).

Given the paronomasia in the coming reference to Tekoa, one might note that *Benjaminites* are *bәnê binyāmin*, “sons of the son of the right hand/south” see the comment.

Vg has simply “inside.”

*Tekoa* comes from the word for blast and one could even translate “with a blast, blast the horn”; the paronomasia might be the reason for mentioning Tekoa in particular.

While *lovely* is usually *nā’wâ*, here the pairing with the next word suggests that *nāwâ* implies “lovely,” but it is usefully also the more regular spelling of the word for “pasture” (23:3): see v. 3. So I give a double translation for *nāwâ*

The qatal is declarative/performative (see the comment on 1:5). There are several verbs *dāmâ* and *dāmam* with the overlapping meanings “be silent/cease/destroy” (see *DCH*); *quash* is an attempt to preserve the overlap. There is also a *dāmâ* meaning “resemble, “ and Syr takes *dāmîtî* here as archaic 2nd person feminine (see the notes on 2:19 and 20) from this *dāmâ*; Vg “liken” also derives *dāmîtî* from this *dāmâ*, but the piel would be required for this meaning. Yet these two understandings might suggest a paronomasia and a conflict within Yahweh, who is both destroying and comparing/imagining (J. Y. Jindo, *Biblical Metaphor Reconsidered* [Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2010], 129-30).

See the note on 4:31.

*Tāqa‘*, which meant “blast” in v. 1, where it accompanied the place name *tәqōa‘*.

Vg plausibly interprets “those who are under his hand.”

LXX interprets “prepare.”

MT has a marker here.

MT’s *‘ēṣâ* is a hapax; a substantial tradition reads *‘ēṣāh* (*BHS*).

Tg takes *hopqad* (which cannot simply qualify feminine *hā‘îr*) as an unmarked relative clause, and Allen (*Jeremiah*, 82-83) renders “handed over”; I have then taken *kullāh* as the subject. “To be visited” (Vg) does not fit the hiphil/hophal.

Q has the odd form *bayir* which might be equivalent to *bә’ēr*;K implies *bôr*, which should denote a cistern, and a cistern can hardly act as this colon says (see 2:13).

R. S. Hess (“Hiphil Forms of *qwr* in Jeremiah vi 7,” *VT* 41 [1991[: 347-50) derives *hāqîr* from *qûr* rather than *qārar* (BDB).

The words form a hendiadys, “violent destruction” or “destructive violence”; a singular verb follows.

Another hendiadys (Blayney, *Jeremiah*, 253).LXX links “sickness and wound” with v. 8.

The form *tēqa‘* makes a link with *tәqōa‘* and *tiq‘û* in v. 1, so that these words hold vv. 1-8 together.

MT has a unit marker here; further, this verse marks the center of the Hebrew Bible (Fischer, *Jeremia* 1:265).

In the first section Yahweh urges Judah to seek protection in light of what he is doing and of what his initiative will issue in. The section goes on to relate the words of the city’s attackers and defenders. A further subsection goes back to Yahweh’s commissioning of the attackers and the rationale for it, before closing with an unexpected challenge to the city to heed his warning so that the devastation may not actually happen. In origin, it may bring together two or three or four units that were originally separate units. It outlines:

vv. 1-3 Yahweh urges Judah to protect itself in light of the action he is commissioning

four bicola and a tricolon marking a pause

vv. 4-5 the attackers’ and the defenders’ words

three bicola

vv. 6-7 Yahweh urges the attack, notes the reasons, but notes the coming suffering

an introduction and four bicola

v. 8 In light of v. 7b, Yahweh urges Jerusalem to take action to protect itself

two linked bicola

**1** Yet again an unnamed speaker issues a commission; v. 2 will suggest it is Yahweh. Yet again Jeremiah invites people to imagine that invasion and attack is imminent. First he urges *Benjaminites* to *make safe* by getting themselves or their people out of *Jerusalem*, with irony since many would have taken refuge there because they thought it was safe, and because 4:6 had issued a commission to get people to take refuge in Zion (with further irony, Jeremiah is himself a Benjaminite). No, even Jerusalem is not safe; actually Jerusalem is especially not safe, because it’s the capital. Since the city straddled the Judah-Benjamin border and could indeed be thought of as within Benjamin (e.g., Josh 15:8, 63; 18:16, 28; Judg 1:21), one might speak of Jerusalemites as Benjaminites, especially if one wanted to distinguish them from Judahites in general. Given that the invaders are coming from the north, it would be logical to go south; and Benjamin means “son of the right hand,” that is, “son of the south.” Fortunately, Yahweh created both north and south (Ps 89:12 [13]). But even *Tekoa*, a town ten miles or so south that might make a refuge, is not safe; there, too, people will need to *blast the horn* to give warning. An attractive candidate for identification as *Beth Hakkerem*, presumably another place south of Jerusalem, is Ramat Rahel near Bethlehem, a strategic site where a new royal citadel and fortification were being built in Jeremiah’s day.[[376]](#footnote-376) A *beacon* (*maś’ēt*) is something that people *raise* (*nāśā’*), which perhaps implies a fire or smoke signal whose smoke goes up. It’s all because *dire trouble* is coming *from the north*. Its arrival will mean *a great shattering*, as we know, because these words repeat from 4:6 where Zion was commended as a refuge. The complementary difference in the formulation over against 4:6 is that there Yahweh said he was making the dire trouble come, whereas here the dire trouble is the subject of the verb. It has itself *peered* *down* on Jerusalem (*šāqap*),like someone leaning out of a window to see what is going on in order then to take some action. It is hanging over the city. The past tense verb expresses the certainty of what is about to happen. In Jeremiah’s imagination and in Yahweh’s intention it has already happened. Yes, the listeners really are in trouble.

**2-3** So *Miss Zion* is doomed. Yahweh first describes the city with some touching expressions that correspond to its associations for its people (Pss 48:1; 50:2; Cant 6:4; Isa 33:20). Then he puts the boot in. Having held back in v. 1 from taking responsibility for the imminent trouble, so that one might read the exhortation as a friendly warning by someone who cares, here Yahweh asserts ownership of events with a strong verb: *I am* [hereby] *quashing*. He then takes up the pasturing image and reverses its implications. Naturally enough, *shepherds* come to this pasture bringing *their* *flocks*, but they are hostile shepherds; in the background is the use of the word “shepherds” for rulers or leaders[[377]](#footnote-377) and the verbal link between being a shepherd (*rō‘ēh*) and bringing dire trouble(*rā‘â*), not to say being a friend or lover.[[378]](#footnote-378) The shepherds and flocks are kings and their armies; further, *come to her* is a term for having sex (e.g., Gen 16:2). The girl is going to be invaded, penetrated. While it’s natural enough that the shepherds *have pitched their tents*, they have done so *against her* and *all round*. “Sheep may *not* graze safely here.”[[379]](#footnote-379) The shepherds are careful and systematic: each has his allocated area.

**4-5** More anonymous imperatives follow. It becomes clear that they are not Yahweh’s words again but the words of the shepherds themselves urging one another to *sanctify battle*. Either way, the assumption is that war-making in itself is not holy or sacred (the Scriptures never use the expression “holy war”), though neither is it unclean or impure. It is neutral, like work or food or time. But one can sanctify it, dedicate it to God’s service, and seek God’s aid and protection in the midst of it (cf. Joel 3:9 [4:9]; Mic 3:5); one might thus pray and offer sacrifice before a battle (1 Sam 7:7-9).[[380]](#footnote-380) Jeremiah imagines the attackers aware that they are serving God in undertaking the “just war” that they are about to begin, in which they are the means of God’s proper judgment being implemented on Jerusalem. If Israel did have the idea of a war being holy, it is turned back on them.[[381]](#footnote-381) Jeremiah imagines a dialogue that goes on as the day passes; it’s as if we are right there.[[382]](#footnote-382) The twofold *set to, let’s go up* are the attackers’ battle resolves. One might expect them to initiate their action in the early morning, when there’s a whole day ahead (and when it’s not too hot yet?); cf. Josh 10:12-14. Actually they are going to attack *at noon*, and then they are quite prepared to make another assault *in the night*. Maybe implementing their resolve at these unlikely hours shows their confidence. Whatever the time, they will *devastate her citadels*, the fortresses and/or palaces at the highest, mostly heavily defended points in the city. In between the two accounts of their resolve, the anxious *alas* *for us* expresses Jerusalem’s converse awareness and fear. Even if morning passes without attack, there is no time that is safe, neither midday nor even evening.[[383]](#footnote-383) As *the evening shadows decline* and the day is wearing on and they have perhaps been fighting all day, “the people sense that their time is running out.”[[384]](#footnote-384) In contrast, the attackers are full of get up and go as the evening comes and they prepare to attack again.

**6** Jeremiah now provides some background. The siege of a walled city requires attackers to *cut down* the city’s own *trees* to construct the scaffolding-like structures that are pushed against the walls and onto which the attackers can climb, and/or the battering ram they will use, and/or the inner reinforcement of the *ramp* up which they will push the battering ram, for which they will also need to *pour* large quantities of earth (see 26:8-9; 52:4; Ezek 4:1-2). Yahweh commissions the attackers to do the work he needs them to do. A further account of Yahweh’s reasoning follows. *The city* is to be totally *handed over*,a form of an unassuming key verb (*pāqad*)that Yahweh has used before (cf. 5:9, 29). It is because of her *fraud* (*‘ōšeq*), the activity or neglect described in 5:26-28, the oppression exercised by powerful people using dishonest means to deprive powerless people of what belongs to them or what they have a right to. The scroll is resolute in looking at the “dark side” of the community.[[385]](#footnote-385)

**7** Yahweh adds a new, clever, sharp, acerbic simile. A lovely thing about a *well* is that *its water* stays *cool*, deep in the ground, for when you want a drink. Jerusalem has the capacity to keep its *dire behavior* ever *cool.* “Israel digs deep into their imaginations to devise ever new and fresh ways to pursue their wickedness, just like ever fresh water bubbles up from deep within a well. Israel’s well for generating such behaviors is bottomless.”[[386]](#footnote-386) And Jeremiah digs deep into his imagination for ever new and fresh ways to communicate Yahweh’s message. Then he reverts to more abstract description. *Fraud* can be committed discretely and quietly. Even *violence* (*ḥāmās*) can be quiet when it means the violation of the norms Yahweh has given his people. But violenceis often accompanied by *destruction* (*šōd*) (cf. 20:8; Ezek 45:9; Amos 3:10; Hab 1:3) and any uncertainty disappears. Destructive violence *makes itself heard in her*, all right. But there is another ambiguity here. Yahweh is the one who commissions destroyers, while at the same time destruction or destroyers have an energy or force of their own (cf. 4:6-7). So the violence and destruction might be what he is commissioning. More certainly, when Yahweh moves to talking about *sickness and wound*, he is returning to speak of suffering imposed on the city rather than suffering its people impose on one another (Tg; see 10:19; 14:17; and the vivid description in Isa 1:5-6). In his mind’s eye this suffering is before his face continually as the trouble he intends to bring about, just as he can see the felling of the trees and the shaping of the ramp. He can see the metaphorical sickness and wounding that will come to the city and/or the literal sickness and wounding that its siege and fall will bring to its people, and he grieves over them while also being determined to impose them. There is a sense in which covenant makes violence necessary.[[387]](#footnote-387) “Those who make use of violent means will eventually suffer violence themselves brought about by Yahweh.”[[388]](#footnote-388)

**8** So he begs *Jerusalem* to *accept restraint* from him (see 2:19-20, 30),[[389]](#footnote-389) to let herself be disciplined by him. The rare but vivid verb *recoil* (*yāqa‘*) is most familiar from the description of what happened to Jacob’s groin to terminate his wrestling (Gen 32:26). *So that I do not make you a desolation* expresses the implications in more familiar down to earth terms (4:27). The two middle cola are parallel “so that… not” (*pen*) clauses, and the section could easily close then; the extra colon adds extra bite. *A country not lived in* (*yāšab* niphal) makes another familiar point (2:15; 4:7, 29) in a slightly unfamiliar way. Jesus will take up Yahweh’s holding together a commitment to the necessity of judgment, a regret at its necessity, and a wish to draw Jerusalem to the kind of change that will make it unnecessary (Luke 19:41-48).[[390]](#footnote-390)

## Strip the Vine (6:9-15)

9Yahweh of Armies has said this

They are to garner, garner,a

like a vine, the remainder of Israel!

Turn back your hand,b

like a grape-picker, over the tendrils!

10To whom am I to speak,c

so that I may testify and they may listen?

There, their ear is foreskinned,

they can’t pay heed.

There, Yahweh’s message has become for them

an object of reviling that they are not partial to.

11But Yahweh’s fury: I am full of it –

I am weary of holding it.

Pour itd on the baby in the street

and on the group of young people, altogether.

Because man with woman, they are to be captured,

the old person with the one who is full of years.e

12Their houses will pass to other people,f

fields and wives, altogether.

Because I will stretch out my hand

over the people who live in the country (Yahweh’s affirmation).

13Because from the smallest of them to the biggest of them,

everyoneg is grabbing what can be grabbed.

And from propheth to priest,

everyone is practicing deception.

14They have healed my people’s shatteringi lightly,j

saying “Things are perfectly well,”k

when things are not well.

15They have acted shamefully, because it is something offensive that they have done –

they neither feel shame at all,l

nor do they know how to show that they feel disgrace.m

Therefore they will fall among those who fall;

at the time I am attending to them,n they will collapse (Yahweh has said).o

The infinitive precedes the finite verb, underlining the action.

The verb and the pronoun are singular.

The verb is cohortative.

For MT *šәpōk* LXX implies first-person *’ešpōk*, assimilating to the context.

Literally, days.

Vv. 12-15 appear in a slightly variant form as 8:10-12.

Literally “all of it,” but there is no antecedent for the suffix on *kullô*, which recurs in v. 13b (and cf. *kullōh* in 8:10; 15:10; 20:7). BDB, 481-82 calls it an idiomatic usage; JM 146j compares it with the “vague” suffix on *yaḥdāw* (*altogether*), which came in vv. 11 and 12.

For the first time LXX translates “false prophet”; see the comment, and the comment on 2:8.

The *šeqer* (deception) consists in failing to minister properly to the potential *šeber* (shattering).

The niphal feminine participle has apparently become a quasi-noun so the phrase means literally “upon a light thing” or “with lightness” (JM 134n).

*Šālôm, šālôm*, a kind of superlative (GK 133l).

The infinitive preceding the finite verb underscores the verb, especially its being negatived (*DG* 101b).

An inwardly transitive hiphil (see GK 53de).

The (anticipatory) qatal verb (see the introductory comment on 13:18-22) depends on the construct noun (GK 130d).

MT has a section marker here.

This second section essentially repeats the message of the first, but does so by means of different imagery. First there is the image of the vinedresser. Then Jeremiah speaks of himself as consumed to overflowing with Yahweh’s wrath and needing to express it. Then there is another account of the necessity for Yahweh’ action, which lies in the people’s acquisitiveness and their leaders’ collusion. The section outlines:

v. 9 Yahweh commissions Jeremiah to set about stripping the vine

an introduction and two bicola

vv. 10-11aαβ Jeremiah raises questions: to whom and how can he speak, but how not?

four bicola

vv. 11b-12 Yahweh answers with another version of the commission

four bicola

vv. 13-15 Yahweh explains it in terms of the attitudes of people, prophets, and priests

three bicola with two tricola in their midst

**9** So the new section resumes the theme from v. 8 but makes its point in a new way. Here, for once, it is explicit that Yahweh speaks, though not whom he addresses, or who are *they*. But in effect *they* are the attackers, and the implicit indirect audience is, as usual, the people of Judah, while the second bicolon will imply that the more direct addressee is Jeremiah himself. The jussive is an un-Israelite bidding. Harvesters are not supposed to *garner* and *garner*, and specifically not to garner *a vine* over again (Lev 19:10; Deut 24:21), which is the implication of *turn back your hand over the tendrils*. These metaphorical harvesters are to do what a literal *grape-picker* was not supposed to do: the fact is underscored by the declaration that they are to garner *the remainder of Israel*, because remainder (*šә’ērît*, traditionally “remnant”) is a term for the portion of Israel that Yahweh has intended to keep in being so that there should continue to be an Israel (e.g., Isa 37:32). Nearly half the First Testament occurrences of this word for *remainder* come in Jeremiah, though it does not usually have a technical meaning. There is a tension between the talk here of eliminating the remainder and the way the scroll talks about not bringing an end to Judah (4:27; 5:10, 18). Yahweh has indeed kept in being a remainder of Israel, even though he got Assyria to put an end to Ephraim and allowed it to devastate Judah. Now he intends “harvesters” (the same people as the shepherds of vv. 1-8) to eliminate that remainder. In the command to *turn back*, Yahweh apparently indeed speaks to Jeremiah, the agent of the elimination through his prophecy,[[391]](#footnote-391) as v. 10 will presuppose.

**10** Jerusalem needs to hear Yahweh issuing this commission to its attackers, paradoxically so that the commission need not be implemented, and it is Jeremiah’s job to bring about that hearing. While he is metaphorically involved in the garnering, his more literal job is to *testify*. He is like a witness in a case being discussed by the elders; if he has seen or heard something that relates to the case, he must say so. Failing to puts him in deep trouble (Lev 5:1). And Jeremiah has heard and seen, through sitting in Yahweh’s cabinet meeting. He must testify. But how can he? No one will *listen*. Indeed, they seem to be unable to. Their *ear* is (as it were) *foreskinned*, uncircumcised, which is much worse than being full of wax. While 4:4 referred to the circumcision or non-circumcision of heart or mind (cf. Deut 10:16; 30:10; Ezek 44:7, 9), within the First Testament only this passage refers to the circumcision of hearing; the image is taken up in 1QHodayota 10:7; Acts 7:51, and Barnabas 10:12.[[392]](#footnote-392) There is little difference between the two images: the heart or mind is where one thinks and makes decisions, the ear is where one listens and responds (mind and ear come together in 7:24). So the state of the Judahites’ ears means *they can’t pay heed.* Apparently it doesn’t relieve them of responsibility, perhaps because they have blocked their own ears as *Yahweh’s message has become for them an object of reviling*. Elsewhere, possessing a foreskin conveys reviling or scorn (Gen 34:14; Josh 5:8-9); here it issues in or issues from reviling or scorn. The people feel free to taunt Jeremiah about Yahweh’s message or to rebuke him for it. He cannot be right that Yahweh intends to take action against them. Yahweh is a God of love and faithfulness. A message that implies the opposite is ridiculous. It is also, of course, something *that they are not partial to*. When Jeremiah or anyone else speaks the truth to them in Yahweh’s name, they don’t like it. The warnings in Isa 6:9-10 seem to have been fulfilled.

**11a** That dynamic makes Jeremiah’s position seem impossible. The message about the grape-gatherers is a message about *Yahweh’s fury*, and people will not take it seriously. The trouble is that Yahweh has given it to him and he is *full of it*. It’s not surprising that he is *weary of holding it*. He’s like a full skin of wine – or a man who needs to vomit. He is supposed to pass on the message Yahweh has given him but people respond with scorn and opposition, and he therefore tries to hold it in, but he can’t (20:7-10 expands on the dynamics of this experience). Even here, however, “the personal thrust in this oracle serves to draw attention, not to the emotional involvement of Jeremiah, but to the horror of the content of the message with which he is entrusted. He is himself a signal of the divine judgment.”[[393]](#footnote-393) His weariness matches Yahweh’s in Isa 1:14.[[394]](#footnote-394) “I am full of prophecy,” Tg paraphrases him, and

the most basic dimension of that God-given word is wrath. To be full of wrath means that there is no room in him for any other kind of word from God (as in 15:17; see the image of fire in 20:9; 5:14). He has held back from proclaiming this hard word; he has not wanted to speak it. But he has become weary in holding it back and can no longer do so (as in 20:9). He must get that word out. In this regard he has become conformed to God’s own situation (15:6); just as God has become weary of holding back, so also has God’s prophet. Weariness is characteristic of both prophet and God, and so is wrath. This should not be interpreted in terms of a clinical compulsion, but of a sense of call that must be fulfilled.[[395]](#footnote-395)

**11b** Yahweh’s response is designed to horrify Jeremiah’s listeners – again we have to recall that this section, like others, is created more as a piece of communication with his Judahite contemporaries than as a journal account of Jeremiah’s struggles. He has been seeking to confront them with Yahweh’s threat to annihilate them, with their own unwillingness to listen to him, and with the fact that Yahweh’s wrath hangs over them. And there is hardly anything that would devastate a parent more than the death of a child, especially a baby. So in his determined commitment to get through to them, Yahweh starts here with the effect that Jeremiah’s delivering his message will have on a *baby* hanging onto its mother *in the street*, then on a *group of young people*, a gang of teenagers laughing and joking, then on everyone, *man with woman*, and then on the *old person* (maybe those in their fifties and sixties) *with the one who is full of years* (the people in their seventies and eighties). Jeremiah is not to protect the children from hearing the bad news, or the women, or the old people. Once more, this is a piece of rhetoric designed to reach Jeremiah’s actual hearers, to whom he must testify in a shocking way that can maybe get home to them. Here, the Jerusalemites’ fate is not to die but *to be captured* like the man caught like an animal in a snare, of which Jeremiah spoke just now (5:26). It will be poetic justice. Jeremiah is to pour out on the people the entirety of his message about Yahweh’s wrath. He is not to try to hold it in. They need to hear it. “The rhetoric of wrath is filled with passion and a lack of restraint.”[[396]](#footnote-396)

Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord;   
he is trampling out the vintage where the grapes of wrath are stored;   
he has loosed the fateful lightning of his terrible swift sword.

**12a** To judge from what happened when Samaria fell, the people who live in Jerusalem will be displaced and will lose their *houses*, which will *pass to other people* – people from elsewhere whom the conqueror will import, or members of the conquering people, or neighbors like the Edomites who will be able to profit from what happens. It will not just be the houses, but the *fields*, the land, as again the Edomite takeover of Judahite land will illustrate, and as the apparent insanity of Jeremiah’s investing in real estate (Jer 32) will imply. It will include the *wives*, who commonly pay a terrible price at the hands of invaders when a country is conquered – because it is one way conquerors assert themselves over the men (who are implicitly Jeremiah’s immediate audience?).

**12b-13a** Yes, *I will stretch out my hand over the people who live in the country*. Such is the declaration of wrath that Jeremiah must pour out, necessitated by the total social collapse in Jerusalem. Jer 5 had pictured Yahweh undertaking a social and moral inventory of the city, in which he started with the ordinary people and then went on to the big people; here he reprises the result. It is not just the wealthy and powerful who are prepared to cheat and deprive other people of their rights in order to fill their homes with good things. *From the smallest of them to the biggest of them*, the entire cityis *grabbing what can be grabbed* (*bôṣē‘ beṣa‘*) in a way that takes no notice of right and wrong. LXX translates “lawlessness” and Vg translates “greed,” both of which are appropriate if less vivid than Jeremiah’s words. A spirit of Mammon possesses the entire community.[[397]](#footnote-397) It is hardly surprising that ordinary also people want their share of stuff – people like Joseph’s brothers who use that expression (Gen 37:26). But the wealthy and powerful people who are involved in the grabbing do include Jehoiakim, to whom this description applies in 22:17 – and who is in the audience if these words are part of the 604 scroll (cf. also 1 Sam 8:3; Ezek 22:27).

**13b-14** As he did in 5:31, Jeremiah moves straight from the perverting of judicial procedures to a condemnation of *prophet* and *priest*. Either they are involved in the wrongdoing (it is not surprising if religious leaders also want nice houses) or they are colluding with it, or both. They are *practicing deception* – that word again recurs from 5:31. What is the nature of the deception? All is not well in Judah. If we think in terms of the 604 context, the Egyptians had defeated and killed Josiah, had deposed Jehoahaz, and had imposed tribute, and there was reason to declare a fast, perhaps linked to a drought.[[398]](#footnote-398) People are suffering. But a much worse breaking in on its way (4:6, 20; 6:1). The question is, “do prophet and priest see the state of the community, its ‘breaking,’ as deeply as Jeremiah?”[[399]](#footnote-399) Actually, they do not acknowledge it. While the problem with the people whom Tg calls false prophets at 2:8 is that they were prophesying in the name of the Master, the problem with the people LXX calls false prophets here is the nature of the message they bring in Yahweh’s name (Tg calls them “scribes” here, and often elsewhere). They are encouraging, positive prophets, unlike Jeremiah.

It is unlikely that the false prophets were shameless charlatans. They were presumably sincere patriots, ardent lovers of the people and zealous in their devotion to state and sanctuary. They as well as the leaders of the state, who had the interest of the country at heart, resented the invectives and exaggerated accusations of Jeremiah and entertained a profound trust in God’s attachment to Israel.[[400]](#footnote-400)

But they *have healed my people’s shattering lightly* by *saying “Things are perfectly well”* (*šālôm, šālôm*), that Yahweh loves his people and will keep us safe and restore us. Actually, *things are not well* at all. In reality, there is no *šālôm*; a better term for “false prophets” would be *šālôm* prophets.[[401]](#footnote-401) “A prophet is made ‘false’ and known to be so on the basis of his message alone,” and the terrible thing about the prophets’ false message is that “it is positively destructive, since by glossing over the real seriousness of the situation it prevents the only action on the part of the people which could possibly forestall the coming destructive judgment.”[[402]](#footnote-402) In Theses 92 and 93 Martin Luther declared, “Away with all those prophets who say to Christ’s people, ‘Peace, peace,’ and there is no peace,” but “May it go well for all of those prophets who say to Christ’s people, ‘Cross, cross,’ and there is no cross!” Contrary to the view of false prophets, “the Christian life goes *through* the cross to peace not around the cross.”[[403]](#footnote-403)

**15** While shame attaches to the entire community (2:26, 36; 3:4, 24-25), in this context *they* who *have acted shamefully* continue to be the prophets and priests. Their action counts as something *offensive* and disgusting, the very antithesis of what meets with acceptance by Yahweh, the kind of thing that reeks of adherence to the Master rather than adherence to Yahweh (2:7; 7:10; 16:18) – the words reformulate the declaration that the prophets practice deception. Yet they do not *feel shame at all*. The recurrence of the word *shame* puts together the relationship (or lack of relationship) between objective and subjective shamefulness, shame as a fact and shame as a feeling. *They do not know how to show that they feel disgrace*, to make the same point in other words; they do not feel disgrace and therefore they do not know how to show it. Jeremiah’s putting healing (v. 14) and shame next to each other also prompts reflection on how Yahweh’s healing needs to involve restoring the inner being as well as the outward wounding. Unless Yahweh does so, *they will fall among those who fall*: the community will meet with defeat, loss, and death, and prophet and priest will be among them. When Yahweh attends to the rest of the community who fall, they will also *collapse.*

Therefore they will fall among (*b*)those who fall;

at (*b*)the time I attend to them they will collapse

The section thus ends with another line combining parallelism with an abb’a’ structure in which the verbs enclose the whole and tie it together.

## Put in Place Things to Trip People (6:16-21)

16Yahweh has said this:

Stand by the paths and look,

ask about the age-long routes,

where actually is the path to what is good.a

Then go on it, and find repose for yourselves;

but they said, “We won’t.”

17I would set up lookouts for you:

“Pay heed to the sound of the horn!” –

but they said,b “We won’t.”

18Therefore listen, nations,

acknowledge, assembly,c what is in them.d

19listen, earth.

Here am I,

causing dire trouble to come on this people,

the fruit of their plans.

Because to my words they have not paid heed;

my instruction: they have rejected it.e

20What use actually is frankincense to me

though it comesf from Sheba,

Or cane, the good kind,g

from a far off country?

Your whole offerings are not acceptable,

your fellowship sacrifices don’t seem sweet to me.h

21Therefore Yahweh has said this:

Here am I, giving toi this people things to make them collapse,

and they will collapse on them,

Parents and children together,

a neighbor and his fellow, and they will perish.j

For *derek haṭṭôb*,LXX, Vg, have “the good path”; while anarthrous *derek* can be used thus with a definite adjective (*IBHS* 14.3.1d; DG 42 remark 2), the more predictable expression would be *hadderek haṭṭôbâ* (1 Kgs 8:36) and *haṭṭôb* was a noun in 5:25.

The *wәqatal* is followed by *wayyiqtol*, perhaps because the frequentative nature of the events has been sufficiently indicated and Jeremiah can revert to the ordinary usage in prose narrative (*TTH* 114, 120).

Aq takes *‘ēdâ* to be the word meaning testimony (from *‘ûd*: see v. 10) rather than the *‘ēdâ* meaning assembly (from *yā‘ad*: see 30:20)

Vg “what I will do to them.”

*Wayyim’ăsû-bāh* follows an extraposed subject (GK143d).

The asyndesis and the postponed placing of the verb suggests that this colon is subordinate to the previous one. For *tābô’*,LXX, Vg, Syr imply *tābî’* “you bring.”

Anarthrous absolute *qāneh* followed anomalously by definite *haṭṭôb* corresponds to *derek haṭṭôb* in v. 16, but the noun does not belong to a category that can be used as if this phrase were a regular noun and adjective expression (*IBHS* 14.3.1d; DG 42 remark 2).

L has a section marker here.

Modern translations (e.g., NRSV, NJPS, NIV) have something like “put before” but *DCH* 5:806 gives no other example of *nātan ’el* with this meaning.

For Q’s *wә’ābādû*,K implies the more expected *yō’bēdû*. MT has a unit marker here.

The section divides into two, each of the two units beginning with a rebuke. The first issues an exhortation to return to the proper Israelite ways of the past, but recognizes that this is not going to happen. The second repudiates the costly worship that the people offer. Each rebuke is followed by a “therefore” stating the consequences that Yahweh will ensure follow. The two units are different in focus and theme and are likely of separate origin. The section outlines as follows:

vv. 16-17 Yahweh issues a bidding, but people resist it, in accordance with past practice

an introduction, an opening tricolon, a bicolon, and a tricolon before the pause

vv. 18-19 “therefore”: Yahweh bids the world to note what will follow

two tricola and a bicolon

v. 20 Yahweh issues a rebuke

two linked bicola and a single bicolon

v. 21 “therefore”: Yahweh issues a warning about what will follow

an introduction and two linked bicola

**16** Jeremiah’s new introduction to Yahweh’s words and Yahweh’s new bidding open the sixth consecutive section to begin with an imperative. It is in the last colon that the identity of the addressees becomes indisputably clear: it is the Judahite community that is urged to *stand by the paths and look*, to *ask about the age-long routes*. Jeremiah has made only negative reference to the paths that the people have followed (see esp. 2:33; 3:13; cf. 7:3, 5), and *routes* will otherwise feature only negatively (18:15). In the first colon it would not be immediately obvious what paths Yahweh wants people to examine, but *age-long* (*‘ôlām*) at the end of the parallel colon qualifies “paths” as well as “routes” and points to the answer. They are Yahweh’s paths, such as the ones Deuteronomy lay before Israel (Deut 8:6; 10:12; 11:22; 19:9; 26:17; 28:9; 30:16; 32:4). There could be people who questioned whether the paths laid out by Deuteronomy and by Jeremiah are really the age-old paths; compared with the traditional religion of the land, they might seem rather innovative. Reformers like Josiah and prophets like Jeremiah often claim to be restoring the old rather than introducing the new (they claim that they are reformers, in fact, not revolutionaries). But Jeremiah and Deuteronomy know that the paths in question correspond to the nature and priorities of the age-old God. Deuteronomy further promised that these paths are also *the path* (singular) that leads *to what is good* – another way of referring to *šālôm* (v. 14; cf. the parallelism in 8:15). At the moment the people’s wrongdoings hold back “what is good” from them (5:25). Walking on the path Yahweh maps out is the key to what is good or to *šālôm*. It’s the way to *repose* or rest or relaxation (*margôa‘*). That wordcomes only here; perhaps it suggests the opposite to the disturbance and turmoil that Jeremiah is otherwise predicting for people. At the moment they have every reason to be concerned about what is going to happen and to be working feverishly in order to safeguard their future. If they would just follow the way Yahweh maps out…. But *they said*, *“We won’t.”*

**17** “Lookout” is Yahweh’s description of Ezekiel’s role as a prophet (Ezek 3:17; 33:7), and here the *lookouts* whom Yahweh has *set up* *for you* will be prophets such as Jeremiah. Metaphorically, these prophets sounded the horn that told people of danger coming (4:5-6a).[[404]](#footnote-404) But again, when they played their part in this “mock liturgy,”[[405]](#footnote-405) *they said, “We won’t.”*

**18-19** Formally, Yahweh therefore turns from speaking to Judah and addresses himself elsewhere (but Jeremiah’s audience is still the Judahites). Rhetorically, he summons the *nations* as witnesses to his people’s intransigence. Hepictures them gathered as an *assembly* like the “assembly of the peoples” gathered around him in Ps 7:7 [8], to *listen* to him giving account and to *acknowledge* *what is in them*, in this people, to acknowledge “the direness that is in their hand.”[[406]](#footnote-406) To put it another way, he summons *earth* to *listen* to what he has determined to do in response to that intransigence: *here am I, causing dire trouble* (that expression familiar since 1:14) *to come on this people* (that slightly dismissive description: e.g., 5:23) as *the fruit of their plans*, which are thus indeed their “baneful plans” (4:14). The plans produce fruit by their inherent nature (direness issues in direness) though it happens also by divine resolve (I am *causing*): once again Jeremiah combines both ways of thinking about cause and effect. It happens because *they have not paid heed* to *my words*; paying heed is something one does by listening (cf. vv. 10, 17), so the reference is to the words of prophets, of the lookouts. Further, *my instruction* (*tôrâ*): *they have rejected it.* Instruction is the business of priests (e.g., Deut 33:10; 2 Chr 15:3); while Jeremiah often talks about prophets and priests as if they are all bad guys, he also makes clear from time to time that this interpretation of his words would be mistaken. The priests’ instruction as embodied in Deuteronomy or Leviticus says the same thing as he does about commitment to Yahweh, about social and moral life, and so on. People ignore such priestly instruction as they ignore his prophetic word. And if you ignore how they point you to the way that leads to something good, then dire trouble is what you find instead. The good (*ṭôb*) and the dire (*ra‘*, conventionally “bad” or “evil”) are antonyms. You either follow one and experience it, or you follow the other and experience it.

**20** The juxtaposition of two units that may be of separate origin suggests that instead of paying heed to what prophets said and following what priests wrote and/or read, people have focused on worship. The resin *frankincense* was an element in the incense used in worship. It had an aroma that delighted both worshipers and deity; its ascent symbolized the ascent of prayers to God. *Sheba* in Arabia was a major source of spices; the distance that frankincense had to travel made it expensive. Fragrant *cane* or grasses (Tg has calamus) was an element in the oil for anointing; it also came from a distance at great expense. There was nothing specific to Israel about these components of its worship. Vergil comments about Venus,

her temple and its hundred altars

steam with Sabean incense, fragrant with fresh garlands.[[407]](#footnote-407)

Similarly, *whole offerings* and *fellowship sacrifices* were Israelite versions of forms of worship known in many cultures. While Deuteronomy doesn’t talk about frankincense or cane, it does talk about whole offerings and fellowship sacrifices. Jeremiah sets these two forms of animal sacrifice over against those more exotic elements. Altogether, the four terms cover a wide range of forms of worship. Whole offerings or burnt offerings meant giving something to God in its entirety. Fellowship sacrifices were occasions where God and people shared the offering. But Judah’s offerings *are* *not acceptable,* a technical term in the Torah in connection with the proper observance of the rules for worship (see esp. Lev 22:17-30). They don’t *seem sweet,* a more poetic word, applicable to the voice of one’s beloved (Song 2:14). Jeremiah does not hint that people were insincere in their worship; their hallelujahs came from the heart. And he and other prophets make clear in other contexts that they themselves can appreciate (e.g.) frankincense (Jer 17:26; Isa 60:6). But in this context Yahweh says none of it means anything to him. Self-sacrificial worship is valueless if it is not matched by a self-sacrificial life outside worship. Although MT will have a unit break in only one verse’s time, L also puts a section break here, perhaps because the next verse has its own resumptive introduction from Yahweh. Its effect would also be to encourage people to think for a moment about what Yahweh has just said.

**21** Yahweh has a solemn further thing to say before we reach the end of this section. It constitutes a restatement of what the dire trouble of v. 19 will look like. People will be walking along the path they have chosen, there will be something there that perhaps they don’t see, and they will tumble to their death. Again Jeremiah declares that everyone will be affected: within the family, both *parents* and their *children*; within the community, both *neighbor* and other *fellow* members.

## All Around Is Terror (6:22-26)

22Yahweh has said this:

There, a people is coming from a northern country,a

a big nation – it stirs itselfb from the furthest parts of the earth.

23Bow and sabrec they grasp hold of,

it’s fierce, and they have no compassion.

The sound of them – it’s like the sea that roars,

and on horses they ride.

Drawn up like an individuald for battle,

against you, Miss Zion.

24We have heard the news of it –

our hands have drooped.

Distress has grasped hold of us,

writhing like a woman giving birth.

25Don’t go out into the open country,

on the path – don’t go,e

Because the enemy has a sword,

all around isterror.

26My dear people,f put on sack,

roll yourself ing ash.

Make the mourning for an onlyh child for yourself,

most bitter lamenting.i

Because suddenly

the destroyer will come upon us.

Vv. 22aβ-24 appear in a slightly variant form as 50:41-43.

The yiqtol verb continues the participial construction; with LXX, Vg, Tg I take the niphal as intransitive rather than passive.

Strictly, a short sword, two feet long (Lundbom, *Jeremiah 1 – 20*, 443).

Lundbom (*Jeremiah 1 – 20*, 444) suggests that this elliptical expression means “drawn up like one man.” For MT *’îš*, LXX “fire” implies *’ēš*.

In each colon the imperative is masculine plural in Q, feminine singular in K. The line works abb’a’, the order binding it tightly and underscoring the negative.

Literally, “my daughter-people.”

Not just “sprinkle yourself with” (LXX, Vg).

LXX “beloved” brings out a connotation.

Literally, “lamenting of bitternesses.”

again, Yahweh warns Jerusalem in more literal terms of the peril from the north that is coming to it. Jeremiah imagines the city’s panicked response and urges people to lament as if they are morning a bereavement. The three units may belong together in origin or may have been brought together in the context of the scroll. The section outlines:

vv. 22-23 Yahweh’s warning of what is coming

an introduction followed by four bicola

vv. 24-25 the people’s anxious response

two bicola, then a linked pair of bicola

v. 26 Jeremiah’s bidding concerning a response

three bicola

**22-23** The new section again follows on what precedes; it makes explicit the means whereby the community is destined to tumble on its path. The portrait begins with two precisely parallel cola:

there a people is coming from a country of the north

and a big nation stirs from the furthest parts of the earth

The tumbling will thus come about through the arrival of the army coming from *a northern country* (1:13-16; 4:6; 6:1), the army of a nation characterized rather as in 5:15, equipped with its threatening, death-dealing *bow* to wield from a distance and a *sabre* to wield when close up, and with its threatening personal qualities, *fierce* like a warrior and lacking the restraining motherly quality of *compassion*. They will be a huge force so that *the sound of them is like the sea that roars*,and they will possess the battle animals that Israelites did not have much to do with: *on horses they ride* (cf. 4:13; and the taunt in Isa 36:8). Yes, it is *equipped like a man*, maybe implying like a single man, *for battle*, and it is coming *against you, Miss Zion* – who turns out to be the addressee. In other respects vv. 22aβ-24 reappear in 50:41-43 applied to Babylon, which confirms that “these poems should not be understood as literal descriptions of the invading armies but as conventional proclamations.”[[408]](#footnote-408) As Jeremiah portrays the invaders setting out and gathering around Jerusalem, “the general impression… is similar to watching a sandcastle threatened by successive waves crashing onto a beach.”[[409]](#footnote-409) But there is no playfulness about the image, because ever since the exodus the sea has stood for “the force of the human world which is hostile to Israel, and therefore opposes the interests and glory of Israel's God, but which is nevertheless ruled and guided and used by Him.”[[410]](#footnote-410)

**24-25** Jeremiah imagines the Jerusalemites describing their reaction to the *news* that their literal lookouts were bringing them. Faced with invasion, their *hands* need to be grasping their own weapons, but instead they have *drooped*, they are paralyzed, and instead they are themselves *grasped* – by *distress*; Jeremiah returns to the image of *writhing like a woman giving birth* (4:31). No one would be wise to leave the city for *the open country* (to do the necessary work in their fields or to get something to eat from there) or take *the path* that might lead to a place of refuge, because *the enemy has a sword* and is surrounding the city. *All around is terror*: it became a phrase that summed up Jeremiah’s message (20:3, 10; 46:5; 49:29).[[411]](#footnote-411)

**26** Jeremiah returns to his own voice and points out the implications for *my dear people* (contrast v. 19, and compare the collocation of the two expressions in 4:11). If he is correct in his account of the northern invader and of the response that it will arouse from them, then they should start grieving about what is to happen, as if it’s happening. Maybe imagining this experience will bring about a change in them now. So start expressing grief. *Put on sack* (cf. 4:8). *Roll yourselves in ash*: never mind about sprinkling just a little on your head. *Make the mourning for an only child for yourself,* the kind of mourning that would indeed involve a *most bitter lamenting* (cf. 4:8). The death of one’s only child is both a cause of deep personal pain and a reason for deep anxiety about the future of the family. The arrival of an invader *suddenly* is a cause of special fear, so that this prospect adds to the reasons to begin mourning now – or rather, in light of that prospect, to turn back now.

## Reject Silver (6:27-30)

27An examiner I made you among my people,

a fortress, so you may acknowledge and examine their path.

28All of them are the most defiant of determined people,a

people who live as liars.

Bronze and iron,

they are all of them devastators.

29Bellows have puffed,b

so from the fire lead has come to an end.c

In vain someone has smelted and smelted,d

but dire ones – they have not poured out.

30Reject silver, people would have callede them,

because Yahweh has rejected them.f

While one could take both *sārê* and *sôrәrîm* as from *sārar*, comparison with 5:23 suggests that the compound expression more likely again represents the collocation of forms from *sûr* and from *sārar*, though the combination of a construct participle and an absolute participle also suggests a superlative construction. Vg, Aq, Syr, Tg imply *śārê* “officials” for *sārê* (LXX omits), which generates another link with Jer 1, but there and regularly elsewhere “officials” appear only in the company of the king and others.

Taking *nāḥar* as the citation form of that verb (*HALOT*), a hapax, rather than as niphal from *ḥārar* (BDB), which would also be a hapax in meaning (bellows are not supposed to burn).

The asyndesis and the verb’s postponement suggests that the second clause is subordinate to the first. Q *mē’ēš tam* (*from the fire has come to an end*) appears in K as the single word *m’štm* which “cannot be read” (Lundbom, *Jeremiah 1 – 20*, 451).

Literally, “has smelted to smelt”; infinitive following a finite verb can indicate continuance in doing something (GK 113r).

Vg has imperative.

MT has a unit marker here.

In the closing section of the unit and of Jer 2 – 6 and thus perhaps of the rewritten 604 scroll, Yahweh recalls his commission of Jeremiah (v. 27) and Jeremiah reports his devastating conclusion (v. 30). While vv. 28-29 indicate no change of speaker and might indicate Yahweh’s own provisional assessment (v. 28) and Jeremiah’s blow by blow (!) account of his process, more likely the section’s logic parallels that in 5:1-9 where Jeremiah’s report of Yahweh’s issuing a commission leads immediately into Jeremiah’s conclusion. Like that passage, the section is a prophecy, a rhetorical piece designed to communicate to Judah. Thus the section outlines:

v. 27 Yahweh’s recollection of his commissioning Jeremiah

one bicolon

vv. 28-30 Jeremiah’s conclusion on the basis of fulfilling the commission

five bicola

**27** While there is no formal marker that a new section begins here, there is a marked change in the rhetoric. In revisiting his commission of Jeremiah, Yahweh uses terms that overlap with the ones in Jer 1. But here he speaks of making Jeremiah a metal worker, *an* *examiner among* *my people*. It is another way of describing his role as prophet. In that vocation Yahweh made him a *fortress* (cf. 1:18), someone invincible who would stand firm to *acknowledge and examine their path*.

**28** Jeremiah’s assessment on the basis of having fulfilled his commission over the years takes up the phraseology of 5:23, affirming again that the Judahites are quite *determined*, as toughas nails in their *defiant* behavior – more literally, in the way they move away (*sûr*)from Yahweh. The description applies to *all of them*. Here, too, as in 5:23, Jeremiah then comments on how they *live* or go about(*hālak*) after making the move away. Here he is more explicit: they live as *liars*. Falsifying the truth about people is the way they get the work done that 5:26-28 described. In that work they are as strong as *bronze and iron*, which is what made it possible to be *devastators* (see 5:26). It is why 1:18 also indicated that Yahweh would ensure that Jeremiah had the same qualities.

**29** In itself, examining simply means looking at something,[[412]](#footnote-412) but discovering the truth about something may also involve testing it – putting it under pressure to see what happens. Further, testing is in turn a different process from refining, of acting to purify, filter, or hone. But in practice these two also overlap (Yahweh’s testing of Job does more than reveal who he is). And in what follows here, by implication Jeremiah is Yahweh’s smelter and refiner as well as examiner and tester, or is smelter and refiner through being tester, or is tester through being smelter and refiner. He moves on to describe the process and the results of his testing activity, which indeed involves action and not merely observation. His metaphor for testing is the process whereby a metalworker smelts and refines silver (rather than the earlier process whereby silver is initially extracted from lead ore).[[413]](#footnote-413) It involves adding lead to the impure silver; when heated, lead has the capacity to absorb the impurities. As a smelter he would have ensured that *the bellows have puffed* so that *the* *fire* got red hot and thus that all the *lead* *has come to an end*, smelted away. But on this occasion the process failed; the impurities remained. It is *in vain* that *someone* – in the real life example, Jeremiah – *has smelted*. The equivalent of the impurities in the real life example is the *dire ones*, and they *have not poured out* like the impurities in the smelting process. The refining and smelting has been unsuccessful. Truly “the way is broad that leads to destruction and many find their way to it” (Matt 7:13).[[414]](#footnote-414)

**30** “Once you have tested them… and you have come to know the ways of my delinquent people, then you will understand that silver mixed with copper can in no way be purified.”[[415]](#footnote-415) Anyone who assesses the results of the smelting process would come to a negative assessment of its results. *Reject silver, people would have called them*. Such is the assessment that Yahweh has reached regarding Judah: *Yahweh has rejected them*. It is an appropriate response to their rejection of Yahweh’s instruction (v. 19).[[416]](#footnote-416) That last comment implicitly identifies Yahweh as the tester/refiner/smelter behind Jeremiah. With regard to the community as a whole, 5:1-9 involved some hyperbole, and one cannot infer from this passage that there was not a single good person in Judah. What Jeremiah’s commission has revealed is that the community as a whole cannot be saved. It is a horrifying ending to Jer 2 – 6 and perhaps to the scroll that Baruch read out on the fast occasion that Jer 36 describes. For people hearing Jeremiah in 604 or afterwards, the conclusion remains one that they are challenged to disprove, like people who heard Isaiah recount his equivalent testimony in Isa 6:9-10. For people reading the scroll some decades later, it helps explain how things actually turned out. But for them, too, “the mention of God’s rejection of Israel at the close of Jer 6 is an apt conclusion to a horrific passage designed to scare and shame its audience into transforming its behavior.” “The mention of God’s rejection of Israel at the close of Jer 6 is an apt conclusion to a horrific passage designed to scare and shame its audience into transforming its behavior.”[[417]](#footnote-417)

1. Y. Raz, “Jeremiah ‘Before the Womb,’” in C. M. Maier and C. J. Sharp (eds.), *Prophecy and Power* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), 86-100 (91, 93). [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. See the section on “Jeremiah and his Curators” in the Introduction to this commentary. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Lundbom, *Jeremiah 1 – 20*, 223-24, discusses possible locations. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. On whether Jeremiah is really an Ephraimite or a Judahite, see H. B. Huffmon, "Jeremiah of Anathoth," in R. Chazan et al (eds.), *Ki Baruch Hu* (B. A. Levine Festschrift; Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1999), 261-72. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Duhm, *Jeremia*,2. But see A. P. Jassen, “The Rabbinic Construction of Jeremiah’s Lineage,” in K. Finsterbusch and A. Lange (eds.), *Texts and Contexts of* ***Jeremiah* (Leeuven: Peeters, 2016), 3-20.** [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. See further S. D. McBride, “Jeremiah and the Levitical Priests of Anathoth,” in J. J. Ahn and S.L. Cook (eds.), *Thus Says the Lord* (R. R. Wilson Festschrift; London: Clark, 2009), 179-196. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Carroll, *Jeremiah*,90-91. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. See further the comment on v. 5. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Herrmann, *Jeremia*, 11. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Fischer, *Jeremia* 1:133. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. J. I. Lawler, “Word Event in Jeremiah,” in J. Kaltner and L. Stulman (eds.), *Inspired Speech* (H. Huffmon Festschrift; London: Bloomsbury, 2004), 231-43 (242). [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Fischer, *Jeremia* 1:127. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. D. Rom-Shiloni, , *Exclusive Inclusivity* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), 212. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Origen, *Jeremiah*, 4-5. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. See further H.-J. Stipp, “Die joschijanische Reform im Jeremiabuch,” in E. Gass and H.-J. Stipp, *“Ich werde meinen Bund mit euch niemals brechen!"* (W. Gross Festschrift; Freiburg: Herder, 2011), 101-29. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. See D. Vieweger, *Die Spezifik der Berufungsberichte Jeremias und Ezechiels im Umfeld* *ähnlicher Einheiten des Alten Testaments* (Frankfurt: Lang, 1986). [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. Miller, “Jeremiah,” on the passage. See further G. Wanke, “Jeremias Berufung,” in J. Hausmann and H.-J. Zobel (eds.), *Alttestamentlicher Glaube und Biblische Theologie* (*H. D. Preuss Festschrift*;Stuttgart:Kohlhammer, 1992), 132-44. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. P. E. Thompson, “Jeremiah 1:1-10,” *Interpretation* 62 (2008): 66-68 (66, 67), quoting from F. Buechner, *Wishful Thinking* (New York: Harper, 1973), 118. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. E. Davis Lewin, “Arguing for Authority,” *JSOT* 32 (1985): 105-19 (107). [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. Craigie, *Jeremiah 1 – 25*,11-12. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. See E. R. Hayes, “The Role of Visionary Experiences for Establishing Prophetic Authority in Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel,” in E. R. Hayes and L.-S. Tiemeyer [eds.], *“I Lifted My Eyes and Saw”* [London: Bloomsbury, 2014], 59-70. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. McKane, *Jeremiah* 1:9, summarizing Rudolph (*Jeremia*,9-10: it’s as real as Paul on the Damascus road) and Weiser (about whose views McKane is hesitant). [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. Pixley, *Jeremiah,* 11. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. For some theories about the development of Jer 1, see e.g., J. Schreiner, “Jeremias Berufung,” in L. Alvarez Verdes and E. J. Alonso Hernández (eds.), *Homenaje a Juan Prado* (Madrid: CSIC, 1975), 131-45; B. Renaud, “Jér 1,” in P.-M. Bogaert et al., *Le livre de Jérémie* (2nd ed. Leuven: Peeters, 1997), 177-196; W. Thiel, “‘Vom Norden her wird das Unheil eröffnet,’” in V. Fritz et al. (eds.), *Prophet und Prophetenbuch* (O. Kaiser Festschrift; Berlin: de Gruyter, 1989), 231-45; J. R. Lundbom, “Rhetorical Structures in Jeremiah 1,” *ZAW* 93 (1991): 193-210; C. J. Sharp, “The Call of Jeremiah and Diaspora Politics,” *JBL* 119 (2000): 421-38. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. J. M. Berridge, *Prophet, People, and the Word of Yahweh* (Zurich: EVZ, 1970), 41. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. Rudolph, *Jeremia*,5. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. E. H. Roshwalb, “Jeremiah 1:4-10,” *JSOT* 34 (2010): 351-76. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. J. M. Berridge, *Prophet, People, and the Word of Yahweh* (Zurich: EVZ, 1970), 29; contrast H. Graf Reventlow, *Liturgie und prophetisches Ich bei Jeremia* (Gütersloh : Mohn, 1963), 70. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. See M. J. de Jong, “Why Jeremiah Is Not Among the Prophets,” *JSOT* 35 (2011): 483-510; more broadly, A. G. Auld, “Prophets through the Looking Glass,” *JSOT* 27 (1983): 3-23; “Prophets and Prophecy in Jeremiah and Kings,” ZAW 96 (1984): 66-82; in response, T. W. Overholt, “Prophecy in History,” *JSOT* 48 (1990): 3-29. [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. Herrmann, *Jeremia*, 58. [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. R. P. Carroll, *From Chaos to Covenant* (London: SCM, 1971), 53. [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. H. Michaud, *“La vocation du ‘prophete des nations,’”* in *Maqqel shaqedh: Hommage à Wilhelm Vischer* (Montpelier: Castelnau, 1960), 157-64 (161). [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. C. J. Sharp, “The Call of Jeremiah and Diaspora Politics,” *JBL* 119 (2000): 421-38; she sees them as reflecting two different political agendas. [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. D. O. Idowu, “The Sovereignty of God in Jeremiah 1:4 -10 and the Belief in Destiny among Yoruba People of Nigeria,” *Practical Theology* (Baptist College of Theology, Lagos) 9 (2016): 146-170. [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
35. Volz, *Jeremia*, 5. [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
36. Y. Gitay, “The Projection of the Prophet,” in Y. Gitay (ed.), *Prophecy and Prophets* (Atlanta: Scholars, 1997), 41-55 (45-46). [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
37. See BDB. [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
38. Jerome, *Jeremiah,* 4. [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
39. B. A. Strawn, “Jeremiah’s In/effective Plea,” *VT* 65 (2005): 366-77. [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
40. Fischer, *Jeremia* 1:134-35. [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
41. Ellison, “Jeremiah,” EvQ 31 (1959): 214. [↑](#footnote-ref-41)
42. See H. P. Nasuti, “A Prophet to the Nations,” *Hebrew Annual Review* 10 (1986): 249-66 (253-54). [↑](#footnote-ref-42)
43. See e.g., C. M. Maier, “Jeremia am Ende, *Evangelische* *Theologie* 77 (2017) 43-56 (51-53); G. Fischer, “Jeremiah – ‘The Prophet like Moses’?” in J. Lundbom et al. (eds.), *The Book of Jeremiah* (Leiden: Brill, 2018), 45-66, also notes the differences between Jeremiah and Moses. [↑](#footnote-ref-43)
44. N. Mastnjak, *Deuteronomy and the Emergence of Textual Authority in Jeremiah* (Tübingen: Mohr, 2016), 40-92. [↑](#footnote-ref-44)
45. See e.g., G. E. Yates, “Intertextuality and the Portrayal of Jeremiah the Prophet,” *BSac* 170 (2013): 286-303 (288-93). [↑](#footnote-ref-45)
46. Schmidt, *Jeremia* 1:49. [↑](#footnote-ref-46)
47. F. Garcia López (“Élection-vocation d'Israël et de Jérémie” [*VT* 35 (1985): 1-12]) also compares with the account of Israel’s election in Deut 7. [↑](#footnote-ref-47)
48. Dearman, *Jeremiah*, on the passage. [↑](#footnote-ref-48)
49. Wenthe, *Jeremiah*, 8 (but I was unable to find the reference in Cassian’s works). [↑](#footnote-ref-49)
50. See G. Wittenberg, “‘To Build and to Plant,” *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa* 112 (2002): 57-67. [↑](#footnote-ref-50)
51. W. Brueggemann, “Meditation Upon the Abyss,” *WW* 22 (2002): 340-50 (347). [↑](#footnote-ref-51)
52. M. Fox, “Closer Look at Jeremiah 1:10,” *Didaskalia* 22 (2011): 61-84. [↑](#footnote-ref-52)
53. Berrigan, *Jeremiah*,2. [↑](#footnote-ref-53)
54. Cf. H Bardtke, “Jeremia der Fremdvölkerprophet,” *ZAW* 53 (1935): 209-39 (215). [↑](#footnote-ref-54)
55. W. Vischer, “The Vocation of the Prophet to the Nations,” *Interpretation* 9 (1955): 310-17 (314). [↑](#footnote-ref-55)
56. See Sharp, “The Call of Jeremiah and Diaspora Politics.” [↑](#footnote-ref-56)
57. Jerome, *Jeremiah*,4-5. [↑](#footnote-ref-57)
58. K. van der Toorn suggests that he saw Aaron’s staff in the temple (Num 17:1-11 [16-26]) (“Did Jeremiah See Aaron’s Staff?” *JSOT* 43 [1989]]: 83-94). [↑](#footnote-ref-58)
59. Holladay, *Jeremiah* 1:37. [↑](#footnote-ref-59)
60. Fretheim, *Jeremiah*,52. [↑](#footnote-ref-60)
61. W. E. March, “Jeremiah 1,” *Austin Seminary Bulletin* 86, 1 (1970): 5-38 (29). [↑](#footnote-ref-61)
62. Holladay, *Jeremiah* 1:40 [↑](#footnote-ref-62)
63. Schmidt, *Jeremia* 1:60. [↑](#footnote-ref-63)
64. Cf. D. J. Reimer, “The “Foe” and the “North” in Jeremiah”, *ZAW* 101 (1989): 223-32; D. S. Vanderhooft, *The Neo-Babylonian Empire and Babylon in the Latter Prophets* (Atlanta: Scholars, 1999)136-49. E. H. Roshwalb ("Build-Up and Climax in Jeremiah's Visions and Laments," in M. Lubetski et al [eds.], *Boundaries of the Ancient Near Eastern World* [C. H. Gordon Festschrift; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998]: 111-35) argues that the figure from the north *is* God. [↑](#footnote-ref-64)
65. Calvin, *Jeremiah* 1:50. [↑](#footnote-ref-65)
66. O’Connor, “Jeremiah,” 490. [↑](#footnote-ref-66)
67. Cf. E. K. Holt’s broader argument in “The Meaning of an *Inclusio*,” *SJOT* 17 (2013): 181-205. [↑](#footnote-ref-67)
68. Duhm (*Jeremia*,12) calls it an “apocalyptic” motif associated with the expression of a “later dogmatic eschatology.” [↑](#footnote-ref-68)
69. Carroll, *Jeremiah*,106-8. [↑](#footnote-ref-69)
70. Sharp, “Jeremiah,” 228. [↑](#footnote-ref-70)
71. Volz, *Jeremia*, 11. [↑](#footnote-ref-71)
72. Nasuti, “A Prophet to the Nations,” 259. [↑](#footnote-ref-72)
73. Holladay, *Jeremiah* 1:31 [↑](#footnote-ref-73)
74. Lundbom, *Jeremiah 1 – 20*,244-48. [↑](#footnote-ref-74)
75. M. Görg, “Die ‘ehernen Säulen’ (1 Reg 7,15) und die ‘eiserne Säule’ (Jer 1,18),” in R. Liwak and S. Wagner (eds.), *Prophetie und geschichtliche Wirklichkeit im Alten Israel* (S. Herrmann Festschrift; Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1991), 134-54. [↑](#footnote-ref-75)
76. On iconographic background to this imagery, see P. Riede, *Ich mache dich zur festen Stadt* (Würzburg: Echter, 2009). [↑](#footnote-ref-76)
77. Diamond, “Jeremiah,” 550. [↑](#footnote-ref-77)
78. See further C. M. Maier, “Jeremiah as Yhwh’s Stronghold,” *VT* 64 (2014): 640-53; R. C. Bailey, “Jeremiah: Fortified City, Bronze Walls, and Iron Pillar against the Whole Land,” *Hebrew Studies* 57 (2016): 117-38. [↑](#footnote-ref-78)
79. See B. T. Dahlberg, ““The Typological Use of Jeremiah 1:4-19 in Matthew 16:13-23,” *JBL* 94 (1975):73-80. [↑](#footnote-ref-79)
80. H. Mottu, “Aux sources de notre vocation: Jérémie 1, 4-19,” *Revue de théologie et de philosophie* 32 (1982): 105-20 (105). [↑](#footnote-ref-80)
81. Herrmann, *Jeremia*, 91. [↑](#footnote-ref-81)
82. R. Youngblood, “The Call of Jeremiah,” *Criswell Theological Review* 5 (1990): 99-108 (108). [↑](#footnote-ref-82)
83. Allen, *Jeremiah*, 39. [↑](#footnote-ref-83)
84. E. R. Hayes, *The Pragmatics of Perception and Cognition in MT Jeremiah 1:1 – 6:30* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2008) is a “cognitive linguistics” study of these chapters; Hayes, “Hearing Jeremiah” (*Hebrew Studies* 45 [2004]: 99-119) considers 1:1 – 2:2 as an introduction to what follows. [↑](#footnote-ref-84)
85. Jones’s comment on 2:26-28, 31-37 (*Jeremiah*, 96-97). [↑](#footnote-ref-85)
86. C. Hardmeier (“Geschichte und Erfahrung in Jer 2 – 6,” *Evangelische Theologie* 56 [1996]: 3-29) rather associates the chapters with the time of Zedekiah and Jerusalem’s imminent fall. See further R. Liwak, *Der Prophet und die Geschichte* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1987). [↑](#footnote-ref-86)
87. Fischer, *Jeremia* 1:151. [↑](#footnote-ref-87)
88. Wright, *Jeremiah*, 72. [↑](#footnote-ref-88)
89. See T. W. Overholt, “Jeremiah 2 and the Problem of ‘Audience Reaction,’” *CBQ* 41 (1979): 262-273; S. Hildebrandt, *Interpreting Quoted Speech in Prophetic Literature* (Leiden: Brill, 2017). [↑](#footnote-ref-89)
90. D. Böhler (“Geschlecterdifferenz und Landbesitz,” in W. Gross [ed.], *Jeremia und die “deuteronomistische Bewegung”* [Weinheim: Beltz, 1995], 91-127) links these changes with the way the passage speaks of Ephraim in relation to the land. [↑](#footnote-ref-90)
91. A. R. P. Diamond and K. M. O’Connor see “the metaphor of the broken marriage…as a root or foundational metaphor” for Jer 2 – 3 (“Unfaithful Passions,” in A. R. P. Diamond et al. (eds.), *Troubling Jeremiah* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999), 123-45 (127); G. E. Yates, “Jeremiah's Message of Judgment and Hope for God's Unfaithful ‘Wife,’” *BSac* 167 (2010): 144-65. [↑](#footnote-ref-91)
92. See the discussion of “Jeremiah and His Curators as Anthologists” in the Introduction to this commentary. [↑](#footnote-ref-92)
93. Cf. H.-D. Neef, “**Gottes** Treue und Israels Untreue,” *ZAW* 99 (1987): 37-58 (though he treats vv. 1-13 as a unit). [↑](#footnote-ref-93)
94. See J. Goldingay, *Hosea to Micah* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2020), on the passage. [↑](#footnote-ref-94)
95. Volz, *Jeremia*, 16. [↑](#footnote-ref-95)
96. T. E. Frethem, “Jeremiah’s God Has a Past, a Present, and a Future,” in J. Lundbom et al. (eds.), *The Book of Jeremiah* (Leiden: Brill, 2018), 455-75 (459-61). [↑](#footnote-ref-96)
97. Schmidt, *Jeremia* 1:71. [↑](#footnote-ref-97)
98. See classically W. L. Moran, “The Ancient Near Eastern Background of the Love of God in Deuteronomy,” *CBQ* 25 (1963): 77-87, but with the critique in J. E. Lapsley, “Feeling Our Way,” *CBQ* 65 (2003): 350-69. [↑](#footnote-ref-98)
99. See further M. de Roche, “Jeremiah 2:2-3 and Israel's Love for God during the Wilderness Wanderings,” *CBQ* 45 (1983): 364-76. [↑](#footnote-ref-99)
100. Barth, *CD* IV,2: 534. [↑](#footnote-ref-100)
101. On this word, see the introduction to 11:1-17. [↑](#footnote-ref-101)
102. Fischer, *Jeremia* 1:177. [↑](#footnote-ref-102)
103. D. Rom-Shiloni, “The Covenant in the Book of Jeremiah,” in R. J. Bautch and G. N. Knoppers (eds.), *Covenant in the Persian Period* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2015), 153-74 – though she implies that in effect Jeremiah does speak in Jer 2 – 3 in terns of a marital and adoptive pact, without using the word. [↑](#footnote-ref-103)
104. McKane, *Jeremiah*, 1:28, 33. See further B. Bowman, “The Place of the Past,” in M. K. George (ed.), *Constructions of Space IV* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2013), 92-110 (94-102). [↑](#footnote-ref-104)
105. J. Jeremias, “The Hosea Tradition and the Book of Jeremiah,” *OTE* 7 (1994): 21-38 (31-35). [↑](#footnote-ref-105)
106. Holladay, *Jeremiah* 1:80. [↑](#footnote-ref-106)
107. A. Miglio, “Ordeal, Infidelity, and Prophetic Irony in Jeremiah 2,1-9,” *SJOT* 24 (2010): 222-34; and see the possible link with this passage noted in the comment on v. 23 below. [↑](#footnote-ref-107)
108. Allen, *Jeremiah*,34, 40. [↑](#footnote-ref-108)
109. Miller, “Jeremiah,” on the passage. [↑](#footnote-ref-109)
110. Miller, “Jeremiah,” in a reflection on 2:1—4:4. [↑](#footnote-ref-110)
111. Holladay, *Jeremiah* 1:85. [↑](#footnote-ref-111)
112. Rudolph, *Jeremia*,15. [↑](#footnote-ref-112)
113. G. Fischer, “Zurück nach Ägypten,” in H. Ausloos and B. Lemmelijn (eds.), *A Pillar of Cloud to Guide* (M Vervenne Festschrift. Leuven: Peeters, 2014), 73-92. [↑](#footnote-ref-113)
114. B. Katho, “Idolatry and the Peril of the Nation,” *Anglican Theological Review* 99 (2017): 713-28 (722, 725). [↑](#footnote-ref-114)
115. So N. C. Lee, “Exposing a Buried Subtext in Jeremiah and Lamentations,” in A. R. P. Diamond et al. (eds.), *Troubling Jeremiah* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999), 87-122. [↑](#footnote-ref-115)
116. R. Abma, *Bonds of Love* (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1999), 242. [↑](#footnote-ref-116)
117. W. Brueggemann, “Israel’s Sense of Place in Jeremiah,” reprinted in *The God of all Flesh and Other Essays* (Cambridge: Clarke, 2016), 44-60 (46). [↑](#footnote-ref-117)
118. See Jerome, *Jeremiah,* 9, 10 [↑](#footnote-ref-118)
119. C. Patton, “Layers of Meaning,” in A. O. Bellis and L. L. Grabbe (eds.), *The Priests in the Prophets* (London: Clark 2004), 149-76 (150-56). [↑](#footnote-ref-119)
120. Qimchi in *miqrā’ôt gәdôlôt* on the passage. [↑](#footnote-ref-120)
121. B. Katho, “La Connaissance de YHWH selon Jérémie,” *OTE* 21 (2008): 38-60 (38-39). [↑](#footnote-ref-121)
122. B. Katho, *To Know and Not to Know Yhwh* (Diss., Pietermaritzburg, 2003), 232-33. [↑](#footnote-ref-122)
123. Rudolph, *Jeremia*,16-17. [↑](#footnote-ref-123)
124. W. R. Domeris, “When Metaphor Becomes Myth,” in A. R. P. Diamond et al. (eds.), *Troubling Jeremiah* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999), 244-62 (254). [↑](#footnote-ref-124)
125. G. Fischer, “*wtpšy htwrh l’ yd‘wny*,” in G. C. Gertz et al. (eds.), *The Formation of the Pentateuch* (.Tübingen: Mohr, 2016), 891-911 (911). [↑](#footnote-ref-125)
126. G. Wallis, *TDOT* 13:549-50. [↑](#footnote-ref-126)
127. See the comment on 1:5b. [↑](#footnote-ref-127)
128. Theodoret, *Ermeneia*, 505. [↑](#footnote-ref-128)
129. I have compared Jeremiah’s analysis of Israel with the situation of the church in California in *“*As a Commentator, One Might Ask, ‘What Would Jeremiah or John Say?’ In T. D. Finlay and W. Yarchin (eds.), *The Genre of Biblical Commentary* (J. E. Hartley Festschrift; Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2015) 234-40. [↑](#footnote-ref-129)
130. J. Skinner, *Prophecy and Religion* (Cambridge: CUP, 1922), 64. [↑](#footnote-ref-130)
131. Duhm, *Jeremia*,20. [↑](#footnote-ref-131)
132. See the comment on v. 5a. [↑](#footnote-ref-132)
133. Abravanʼel, *pyrwš ‘al nby’ym ’ḥrwnym*, on the passage. [↑](#footnote-ref-133)
134. Holladay, *Jeremiah* 1:90. [↑](#footnote-ref-134)
135. Miller, “Jeremiah,” on the passage. [↑](#footnote-ref-135)
136. See the note. [↑](#footnote-ref-136)
137. See the section on “Jeremiah as Persuader” in the Introduction to this commentary. [↑](#footnote-ref-137)
138. Cf. E. K. Holt, “The Fountain of Living Water and the Deceitful Brook,” in P. van Hecke (ed.), *Metaphor in the Hebrew Bible* (Leuven: Peeters, 2005), 99-117 (102). She notes that 15:18 and 17:13 contradict 2:13. [↑](#footnote-ref-138)
139. See further H. Ghantous and D. V. Edelman, “Cisterns and Wells in Biblical Memory,” in D. V. Edelman and E. Ben Zvi (eds.), *Memory and the City in Ancient Israel* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2014), 177-96. [↑](#footnote-ref-139)
140. But M. DeRoche compares Prov 5:15-18; Song 4:12, 15 and sees a further pointer to quasi-sexual unfaithfulness (“Israel's ‘Two Evils’ in Jeremiah ii 13,” *VT* 31 (1982): 369-72. [↑](#footnote-ref-140)
141. Craigie, *Jeremiah 1 – 25*,32. [↑](#footnote-ref-141)
142. And see the note. [↑](#footnote-ref-142)
143. But J. M. Henderson urges that Jeremiah is talking about Ephraim’s history through the chapter (“Jeremiah 2 – 10 as a Unified Literary Composition,” in J. Goldingay (ed.), *Uprooting and Planting* (L. Allen Festschrift; London: Clark 2007), 116-52 (141-44); cf. J. M. Henderson, *Jeremiah under the Shadow of Duhm* (London: Clark, 2019), 324-28. [↑](#footnote-ref-143)
144. See e.g., W. Brueggemann, 1 & 2 Kings (Macon, GA: Smith & Helwys, 2000; M. A. Sweeney, *I & II Kings* (Louisville: WJK, 2007). [↑](#footnote-ref-144)
145. Lundbom, *Jeremiah 1 – 20*, 272. [↑](#footnote-ref-145)
146. Carroll, *Jeremiah*,126, 128. [↑](#footnote-ref-146)
147. J. R. Lundbom, *Jeremiah: Prophet Like Moses* (Eugene: Cascade, 2015), 132. [↑](#footnote-ref-147)
148. Carroll, *Jeremiah*,129-30. [↑](#footnote-ref-148)
149. McKane, *Jeremiah* 1:39. [↑](#footnote-ref-149)
150. Weiser, *Jeremia* 1:23-24. [↑](#footnote-ref-150)
151. H. F. Fuhs (*TDOT* 6:293) and H. P. Müller (*TDOT* 11:517-23) suggest that *paḥad*/*paḥdâ/pāḥad* connotes trembling. [↑](#footnote-ref-151)
152. Fretheim, *Jeremiah*,67. [↑](#footnote-ref-152)
153. Holladay, *Jeremiah* 1:97. [↑](#footnote-ref-153)
154. Achtemeier, *Jeremiah*, 22. [↑](#footnote-ref-154)
155. See the note. [↑](#footnote-ref-155)
156. See the introduction to Jer 2. [↑](#footnote-ref-156)
157. Calvin, *Jeremiah* 1:109. [↑](#footnote-ref-157)
158. Rudolph, *Jeremia*,19-20. [↑](#footnote-ref-158)
159. S. Van Den Eynde, “Taking Broken Cisterns for the Fountain of Living Water,” *Biblische Notizen* 110 (2001): 86-96. [↑](#footnote-ref-159)
160. See the comment. [↑](#footnote-ref-160)
161. On feminist disquiet or hostility regarding the way this passage speaks of women (concerning which see also 3:7 and the comment), see e.g., J. C. Exum, “The Ethics of Biblical Violence against Women,” in J. W. Rogerson et al. (eds.), *The Bible in Ethics* (Sheffield: JSOT, 1995), 248-71; A. Brenner, "On Jeremiah and the Poetic of (Prophetic?) Pornography," in A. Brenner and F. van Dijk Hemmes, *On Gendering Texts* (Leiden: Brill, 1993), 177-93; cf. A. Brenner, “On Prophetic Propaganda and the Politics of ‘Love,’” in A. Brenner (ed.), *A Feminist Companion to the Latter Prophets* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1995), 256-74; R. P. Carroll, “Desire under the Terebinths,” in the same volume, 275-307; A. Bauer, *Gender in the Book of Jeremiah* (New York: Lang, 1999);E. K. Holt, “‘The Stain of Your Guilt Is Still before Me,’” in C. M. Maier and C. J. Sharp (eds.), *Prophecy and Power* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), 101-16; S. MacWilliam, “Queering Jeremiah,” *BibInt* 10 (2002): 384-404; M. E. Shields, “Impasse or Opportunity or…?” in A. R. P. Diamond and L. Stulman (eds.), *Jeremiah (Dis)placed* (New York: Clark, 2011), 290-302; A Brenner, “Response to Mary E. Shields,” in the same volume, 303-6. [↑](#footnote-ref-161)
162. D. Rom-Shiloni, “‘How Can You Say, Ί Am Not Defiled...’?” *JBL* 133 (2014): 757-75, notes that most occurrences of this verb in the niphal come in that passage. [↑](#footnote-ref-162)
163. See further Isa 57:3-10 and J. Goldingay, *Isaiah 56 – 66* (London: Bloomsbury, 2014), on this passage. [↑](#footnote-ref-163)
164. Holladay, *Jeremiah* 1:102. [↑](#footnote-ref-164)
165. Carroll, *Jeremiah*, 142. [↑](#footnote-ref-165)
166. See v. 2 and the comment. [↑](#footnote-ref-166)
167. See the imaginary argument between prophet and politician in J. Goldingay, “Proverbs and Isaiah 1 – 39,” in K. Dell and W. Kynes (eds.), *Reading Proverbs Intertextually* (London: Bloomsbury, 2018), 49-64. [↑](#footnote-ref-167)
168. *Hōbîšû* is inwardly transitive hiphil (GK 53d). LXX has a future verb, a not inappropriate piece of interpretation: see the comment. [↑](#footnote-ref-168)
169. The enjambment could make one ask whether that verb was transitive: *they have brought shame on Israel’s household, they, their kings, their officials, and their priests, and their prophets.* [↑](#footnote-ref-169)
170. The participle suggest an ongoing practice. [↑](#footnote-ref-170)
171. Q *yәlidtānû* has “us” which makes for variation over against the parallel colon; K, LXX, Vg have *yәlidtānî* “me.” [↑](#footnote-ref-171)
172. Cf. Lundbom, *Jeremiah 1 – 20*, 283 for this translation. [↑](#footnote-ref-172)
173. McKane, *Jeremiah* 1:48 [↑](#footnote-ref-173)
174. See E. Bloch-Smith, “Massebot Standing for Yhwh,” in J. J. Collins et al. (eds.), *Worship, Women, and War* (S. Niditch Festschrift; Providence, RI: Brown University, 2015), 99-115. [↑](#footnote-ref-174)
175. S. M. Olyan, “The Cultic Confessions of Jer 2,27a,” *ZAW* 99 (1987): 254-59. [↑](#footnote-ref-175)
176. See e.g., W. Domeris, “Jeremiah and the Religion of Canaan,” *OTE* 7 (1994): 7-20. [↑](#footnote-ref-176)
177. Holladay, *Jeremiah* 1:104. [↑](#footnote-ref-177)
178. Fischer, *Jeremia* 1:171. [↑](#footnote-ref-178)
179. Weiser, *Jeremia* 1:27. [↑](#footnote-ref-179)
180. J. S. Burnett, “Changing Gods,” *RevExp* 101 (2004): 289-99. [↑](#footnote-ref-180)
181. D. Bourguet, *Des Métaphores de Jérémie* (Paris: Gabalda, 1987), 199-334. [↑](#footnote-ref-181)
182. See the note and comment. [↑](#footnote-ref-182)
183. Blayney, *Jeremiah*, 234. [↑](#footnote-ref-183)
184. Qimchi in *miqrā’ôt gәdôlôt* on the passage. [↑](#footnote-ref-184)
185. Craigie, *Jeremiah 1 – 25,* 3. [↑](#footnote-ref-185)
186. B. D. Sommer, *A Prophet Reads Scripture* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), 37. [↑](#footnote-ref-186)
187. Rashi in *miqrā’ôt gәdôlôt* on the passage. [↑](#footnote-ref-187)
188. Tg; Qimchi in *miqrā’ôt gәdôlôt* on the passage. [↑](#footnote-ref-188)
189. Allen, *Jeremiah*, 50. [↑](#footnote-ref-189)
190. Calvin, *Jeremiah* 1:122. [↑](#footnote-ref-190)
191. See W. J. Holladay, *The Root šûbh in the Old Testament* (Leiden: Brill, 1958); and on the imprudence of translating the word “repent,” D. A. Lambert, *How Repentance Became Biblical* (Oxford: OUP, 2016), 71-90. [↑](#footnote-ref-191)
192. E.g., Fischer, *Jeremia* 1:183. [↑](#footnote-ref-192)
193. R Abma, *Bonds of Love* (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1999), 243. On the possible process whereby the chapters might have developed, see M. E. Biddle, *A Redaction History of Jeremiah 2:1 – 4:2* (Zürich: TVZ, 1990). [↑](#footnote-ref-193)
194. Lundbom, *Jeremiah 1 – 20*, 299. [↑](#footnote-ref-194)
195. M. E. Shields, *Circumscribing the Prostitute* (London: Clark, 2004), 17; she systematically considers the gender movements in the section. See earlier, “Circumcision of the Prostitute,” *BibInt* 3 (1995): 61-74; and later, C. M. Maier, “Reading Back and Forth,” in J. K. Aitken et al. (eds.), *Interested Readers* (D. J. A. Clines Festschrift; Atlanta: SBL, 2013),137-50. [↑](#footnote-ref-195)
196. But (e.g.) Schmidt lays out the verse as poetry (*Jeremia* 1:100, 102). [↑](#footnote-ref-196)
197. M. A. Fishbane has a detailed comparison in *Biblical Interpretation in Ancient Israel* (Oxford: OUP, 1984), 307-11. See more recently D. Rom-Shiloni, “Actualization of Pentateuchal Legal Traditions in Jeremiah,” *ZABR* 15 (2009): 254-81 (262-67); D. Rom-Shiloni, “Priestly and Deuteronomic References in the Book of Jeremiah,” in G. C. Gertz et al. (eds.), *The Formation of the Pentateuch* (Tübingen: Mohr, 2016), 913-41 (928-33). [↑](#footnote-ref-197)
198. F. Horst, *Hiob* (Neukirchen: Neukirchener, 1968) 1:132, as quoted by K. Seybold, *TDOT* 5:37. [↑](#footnote-ref-198)
199. Shields, *Circumscribing the Prostitute*, 56. [↑](#footnote-ref-199)
200. See the note. [↑](#footnote-ref-200)
201. Trapp, *Commentary*, on the passage. [↑](#footnote-ref-201)
202. Holladay (*Jeremiah* 1:47-131) simply treats them as one. [↑](#footnote-ref-202)
203. Carroll, *Jeremiah*, 143. [↑](#footnote-ref-203)
204. Holladay, *Jeremiah* 1:66. [↑](#footnote-ref-204)
205. Fretheim, *Jeremiah*, 76. [↑](#footnote-ref-205)
206. Volz, *Jeremia*, 38. [↑](#footnote-ref-206)
207. Weiser, *Jeremia* 1:33. [↑](#footnote-ref-207)
208. Holladay, *Jeremiah* 1:116. [↑](#footnote-ref-208)
209. Shields, *Circumscribing the Prostitute*, 71 (referring to vv. 6-11). [↑](#footnote-ref-209)
210. See the section on “The Torah, the Prophets, and the Psalms” in the Introduction to this commentary. [↑](#footnote-ref-210)
211. M. A. Sweeney sees Jer 2 – 6 as a whole as ultimately going back to Jeremiah’s preaching in Ephraim in Josiah’s day (“Structure and Redaction in Jeremiah 2 – 6,” in *Form and Intertextuality in Prophetic and Apocalyptic Literature* (Tübingen: Mohr, 2005), 94-108. [↑](#footnote-ref-211)
212. Diamond, “Jeremiah,” 554-55 (though he draws a different inference). [↑](#footnote-ref-212)
213. A. Kalmanofsky, “The Dangerous Sisters of Jeremiah and Ezekiel,” *JBL* 130 (2011): 299-312 (299). Cf. R. J. Weems, *Battered Love* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995), 52-58. See further the comment on 2:21. [↑](#footnote-ref-213)
214. Allen, *Jeremiah*, 56. [↑](#footnote-ref-214)
215. See the discussion of the passage in J. Goldingay, *Isaiah 40 – 55* (London: Clark, 2005). [↑](#footnote-ref-215)
216. Lundbom, *Jeremiah 1 – 20*, 308. [↑](#footnote-ref-216)
217. Though Deut consistently uses *lēbāb*, whereas Jer has *lēb*. [↑](#footnote-ref-217)
218. Dearman, *Jeremiah*, on the passage. [↑](#footnote-ref-218)
219. Origen, *Jeremiah*, 35, quoting from Rom 11:18, 21- 24. [↑](#footnote-ref-219)
220. Rashi in *miqrā’ôt gәdôlôt* on the passage. [↑](#footnote-ref-220)
221. Jerome, *Jeremiah*, 22. [↑](#footnote-ref-221)
222. Contrast e.g., Holladay, *Jeremiah* 1:62-73. [↑](#footnote-ref-222)
223. Trapp, *Commentary*, on the passage. [↑](#footnote-ref-223)
224. Rashi in *miqrā’ôt gәdôlôt* on the passage. [↑](#footnote-ref-224)
225. Calvin, *Jeremiah* 1:157; he notes there were good reasons for the law applying to humanity which need not apply to God. [↑](#footnote-ref-225)
226. Brueggemann*, Jeremiah 1 - 25,* 41. [↑](#footnote-ref-226)
227. B. Gosse, “L'**ouverture** de la nouvelle alliance aux nations en Jérémie iii 14-18,” *VT* 39 (1989): 385-92. [↑](#footnote-ref-227)
228. W. Wessels, “Zion, Beautiful City of God,” *Verbum et Ecclesia* 27 (2006): 729- 48 (743-44). [↑](#footnote-ref-228)
229. See K. M. O’Connor, “A Family Comes Undone,” *RevExp* 105 (2008): 201-12 (208); cf. K. M. O’Connor, “Reclaiming Jeremiah’s Violence,” in J. M. O’Brien and C. Franke (eds.), *The Aesthetics of Violence in the Prophets* (New York: Clark, 2010), 37-49; also M. E. Mills, *Jeremiah* (London: Bloomsbury, 2015), 60-69. [↑](#footnote-ref-229)
230. Allen, *Jeremiah*, 57. [↑](#footnote-ref-230)
231. B. A. Foreman, *Animal Metaphors and the People of Israel in the Book of Jeremiah* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck, 2011), 93-102. [↑](#footnote-ref-231)
232. M. Haran, “The Disappearance of the Ark,” *Israel Exploration Journal* 13 (1963): 46-58; *Temples and Temple Service in Ancient Israel* (reprinted Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1985), 276-88. See further J. A. Soggin, “The Ark of the Covenant,” in P.-M. Bogaert et al., *Le livre de Jérémie* (2nd ed. Leuven: Peeters, 1997), 215-21. [↑](#footnote-ref-232)
233. E.g., Volz, *Jeremia*, 48. [↑](#footnote-ref-233)
234. Allen, *Jeremiah*, 58. [↑](#footnote-ref-234)
235. J. Hwang, “The *Missio* *Dei* as an Integrative Motif in the Book of Jeremiah,” *BBR* 23 (2013): 481-508 (489-90). [↑](#footnote-ref-235)
236. Schmidt, *Jeremia* 1:112. [↑](#footnote-ref-236)
237. Shields, *Circumscribing the Prostitute*, 116. [↑](#footnote-ref-237)
238. See the note. [↑](#footnote-ref-238)
239. Berrigan, *Jeremiah*, 18. [↑](#footnote-ref-239)
240. Ellison, “Jeremiah,” 32 (1960): 215. [↑](#footnote-ref-240)
241. Jerome, *Jeremiah*, 25. [↑](#footnote-ref-241)
242. Fretheim, *Jeremiah*, 77. [↑](#footnote-ref-242)
243. A. F. Wilke *Die Gebete der Propheten* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2014, 12-16) finds the beginning of prayer in the Prophets in Jer 1 – 10, in passages such as this one. [↑](#footnote-ref-243)
244. Origen, *Jeremiah*, 43. [↑](#footnote-ref-244)
245. Bright’s translation (*Jeremiah*, 20). [↑](#footnote-ref-245)
246. Weiser, *Jeremia* 1:38. Abravanʼel pictures Jeremiah picturing Israel praying the prayer and God replying (*pyrwš ‘al nby’ym ’ḥrwnym* on the passage, as paraphased by Rosenberg, *Jeremiah* 1:32). [↑](#footnote-ref-246)
247. See D. Buchner, “*Boshet* in Jeremiah 3:24,” *JTS* 59 (2008): 478-99 (he sees Boshet as a goddess not as the Master). [↑](#footnote-ref-247)
248. Qimchi in *miqrā’ôt gәdôlôt* on the passage [↑](#footnote-ref-248)
249. R. Mosis, “Umkehr und Vergebung,” *Trier Theologische Zeitschrift* 98 (1989): 39 -60 (55). [↑](#footnote-ref-249)
250. Wright, *Jeremiah*, 85. [↑](#footnote-ref-250)
251. Rudolph, *Jeremia*, 31. [↑](#footnote-ref-251)
252. Duhm, *Jeremia*, 45. [↑](#footnote-ref-252)
253. Cf. J. M. Bracke, “Justice in the Book of Jeremiah,” *WW* 22 (2002): 387-95. [↑](#footnote-ref-253)
254. Pixley, *Jeremiah*, 19. [↑](#footnote-ref-254)
255. C. J. H. Wright, “‘Prophet to the Nations,’” in J. A. Grant et al. (eds.), *A God of Faithfulness* (J. G. McConville Festschrift; New York: Clark, 2011), 112-29 (123-24). [↑](#footnote-ref-255)
256. Carroll, *Jeremiah*, 157. [↑](#footnote-ref-256)
257. Weiser, *Jeremia* 1:41. [↑](#footnote-ref-257)
258. Fretheim, *Jeremiah*, 88. [↑](#footnote-ref-258)
259. Carroll, *Jeremiah*, 158. [↑](#footnote-ref-259)
260. Fretheim, *Jeremiah*, 88. [↑](#footnote-ref-260)
261. Shields, *Circumscribing the Prostitute*, 145. [↑](#footnote-ref-261)
262. Calvin, *Jeremiah* 1:214-15. [↑](#footnote-ref-262)
263. Miller, “Jeremiah,” in his reflection on 2:1—4:4. [↑](#footnote-ref-263)
264. See S. Joo, “‘Dynamistic Thought’ in Context,” *Korean Journal of Christian Studies* 84 (2012): 49-67. [↑](#footnote-ref-264)
265. Bright, *Jeremiah*, 33. [↑](#footnote-ref-265)
266. Miller, “Jeremiah,” on 4:11-18. [↑](#footnote-ref-266)
267. Pixley, *Jeremiah*, 20. [↑](#footnote-ref-267)
268. K. Finsterbusch (“Vioelnce against Judah and Jerusalem,” in M. Zehnder and H. Hagelia [eds.], *Encountering Violence in the Bible* [Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix, 2013], 79-93 suggests a similar perspective on the basis of a pre-587 and post-587 reading. [↑](#footnote-ref-268)
269. “Es gibt Krieg!” (Rudolph, *Jeremia*, 32). [↑](#footnote-ref-269)
270. W. L. Holladay, *Jeremiah: Spokesman out of Time* (Philadelphia: United Church Press, 1974), 47, 59. [↑](#footnote-ref-270)
271. McKane, *Jeremiah* 1:114-15. [↑](#footnote-ref-271)
272. McKane, *Jeremiah* 1:92. [↑](#footnote-ref-272)
273. Rudolph, *Jeremia*, 34. [↑](#footnote-ref-273)
274. McKane, *Jeremiah* 1:94-95. [↑](#footnote-ref-274)
275. Calvin, *Jeremiah* 1:224. [↑](#footnote-ref-275)
276. See the note. [↑](#footnote-ref-276)
277. Lundbom, *Jeremiah 1 – 20*,345. [↑](#footnote-ref-277)
278. Thompson, *Jeremiah*, 225. [↑](#footnote-ref-278)
279. Duhm, *Jeremia*, 51. [↑](#footnote-ref-279)
280. Fischer, *Jeremia* 1:230. [↑](#footnote-ref-280)
281. Holladay, *Jeremiah* 1:160. [↑](#footnote-ref-281)
282. N. C. Lee sees a different voice, the voice of a lament-singer, in such passages in Jeremiah (“Prophet and Singer in the Fray,” in J. Goldingay (ed.), *Uprooting and Planting* (L. Allen Festschrift; London: Clark 2007), 190-209. [↑](#footnote-ref-282)
283. Calvin, *Jeremiah* 1:239-40. [↑](#footnote-ref-283)
284. Weiser, *Jeremia*, 45. But S. Köhler (*Jeremia – Fürbitter oder Kläger* [Berlin: de Gruyter, 2017]) makes it the first of her comparisons with an Old Babylonian kalu priest. [↑](#footnote-ref-284)
285. W. Brueggemann, *Like Fire in the Bones* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2006), 192. [↑](#footnote-ref-285)
286. M. C. A. Korpel discusses possibilities in “Who Is Speaking in Jeremiah 4:19-22?” *VT* 59 (2009): 88-98. [↑](#footnote-ref-286)
287. Jones, *Jeremiah*, 115. [↑](#footnote-ref-287)
288. See R. Graybill, “‘Hear and Give Ear!’” *JSOT* 40 (2016): 467-90. [↑](#footnote-ref-288)
289. Miller, “Jeremiah,” on the passage. [↑](#footnote-ref-289)
290. Holladay, *Jeremiah* 1:147, 147-48, 148. [↑](#footnote-ref-290)
291. Lundbom, *Jeremiah 1 – 20*, 355. [↑](#footnote-ref-291)
292. Fischer, *Jeremia* 1:223. [↑](#footnote-ref-292)
293. See further S. Balentine, “Sagacious Divine Judgment,” in J. Lundbom et al. (eds.), *The Book of Jeremiah* (Leiden: Brill, 2018), 113-25. [↑](#footnote-ref-293)
294. W. Zimmerli discusses it as one of Jeremiah’s three actual visions, “Visionary Experience on Jeremiah,” inR. J. Coggins et al. (eds.), *Israel’s Prophetic Tradition* (P. R. Ackroyd Festschrift; Cambridge: CUP, 1982), 95-118 (99-104), along with 1:11-15 (16) and (perhaps) 24:1-10. [↑](#footnote-ref-294)
295. Barth, *CD* III,1: 104, 105. [↑](#footnote-ref-295)
296. On which relationship see e.g., J. T. A. G. M. van Ruiten, “Back to Chaos,” in G. H. van Kooten (ed.), *The Creation of Heaven and Earth* (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 21-30; B. Janowski, “Eine Welt ohne Licht,” in A. Berlejung (ed.), *Disaster and Relief Management* (Tübingen: Mohr, 2013), 119-41. [↑](#footnote-ref-296)
297. Wiesel, *Five Biblical Portraits*, 126 (cf. Carroll, *Jeremiah*, 170). [↑](#footnote-ref-297)
298. H. C. P. Kim (“Tsunami, Hurricane, and Jeremiah 4:23-28,” *BTB* 37/2 [2007]: 54-61) links with the story of the flood as an act of uncreation. [↑](#footnote-ref-298)
299. K. M. Hayes, *“The Earth Mourns*” (Atlanta: SBL, 2002), 75. [↑](#footnote-ref-299)
300. Cf. H. Gunkel, *Schöpfung und Chaos in Urzeit und Endzeit* (Göttingen: Vandehoeck, 1895), a study of Gen 1 and Rev 12. [↑](#footnote-ref-300)
301. Berrigan, *Jeremiah*, 23. [↑](#footnote-ref-301)
302. Cf. Á. Borges de Sousa, “Jer 4,23-26 als P-orientierter Abschnitt,” *ZAW* 105 (1993): 419-28. D. C. Olson, “Jeremiah 4.5-31 and Apocalyptic Myth,” *JSOT* 73 (1997): 81-107, sees the passage as dependent on Enochic materials. [↑](#footnote-ref-302)
303. It is one of the few passages that Y. Hoffman is prepared to call possibly eschatological, in his study of “Eschatology in the Book of Jeremiah” in H. Graf Reventlow (ed.), *Eschatology in the Bible and in Jewish and Christian Tradition* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997), 75-97. Contrast M. A. Sweeney’s happiness with the word in his “Eschatology in the Book of Jeremiah,” in S. Yona et al. (eds), *Marbeh Ḥokmah* (V. A. Hurowitz Memorial; Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2015), [↑](#footnote-ref-303)
304. Lundbom, *Jeremiah 1 – 20*, 358. [↑](#footnote-ref-304)
305. W Brueggemann, *Texts Under Negotiation* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993), 84. [↑](#footnote-ref-305)
306. L. Stulman, *Order amid Chaos* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1998), 11-12. [↑](#footnote-ref-306)
307. See W. Brueggemann, “An Ending that Does Not End,” in A. K. M. Adam (ed.), *Postmodern Interpretations of the Bible* (St. Louis: Chalice, 2001), 117-28. [↑](#footnote-ref-307)
308. Brueggemann*, Jeremiah 1 - 25,* 57. [↑](#footnote-ref-308)
309. Lundbom, *Jeremiah 1 – 20*, 362. [↑](#footnote-ref-309)
310. Qimchi in *miqrā’ôt gәdôlôt* on the passage. [↑](#footnote-ref-310)
311. Brueggemann*, Jeremiah 1 - 25,* 56. [↑](#footnote-ref-311)
312. Holladay, *Jeremiah* 1:168. See further the comment on 12:4. [↑](#footnote-ref-312)
313. See H.-J. Fabry, *TDOT* 9:340-55 (342). [↑](#footnote-ref-313)
314. A Bauer, “Dressed to be Killed,” in A. R. P. Diamond et al. (eds.), *Troubling Jeremiah* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1999), 293-305 (295). [↑](#footnote-ref-314)
315. Holladay, *Jeremiah* 1:149. [↑](#footnote-ref-315)
316. Duhm, *Jeremia*, 55. [↑](#footnote-ref-316)
317. If “war-related aggression against women is ‘one of history’s great silences’”(F. R. Ames, “The Cascading Effects of Israel,” in B. E. Kelle et al. [eds.], *Interpreting Exile* [Leiden: Brill, 2011], 173-87 [176], quoting from E. Rehn and E. Johnson-Sirleaf, *Women, War, Peace* [New York: UNDFW, 2002], 19), Jeremiah is not wholly silent about it; see further 5:17; 13:22; 51:35. [↑](#footnote-ref-317)
318. See B. B. Kaiser, “Poet as ‘Female Impersonator,’” *Journal of Religion* 67 (1987): 164-82 (166-74) [↑](#footnote-ref-318)
319. Pixley, *Jeremiah,* 20-21. [↑](#footnote-ref-319)
320. Jones, *Jeremiah*, 119. [↑](#footnote-ref-320)
321. Fischer, *Jeremia* 1:254. [↑](#footnote-ref-321)
322. See R. P. Carroll, "Theodicy and the Community," *OTS* 23 (1984): 19-38. It is the first passage C. Bultmann discusses in arguing that theodicy is the central question in Jeremiah (“Grausamkeit,” in S. Gillmayr-Bucher et al. [eds.], *Ein herz so weit wie der Sand am Ufer des Meeres* [G. Hentschel Festschrift; Würzburg: Echter, 2006], 273-98). [↑](#footnote-ref-322)
323. Duhm, *Jeremia*, 57. [↑](#footnote-ref-323)
324. Mayer, *Commentary*, 350. [↑](#footnote-ref-324)
325. Fretheim, *Jeremiah*, 109. [↑](#footnote-ref-325)
326. *DCH* 8:559. [↑](#footnote-ref-326)
327. See the note and comments. [↑](#footnote-ref-327)
328. McKane, *Jeremiah* 1:116. [↑](#footnote-ref-328)
329. Rudolph, *Jeremia*, 37. [↑](#footnote-ref-329)
330. See the comment on 1:15 above. [↑](#footnote-ref-330)
331. See the note and comments. [↑](#footnote-ref-331)
332. Jerome, *Jeremiah*, 34. [↑](#footnote-ref-332)
333. See W. J. Wessels, “Calling Leaders to Account,” *OTE* 8 (2015): 874-93. [↑](#footnote-ref-333)
334. E.g., Rashi in *miqrā’ôt gәdôlôt* on the passage; Tg takes them as king, nation, and officer. [↑](#footnote-ref-334)
335. Cf. Weiser, *Jeremia* 1:50, 52. [↑](#footnote-ref-335)
336. Holladay, *Jeremiah* 1:180. [↑](#footnote-ref-336)
337. Fretheim, *Jeremiah*, 110. [↑](#footnote-ref-337)
338. B. A. Foreman, *Animal Metaphors and the People of Israel in the Book of Jeremiah* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck, 2011), 119. [↑](#footnote-ref-338)
339. *Brueggemann, Jeremiah 1 - 25,* 61. [↑](#footnote-ref-339)
340. Jones, *Jeremiah*, 122. [↑](#footnote-ref-340)
341. Weiser, *Jeremia*, 47. [↑](#footnote-ref-341)
342. Blayney, *Jeremiah*, 249. [↑](#footnote-ref-342)
343. The two expressions *enduring* and *from of old* recur in Bernadino de Sahagún’s description of the fate of Latin American peoples at the hands of the Conquistadores (see Y. Sherwood, “Prophetic ‘Postcolonialism,’” in C. M. Maier (ed.), *Congress Volume Munich 2013* (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 300-32 (327). [↑](#footnote-ref-343)
344. Lundbom, *Jeremiah 1-20*, 394. [↑](#footnote-ref-344)
345. E.g., Volz, *Jeremia*,65. [↑](#footnote-ref-345)
346. P. J. Willson, “Jeremiah 5:20-29,” *Interpretation* 62 (2008): 70-72 (72). [↑](#footnote-ref-346)
347. Abravanʼel (*pyrwš ‘al nby’ym ’ḥrwnym*, on the passage) nicely comments that serving foreign gods is, after all, entirely appropriate in a foreign country whereas it is horribly inappropriate in the holy land. [↑](#footnote-ref-347)
348. *Determined* in the previous colon was *sôrēr*, *were defiant* is *sārû*: the words’ similarity matches the link in what they refer to (Allen *Jeremiah*, 80-81). [↑](#footnote-ref-348)
349. For Q *yôreh* K implies *wәyōreh* which presumably means “both…” (it hardly distinguishes three forms of rain). [↑](#footnote-ref-349)
350. Literally, “weeks of decrees of harvest.” [↑](#footnote-ref-350)
351. Literally, “like the crouching of bird catchers,” though it is the only occurrence with this meaning of the rare verb *šākak* (see BDB; *DCH*). Syr suggests a word from *śākak*/*sākak* which could mean screen, thicket, or covert (*HUB*). [↑](#footnote-ref-351)
352. Vg has “trap,” but there are no parallels for this more concrete meaning; LXX has the verb *diaphtheirai* “devastate.” [↑](#footnote-ref-352)
353. The asyndetic verb (with the object before the verb), subordinate to the one that precedes, suggests a purpose clause. [↑](#footnote-ref-353)
354. A metonymy for the fruits of duplicity. [↑](#footnote-ref-354)
355. For the hapax *‘āšat*, BDB notes possible links with *‘ešet* or *’āšût*; on the basis of the context, I follow Rashi in the first direction (in *miqrā’ôt gәdôlôt* on the passage; Rudolph, *Jeremia*, 40), rather than Qimchi, who takes it to mean “sleek” (also in *miqrā’ôt gәdôlôt*; *DCH* 6:623-24). [↑](#footnote-ref-355)
356. For this meaning of *‘ābar*, see BDB, 717b. [↑](#footnote-ref-356)
357. I treat *dîn yātôm* as an extraposed phrase followed by the simple *waw* on *wәyaṣlîḥû* suggesting purpose; Craigie, *Jeremiah 1 – 25*, 94-95. [↑](#footnote-ref-357)
358. MT has a section marker here. [↑](#footnote-ref-358)
359. Literally, “a desolation and a horror.” [↑](#footnote-ref-359)
360. I.e., by the Master (Rudolph, *Jeremia*, 32). [↑](#footnote-ref-360)
361. Literally, “on their hands”: cf. 1 Chr 25:2, 3, 6. [↑](#footnote-ref-361)
362. Holladay, *Jeremiah* 1:195. [↑](#footnote-ref-362)
363. Holladay, *Jeremiah* 1:195. [↑](#footnote-ref-363)
364. Theodoret, *Ermeneia*, 540. [↑](#footnote-ref-364)
365. Calvin, *Jeremiah* 1:310-11. [↑](#footnote-ref-365)
366. N. R. Bowen, “Out of Bounds,” *Brethren Life and Thought* 57/2 (2012): 15-24 (17-18). [↑](#footnote-ref-366)
367. Holladay, *Jeremiah* 1:197. [↑](#footnote-ref-367)
368. On bird hunting and catching, see B. A. Foreman, *Animal Metaphors and the People of Israel in the Book of Jeremiah* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck, 2011), 202-11. [↑](#footnote-ref-368)
369. W. J. Wessels, “Prophet, Poetry and Ethics,” *OTE* 21 (2008): 729-44 (641). [↑](#footnote-ref-369)
370. Carroll, *Jeremiah*, 190. [↑](#footnote-ref-370)
371. Lundbom, *Jeremiah 1 – 20*, 410. [↑](#footnote-ref-371)
372. Calvin, *Jeremiah* 3:402. [↑](#footnote-ref-372)
373. Holladay, *Jeremiah* 1:200. [↑](#footnote-ref-373)
374. Allen, *Jeremiah*, 84. [↑](#footnote-ref-374)
375. A. Kalmanofsky, *Terror All Around* (New York: Clark, 2008), 104. [↑](#footnote-ref-375)
376. See O. Lipschits et al., “Palace and Village, Paradise and Oblivion,” *Near Eastern Archaeology* 74 (2011): 1-49. [↑](#footnote-ref-376)
377. See 2:8 and the comment. [↑](#footnote-ref-377)
378. Jerome, *Jeremiah*, 41; cf. J. Barr, *Comparative Philology and the Text of the Old Testament* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1968), 212. [↑](#footnote-ref-378)
379. Carroll, *Jeremiah*, 191, alluding to words by Salomon Franck set to music by J. S. Bach. [↑](#footnote-ref-379)
380. See Weiser, *Jeremia* 1:59-60. [↑](#footnote-ref-380)
381. J. A. Soggin, “Der Prophetische Gedanke über den Heiligen Krieg, als Gericht Gegen Israel,” *VT* 10 (1960): 79-83. [↑](#footnote-ref-381)
382. Volz, *Jeremia*, 72. [↑](#footnote-ref-382)
383. Jerome, *Jeremiah*, 41-42. [↑](#footnote-ref-383)
384. Miller, “Jeremiah,” on the passage. [↑](#footnote-ref-384)
385. G. Fischer, “Is there *Shalom*, or Not?” *OTE* 28 (2015): 351-70 (352). [↑](#footnote-ref-385)
386. Fretheim, *Jeremiah*, 121. [↑](#footnote-ref-386)
387. E. A. Martens, “Toward an End to Violence: Hearing Jeremiah,” in M. D. Carroll R. and J. B. Wilgus (eds.), *Wrestling with the Violence of God* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2015), 133-50 (134-38). [↑](#footnote-ref-387)
388. S. D. Snyman, “A structural-historical Investigation of *ḥms wśd*  in Jeremiah 6:1-81,” *HTS* 58 (2002): 1593-1603 (1602). [↑](#footnote-ref-388)
389. See the not and comments. [↑](#footnote-ref-389)
390. Rudolph, *Jeremia*, 44. [↑](#footnote-ref-390)
391. Craigie, *Jeremiah 1 – 25*, 103. Calvin neatly think of one harvester speaking to another (*Jeremiah* 1:345), but this understanding involves considerable inference. [↑](#footnote-ref-391)
392. See B. A. Thomason, *The Circumcision of the Ear* (Diss., Durham, 2016). [↑](#footnote-ref-392)
393. Jones, *Jeremiah*, 135. [↑](#footnote-ref-393)
394. Fischer, *Jeremia* 1:268. [↑](#footnote-ref-394)
395. Fretheim, *Jeremiah*, 122. [↑](#footnote-ref-395)
396. Brueggemann*, Jeremiah 1 - 25,* 68, who goes on to quote the words from Julia Ward Howe’s “Battle Hymn of the Republic” composed during the America Civil War as an encouragement to northern soldiers. [↑](#footnote-ref-396)
397. Rudolph, *Jeremia*, 45. [↑](#footnote-ref-397)
398. Cf.5:3 and the comment. [↑](#footnote-ref-398)
399. Schmidt, *Jeremia* 1:163. [↑](#footnote-ref-399)
400. A. J. Heschel, *The Prophets* (New York: Jewish Publication Society, 1962), 482; Fretheim, *Jeremiah*, 123. [↑](#footnote-ref-400)
401. Miller, “Jeremiah,” in an introductory comment on 23:9-40. [↑](#footnote-ref-401)
402. T. W. Overholt, *The Threat of Falsehood* (London: SCM, 1970), 85. [↑](#footnote-ref-402)
403. T. J. Wengert, “The *95 Theses* as Luther’s Template for Reading Scripture,” *Lutheran Quarterly* 31 (2017): 249-66 (257-58). [↑](#footnote-ref-403)
404. See the comment. [↑](#footnote-ref-404)
405. Craigie, *Jeremiah 1 – 25*, 106. [↑](#footnote-ref-405)
406. Rashi in *miqrā’ôt gәdôlôt* on the passage. [↑](#footnote-ref-406)
407. Aeneid 1:416-17; Rudolph, *Jeremia*, 47. [↑](#footnote-ref-407)
408. Carroll, *Jeremiah*, 202-3. [↑](#footnote-ref-408)
409. J. M. Henderson, “Jeremiah 2 – 10 as a Unified Literary Composition,” in J. Goldingay (ed.), *Uprooting and Planting* (L. Allen Festschrift; London: Clark 2007), 116-52 (145); cf. J. M. Henderson, *Jeremiah under the Shadow of Duhm* (London: Clark, 2019), 329. [↑](#footnote-ref-409)
410. Barth, *CD* III,1: 148. [↑](#footnote-ref-410)
411. On the origin of the phrase, see A. H. W. Curtis, “Terror on Every Side,’” in A. H. W. Curtis and T. Römer (eds.), *The Book of* ***Jeremiah*** *and Its Reception* (Leuven: Peeters, 1997), 111-18. [↑](#footnote-ref-411)
412. See M. Tsevat, *TDOT* 2:69-72. [↑](#footnote-ref-412)
413. See further Holladay, *Jeremiah* 1:230-32. [↑](#footnote-ref-413)
414. Dearman, *Jeremiah*, on the passage. [↑](#footnote-ref-414)
415. Jerome, *Jeremiah*, 48. [↑](#footnote-ref-415)
416. Y. Hoffman, “‘Isn’t the Bride Too Beautiful,’” *JSOT* 64 (1994): 103-20 (113); he sees it as an example of how 6:16-21 was composed to dovetail into this context. [↑](#footnote-ref-416)
417. A. Kalmanofsky, *Terror All Around* (New York: Clark, 2008), 129. [↑](#footnote-ref-417)